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**In California: Still Another Plot Against Democracy
Left Margin
By Carl Bloice
BC Editorial Board**

Quiet as it's kept while the nation's attention is focused on the November 6 Presidential election, a ballot box battle is underway in California, the implications of which extend far beyond the borders of the country's largest state. Here, rightwing big business operative have launched an effort that, should it succeed, would seriously undermine the political strength of working people and undermine democratic decision-making.

Attempts to restrict labor unions' ability to engage in political campaigns have been on the ballot in California more than once and each time they have gone down to defeat. This time, the effort is masquerading as an attempt at electoral reform. In fact, it would mean that three million members of labor unions would be unable to contribute to political campaigns while large corporate financiers would be exempted from any restrictions at all.

While the referendum measure, Proposition 32, on the November ballot proposes to end labor unions' use of funds collected from members through dues, and bars corporations from using their operating funds for backing candidates and parties, the illusion of equal treatment is a fraud. No restriction is placed on the ability of billionaires, either individually or collectively, to contribute any amount they wish to political campaigns, which is their usual route. Furthermore, the framers of the measure wrote in special exemptions for corporate-linked super PACS.

John Logan, a professor and director of labor and employment studies at San Francisco State University and member of the California

Teachers Association warns that, "If Prop. 32 passes in November, right-wing activists will promote a tsunami of ballot initiatives in 2013 at the local level and in 2014 at the state level designed to drive down working conditions in both the public and private sectors. Lacking the ability to oppose these reactionary measures under the new election rules, California's workers could soon face some of the weakest labor standards in the country."

"Prop. 32 is not campaign finance reform, but a billionaires' bill of rights, one that would be a game-changer in California politics," Logan wrote recently. "When it comes to ballot initiatives, Prop. 32 is the ultimate wolf in sheep's clothing."

The hardly pro-labor *San Jose Mercury-News* says Proposition 32 is "a deceptive sham that would magnify the influence of wealthy interests while shutting out many middle-class voters."

The Proposition 32 campaign is being run by a superpac that operates mostly in the shadows but is linked to the notorious Koch Brothers and others who have bankrolled anti-union campaign in other parts of the country. The group most publicly identified as a promoter of the proposition the Lincoln Club of Orange County. The 50-year-old business group is associated with Republican Party operations and its founding members and past luminaries have included such rightwingers as Arnold O. Beckman, the founder of Beckman Instruments, Walter Knott, the founder of Knott's Berry Farm, and Si Fluor of the Fluor Corporation, former U.S. President Richard Nixon, and actor John Wayne. The group's leaders say it was "instrumental" in advocating for the recent Supreme Court Citizens United decision that defined corporations as people with regards to campaign contributions. Two years ago, the group joined Tea Party activists in a failed attempt to restrict union political contributions, but that failed to qualify for the ballot.

As the progressive activist network, Credo, describes it, Proposition 32 "could cripple our ability to beat back right-wing candidates and ballot initiatives in California for decades to come."

"Proposition 32 was written to limit the voice of nurses and other working people in Sacramento, while giving free reign for corporate interests and the wealthiest Californians to exert limitless influence over public policy in California. RN duties and rights will be encumbered and made subordinate to the hospital industry's for-profit business enterprise." DeAnn McEwen, RN, co-president of the

California Nurses Association/National Nurses United, wrote September 27 in *Daily Kos*.

"For nurses, that means that we would have far less ability to counter the efforts of the wealthy hospital industry, insurance companies, pharmaceutical and health technology corporations who are in the halls of the Capital every day lobbying to roll back longstanding workplace safety regulations to increase their own profits at the public's expense," wrote McEwen. "Similarly, other public safety workers and teachers would be unable to fight effectively on issues that matter to us all - like cuts to our schools and colleges; and, police and fire response times."

But this is not just a California story.

The *Nation* magazine's Washington correspondent and regular commentator on MSNBC, John Nichols, was in San Francisco a couple of weeks ago where he address a group of determined local union activists. He called Proposition 32 "an absolutely critical matter" of "relevance to the whole country." If it passes, he wrote recently, "it will go national just as groups like the American Legislative Exchange Council and its corporate allies are mounting multi-state drives to silence unions."

If Prop 32 passes, unions "could become almost extinct in California politics," UC San Diego political science professor, Thad Kousser, told Nichols. "First they silence our voice," says the California Labor Federation. "Then they will come after our jobs, wages and retirement."

"In Michigan, unions are trying to get ahead of the fight with a "Protect Our Jobs" amendment on the ballot this fall that would add the right to collective bargaining by public and private sector employees to the state Constitution," wrote Nichols, author of the new book *Uprising: How Wisconsin Renewed the Politics of Protest, from Madison to Wall Street*. "Right-wing interests have poured millions into a brutal ad campaign falsely claiming that the amendment would block schools from removing employees who are former criminals. Michigan's Protect Working Families coalition has countered with the truth: 'States with higher levels of collective bargaining have lower poverty levels, higher average incomes, fewer workplace deaths and higher pension and health insurance coverage for all workers, according to the Economic Policy Institute'."

"In an honest fight, voters will protect collective bargaining rights, as they did last fall in Ohio by a 62-38 margin," wrote Nichols. "That's why Mitt Romney, the Koch brothers and their billionaire pals are spending so heavily - and campaigning so dishonestly - to silence the voice of unions. And that's why, as important as the presidential race is, it's also vital to win fights to maintain the capacity of working people to speak truth to power."

In an opinion piece in the *Contra Costa Times* last month, Leonard McNeil, vice mayor of San Pablo and a professor of political science at Contra Costa College, called Proposition 32 an attempt "by conservative forces in California to curtail and stifle the voices of working people" and an effort "to align the political system with their ideological vision." It represents, he wrote, "a frontal assault on democratic pluralism to advance the agenda of corporations and the wealthy."

This latest well-financed and deceptive effort to restrict labor ability to influence political decision making in California and the nation are not unrelated to the coordinated efforts to smash public sector unions, the Citizens United decision and the ongoing voter repression conspiracy. The plutocrats and the rightwingers have seen the handwriting on the wall in terms of political and demographic trends in the country and they are determined to reshape politics in the interest of the one-percent by curtailing democratic decision-making.

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