After Supreme Court ruling against Voting Rights Act

States suppress the right to vote

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17 August 2013

On Monday, a coalition of public advocacy groups filed a lawsuit challenging a newly enacted North Carolina law that severely restricts the right to vote. The lawsuit, *League of Women Voters et al. v. North Carolina*, charges that the state's new voting regulations disproportionately affect minority voters. The law in question is the most reactionary piece of legislation purporting to curtail the nonexistent problem of voter fraud to date, and comes on the heels of the US Supreme Court's striking down of a key enforcement provision of the Voting Rights Act in June.

A number of other states have taken similar measures to restrict the franchise. In Alabama, Mississippi, Virginia and South Carolina, previously enacted photo ID requirements, at one time precluded or tied up in Voting Rights Act litigation, will soon go into effect. Pennsylvania's Democratic attorney general is currently fighting in court to uphold the photo ID law enacted by the Republicans.

A letter from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach charged that his office was impeding the approval of 14,000 voter registration applications in violation of the National Voter Registration Act. Kansas has a voter registration law that requires applicants to provide proof of citizenship in order to register to vote. A substantially similar requirement in an Arizona law was recently struck down by the US Supreme Court.

North Carolina's state government is presently dominated at all levels by the Republican Party, the chief instigator of anti-voting legislation in the United States. The Republicans enjoy a supermajority in both houses of the state legislature, as well as a favorable judiciary and the governorship. Extreme right-wing sections of the ruling elite have used the state as a testing ground for the implementation of reactionary policies on a host of issues, from workplace rights to social services. Art Pope, the billionaire magnate of Variety Wholesalers, spent over $2 million on the state's congressional elections, and in return, Governor Pat McCrory placed Pope in the important post of state budget director.

The new voting law aims to disenfranchise likely Democratic voters. It creates enormous difficulties for working-class voters, as well as youth and the elderly, by eliminating same-day voter registration and shortening the early voting period.

In the 2012 election, 2.5 million North Carolinians cast their ballots during the early voting period, more than half the total electorate. In the 2008 and 2012 general elections, more than 70 percent of African-American voters took advantage of early voting.

In the 2008 and 2012 elections, approximately 250,000 North Carolinians were able to vote or register to vote or update their registration all at the same time, with African Americans disproportionately taking advantage of this opportunity. Under the new law, there is no same-day registration at all.

The same is true for so-called out-of-precinct voting. In the past, North Carolina voters would have their votes counted in presidential and gubernatorial elections even if they voted at the wrong precinct. Now those votes will not be counted, with a disproportionate effect on poor, working-class and young voters, who change residences more frequently.

The new law also includes a photo ID provision, creating another hurdle for low-income, working, elderly and disabled voters who have to obtain an approved government-issued ID card to show at the polls.

State-level attacks on the right to vote confirm the prognosis of the *World Socialist Web Site* that there is

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no section of the ruling elite interested in defending democratic rights. To the extent that any Democratic Party politicians or leaders who claim to carry forward the legacy of the civil rights movement oppose the attacks on the right to vote, it is only from the standpoint of seeking electoral advantage over their Republican rivals.

Attacks on the right to vote starkly reveal the state of class relations in the United States. As social inequality reaches new heights on an almost daily basis, the ruling class cannot maintain its privileges without undermining democratic forms of rule.

The right to vote has been fought for and expanded on the basis of mass political struggle. One look at the US Constitution's several amendments concerning the right to vote reveals its paramount importance. The 15th Amendment, passed in the wake of the Civil War that freed the slaves, states that "the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State...on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude..."

The 19th Amendment, ratified in 1920 amid rising social struggles of the working class and just three years after the Russian Revolution, guaranteed the right to vote to women. The 24th Amendment assured that the right to vote could not be thwarted by a poll tax or any other tax.

The Supreme Court's decision in *Shelby County* paved the way for a redoubled assault on the right to vote. The Court's majority opinion repeatedly emphasized the reactionary doctrine of "states' rights" to mask its antidemocratic agenda. The majority ruled that the right of a state to regulate elections outweighed the constitutional principles granting power to the federal government to protect the right to vote *against* the intervention of any state, including the power to enact legislation to achieve this end.

"States' rights" was of course the battle cry of the slaveholders of the Confederacy in the Civil War. In that instance as well as today, states' rights ultimately means the right to suppress the people of the state in question, whether they be actual chattel slaves or workers who are barred from the polls. The right of the state stands in opposition to the rights of the people.

The new voting restrictions at the state level represent a growing break with constitutional principles and the progressive heritage of the American Revolution and Civil War, and later social struggles of the working class. They are of a piece with the burgeoning surveillance state, militarism abroad and the assault on all basic democratic rights.

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