

Dissecting Right to Work

By Dr. John P. David Guest Columnist Feb 9, 2016

Senate Majority Leader Mitch Carmichael recently defended the so-called “Right to Work” study as an “independent study by an academic (WVU) Ph.D. economist” and said he trusted “the independent analysis”.

This assertion prompts several observations. In regard to independent, it was not. The basis of the study, funded by right-wing Charles and David Koch, is the same as what was developed by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), Mackinac Center, Americans for Prosperity, and similar Koch funded think tanks to attack workers and labor organizations in Michigan, Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, and now West Virginia as well. The legacy of the Koch Family is significant. Fred Koch, the family patriarch, was one of the founders of the John Birch Society and helped the Nazis build a huge refinery that fueled the Luftwaffe until destroyed by the Allies in 1944. He penned an article for Adolph Hitler in 1938 that noted “the only sound countries in the world are Germany, Italy, and Japan.”

It should be noted that “right to work” legislation is prohibited by the 1935 New Deal Wagner Act, a cornerstone of the Franklin Roosevelt administration’s effort to create a fair economic playing field for workers rights. The Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 amended Wagner and permitted an unprecedented one-item option for a state over-ride in Section 14 (b), which passed by a single vote after President Harry Truman’s veto. Even so-called Right to Work legislation via a state over-ride, however, does not pertain to Federal employees nor those in transportation covered by the Railway Labor Act of 1926.

The WVU study is from the College of Business and Economics that for years has taken Koch Brothers money to hire right-wing faculty. While the Koch Brothers fund think tanks and universities that promote anti-worker legislation with the misguided purpose to create jobs and promote economic development, one has to only look to the Koch Brothers owned Georgia Pacific plant that stands massively idle along U.S. 19 in Mt. Hope, Fayette County, WV. This is a state-of-the-art oriented strand board (OSB) facility that once employed hundreds at the plant and timbering. It now stands silent as a visibly huge monument to once what was showcased as a model on how to mobilize local resources in rebuilding West Virginia. The plant was opened in 1994 and even resulted in CSX re-opening a branch to serve the plant. Fifteen years later, all employees at Koch’s Mt, Hope plant received Worker Adjustment and Retaining Notification Act (WARN) notices that the plant was shutting down in 60 days and production was moving to a foreign facility.

Was the Koch opening and closing due to “Right to Work”? Clearly it was not. It was due to corporate greed, disinterest in the community, and disrespect to those who worked hard to make the plant a reality.

John Revitte, a Michigan State University Professor Emeritus in Labor Relations, recently analyzed the Right to Work game plan as developed by the The Sterling Corporation, a premier

Republican communications company that advertises it can provide the “right” message at the “right” time.

Basically, Revitte noted that Sterling’s goal is not to enhance the economy but to take advantage of the moment to politically tame organized labor cheaply when labor is weak due to economic distress. Its prescription is to introduce fast track legislation, avoid normal multi-committee hearings, avoid witness testimony and alternative bills, and take advantage of any legislators more prone to influence by lobbyists and leadership recommendations with little time for informed debate.

For example, the act of bringing a UAW worker to testify in West Virginia in favor of so-called Right To Work (RTW) is a classic Sterling tactic. The same worker has been paraded around in several states considering RTW legislation.

In the Charleston Gazette-Mail, the primary WVU author stated that “every right-wing think tank has a study that says {right to work) is good “ and noted that “there are lots of ways for researchers to manipulate their models to suit their proposes.”

The WVU study has now been carefully reviewed by the national Economic Policy Institute, which noted that it contains such egregious errors as to “allow serious researchers and conscientious policy makers to disregard the study and results.” That said, perhaps the report should be professionally peer reviewed before being accepted and trusted as gospel.

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