

LABOR PARTY to Seek Ballot Access in South Carolina

Since our founding, the issue of whether, when and how to enter the electoral arena has been a source of spirited discussion and debate among Labor Party activists. Our 1998 convention adopted our current electoral strategy after thorough and serious consideration. Subsequent developments have affirmed the wisdom of our strategy, as has our survey earlier this year of Labor Party members. Most think that our basic approach to electoral action is sound.

At the same time, a clear majority of respondents agree that it is time for us to “get our feet wet” electorally.

Well, we now have an exciting opportunity to pursue establishing a presence in the electoral realm. The Labor Party Interim National Council has approved a plan to assist in the development of a state Labor Party in South Carolina with the aim of testing the waters in the November 2006 elections. The first step was creation of a South Carolina Labor Party Organizing Committee to lead the building of a statewide party, gain ballot access to certify the

party and run a credible candidate for the state legislature in 2006. The organizing committee is chaired by SC AFL-CIO President Donna Dewitt and South Carolina State University political science professor Willie Legette, who has been instrumental in building the campaign for free higher education in the state.

Attacks on South Carolina Workers

At first blush, it might seem surprising that South Carolina would be the site for our first foray into electoral politics. After all, it is a right-to-work state that has the second lowest union density (only North Carolina is lower) in the country. Only 3 percent of South Carolina’s workers belong to unions. And the state is home to forces intent on undermining workers’ rights even more, both in the Palmetto state and nationally. Not content with existing right-to-work laws, anti-worker politicians have pushed state and county legislation declaring “employment at will” to be the law in South Carolina, which they hope could

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California Nurses Association Executive Director Rose Ann Demoro at the nurses election-night victory party.

NURSES ROCK CALIFORNIA

*November 8 Special Election
Total Defeat for Governor*

Despite an estimated cost to taxpayers of \$40 to \$80 million and polls showing that 60 percent of Californians did not want the November 8 special election, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger stormed ahead in an attempt to win his sweeping pro-corporate reforms. “If they succeed in winning in California, it will consolidate radical conservatism nationally” commented California Nurses Association (CNA) Executive Director Rose Ann DeMoro before the election.

But thanks to CNA and the coalition of unions they spearheaded, voters defeated all eight of the ballot issues which included the Governor’s Reform Agenda. “For more than a year, California nurses have been the conscience of California, following the governor and exposing his degrading of our political system and democracy on behalf of his corporate donors,” said DeMoro.

With nearly \$300 million spent conducting the campaign and lobbying the voters both for and against, the election is the most expensive in the state’s history.

Voters said:

- “No” on lengthening the probationary period before teachers can qualify for tenure (Prop 74).
- “No” on requiring public employee unions to get written consent from members to spend dues money for political purposes (Prop 75).
- “No” on allowing the governor to bypass elected lawmakers on fiscal matters (Prop 76).
- “No” on taking the job of redistricting legislative districts away from publicly elected officials (Prop 77).
- “No” on creating a “voluntary” drug rebate program to the benefit of drug companies (Prop 78).

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Labor Party

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www.thelaborparty.org

National Affiliates/Endorsers

American Federation of Government Employees
Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees/IBT
California Nurses Association
Farm Labor Organizing Committee
International Longshore & Warehouse Union
United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America
United Mine Workers of America
United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied-Industrial & Service Workers
For a complete list of regional and local affiliates, visit www.thelaborparty.org

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LABORPARTY news

December 2005

The Labor Party News is the official news publication of the Labor Party and is published ten times a year.

Editor Katherine Isaac

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Rail Workers Fight Union Busting



BMWED member pickets in Philadelphia

A recent lawsuit filed by the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employee Division (BMWED) of the Teamsters Union charges the Amtrak Corporation with using the Railway Labor Act to deprive workers of their collective bargaining rights. For more than six years, 2,500 BMWED workers—who maintain and build track and equipment for Amtrak—have been working under an expired contract. Under the Railway Labor Act, unresolved labor disputes should be referred to the National Mediation Board (NMB) for prompt settlement. The lawsuit—which seeks to release BMWED from the sham mediation process—asserts that the NMB did not call a mediation session from August 2001 until April 2003; and then only to allow Amtrak to place more demands for concessions on the table. Only one additional session has been called since July 2003.

“The White House-appointed NMB is ensuring that no negotiations, except the negotiations of surrender, take place with the Union,” said Jed Dodd, General Chairman of the Pennsylvania Federation of the BMWED. “In short, the Bush Administration appoints our management, and, when

our management seeks to break our union, the same Bush Administration appoints mediators to help them destroy us. Our mediators are functioning as the servants of union busters and public looters.”

BMWED has taken its fight to the public along Amtrak’s highly profitable northeast corridor, picketing and leafleting rail stations from Boston to Washington, raising the possibility of a strike. “The Amtrak Board won’t negotiate with us, so a service stoppage might be our only option,” said BMWED member Kevin Hussey. “Many commuters were quite surprised to find out that their Amtrak and NJ Transit service might stop.”

Critics charge that these union-busting tactics are part of a flagrant move to sell off the most profitable parts of Amtrak to politically-connected private corporations.

“The White House is using the Amtrak Board to engage in old-fashioned union busting in order to shift this public asset to the private campaign contributors of the Administration,” charges Mark Kenney, General Chair of the Locomotive Engineers Division, which joined BMWED in their protests.

“We are calling upon all who care about rail passenger service in America to contact their representatives to encourage them to properly fund Amtrak and to replace the current Amtrak leadership with competent railroad professionals with a mandate to provide this vital economic service to the American people.”

More Information:
www.pennfedbmwe.org

Nurses, continued from page one

CNA’s victory in the special election was sweetened further when the governor abandoned his legal fight over nurse-to-patient ratios in hospitals just a few days after his defeat at the polls. California is the only state in the country with mandatory staffing levels for hospitals. But as CNA’s National Nurses Organizing Committee challenges the growing clout of hospital chains around the country, that may soon change.

With an emphasis on grassroots mobilizations and novel campaign tactics, CNA’s effort is a model for the nation in confronting corporate control of political, economic and social life.

Follow the Money

Amount of money you’d need to give to rank in the top 100 contributors to Schwarzenegger: \$86,200

Amount given by top 100 contributors to Schwarzenegger: \$30 million

Average amount of top ten drug company contributions supporting Prop 78: \$6.7 million

Amount raised by Prop 78 committee as of 9/05: \$80 million

Source: California Nurse, November 2005



Penn Fed General Chairman Jed Dodd (far right) addresses BMWED members at Newark picket

eventually undermine union representation in the state.

U.S. Senator Jim Demint is a major backer of the Secret Ballot Protection Act, which effectively outlaws card check elections. In the words of Ken Riley, Charleston ILA Local 1422 president, in a 2001 interview with journalist David Bacon, "South Carolina is like a third world country for working people. That's actually the way we're being marketed. We have some of the most productive workers in the world, paid 20 percent less than the national average. There's a very hostile climate toward unions."

And no one would know this better than Riley. His local was involved in one of the most important union struggles of the late 1990s, when five of its leaders were arrested and hit with felony riot charges, carrying a potential penalty of five years in state prison. They were charged after police attacked them and other Charleston dockworkers as they picketed a scab stevedore firm. Their fight sparked an international support movement, and the union ultimately won.

Ideal Site?

But these conditions also point to why South Carolina is an ideal site. The state's unemployment rate is the fourth highest in the country. It has lost more than 76,000 manufacturing and textile jobs in the last five years and is likely to experience an overall net loss of more than 20,000 jobs this year alone. And neither Republicans nor Democrats in the state seriously address these and other issues vital to workers and their families, and many Democrats actively aid and abet the anti-worker assault.

That is why the Labor Party has received a positive response in the South Carolina labor movement. The state's AFL-CIO has been a Labor Party

affiliate for several years, and its president, Donna Dewitt, is a national party Co-Chair. Our Free Higher Education campaign also has struck a responsive chord in the state. Labor Party activists there have been among the most successful nationally in building enthusiasm for the campaign.

After several months of discussion and preliminary examination with activists in the state, the Interim National Council authorized undertaking steps to create a state party as an electoral entity.

What's Next

This will require substantial commitment and effort because in South Carolina, as everywhere else, the rules governing entry into the electoral realm are stacked in favor of the bosses' two parties. Specifically, recognition as a political party and thereby the attainment of ballot access, requires the signatures of 10,000 registered South Carolina voters. The state's rigorous validation process means, of course, that many more signatures must be gathered and validated – within a very short time frame. While this threshold is high, it is attainable.

Volunteers began signature gathering last month. To meet the deadline for submission, the Labor Party is launching a statewide petition campaign. This process is taxing and expensive, and it carries no guarantee of success. However, the potential to establish a serious Labor Party presence that would project an unabashed working class voice in South Carolina politics justifies the risk.

Your Support is Critical!

The Labor Party has always stood for the principle that workers, if given a clear and serious choice, will embrace a working class political agenda and program. Our existence has been

SOUTH CAROLINA CAMPAIGN

Ballot access is the first critical step to launching our electoral strategy in South Carolina. Because we must collect the required signatures no later than January 31, 2006, we need your support now!

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW!

INDIVIDUALS CAN:

- ★ Make unlimited contributions to party-building activities. Make checks payable to Labor Party (write South Carolina in the memo of your check) and mail to PO Box 53177, Washington, DC 20009.
- ★ Attend or help organize a house party or fundraiser. A number of these events are in the works. Email houseparty@thelaborparty.org to attend or help organize one of these events.
- ★ Spread the word! Encourage co-workers and friends to contribute.
- ★ Send a solidarity message to South Carolina! Email your message to scip@thelaborparty.org
- ★ Stay informed! Watch for updates in the Party Builder online newsletter. Sign up at www.thelaborparty.org.

UNIONS CAN:

- ★ Contribute to the Labor Party Political Fund (LPPF) - the brand-new 527 political committee of the Labor Party! Unions are encouraged to contribute funds from their soft-money PACs to the LPPF. Make checks payable to Labor Party Political Fund and mail to 1532 16th ST NW, Washington, DC 20036. These funds will help build the Labor Party in South Carolina directly.
- ★ Continue to contribute general treasury money directly to the Labor Party to continue support of our non-electoral issue campaigns. **WE NEED THESE FUNDS NOW MORE THAN EVER!**

Contributions to the Labor Party and the Labor Party Political Fund are not tax-deductible

built and sustained on the fact that no other effort in American politics stands so resolutely on that conviction. We have maintained that all the "red state/blue state" analysis from pundits and political hacks is just a bunch of hoey.

Nowhere could we find a more convincing test for our politics than South Carolina. The national Democratic party and much of the labor movement may have written off the state as hopelessly in the right wing's grip, but we know better. We welcome the opportunity to find a way to break through the ideological smokescreens that corporate-dominated politics has thrown up and mobilize large numbers of workers around their own agenda. We welcome it because we know that, if we can do it in South Carolina, we will show that we can do it anywhere, and everywhere. **LP**

Dudzic, continued from page four

to support their effort. Now it's time for all LP members to put our money where our mouths are.

The odds are long, but I am convinced that South Carolina provides the best opportunity to build our party and our style of work in ways that can serve as a model for activists everywhere. For nine years, our Labor Party has survived some of the most difficult and adverse conditions that working people have ever faced.

We have survived because of the rock solid commitment of our members and affiliates and because of our clear headed, realistic organizing approach. Now is the time for all of us to step up and do our best to make sure we don't squander the opportunity presented to us.

Let's Put Our Money Where Our Mouths Are

Mark Dudzic, National Organizer

Anyone who has ever worked on a NLRB-supervised union organizing campaign quickly learns that the rules are stacked in the boss's favor. It usually takes a near-miracle—and extraordinary commitment and heroism on the part of the workers—to even have a chance at winning. Now, imagine those problems magnified a thousand fold.

That's what we're up against when we try to run political candidates who are not beholden to the corporations and are committed to being part of a serious movement of working people with a real program for economic justice. Everything—from the rules to gain ballot access to the very ways we can raise and spend money—is set up to perpetuate the dominance of the two political parties of the bosses. This corporate dominance of the political process is reinforced by nearly every TV, radio and news outlet in the nation as well as countless political appointees, judges and bureaucrats who make and administer the rules governing political access.

This is what made us so careful setting up an electoral policy for the Labor Party. We wanted to stay away from the kind of vanity, spoiler and marginal campaigns that get a tiny percentage of the vote, demoralize our activists and leave nothing in their wake. We wanted to develop the conditions that would allow credible candidates to run winning campaigns. And we wanted to be able to hold those candidates accountable to a party and a program after they've won.

Our Electoral Strategy says it best: "The Labor Party is unlike any other party in the United States. We stand independent of the corporations and their political representatives in the Democratic and Republican parties.... Unlike other political parties, the Labor Party will be active before, during and after the elections, building solidarity in our communities, workplaces and unions."

When we wrote that strategy, few of us would have predicted that South Carolina would be the first place to put it to a serious test (see article on page one). This is a state where the political discourse is dominated by right-wing ideologues and where even Democratic

politicians proudly tout their adherence to the "right to work" credo.

But that only tells half of the story. South Carolina's labor movement, although beleaguered on all sides, has achieved an incredible level of unity. In the Charleston 5 campaign, they sparked an international movement that took on the entire political establishment, defeated the multinational shipping companies and ruined the political career of the state's Attorney General.



WORKADAY

And although union density is very low, the vast majority of South Carolinians are workers. Many bristle under a political regime in which neither party serves them well. They are disrespected and attacked as working people and citizens. As African Americans, they are rebuffed and dismissed in their demands for dignity, equal representation, and justice. As women, they are derided in their aspirations for equal treatment, and even physical safety.

At this September's AFL-CIO convention, I met with a number of leaders from throughout the state to discuss ways to regain the offensive. They told me that they were ready for the serious organizing that it will take to establish the Labor Party as a statewide electoral party. Later that month, the Interim National Council authorized the first steps to make their commitment a reality.

The road ahead will not be easy. We first have to take up the daunting task of gaining statewide ballot access. Then we have to develop a strategic candidacy for the November 2006 election that will help build the state party, focus national attention on our efforts and, most importantly, run a winning campaign. And we have to adequately fund and support this project while continuing to build the Labor Party and our national campaigns in our unions and communities.

This past summer Labor Party members urged us to pursue building an electoral presence. Our brothers and sisters in South Carolina are willing to stand in the front lines to make this happen. It would be naive and irresponsible to expect them to succeed without the rest of us working to bring a national focus and raise the necessary funds

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LABOR PARTY

LABOR PARTY TO SEEK BALLOT ACCESS IN SOUTH CAROLINA

"Given the results of the past few elections, I think the workers of South Carolina would jump at the opportunity to consider a Labor Party which would guarantee an uncompromised voice for working people on their issues."

— Leonard Riley, ILA Local 1422
Charleston, South Carolina