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## **Politics in America:**

### **The Right Wing Attack on the American Labor Movement**

by Joanne Ricca, Wisconsin State AFL-CIO

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Union members have been fighting attacks on worker rights and protections on many fronts. These are not random, unconnected attacks. They are the result of a coordinated strategy by a corporate-funded ideological movement that aims to eventually destroy the labor movement. Other progressive movements have seen hard won gains attacked and eroded as well.

This report documents the development of the New Right, its ideology and its strategy. In particular, it explains how the Right exploits single issues and manipulates religious faith to direct workers into voting for candidates who are a threat to their economic interests. Hopefully, this summary can serve as a framework for a larger, continuing discussion on how to challenge and defeat the Right.

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August 2002

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## **POLITICS IN AMERICA: THE AMERICAN RIGHT WING**

Prepared by Joanne Ricca for the education of union members concerning the  
Right Wing political movement in this country

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Summary

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There has always been an American Right. There has always been some sort of archconservative political activity in this country. However, the Right Wing activism of today is different in both degree and kind. It is important to understand that the political effectiveness of the Right is the result of years, in fact decades, of dedicated organizing and that the Right has not been systematically challenged up to this point.

### **Origin of the Term: Right Wing**

The origin of the term is found in French history. When France was ruled by a monarchy, all of the nobility who came before the King had to bow to the King's *right*. The peasants were instructed to bow to the King's *left*.

After the French Revolution which overthrew the monarchy, the people created a National Assembly. However, those who were elected to represent the wealth, power and privilege of the upper classes sat on the *right* of the Assembly hall. Those who were elected to represent the workers and peasants sat on the *left*.

Over time, the terms *Right* and *Left* began to be used throughout the world to represent the different economic interests of capital and labor, corporations and workers, the wealthy and the poor. These terms also represent opposing views about which interests government should serve -- those of the corporations or the people.

The ideological battle concerning the role of government continues to this very day.

### **World View: Ideology**

So that we have a frame of reference, it is important to briefly summarize Right Wing ideology. Ideology is a set of beliefs on which political, economic and social policies are based. For the Right, the world of the future is the world of the past – the America of the late 1800s – when free enterprise was unregulated and the role of government was minimal. Right Wing ideology can be summarized by the following points:

- **Survival of the Fittest.** The Right believes that anyone who does not succeed or prosper in the system lacks the necessary self-discipline, or was born with the wrong genes. There are no flaws in the system or in institutions; the flaws are in the individual. Because the term "survival of the fittest" sounds too cruel, the Right has popularized the concept of "personal responsibility". However, that means being personally responsible for such things as retirement security, health care, and coping with the loss of a job due to unfair trade agreements or corporate mergers. Those who do achieve wealth and power are the "most fit", the product of natural selection or social Darwinism. They deserve the most privileges and highest power. For the Right, the growing income inequality in the U.S. is only a natural and perfectly acceptable consequence of the "survival of the fittest."
- **Private Enterprise Should Rule.** The Right believes that the "natural forces" of free enterprise should run the economy. It is opposed to regulation in the interests of workers, the environment, consumers, the elderly and the powerless and constantly attempts to demonize government. However, the Right is not opposed to regulation and activism that protects corporate interests, such as ensuring that trade agreements like NAFTA protect capital and patents. The Right hated the activism of government during the Great Depression of the 1930s, especially the creation of the Social Security program and passage of collective bargaining rights for workers. Public services should be privatized, social programs minimized, and church-based charity should aid those in need. The role of government is basically to provide a military defense and any regulation that protects competitive business interests.
- **Property Rights Supersede Human Rights.** The Right is determined to protect the property rights of corporate owners. Russell Kirk, a major conservative theorist who wrote *The Conservative Mind* in 1953, reiterated that property ownership is what separates humans from other animals so "the rights of property are more important than the right to life." For government to order business owners to behave a certain way – such as imposing minimum wage, overtime, health and safety, pollution and fair trade laws – erodes the right to own property. Kirk opposed the notion of worker "rights" and wrote that limiting working hours and requiring periodic holidays meant workers insisted on a "right to be idle".
- **Decisions Should Be Made By The Elite.** It follows then that those who accumulate the most wealth deserve to make the decisions. Contrary to its populist rhetoric, the Right believes that the masses have a persistent and basic incompetence, and has often referred to democracy as "mob rule." Consistent with this view, the Right will oppose any policy to expand citizen participation and create a more informed electorate – such as the Voting Rights Act, the Freedom of Information Act, voter registration at the polls, and public funding for public radio, television and the arts. It is especially opposed to unions which are the most powerful mass-based, democratic organizations.

Right Wing ideology, if allowed to evolve to its logical end, would destroy democracy and allow unlimited corporate power. The growth of private power to a point where it becomes stronger than the democratic state itself is known as fascism.

## **Why the Labor Movement is a Threat to the Right**

There are good reasons why the Right views labor unions and their members as the main enemy:

- The Right represents the interests of corporations and wealthy individuals who are fundamentally opposed to unions because unions provide workers with organized power.
- Unions are the most powerful worker-based organizations in our society. Union members are informed about issues that will affect their well-being and that of their families. They can discuss the real agenda of the Right and the economic threat it poses to working families. They can interview, discuss and support candidates for public office. They can organize effective opposition to the Right. Non-union workers never gather together in such a way, have the resources to fight for their rights, or work collectively to promote their economic interests. Unions can also join with other progressive organizations (seniors, women, civil rights, environmental and consumer) to create a powerful and effective force to challenge and defeat the Right.
- Unions are the major source of funds to elect candidates who will truly represent the economic interests of working families.
- Union households vote at a significantly higher percentage than non-union households, so union members have much greater power to decide which candidate will win.

For the Right to succeed in gaining total power, it must cripple and eventually destroy the labor movement.

## **Old Right**

In the past, the Right was represented by such organizations as the John Birch Society. Leaders would write 30-page pamphlets about the threat of communism, even calling President Dwight Eisenhower a communist. They said fluorination of our water was a communist plot because it would numb the tissue on the left side of our brain which would then allow us to be dominated. They predicted that Krushchev would take over the U.S. by 1973 and make San Francisco his world headquarters.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Right's use of communism and red-baiting is no longer a reliable tactic. This makes their use of single issue politics, described later in this paper, far more important to their success.

In addition, the Right included the conservative intellectual William F. Buckley, the anti-Semitic Liberty Lobby, the racist Ku Klux Klan and the anti-union National Right-to-Work Committee. The extremist politician Senator Barry Goldwater (R-Arizona) tried to run for president in 1964 and was soundly defeated. Goldwater wrote that conservatives "condemned unions because they sought to elevate the economic status of workers beyond that which their 'mortal souls' would warrant, and also infringed upon the property rights of company owners."<sup>1</sup> The Old Right also had some corporate support from such companies as Coors Brewing and General Electric. [GE had sponsored Ronald Reagan on the lecture circuit and television.]

However, the Right was largely viewed as fringe fanatics and not effective in building a mass base to influence electoral politics. They had a nagging problem. How could they convince working people to vote for Right Wing candidates when their ideology is a direct threat to workers' economic interests – in fact, the interests of a majority of people in the country?

That is where the New Right begins. It is not new in extremist beliefs, but it is new in tactics. It has taken the Right from isolation to power.

## **Origin of the New Right**

The origin of the New Right can be traced to 1960. Young conservatives who had grouped around Sen. Barry Goldwater took his suggestion that they form a national youth organization to train new Right Wing

leadership. They felt that most Republicans of that day were too liberal and unprincipled, and the Old Right leaders too ineffective.

Approximately 100 college students took that advice and met at the estate of William F. Buckley, Jr. and formed the Young Americans for Freedom (YAF). At the time they admitted that business interests contributed a major share of their budget.

A 1961 magazine article reported:

"American conservatism has recently received a shot in the arm and American liberalism a kick in the pants. Administering both is a new and fast growing national organization called Young Americans for Freedom. We should point out that liberalism in this instance means most politicians that are to the left of...Senator Barry Goldwater and William Buckley, Jr. Is YAF a genuinely new political voice or merely a new political organization out to repeal the twentieth century?"<sup>2</sup>

It was YAF that provided the training ground for many leaders of the New Right such as Richard Viguerie, Howard Phillips and others. In 1964, YAF members worked on Goldwater's campaign for president and that brought together young conservatives from around the country for the first time. The following is a sample of Goldwater's campaign speech:

"There is a stir in the land. There is a mood of uneasiness. We feel adrift in an uncharted and stormy sea. We feel we have lost our way....Wave after wave of crime in our streets and in our homes...riot and disorder in our cities...a breakdown of the morals of our young people...juvenile delinquency...obscene literature...corruption. The moral fiber of the American people is beset by rot and decay."<sup>3</sup>

Remember, this speech was in 1964.

After Goldwater's ignominious defeat, Richard Viguerie copied the list of Goldwater's contributors and began the now routine direct mail political operation that was an historic and significant step forward for the Right. The Old Right had written in elitist publications that few read. The New Right would reach out with direct mail.

The problem was that the Goldwater list included the usual Right Wing zealots and some country club Republicans. They needed to branch out beyond that and the opportunity came with the campaign of George Wallace (D-Alabama). Viguerie volunteered to do fundraising for Wallace and in return keep the names of his contributors. For the first time, the Right began to collect names of blue collar workers, urban ethnics and Democrats who, in reaction to the civil rights movement and other societal changes, were attracted to George Wallace. Those names were added to the direct mail base.

During 1968 and 1972, the New Right leaders were also promoting the candidacy of Ronald Reagan in the Republican Party. They also tried to take over the American Independent Party, formed in 1968 to aid George Wallace, and largely composed of far Right extremists. They could then destroy the Republican Party and create a new majority. That strategy was not successful and they came to the conclusion that they had to dominate one of the two major parties.

Paul Weyrich, a key strategist for the New Right, said that in the early days:

"I sat in meetings with these guys (the traditional conservatives) for years. They would come up with actually brilliant ideas. Then the question would come up: what should be done about it? And then nobody would seem to know. We are different from previous generations of conservatives. We are no longer working to preserve the status quo. We are radicals, working to overturn the present power structure in this country....Our enemies are not encroaching socialists [who are] taking away what's there. They have already succeeded. We are not in power, *they* are."<sup>4</sup>

## New Right Strategy: Early Development (1973 - 1976)

So they began to develop an organizational network funded outside the Republican party. Their strategy:

- **Develop Independent Funding.** Key financial support for the early infrastructure of the New Right came from anti-union Joe Coors of the Coors Brewing Company and Richard Scaife of the Mellon bank fortune. This funding from Right Wing ideologues outside of the Republican party structure provided vital seed money for the New Right.
- **Dominate and Direct the Public Policy Debate.** Create "think tanks" to produce research to "legitimize" and support Right Wing ideology. The Heritage Foundation was formed for this purpose and it produces studies that support the elimination of minimum wage and prevailing wage laws and the privatization of public services and Social Security. It also attacks health and safety standards such as ergonomics regulation as "junk science." The Heritage Foundation continues to be the ideological headquarters of the American Right. Since then, Right Wing think tanks at the state level have been encouraged and funded as well to influence state legislators. The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) was formed to develop model legislation and network state legislators to promote the Right's agenda in each state.
- **Conservative Legal Activism.** Create groups such as the Mountain States Legal Foundation, Washington Legal Foundation, Landmark Legal Foundation, the Institute for Justice, and many others. They would use lawsuits to roll back labor, consumer and environmental protection laws, and undermine public education and teacher unions by promoting the constitutionality of diverting public tax money to private schools (vouchers). The Institute for Justice is particularly active in challenging the Davis-Bacon Act which protects wage standards on publicly-funded construction projects.
- **Train and Support Candidates.** Create a network to select, train and support Right Wing candidates to begin to build electoral power. The Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress (CSFC) was formed in 1974 and headed by Paul Weyrich. It has since evolved into the Free Congress Foundation. Fundraising letters from CSFC in the 1970s said:

".... in less than 120 days before the 1974 elections, CSFC raised and distributed \$194,000 to 71 conservative Congressional candidates in 37 states, many of whom would have lost to liberals and labor unions without CSFC emergency help...If we don't act now, liberal pro-union legislation could severely cripple our free enterprise system. Your contribution is needed now to help save our country from this liberal threat."<sup>5</sup>

"Please send a check to the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress today. We can't delay any longer if we are to defeat the Big Labor politicians in time for the 1978 elections. If we don't act now, liberal pro-union legislation could severely cripple our free enterprise system."<sup>6</sup>

- **Attack Liberal Incumbents.** Create "hit lists" of liberal, pro-labor incumbents and run "independent" negative ads against them. The National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC) was formed with the assistance of Sen. Jesse Helms (R-North Carolina). Some early targets included Democratic Senators George McGovern (South Dakota), Frank Church (Idaho), Frank Moss (Utah), Birch Bayh (Indiana) and Dick Clark (Iowa). NCPAC would run ads attacking them as "baby killers", often distorting their position on abortion. Terry Dolan (now deceased) headed NCPAC and he said at the time:

"We can elect Mickey Mouse to the Senate. People will vote against the liberal candidate and not remember why."

A fundraising letter mailed by NCPAC in 1978 said:

"The union bosses will have their troops out on election day digging up derelicts, vagrants and anyone else who will take a dollar to cast a vote...George Meany's henchmen will just drive them to the polls like a herd of blind cattle...We must stop these villains from seizing total and final control of our elections."<sup>7</sup>

The Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress (CFSC) groomed and supported a Right Wing candidate while NCPAC attacked the liberal incumbent, with voters unaware of the connection. NCPAC is no longer in existence and has been replaced by other groups, but this early tactic was critical to the defeat of a number of worker-friendly members of Congress in the late 1970s and 1980s.

### **Manipulate and Distract Working Class Voters.**

The Right needed to build an electoral base to take power so they developed a "bait and switch" strategy:

(1) Create issue groups, especially around the gun control and abortion issues, to manipulate voters to support Right Wing candidates against their own economic interests. The American Life Lobby, Gun Owners of America, Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms, Conservative Caucus and many, many others were formed - and continue to be created. A letter sent by the Conservative Caucus in the late 1970s said:

"With access to millions of union dollars, the liberal Big Union bosses can and do buy elections. That's why we have forced busing, government subsidy of gay liberation, food stamps for students and strikers, furloughs for convicted rapists and murderers, higher taxes and more inflation."<sup>8</sup> [Note: None of these actually were union positions.]

(2) Create a religious front to manipulate peoples' faith in support of Right Wing candidates. Some examples over the years: Christian Voice, Moral Majority, Christian Coalition, Focus on the Family, Traditional Values Coalition, Concerned Women for America, and Family Research Council. [See "Religious Front"]

### **Early Major Electoral Success**

Using their new strategy, the New Right elected Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) in 1976, defeating the liberal incumbent Sen. Frank Moss (D) who had a 90% AFL-CIO pro-worker voting record. Hatch was key to the defeat of labor law reform in 1978 when the AFL-CIO almost succeeded in passing legislation that would have made organizing rights under the NLRB much fairer. Sen. Hatch led a determined filibuster against the legislation and, along with others elected by the New Right, forced the bill back to committee where it died. He also helped defeat common situs picketing legislation, important to building trades unions, which was also a labor priority during the 1978 Congress.

The defeat of two key labor issues by newly-elected Right Wing congressmen proved to Corporate America that this really was a new Right. It was now a sophisticated movement that could deliver electorally. So corporations and conservative foundations began to fund the infrastructure of the New Right on a major scale.

### **Single Issue Politics**

Since candidates of the Right cannot run openly and honestly on an ideology that is a threat to a majority of the people and our democracy, it is necessary to use other tactics. One tactic is to encourage voters to make decisions based on single issues.

Union members have a right to their opinions on any given issue and that must be respected, but they must be aware of a political movement whose strategy it is to distract and manipulate working class voters. The Right's deliberate manipulation of voters through single issues -- particularly abortion, gun control, school prayer, crime and taxes -- has allowed candidates to conceal their real pro-corporate, anti-worker agenda.

The following quotes from Paul Weyrich, a founder of the New Right, documents this strategy:

"In the past we conservatives paraded all those Chamber of Commerce candidates with Mobil Oil signs strapped to their backs. It doesn't work in middle-class neighborhoods. Instead, we talk about issues that people care about – like gun control, taxes and crime. Yes, they're emotional issues, but that's better than talking about capital formation."<sup>9</sup>

"In truth, a lot of people who voted for the Republican candidates positively despise the party. These voters were drawn into the political process because of their beliefs in certain issues which overrode their party preference. Of these, the three most effective for us in unseating liberal incumbent senators have been the Right-to-Life, Right-to-Work and Gun Control groups."

"Elections are not won by a majority of people. As a matter of fact our (the Right's) leverage in the elections goes up as the voting populace goes down."

During Reagan's presidency, Weyrich said:

"We can't win by defending Reaganomics. We can only win by pushing those populist / conservative anti-elitist themes which real people support. I am not going to ...try to explain trickle down to an unemployed steelworker in Birmingham. But that same steelworker if asked to choose between our desire to see hardened criminals punished and the liberals' defense of soft-headed judges, will be with us. That's where it's at."<sup>10</sup>

On a 1982 U.S. Senate race where the Right had targeted Democratic Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia for defeat:

- "Let me tell you, frankly, there are those rural people in West Virginia who don't understand Reaganomics and who are being hurt by Reaganomics and who wouldn't like it if they did understand it. If those people aren't hearing the issue of prayer in the schools in the West Virginia Senate race, then Bobby Byrd is going to be back in the U.S. Senate."

On the real agenda:

- "The alliance on family issues is bound to begin to look at the morality of other issues such as...the unjust power that has been legislated for union bosses."<sup>11</sup>

Now the Right could convince workers to vote against their own economic interests by manipulating their concerns about certain issues. So single issue politics was absolutely key to building the electoral base that the Right had lacked.

### **Religious Front for the Right**

The second part of their strategy relies on the formation of the religious arm of the New Right. Concerning the development of the Christian Coalition and other Religious Right groups the same Paul Weyrich said:

- "This alliance between religion and politics didn't just happen. I've been dreaming and working on this for years."<sup>12</sup>

Although a few evangelical Christian leaders have histories of Right Wing involvement, the vast majority of fundamentalists had not been involved in politics and their beliefs are not any different today than in the past. In fact, in the past fundamentalists were told that the road to salvation lay in the Bible, not in the ballot box – that to mix the secular with the sacred was sinful. They were to practice a personal morality, not a political one.



All that changed in the late 1970s. New Right leader Paul Weyrich saw the potential of expanding the Right's base among white, middle-class fundamentalists. Weyrich helped create an organization called Christian Voice (now defunct) which made its headquarters at the Heritage Foundation. Christian Voice developed a so-called "morality rating" for members of Congress based on certain votes they cast. This morality rating included the following issues that the Right opposed: the Panama Canal Treaty, voting rights for the District of Columbia, the Salt II Arms Treaty and collective bargaining rights for teachers. And some that the Right supported: recognition of Taiwan as the government of China and elimination of the Federal Election Commission.

Clearly this is a rating of Right Wing ideology, not Christian theology. And it resulted in some interesting morality ratings. Fr. Robert Drinan, a Catholic priest who was a Democratic member of Congress at the time, received a 0% morality rating. Two other Democratic members of the clergy in Congress also received very low morality ratings. However, Rep. Richard Kelly, a Republican who was indicted in the ABSCAM bribery scandal, received a 100% morality rating, along with another who was censured for having a sexual relationship with a teenage page.<sup>13</sup> The AFL-CIO Voting Record at that time showed Fr. Drinan with an 88% pro-worker record; Richard Kelly had 8%. The real agenda was politics, not piety.

### **Moral Majority**

In 1979 Jerry Falwell was invited to a meeting with Paul Weyrich, Howard Phillips (who now heads the extremist Constitution Party, formerly the U.S. Taxpayers Party) and Richard Viguerie. Falwell and other fundamentalist preachers had grown alarmed at two developments. One was a decision by the IRS to investigate their Christian academies due to charges of racial discrimination that, if true, would threaten their tax-exempt status. The other was an investigation by the Federal Communications Commission of a TV broadcast of one preacher who had been particularly virulent in his attack on homosexuals to see whether action against the station should be taken. The New Right leaders said they had a mutual interest in limiting government. Out of this meeting came the Moral Majority -- the name being suggested by Weyrich. Jerry Falwell was the public voice for the group but Weyrich appointed Robert Billings, a trusted New Right leader, to be executive director.

A *New York Times* article in 1980 that chronicled the rise of the "religious right" said:

"The new political activism of conservative Christians arises in large part from the growth of TV evangelists....But the organization of the movement largely took shape in Washington, in the hands of men like Mr. Weyrich -- a small group of tacticians composed of former businessmen, (private) schoolmasters and professional strategists from the far-right hallways of politics."<sup>14</sup>

Now they could use scripture to mask Right Wing ideology. Now they could convince sincere working people to vote against their own economic interests by manipulating their religious faith. Now they would be beyond criticism. They could attack anyone who tried to expose the real pro-corporate, anti-democratic agenda as being anti-Christian.

They also created an umbrella organization called the Religious Roundtable to coordinate activities between the secular and religious arms of the Right. According to Ed McAteer, a Colgate Palmolive salesman who helped arrange the Falwell / Weyrich meeting, the Roundtable was funded mainly by "some gifts from businessmen." Since that time other coordinating groups have been created as well.

The preachers-turned-political leaders then began to urge people in the pews to become politically active, that the road to salvation lay in the Bible and the ballot box. Paul Weyrich himself commented about this development:

- "We are sort of operations people. It has been our job to tell them [religious leaders] 'Okay here is what to do'."<sup>15</sup>

The following are some leaders of the Religious Right who have made statements which reveal the true agenda:

#### **Rev. Jerry Falwell**

- "Labor unions should study and read the Bible instead of asking for more money. When people get right with God, they are better workers."<sup>16</sup>
- "I think we ought to take the shackles off business and get rid of outfits like OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration]."<sup>17</sup>
- "We need a hundred Jesse Helms in the U.S. Senate. If a determination were made that we're going to have a benevolent dictatorship and only one person could run it ... I wouldn't have to think twice, I'd say Jesse Helms."<sup>18</sup>

As of 2000, the AFL-CIO reports that Sen. Helms, a Republican from North Carolina, has voted correctly on pro-worker legislation only 10% of time during his lifetime tenure in the U.S. Senate.

The Religious Right kept a low profile during the 2000 elections, which was part of a deliberate strategy to avoid attention. Jerry Falwell admitted as much:

- "Our crowd needs to get into the battle, keep their mouths shut and help this man (Bush) win."<sup>19</sup>

#### **Rev. Tim La Haye**

Tim LaHaye was an early leader in the Moral Majority and the Council for National Policy, another group which networks the major Right Wing funders and activists in the U.S., including the anti-union National Right-to-Work Committee:

- "Unions are one of the organizations leading the world to wickedness."

#### **Rev. Pat Robertson**

Pat Robertson recently stepped down as president of the Christian Coalition. He used the Coalition, and continues to use his 700 Club television program, to promote the Right's agenda among white fundamentalist Christians. When questioned about his strong support for U.S. Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), who is a Mormon, Robertson said:

- "We may differ on some important spiritual issues, and we do, but that does not keep me from making an alliance with Senator Hatch on the major political issues confronting our nation. When he was appointed chair of the Senate Labor Committee (in 1981), I wrote him a letter and said 'Thank God you're there!' and I really meant it."<sup>20</sup>

Senator Hatch has voted correctly on pro-worker legislation only 11 % of the time during his tenure in the U.S. Senate, according to the National AFL-CIO 2000 Lifetime Voting Record.

#### **Christian Coalition**

Under Robertson's leadership, the Christian Coalition developed a political training manual. It declares:

- "Christians have a responsibility to submit to the authority of their employers since they are designated as part of God's plan for the exercise of authority on the earth by man."<sup>21</sup>

The Christian Coalition has strongly attacked any candidate who supports abortion rights saying that it is a fundamental moral principle. During an appearance by Pat Robertson on CNN, he was asked about his support for a stronger trading relationship between the U.S. and China, even though that country has been said to promote forced abortion as a means of population control. Robertson responded that he would not agree with such a policy:

- "But at the same time, they've got 1.2 billion people, and they don't know what to do. If every family over there was allowed to have three or four children, the population would become completely unsustainable. So I think that right now they're doing what they have to do."<sup>22</sup>

The real pro-business agenda of the Christian Coalition is revealed. Abortion is used as an issue when it serves the larger purpose - to defeat pro-worker candidates. And it is conveniently overlooked when it serves the global trade interests of Corporate America.

The Christian Coalition has also been involved in the anti-union "paycheck protection" ballot initiatives. In Oregon it was paid to collect signatures on petitions.<sup>23</sup>

If passed, these initiatives would create laws in each state that would effectively silence unions and their members in the political process. The complex paperwork requirements placed on unions to use money for politics by such laws would make it administratively impossible to raise the funds needed to communicate with union members on legislative and political issues and elect pro-worker candidates.

A new initiative by the so-called Religious Right is to push for federal legislation that will allow churches to directly engage in politics. So the religious arm of the political Right continues to be very active even though it has attempted recently to be less visible.

### **Ralph Reed**

Ralph Reed has served for several years as executive director of the Christian Coalition. Reed had been a Republican political operative on the staffs of Congressmen Jack Kemp and Newt Gingrich and Senator Jesse Helms.<sup>24</sup> When questioned about the use of issues such as school prayer and abortion in elections, Reed said:

- "They are the bridge that gets you to constituencies that aren't with you on the economic issues."<sup>25</sup>

This is a bold admission that the most important issues for the Right are economic issues and that the Right manipulates working class voters by exploiting single issues and religious faith. After serving seven years with the Christian Coalition, Ralph Reed left and formed his own consulting firm. He advised the campaign of George W. Bush and acted as liaison to the religious arm of the Right. Reed received a lucrative consulting contract with the Enron Corporation based on a recommendation from Bush's staff. He is currently chair of the Georgia Republican Party.

### **Gun Control Issue**

The Right also sees the gun control issue as a means to divert workers from voting according to their economic interests and that of their families. The Right sees it as a particularly clever way to prevent workers from following the candidate endorsements of their union, which are made based on economic interests of the members. Neal Knox, former head of the National Rifle Association (NRA), said as much:

- "[The gun issue] is the one thing that will spin the blue-collar union member away from his union."<sup>26</sup>

## **The NRA and Grover Norquist**

As of May 2000, a new member of the NRA Board is Grover Norquist. Norquist heads a group called Americans for Tax Reform. On the surface his interest in the NRA is puzzling. However, Norquist leads the anti-union "paycheck protection" ballot initiatives throughout the country and the connection to the NRA will give him access to a massive base of voters, mainly workers.

Grover Norquist is a close friend of former Republican Congressman Newt Gingrich and helped design the Contract with America (which became known as the Contract on America due to its anti-working family provisions). The AFL-CIO Lifetime Voting Record for Newt Gingrich showed that he voted correctly on pro-worker legislation only 10% of the time during his tenure in the Congress.

During the so-called "paycheck protection/deception" ballot campaign in California Grover Norquist declared:

- "We're going to crush labor as a political entity" and ultimately "break the unions."<sup>27</sup>

Since the 2000 election, Bush administration officials attend a strategy session every Wednesday with representatives of some 100 conservative groups, chaired by Grover Norquist. The Bush administration is using the meetings to "tap into the conservative network to help with the grassroots lobbying for Bush's agenda".<sup>28</sup>

Over the past decade, Norquist has eclipsed older leaders of the Right such as Ed Feulner of the Heritage Foundation, David Keene of the American Conservative Union and Paul Weyrich of the Free Congress Foundation to emerge as the managing director of the hard-core Right in Washington.<sup>29</sup>

Grover Norquist says:

- "There isn't an us and them with this [Bush] administration. They is us. We is them."<sup>30</sup>
- "My goal is to cut government in half in twenty-five years to get it down to the size where we can drown it in the bathtub."<sup>31</sup>

In describing the effects of the 2001 Bush administration tax cut which went mainly to the rich, Norquist bragged that the Right had put all the Democrats' interest groups in a glass bottle. He said:

- "They will now have to fight each other because they think there is only a little money left. While we unite, they will fight each other. Every tax cut will make them fight each other more." He went on to say that the Right has the Left exactly where they want them, in a glass jar like fireflies.<sup>32</sup>

## **NRA / Religious Right / Anti-Union Right-to-Work Group**

The NRA conducted a massive get-out-the-vote effort on behalf of George W. Bush. Chuck Cunningham, a former director of voter education for the Christian Coalition, led that effort for the NRA. Before working for the Christian Coalition, Cunningham was executive director of the anti-union New England Citizens for Right-to-Work.<sup>33</sup>

Charlton Heston, President of the NRA, supported the National Right-to-Work Committee in 1994 when it lobbied Congress to defeat S.55 / H.R.5 Strikebreaker Bill, which would have prohibited employers from permanently replacing strikers. Heston has appealed to union members to "put freedom first" and support NRA-endorsed candidates. However, the right to strike is a most basic and essential freedom. Heston personally appealed to members of Congress to defeat legislation that would prohibit strikebreakers and produced a video on behalf of the National Right-to-Work Committee, which called him their "world famous ally."<sup>34</sup>

In 1996, Charlton Heston championed the most serious threat to the very existence of labor unions. He assisted the National Right-to-Work Committee in a \$260,000 ad campaign to lobby Congress to pass a National Right-to-Work Bill which had been introduced.<sup>35</sup> Right-to-Work legislation would prohibit unions from negotiating any union security clause in their contracts. Union membership would be totally voluntary, though all workers would benefit from the contract and grievance procedure. It has nothing to do with a right to work, but is part of a larger corporate strategy to weaken and eventually eliminate unions.

It is a legitimate question to ask why someone who was union president of the Screen Actors Guild, and uses that role to establish credibility with union members, would aid the National Right-to-Work Committee, the most notorious anti-union employer organization. What is Charlton Heston's real agenda?

## SUMMARY

- The American Right as it has evolved today is determined to undo all the progress we have made since the 1930s. This is when the administration of Franklin Roosevelt responded to the Great Depression and the demands of unemployed workers by expanding the role of government to guarantee union rights, create reliable social and economic support programs, and regulate business in the public interest.
- Over the last 30 years the Right has been transformed from small fringe groups of John Birch Society zealots and ineffective Goldwater-type politicians, into a powerful anti-worker, pro-corporate movement. The American Right of today has established a political infrastructure that is immensely more sophisticated and well-funded than at any period in our country's history.
- The modern Right developed independently of the Republican Party, though it is more compatible with that party and views it as the best vehicle to achieve its goals.
- The American Right is really not about traditional values, or gun control, or morality or abortion. It is about unlimited corporate power. Corporate America could care less about gun control or traditional values, nor does it feel totally comfortable with the extremism of the religious front for the Right, but the movement serves their economic interests perfectly.
- The Right has developed an extensive infrastructure of national and state-level think tanks, legal groups, magazines and columnists. They are magnified by the numerous conservative radio and television talk shows which create an "echo chamber" for the Right's views -- and give the impression of a public "mandate" for Right Wing policies.
- The Christian Coalition is not about the right of Christians to be involved in politics. That is how the so-called Religious Right would like to have their involvement defined to intimidate anyone who challenges its activism. The leadership of the Religious Right is essentially a front for the political Right. It did not develop spontaneously out of concern for traditional values, but rather is the result of a calculated electoral strategy by the secular, corporate Right.
- We must respect the opinion of any union member on a given issue. However, unions have a duty to represent workers' economic and social interests, and inform members of any threats to those interests. Members must be made aware of the Right's "bait and switch" tactics -- the use of certain single issues and religious faith to distract voters from the Right's anti-worker, anti-union, anti-democratic political agenda. Union members need to know that it is dangerous to make a decision based on a single issue when a movement hostile to their economic interests is cynically manipulating those issues. A candidate's whole record or position on a broad range of working family issues must be considered.
- The strength of the Right should be kept in perspective and not overstated. Often Right Wing candidates win by a tiny margin in close votes due to their tactics. Voters are unaware of the larger anti-worker agenda and often would not support the candidate if they understood.

- Decades of progress in labor standards, civil rights, environmental and consumer protection, women's rights, public education and economic support programs (Social Security, Medicare, etc.) are at risk – and so is the very existence of our unions. This is a sophisticated, determined, corporate-funded reactionary movement that will not automatically be swept back by some inevitable political pendulum. It will not dissipate on its own. It needs to be tracked, analyzed, challenged and defeated.
- Ideas have consequences. The ideological course that the Right Wing has charted for workers and their families is a dead end. We can change that course – when we understand it.

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