

The Democrat's Anti-Union Strategy

By [Shamus Cooke](#)

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Major crimes are often committed with multiple accomplices. In a sophisticated bank robbery there stand, behind the vault busters, layers of criminals who act as lookouts, getaway drivers, planners, etc. So, too, in the colossal crime being committed against organized labor across the U.S., where the Republicans act as the vault busters while the Democrats have a less direct — but equally guilty — role in this historic attack against working people.

The Democrats are spared a lot of blame in this bi-partisan assault due to the Republican's honesty: they are unabashedly anti-union. On the other hand the Democrats will say they are pro-union while constantly stabbing labor in the back.

For example, numerous governors that campaigned as “pro-labor” in the last mid-term elections are now attacking the same unions that supported them. In multiple states across the country unions are forced to hold giant rallies outside — and inside — state capitals where Democratic governors sit. In these examples the Democrats are playing an openly anti-union role.

A recent debate in The New York Times discussed the topic “whose best at cutting state budgets.” The article discusses the tactics of Republican and Democratic governors in their drive to cut — what turns out to be — the benefits of union workers. One debater, Matthew Mitchell, advocated “reforming” (slashing) state's pension systems, long a target of the right wing in its assault against unions:

“... governors across the country from California's Jerry Brown (a Democrat) to Florida's Rick Scott (a Republican) are talking about pension reform. Several states are trying to reform pensions by raising the retirement age, increasing contributions, or changing benefit formulas.”

The debater goes on to advocate “reforming” (slashing) the state health care system for organized labor too, which Democratic governors across the country are actively pursuing.

Another debater, Elizabeth McNichol, advocates the always dishonest “shared sacrifice” approach: tiny tax increases for the wealthy or middle class combined with gigantic cuts for labor unions. McNichol's favorite examples are Minnesota and Connecticut, where the latter's Democratic governor is demanding \$1.6 billion in cuts to public workers' benefits every two years. Speaking of Minnesota's Democratic Governor, McNichol says:

“His [Governor Dayton] cuts to health care and public employee benefits are deep, but they'd be even deeper without these revenue measures [tax increases].” (The New York Times, May 16, 2011).

Labor leaders are torn between rallying their members against these anti-union politicians, and using language that isn't too harsh, since calling the Democrats by their rightful names would mean a divorce between these long-unhappily married groups. But some labor leaders are speaking more openly about the role of the Democrats, most recently Richard Trumka, President of the AFL-CIO. Trumka denounces not only the above directly anti-union Democrats, but the passively anti-union Democrats too:

"It doesn't matter if candidates and parties are controlling the wrecking ball or simply standing aside — the outcome is the same either way. If [political] leaders aren't blocking the wrecking ball and advancing working families' interests, working people will not support them." (The Huffington Post, May 20, 2011).

The head of the national Firefighters Union, Harold Schaitberger, also points the finger at the criminally complicit Democrats:

"Mr. Schaitberger complained that Congressional Democrats were doing far too little to combat ongoing efforts to weaken public-sector unions in Florida, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Tennessee and elsewhere. In Oklahoma, the Republican-led State Senate sent the governor legislation last week that would prohibit the state's 12 largest cities from bargaining with public-sector unions." (The New York Times, April 27, 2011.)

This abusive relationship continues because of the enabling behavior of labor leaders. The cycle of violence will continue until the victim (labor) leaves for good, since future promises of "change" from the Democrats are never manifested. When unions make threats to their abusers while continuing to fund Democratic campaigns, mixed messages are sent, which the Democrats correctly interpret as labor leaders "blowing off steam."

Unlike Trumka, who has only threatened to withhold some support for the Democrats, the Firefighters Union has already decided to withhold funding from the Democrats on the national level. This is a bold step forward that other unions must follow, since labor's resources are badly needed in other areas.

Unlike the Republicans, the Democrat's want labor unions to survive, albeit in a state of powerlessness. The Democrats want unions that cannot fight back against the corporate interests who control the Democratic Party, but want unions that exist as campaigning machines for Democratic politicians.

The Republicans, on the other hand, have rarely had the unions actively campaign for them, and thus have a one-sided hatred against labor for lowering corporate profits through higher union wages and benefits. The Democrats want the type of unions that exists in China and other countries, where the union officialdom is completely incorporated into the government apparatus, having no independent voice and thus little ability to improve the lives of working people.

Against the notion of labor unions being attached to the existing political parties, Richard Trumka said:

"We have listened hard, and what workers want is an independent labor

movement that builds the power of working people — in the workplace and in political life.”

But talk is cheap. Words must be backed by action; threats of flexing labor’s muscle must be transformed into actually fighting back. Detaching labor from the Democrats would be a crucial step for unions, since the money could be invested in organizing new members and launching fight-back campaigns on the state and national level, which includes mobilizing union members and labor’s allies for massive nationwide demonstrations to demand: No Cuts! No Concessions! Defend and improve Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid! In addition, union money can be used to build up strike fund reserves for the inevitable contract battles that lie ahead. Ultimately, labor unions should use their funds to run politically independent labor candidates from within the ranks of the labor movement.

Unions must also demand that state pension systems be bailed out by hefty taxes on Wall Street, since many states invested their pension savings in Wall Street banks whose fraudulent behavior destroyed these savings: Wall Street was bailed out and many pension systems remain in ruins. Likewise the state budget crises are due to the recession caused by Wall Street’s criminality. The criminals must pay! In addition, a new federal stimulus must be demanded that bails out the states and cities, while increasing taxes on Wall Street and the richest 1 percent to pre-Reagan levels, creating enough funds to pay for a massive national jobs program that would put the millions of unemployed back to work.

Shamus Cooke is a social service worker, trade unionist, and writer for Workers Action (www.workerscompass.org) He can be reached at shamuscooke@gmail.com

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