

Unjust Measures Imposed on Labor and African Americans After Midterm Elections

Railroad workers denied paid sick leave by Congress while Jackson residents face an administration consent decree on water services

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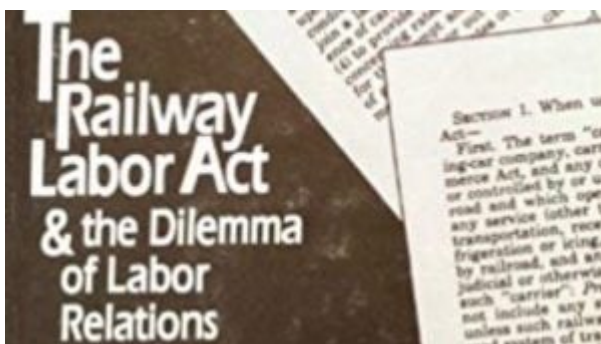
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United States President Joe Biden while running for office in 2020 pledged to become the most pro-union head-of-state in the history of the government.

However, many within the labor movement are incensed that Biden would demand that the House of Representatives and the Senate force the Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen (BRS), SMART-TD, and Brotherhood of Maintenance Way Employees Division which represent more than half of all railroad workers to accept a labor agreement previously rejected by large numbers within the membership. (See [this](#))



The president had intervened several weeks ago utilizing a decades-old federal law, the 1926 Railway Labor Act, which allows the administration and Congress to impose contracts that would prevent a strike within the transport industry. Any labor action which might disrupt interstate commerce such as ground and air transport could be halted through government intervention. (See [this](#))

Biden cited the current state of the U.S. economy as a rationale for his approach to the deadlock in negotiations between the labor unions and the Association of American Railroads which controls the private operations of the industry. The deal Biden attempted to

force on the Railroad owners and unions failed to be ratified by key elements of the workers.

Even after the midterm elections of November 8 where the president and Democratic members of Congress praised the electorate for voting in large numbers hence preventing far worse outcomes within the House and Senate, the rights of workers were so rapidly denied. In the weeks leading up to the midterm elections, Biden warned against the threat of far-right extremism and fascism in the U.S. He declared that democracy itself was on the Midterm ballot since the entire electoral process was vehemently attacked on January 6 of 2021 at the Capitol Building.

Yet, when the still sitting Democratic House and Senate were provided an opportunity to rebuke the Biden anti-labor policies, they decided to approve a contract which denies paid sick leave for railroad workers. The House bill initially voted on did place the 7 days paid sick leave clause into the text. Nonetheless, in the Senate, this key demand of the workers was denied.

Such an approach to the interests of organized labor and the working class in general illustrates the actual class character of the Democratic Party leadership which heavily relies upon unions and African Americans to win local, statewide and national elections. Absent the passage of legislation to ensure and enhance the voting rights of African Americans and other nationally oppressed peoples in the U.S., millions still went to the polls to cast their ballots largely for the Democratically-dominated Congress.

The December 6 runoff election in Georgia for the Senate has been marked by nationwide efforts on the part of Democratic-oriented political action committees to pour money into the state in support of the incumbent Raphael Warnock. The results of the Georgia Senate runoff election will determine whether the chamber will be evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans or a one-member majority for the Democrats if Warnock prevails. Even with a split Senate, Vice President Kamala Harris, as the President of the Senate, could break any tie vote.

A statement from Tony Caldwell, President of the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division (BMWED) in the Railroad industry said in a letter to the Senate on the present situation:

“Railroad workers are at their breaking point. An extension of the status quo will also deny railroad workers a much needed and well-deserved increase to their pay during a period where they have felt the woes of inflation. It has been three years since Railroad Workers have received a raise. They should not have to wait two more months.” (See [this](#))

Based upon these developments, the ongoing efforts to organize within the low-wage service sectors of the labor market will continue to face formidable challenges. The potential for a Teamsters’ strike against UPS in 2023 could evoke similar anti-union actions by the administration.

Justice Department and the Environmental Protection Agency Files Complaint against Jackson, Mississippi

In another move within the same week, Attorney General Merrick Garland announced several legal actions involving the water crisis in the majority African American municipality

of Jackson, the capital of the State of Mississippi. On behalf of the EPA, the Justice Department leveled a complaint against the administration of the beleaguered city saying it had failed to enforce the Clean Water Act.

Immediately a federal judge accepted the Justice Department complaint along with the appointment of a third-party administrator to manage the water system in Jackson. In addition to the EPA complaint filed by Garland, negotiations will be underway for a period of six months related to the implementation of a federal consent decree on the Jackson water system.

Jackson's problems became national news in the summer of 2022 when residents were unable to use the water supplied by the city's treatment plant. Although the state government dominated by Republican Governor Tate Reeves has blamed the water crisis on the Jackson administration of Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba, others have cited the decades-long neglect and disinvestment by the state and federal governments in Jackson as well as scores of other majority African American populated cities.

Image: Jackson Mayor Chokwe A. Lumumba and Governor Tate Reese



[A report published](#) on November 30 by the Associated Press notes that:

“The department filed a proposal to appoint a third-party manager for the Jackson water system. That is meant to be an interim step while the federal government, the city of Jackson and the Mississippi State Department of Health try to negotiate a court-enforced consent decree, the department said in a news release.”

[Garland in a press release](#) emphasized that he was compelled in:

“[T]aking action in federal court to address long-standing failures in the city of Jackson’s public drinking water system. The Department of Justice takes seriously its responsibility to keep the American people safe and to protect their civil rights. Together with our partners at EPA, we will continue to seek justice for the residents of Jackson, Mississippi. And we will continue to prioritize cases in the communities most burdened by environmental harm.”

Vangela M. Wade, CEO of the Mississippi Center for Justice indicated her hope that the Justice Department intervention would improve the status of the Jackson water system. Nonetheless, she pointed out as well that:

“[T]he deplorable and unsafe condition of Jackson’s water system didn’t happen overnight but stems from decades of neglect and the intentional disinvestment of

resources for the majority-Black municipality.”

Governor Reese, who has consistently attacked the Jackson administration of Mayor Lumumba, praised the action taken by the Justice Department. He noted the fact that the control of the water system was finally being taken out of the control of the city government.

[Reese said in a press release:](#)

“It is excellent news for anyone who cares about the people of Jackson that the Mayor will no longer be overseeing the city’s water system. It is now out of the city’s control, and will be overseen by a federal court.”

Denial of Democracy and Self-Determination

The situation in Jackson is not an isolated one in the U.S. Numerous majority Black cities throughout the country have been subjected to similar violations of home rule and the right to self-determination.

Cities in Michigan such as Detroit, Flint, Inkster, Highland Park, etc., have been forced into emergency management effectively denying their right to vote for officials who embody the authority inherent in the municipal charters and state constitutions. Even the emergence from emergency management and bankruptcy, the state governments backed up by Washington and Wall Street continue to inflict regressive tax measures which transfer billions of dollars to the rich while driving working class and impoverished people out of the municipalities.

Mississippi historically has been one of the most repressive states since the period of antebellum slavery. As a center for cotton production and the interstate slave trade, after the Civil War until well into the 20th century, the African American population proportionately had been one of the largest in the U.S.

Many African Americans were lynched by law-enforcement personnel and white mobs in the state during the late 19th and 20th centuries. Mississippi was a focal point of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, prompting economic and violent retaliation against African Americans and their allies seeking change to the status quo.

It was in the state of Mississippi that one of the earliest independent political organizations was established, the Freedom Democratic Party. The MFDP registered people to vote and carried out a challenge to the seating of the all-white Democratic Party delegates present at the 1964 Democratic National Convention held in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Later in June 1966, the slogan Black Power was advanced by Willie Ricks and Stokely Carmichael, leaders in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Later in 1968, the state and its capital of Jackson was designated as the center of the Republic of New Africa (RNA), which has sought to found an independent Black nation in five southern states.

Since the era of Reconstruction, where two African Americans, Hiram Revels and Blanche K. Bruce were elected by the state legislature to serve in the Senate representing Mississippi, no one else from the community has worked in the same capacity. These factors highlight the contradictions within the national politics of the Democratic and Republican parties. The fairness supposedly guaranteed under the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution has never been fully implemented by the federal courts and the administrative apparatus of the

state.

Whether in the realm of labor rights for living wages and safe working conditions to the guarantees that the oppressed peoples have democratic due process and self-determination, the U.S. political and economic system has failed. Under socialism the working class could be ensured of adequate wages, quality conditions within the workplace and the necessary social needs of the proletariat, farmers and youth.

With the abolition of institutional racism and national oppression, African Americans and other people of color communities would enjoy the same rights and privileges as those within the white population. African Americans are in desperate need of self-determination and equal protection under the law necessitating the complete transformation of capitalist society.

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