

**Jill Stein says:**

## Winning labor's battles requires independent politics

I welcome and endorse the AFL-CIO's campaign to finally fulfill President Roosevelt's 1944 call for a second, Economic Bill of Rights, including the rights to jobs, living wages, labor unions, voting rights, health care, education, and retirement security.

As the Green Party candidate for President, my Green New Deal platform already has specific proposals to secure these rights.



- **Jobs:** Employ the unemployed in public works projects and federally-supported community-controlled cooperatives and other enterprises; create 25 million green and pink jobs.
- **Living Wages:** Raise the federal minimum wage to a living wage.
- **Labor Law Reforms:** Repeal the anti-labor Taft-Hartley Act, outlaw permanent striker replacements, and authorize majority card check union recognition.
- **Voting Rights:** Pass the Right To Vote Amendment to establish an affirmative constitutional right to vote and accurate vote counting.
- **Corporate Power:** Pass a constitutional amendment to repeal the corrupting court-ordered doctrines that corporations are people and money is speech and establish that corporations and election campaign finance can be regulated
- **Health Care:** Enact single-payer Medicare for All.
- **Education:** Forgive student debt and provide tuition-free public education from pre-school through graduate school.
- **Retirement Security:** Eliminate the cap on Social Security taxes for high incomes in order to secure Social Security's indefinite fiscal sustainability.

The AFL-CIO leadership are demanding that the two corporate-financed parties, the Democrats and Republicans, adopt the Economic Bill of Rights in their platforms at their conventions this year. They must know this a lost cause with the openly anti-union Republicans. They should know that a real commitment to an Economic Bill of Rights is as much a lost cause with the Democrats, who have taken labor's political support for granted for many decades with no significant pro-labor reforms to show for it.

If they didn't know that, it should have been clear on August 11 when a 40,000-strong AFL-CIO sponsored rally in Philadelphia called for the Economic Bill of Rights. The rally heard by video from President Obama, who made no mention of the Economic Bill of Rights. Meanwhile, in Detroit, the platform committee of the Democratic National Convention put the final touches on the platform to be adopted over Labor Day week that has no planks to secure any of these economic rights.

The great victories of labor have always been won by independent actions that pressured the political establishment to make concessions. The landmark National Labor Relations Act, which finally established workers' right to collectively bargain, was adopted in 1935 under the pressure of independent labor political action in the factories, shops, and streets by the ascendant union movement and in the electoral arena in the form of many union resolutions calling for a labor party. The labor party resolutions had credibility because the labor-backed Farmer-Labor and Progressive parties in the Upper Midwest already had two governors, three Senators, and 12 Representatives in their camp in 1935 and they were considering an independent presidential campaign in 1936.

But after the AFL rejected the labor party and went into the Democratic Party in 1936, labor lost its independent vision and its leverage in the political system. It was now part of a coalition dominated by big business.

The anti-labor Taft-Hartley Act passed in 1947 with majority support of the Democratic majority in Congress. Every attempt labor law reform since then has failed when there was a Democratic President with Democratic majorities in both Houses of Congress.

- Under Truman in 1949, the Democrats failed to repeal Taft-Hartley in 1949.
- Under Johnson in 1965 and 1966, the Democrats twice failed to repeal Section 14b of Taft-Hartley, the section that enabled states to outlaw union shops (so-called “right-to-work” laws).
- Under Carter in 1977 and 1978, the Democrats failed to pass one bill that would have repealed the Taft-Hartley prohibition on solidarity picketing at construction sites and another bill to reform the National Labor Relations Board whose long delays and inconsequential employer sanctions had made it a shield for union-busting.
- Under Clinton in 1993, the Democrats failed to pass a ban on permanent striker replacements.
- Under Obama in 2009-2010, the Democrats failed to pass the Employee Free Choice Act for majority card check union recognition. Worse, unlike any previous period of Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress, the Democrats failed to even bring the bill to a vote.

The AFL-CIO leadership has taken a small step toward independence by saying they will not give money directly to Democratic committees and candidates but instead spend it “independently” on their behalf. Unfortunately, this often means supporting the very same Democrats who are collaborating with the anti-worker forces that dominate Washington. The words “political independence” are just that --words-- that have no power unless it involves running labor candidates who can challenge both corporate parties.

Imagine if labor had spent the over \$15 billion they spent on the Democrats over the last 40 years instead building an independent labor party and movement. Today we would have scores of labor party organizers in every state supporting a broadly based party of the working class majority. We would have blocks of independent labor representatives in municipal, county, state, and the national legislatures. We would have a national labor daily newspaper and labor networks on radio and cable. The two corporate financed parties would no longer monopolize U.S. politics. Democrats like Obama would not dare to force new free trade treaties upon workers. Badly needed labor reforms would be back on the table. And halting the decline of real wages and living standards would suddenly be more of a priority than protecting the big Wall Street banks.

The labor movement in every other industrial nation has formed its own party that is independent of corporate money and control. They have been able to organize the working class majority to take political power, exercise it for the benefit of the working class majority, and secure economic rights, including universal health care, affordable public transit, free public college education, secure pensions, four to six weeks of paid vacation for all workers, paid maternity and family sick leave, and labor laws that protect their rights to organize and strike.

Labor has suffered a crushing series of political defeats in recent years and continuing a losing strategy is clearly unthinkable. It is time to practice the politics of courage rather than the politics of appeasement. Labor unions must offer reliable support to labor candidates running against both the corporate parties. And rank-and-file workers do not have to wait for the leadership to disentangle themselves from establishment politics. They can vote this year for Green Party candidates who refuse corporate funding and are campaigning for a Green New Deal that already incorporates the Economic Bill of Rights. Vote by vote, we can raise the voices of working people until we have overcome the corporate domination of politics, and set our country on a progressive course.

