

Class War in Michigan

Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin

Recently Governor John Engler, Republican Governor of the state of Michigan, sponsored legislation which outlawed so-called "Living Wage" laws, championed by both civil rights and labor groups, in the state. This far reaching legislation not only outlawed existing laws in several cities, including Detroit, but also prevented other cities from adopting it.

This action is in line with other acts of Governor Engler, who was elected as part of former Newt Gingrich's right-wing Republican mafia, that took over Congress and got elected in several of the states in the early 1990's, on an anti-worker, anti-Black, anti-gay, pro big business campaign. One of the first acts of his administration was to do away with welfare, most worker rights legislation, and weaken civil rights laws. Since that time he has progressively whittled away at all democratic and legal rights for oppressed groups, has taken over the Detroit school system, is stripping away the city police and hospital authority, and tried to usurp the city council. Now he has done away with living wage legislation. Should anyone be surprised?

His actions do not startle me; he is a racist and fascist politician, a total demagogue doing the bidding of big business. What does startle me is how people are laying down and just letting him get away with it. I don't know if this is because the left and labor is so pathetically weak at this time, or if it's because of treachery by their leaderships, or if the people are truly demoralized, or just what? What I do know is that in an industrial state such as this, which has suffered from tremendous economic distress and mass unemployment over the last 25 years, it is amazing that no one is talking about, less known organizing around this.

True, living wage laws are a moderate attempt to deal with the inequality of the capitalist system, but they are important and can provide some relief on the local scene, where people are hardly paid enough to live on and have no benefits to accompany their salaries. Just like social security and the welfare laws, they are a form of *survival program*, fought for and won by the labor and civil rights movement. Now, this political pimp proposes to do away with them, and to prevent elected local governments from even proposing them as solutions to local economic problems. Does anyone *not* understand that this is part of a class warfare agenda of the most reactionary elements of the Republican Party? [I don't mean to imply that the Democrats are innocent in all this, hey Clinton signed and supported the federal bill which outlawed welfare nationally when it was presented by Newt Gingrich's Congressional Republican allies).

I guess what I'm trying to do here is not give a dry lecture, but to talk a little bit about how class warfare really plays out in daily life, not just in some 100 years old theory. The state has

taken a huge hit with the dismantling of the auto industry. in my opinion, the fact that we are not fighting this on the labor Left [in a major industrial state], whether Syndicalists, Socialists, Black Radicals, Anarchists or whatever, shows us we really don't understand the question, much less the issue, and that we have no will at all to resist capitalism. How long will we just take it on the chin? The people have to fight back, whether organized or unorganized.

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