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**The Employee Free Choice Act
Correcting the Balance Between Corporate Bosses and Workers
African American Leadership
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BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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One of the apparent mysteries many people ponder is how it was that union membership was responsible for virtually building the American middle class after World War II and now so many people appear to blame unions for the loss of jobs rather than the push for more profits by company bosses. The answer is fear. In reality, the intimidation of workers has made it more difficult for them to organize in various companies for fear they would lose their jobs. Employer influence over the unionizing process has been a primary reason why the American work force has declined from one-third of the labor force at its heights to 12% at present, forcing organized labor and its allies to formulate the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) to make union organizing much easier.

When the National Relations Labor Act was passed in 1935, it spelled out two methods for unions to become organized that exist today. If 30% of employees in a company signed up, union organizers could request that the National Labor Relations Board direct the company to hold an election under secret ballot. But if over 50% of employees sign up, the employer could voluntarily waive the election provision, recognize the union and go directly to collective bargaining. The EFCA proposes that if over 50% of workers sign up for a union that could automatically void a secret ballot election, but workers could still opt to have an election with secret ballot if they chose.

As the age of Obama dawns with a focus on improving the economic status of the middle class, it would appear necessary to correct the balance between the power of the corporate bosses and the power of workers represented by their unions. It is worth noting that one of the primary reasons why the wages of the middle class did not rise for about the past two decades while the upper class wages ran away from the whole wage structure was not only because of the tax cuts enacted by Republican administrations, but because corporations virtual held up cities and their workers. It went something like this: companies received concessions from cities and towns to

locate their operations in them, but in order to make more profit, they threatened to leave and go overseas. For many communities to retain jobs, that put pressure on the cost of making products which meant workers giving up wages and benefits negotiated under collective bargaining agreements. But even after these labor "give-backs" boosted profits for a while, many companies eventually left for low-wage labor markets abroad anyway blaming the cost of domestic labor supported by unions.

There is now a great flood of economic resources from the Stimulus Package, the recent national budget and the financial enhancements to small businesses that will boost the labor market and create hundreds of thousands of jobs. But the rational person must ask under what conditions will these jobs be created; will conform to the downward pressure on wages, or will they be at a wage rate that will allow a person to take home enough money to feed, clothe, and educate their families? Recent census data for 2008 show us that with respect to the group that are union members: Blacks – 14.5%; whites – 12.2%; Hispanics – 10.6%; and Asians – 10.6; for a national rate of 12.4%. With wage rates that are 65-80% of whites when one compares just races or two parent households, Blacks and Hispanics in particular would appear to have a vested interested in strong support of improving union organizing and the higher wage rates and, health and retirement benefits that come from union membership and collective bargaining.

When we think of what it takes to turn the corner economically in this era of history, we must combine turning around the top-down economics that Ronald Reagan instituted with the war on labor, reflected in his attack on the PATCO because of the pilots union strike early in his administration. This attack has continued as a necessary aspect of creating the condition for companies to take massive profits. Even foreign companies coming into the country have taken advantage of the "right to work" provision of the Taft Hartley Act of 1947 to settle their operations in Southern states that permit companies to reject unions.

So, the hard question the Obama era must face is whether, in the attempt to retain an industrial base, the labor system it builds resembles the Third World, or sets an example of the kind of standards of fair wages and benefits that should be the model for workers around the world. The EFCA must be supported.

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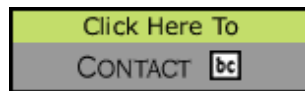
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