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What The New Administration Might Consider To Benefit America Solidarity America By John Funciello BlackCommentator.com Columnist

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Over the past few months, there have been literally thousands of to-do lists for the incoming Barack Obama Administration to consider and, for certain, someone is duly noting all of them and weighing them for action and the setting of priorities.

The big things have been addressed by large advocacy organizations and even some lawmakers: the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, our other war in the Middle East in Gaza, the impending collapse of the national economy, the potential disappearance of the Big Three auto companies which have been the primary manufacturing industry for a century, and the failure of America to tend to the diseases and injuries of all of its people—as other developed and civilized countries have had for a few generations.

The following are a few that have taken a back seat to the other important issues of our day: rid the federal government of the animus against unions, give us back our free speech rights in our own public places, ensure the children of adequate food and shelter and a real education, give us back our constitutional right to habeas corpus, and acknowledge that real national security comes from a people that is secure in their homes, community, and nation—no matter how many guns a nation displays before the world, it will not be secure without the fundamental security and health of all of its citizens.

Fundamental to the security of the people is the democratic right to free and fair elections, on and off the job. Rarely does any public figure discuss the right to a union as being a part of the general right to fully participate in a democratic republic.

Early in his first term, George W. Bush, in the wake of the events of 9-11, consolidated a number of departments into the so-called Department of Homeland Security. The 170,000 workers in the new department were to do so without the benefit of the right to join a union—because it involved “national security”.

In a straight line from Ronald Reagan (many in the Bush Administration had actually done the revolving-door circuit, from Corporate America to high government office in those two decades), Bush carried out Reagan’s animus against workers and their unions. Fortunately, the stripping of worker rights by Bush and Dick Cheney continues to be opposed by federal unions in the courts.

Barack Obama could reverse this and take it out of the interminable round of court proceedings and allow federal workers to join unions, by executive order. That would be a signal that he and his administration will not allow the animus to continue and that the rights of workers, in general, to join unions will not be infringed.

The new president also can make a break with the previous administration by allowing dissent to be expressed where the powers-that-be can see the people and hear what it is to which they object. Bush and Cheney used the so-called “free speech pens,” where dissenters were “allowed” to express their opposition.

Usually, these are enclosures surrounded by chain link fences and located some distance from the site of an event involving public officials—where the demonstrators could neither be seen, nor heard. These pens were adopted around the country by states and cities—anywhere that dissent was to be hidden away, in clear violation of the U.S. Constitution.

The Bush Administration handled national security by removing a number of constitutional rights, including habeas corpus, which simply means that a person has the right to know what the charges are, has a right to counsel, has a right to a bail hearing, and has a right to let family members know his or her whereabouts.

With the designation of the term “enemy combatants” (people who had no rights, anywhere), the Bush Administration could designate anyone such a non-person, including American citizens. We want our habeas corpus rights back.

Nearly half the children in America are eating food purchased with food stamps, which means that their parents are having a tough time making ends meet. These are not those living on “the dole.” Remember, “welfare as we knew it” was eliminated by another president, Bill Clinton, who accomplished what the right wing could not do over decades of trying. We don’t know where those people or their children are.

We do know that 13.3 million children are living below the poverty line. Many, if not most, of their parents are wage workers and few are talking about *their* welfare. If they’re not doing well, we are not a secure nation, no matter how many weapons systems we have.

It’s true that we can’t resolve these problems overnight, but a high level of unionization of American workers will go a long way toward solving the problems and preventing the kind of wealth disparity between the rich and poor (working or otherwise) that we’ve seen develop over the past 25 years.

There probably is no single issue that can destroy the confidence of an entire people than this: people who work hard, sometimes at two or three jobs, not being able to live decently and, even, losing their homes when there’s a downturn in the economy.

It's an economic system from another time.

As for unionization's effect on national security right here at home, a worker, knowing that she can be fired only for cause, is much more likely to report wrongdoing, thus, allowing the president or congress to fix the problem. Whistleblowers are most secure when truth is told under a union contract.

When the Obama Administration takes office next week, it will be considering an economic stimulus package. That package should be geared toward the people who pay the most and are the productive people in the society and nation: the workers. There are those who continue to insist that tax cuts for the rich is what is needed for stimulus, ignoring the dire straits that America is in, just because of those very economic policies and philosophies.


The people who need help the most are not the ones who will go to the whirl of parties and events connected to the inauguration. They are not the ones who would ever even get a ticket to the big event. They are the ones who just keep on working for a paycheck and trying to pay their bills. If they are not the primary beneficiaries of the stimulus package and other programs and legislation designed to bring us out of recession, there won't be much of an America, as we knew it, left at the other end of this mess.


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BlackCommentator.com Columnist, *John Funciello*, 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. Funciello.

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