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**The Power of a
Non-Violent Movement
Solidarity America
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Considering the advancement of workers in America through the labor movement and the union movement - which has been, in the aggregate, a non-violent one - it's hard to believe that the powerful people of the country have become so fearful of the Employee Free Choice Act.

Throughout the history of unions in the U.S., workers have suffered the conditions of their jobs and their industries with courage and perseverance, in the interest of providing for their families and their communities.

Although violence was used by corporations and the government to keep workers and their families in line on a regular basis, the workers resorted to violence in return when there was no other choice.

Essentially, the workers usually lost in any confrontation with the power of the U.S. military, the private armies of the corporations, and the "security" forces of the industrialists and, later, what came to be known as Corporate America. In an earlier time, those who made up Corporate America were known as Big Business or The Trusts.

They controlled the country and its economy. They still do and it appears that they will be in control for the foreseeable future.

There have been bail-outs of the biggest corporations - banks, investment funds, insurance companies and others deemed "too big to fail" - but this kind of trickle-down

hasn't reached the people on a personal level. It's not likely that it will.

Through all of this economic turmoil, the people have accepted their terminations at work, dutifully crafted their resumes, and sent out applications to dozens, if not hundreds, of potential employers. Multiply this by millions of Americans and you have a multitude of pleas for gainful employment sailing through the U.S. Postal Service. Most of the pleas go unanswered.

Workers have not rebelled. They have gone about the business of finding another job with the dedication that they exhibited while they were employed. There are few jobs out there to satisfy the millions who are desperate for work.

The economy has not ground to a halt yet, but it's headed in that direction. It's said that, if you have a job, the unemployment figures don't mean much to you, but if you're the one who is close to running out of unemployment benefits, it means everything.

Yet, the millions of people who have had their lives turned upside down have not rebelled. They have not even taken to the streets. They're plugging away because they believe in the "American dream," the belief that hard work and dedication will pay off.

Most wage workers, whether they earn \$40,000 a year or \$150,000 a year, know that they are not likely to own three or four houses - one for each season - or five cars. They would be satisfied with a home without the threat of foreclosure, good food on the table, the possibility of higher education for their children, and health care for the family.

The most prosperous time in the country for the greatest number of Americans was in the decades after World War II. Two factors combined to make that so: the GI Bill and the surge of union organizing. The factors were education and workers' right to join together to seek a better life. What a concept! And it worked, for a time.

For the most part, workers organized their unions non-violently, although there are propagandists everywhere today who claim that unions are organized on the basis of violence and threat. There is something of the psychological concept of transference at play here. The powerful are pulling out the stops and claiming that the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) will end civilization as we know it, as one corporatist put it. And they can get that word out, because they have the money to influence local communities and they literally own access to the airwaves.

They fear the joining together of the powerless into unions, which movement might express itself as power in politics and in the economy. In the eyes of the powerful, that's a threat that can not be tolerated. Considering that most of the progress of American workers has been accomplished in the most peaceful way - at the bargaining table and in grievance procedures and in the assurance of fair treatment in the workplace - one would not think that Corporate America would be so fearful of EFCA, but they are.

Gene Sharp, senior scholar at the Albert Einstein Institution, has written: "People are capable of self-liberation when they learn of the possibility of increasing their own power self-reliantly, when they refuse to fight with their oppressors' best weapons, but

instead defy injustices and domination with the social, economic, psychological, and political weapons of people power. They are beginning to learn that their courage is more likely to be effective when they learn what they are doing and how to do it skillfully.”

The mission of AEI is to spread the knowledge of the use of non-violence to win social and economic justice and political freedom for masses of people everywhere. There is no set formula, but there are examples from around the world and the institution educates people about the practice of non-violent methods to solve conflicts, within nations and among nations. Again, it’s about education and dedication to a principle.

Before the knowledge can be turned into non-violent action, though, the people have to join together. That’s what EFCA would facilitate. It would make it a little easier for workers to join together to uphold their tradition of non-violent advancement. That’s why Corporate America is so intent on crushing any such attempt to make it easier for workers to unionize.

Polls show that a majority of workers would join unions if they had the opportunity, but employers have routinely fired union activists in their shops and suffered no consequences, even though such action is against federal law. Workers know this and fear loss of their jobs, so they are reluctant to stand up for their rights at work.

AEI quoted John Adams, American independence leader and U.S. president, who wrote, “A history of military operations...is not a history of the American Revolution....The revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people, and (was) substantially effected before hostilities commenced.”

Overcoming oppression also requires understanding and unity, as Adams pointed out. And oppression comes in so many ways - political, economic, and social, but in solidarity, workers can overcome all efforts to keep them down. They can win, as they have shown over generations, in a non-violent way. First, they need to join together and that’s where EFCA comes in and that’s why Corporate America is so fearful of it.

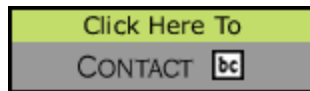
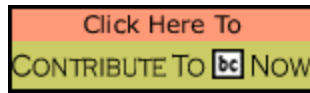
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BlackCommentator.com Columnist, John Funciello, is a labor organizer and former union organizer. His union work started when he became a local president of The Newspaper Guild in the early 1970s. He was a reporter for 14 years for newspapers in New 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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