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[Contents of Issue Menu](#)

Click Here

[Home](#)

**America's Union Workers Need a Pay Cut:
Congressional GOP
Solidarity America
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The introduction of the Employee Free Choice Act in Congress this week signaled the beginning of a battle royal between the Republican Party and American workers.

It became very clear several weeks ago, when Congress was debating the bailout of the American auto industry that the Republicans believe American workers make too much money. They said at that time that United Auto Workers union members needed to give up the pay scales that they had worked decades to win at the bargaining table and on the shop floor, and agree to reductions in pay and benefits to match the lower pay and benefits of their non-union counterparts at the foreign auto plants.

It was the peak of their decades-long campaign to keep American workers from organizing their own unions. They had them where they wanted them - without unions and without a way of expressing their desire for democracy in the workplace.

"You want your industry bailed out? Then submit to our demands for ever-lower wages and no unions, no collective bargaining," was the message from the Republicans, who maintained a united front on the issue.

The Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) simply makes it easier for workers to form a union. They can do so by having a majority sign union cards, indicating their wish to join a union. Of course, they still may vote by secret ballot, conducted by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), if they wish.

Republicans, in their desperation, have lied about the effect of the EFCA, saying that it eliminates the possibility of secret ballot for workers and, therefore, is not in conformance with the American way. As has been noticed in the matter of free, secret ballot elections, the Republicans have shed crocodile tears about "their" workers. You'd

almost think they cared about them and their families.

In the early days of the last century, when assembly line production was coming into its own in all of the major industries - auto, rubber, glass, steel, appliances, and electrical gadgetry - workers didn't like the idea that they could be fired for any reason or for no reason. They didn't like the idea that they were paid on the basis of what the boss or the employer deemed sufficient.

The labor movement was in its early stages, even though unions had been around for a half-century. In all those decades, employers and the wealthy hired their own armies, called "detective agencies," which knew how to break heads and, when it was necessary, kill those who were too unruly and too insistent on forming their own unions or demanding rights.

A federal law that encouraged workers to form unions was the next step, under President Franklin D. Roosevelt. In the ensuing 20 years, there was a surge of union organizing that shook the foundations of the political right wing. They looked at the rate of organizing and feared that the whole country would be unionized in no time.

All the time, however, they were pursuing the same line of propaganda that they'd been pushing through the late 19th Century and the first three decades of the 20th - unions are the same as Bolshevism...unions will destroy freedom and the American way of life.

In recent weeks, Republicans have stood up in Congress and said essentially the same thing: EFCA is a sure path to socialism. They never explain what they mean by that and we shouldn't expect them to explain. Using the word is enough to devastate any proponent of card-check organizing.

According to the Center for Economic and Policy Research, in a report released this month, more than one-fourth of all union representation elections in the 2000s have been marred by an illegal firing of a pro-union worker. The report covers firings of union supporters from 1951-2007 and finds that the rate of firing of union-supporting workers has increased in this decade. Since the election of Ronald Reagan as president, a new industry has arisen - union-busting law firms and individual "union-avoidance" consultants. Their job is the same as those of 80 years ago, except without the clubs. In the past three decades, they have used the law and courts to deny workers their right to a union.

The effect has been the same, but the worker-organizers appreciate having their skulls intact at the end of a union campaign, although they might be without a job. Some get their jobs back, but it has taken years for the cases to make their way through the National Labor Relations Board proceedings, especially under Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and George W. Bush. By then, most fired workers were employed elsewhere.

It is difficult to organize a union under any circumstance. The opposition is formidable: hostile politicians, a very hostile Corporate America, a court system that often sees things through a haze of sympathy for the fellows of their class, and individual bosses that exert direct influence and power over all the workers, union-supporters or not.

When employers decide to get rid of a union, they start a petition for what's called a decertification election. That's pretty straightforward. They like decertification, yet they

don't want workers to have a similar basic process to form their own union.

What Republicans have demanded recently of individual workers - to take the lower pay of non-union foreign-car makers in the U.S. - is what American corporations have done for nearly four decades: They have told workers that, in a global economy, you will take the lower pay and lesser benefits that we're offering at the bargaining table, or we'll just take our factory or company to a low-wage country.

At this stage of American history, they no longer need to threaten flight to another country. Deregulation and other factors in the financial sector have brought the U.S. economy to a condition in which it seems almost reasonable for workers to give up their present and their future. But the people in Congress who are demanding it never for a second think about giving up the life of privilege that they enjoy. And they don't demand much sacrifice from corporate CEOs and their minions.

Democrats are not all that brave for introducing EFCA, for it will not guarantee rejuvenation of the organized labor movement. They have had a half-century to mitigate the laws and court rulings that have weakened American workers' right to a decent standard of living for themselves, their families, and communities. It hasn't happened. But card-check is a small step toward a new beginning, when workers will be able to support one another across industries and geographical boundaries to form unions of their choice. And, it's hard to imagine Democrats calling for pay cuts for American workers.

In all of the debate and threats and whining about card-check, it should not be forgotten that the huge middle of the American economy - whether it's called a middle class or a powerful working class - was possible because of two things: a growing and strong union movement and the GI Bill that gave the working class's sons and daughters an opportunity to be educated and thrive in a scientific and technological age.

Maybe, that's what worries congressional Republicans and their friends and supporters. You can't keep too tight a leash on a resurgent working class. And, you can't let them make too much money.

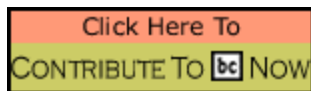
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BlackCommentator.com Columnist, John Funicello, is a labor organizer and former union organizer. His union work started when he became a local president of The Newspaper Guild in the early 1970s. He was a reporter for 14 years for newspapers in New York State. In addition to labor work, he is organizing family farmers as they struggle to stay on the land under enormous pressure from factory food producers and land developers. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Funicello.

[Contents of Issue Menu](#)

[Click Here](#)

[Home](#)



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