

AFL-CIO pledges all-out backing for Democrats in 2010 elections

Patrick Martin
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The AFL-CIO Executive Council announced this week that the union federation would provide even more financial and organizational support for Democratic Party candidates this year than in 2008, despite the anti-working-class record of the Obama administration and the Democratic-controlled Congress.

AFL-CIO officials who briefed reporters on the federation's 2010 political operations said that it would spend even more than the \$53 million laid out in 2008 to elect President Obama and Democratic majorities in the House and Senate. They said that the focus would be on a "firewall" of six states where a large number of Democratic officeholders—governors, senators, congressmen—are endangered, and where there are numerous union members.

The six states are California, New York, Illinois, Nevada, Ohio and Pennsylvania. All six have gubernatorial and Senate contests, and between them they account for 141 seats in the House of Representatives, one third of the total, with a current 97-44 advantage for the Democrats.

Union officials said they would provide both more money and more volunteers for the 2010 campaign, even though union treasuries have been hit by the impact of the recession on employment, particularly in manufacturing and construction.

AFL-CIO Political Director Karen Ackerman said that the political environment for Democrats was "very, very difficult" because of continuing high unemployment. She declared the principal goal of the unions was to prevent a "1994-like" surge that would cost the Democrats control of Congress.

There was a further demonstration of the complete integration of the AFL-CIO officialdom with the

Democratic Party on the second day of the council meeting. The number two AFL-CIO official, Secretary-Treasurer Linda Chavez-Thompson, won the Democratic primary in Texas for the position of lieutenant governor. She will be the running mate of Democratic gubernatorial candidate Bill White, the conservative, pro-business mayor of Houston, against Republican incumbent Rick Perry.

The Executive Council adopted a resolution declaring itself "appalled" by Obama's support for the mass firing of teachers by the school board in Central Falls, Rhode Island, which he announced in a speech to the US Chamber of Commerce on Monday. AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said Obama's comment was "a bad call" based on "wrong facts." Individual union leaders called Obama's policy "unacceptable" and "disappointing"—muted statements designed to signal the agreement of the unions with the policies of the administration.

Vice President Joseph Biden was the opening speaker at the council meeting. His remarks combined patronizing flattery—he was pleased to be with people "with whom we almost always agree, we might not get it done, but we agree"—and defense of the record of the administration, particularly its bailout of the banks and its policy toward the auto companies (which centered on slashing jobs and cutting workers' wages and benefits). Without those interventions, he claimed, "it would be a flat-out depression."

Biden expressed sympathy for the union officials' difficulties in justifying their continued support for the administration. "You have a hard time explaining why the guys you elected haven't been able to do more," he said, adding that union members were undoubtedly asking, "What's happening? A year later and I don't have a job." He reassured his audience, "We get it. We

get the fact that you guys are under a lot of pressure, too.”

The vice-president also touted the administration’s actions on trade, particularly in cracking down on imported tires and other goods from China. He then took a series of questions, many of them related to overtly anti-labor actions by the administration, including the proposed excise tax on higher-priced health insurance policies, like those in many union contracts, the teacher firings in Rhode Island, and the refusal of the administration to push for legislation to make it easier to gain union recognition at hostile companies.

In another effort to disguise their support for the right-wing program of the Obama administration, the AFL-CIO announced Tuesday that it would endorse Arkansas Lt. Gov. Bill Halter’s challenge to incumbent Senator Blanche Lincoln in the state’s Democratic primary election. Lincoln was targeted for her opposition to the Employee Free Choice Act and her support for a Republican-led filibuster that has blocked the nomination of union attorney Craig Becker to a seat on the National Labor Relations Board.

This was hardly a demonstration of political courage, since Lincoln is trailing badly in the polls against several prospective Republican challengers, and is widely viewed in Arkansas as the “senator from Wal-Mart” because of her close ties to the largest corporation headquartered in that state.

Nonetheless, union officials tried to portray their decision as an act of political retaliation against the more conservative elements in the Democratic Party. Gerald McEntee, the long-time president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, declared, “The time has come to draw a line in the sand.”

The AFL-CIO also announced two “weeks of action” later this month against major banks, including most of the recipients of bailout money, under the slogan, “Good Jobs Now, Make Wall Street Pay.” The rallies—which will almost certainly be attended only by union officials and their staff employees—will call for taxing the banks to finance job-creation programs.

This is an empty political stunt, since the Obama administration and the congressional Democrats oppose any such action. As the AFL-CIO statement itself admits, “neither Congress nor the Obama

administration has proposed a jobs bill on the scale that is needed to close our jobs gap.”

Moreover, the AFL-CIO is itself tied to Wall Street by a thousand threads, most of them financial, since the union executives themselves control sizeable investment trusts (benefit and pension funds) which yield income and employment to the union executives.



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