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# Yvonne Farley: The unseen hand being seen in WV

By Yvonne Farley

My dad worked in an oil refinery in St. Marys and was a member of the Oil Chemical and Atomic Workers union. He told me that before they organized a union the company used to hand out turkeys at Thanksgiving. He said that the company pets always received the biggest turkeys.

“After we got the union,” he said, “We bought our own #%!@@@ turkeys!”

Because they did have a union both my brother and I were able to gain college educations, which neither of my parents, although smart high school graduates, ever were privileged to have. Both of them, children of the Great Depression, were progressive FDR Democrats all their lives.

I have always been aware of the history between big business and working people. The rich have always wanted to accumulate as much money and power as they can and hire people to help them do it.

All of this brings me to the current attack on labor unions by the Republicans at the West Virginia Legislature who are backed by a wealthy elite of right-wing donors from out-of-state. Franklin Roosevelt called them “economic royalists.”

The attack on unions is a major part of a series of bad ideas emanating from our state Capitol funded by Charles and David Koch and their allies. Along with busting unions, this legislation includes a discrimination law disguised as religious freedom, eminent domain of mineral rights for the oil and gas industry, refusal to restore PEIA benefits to public employees and the whittling away at the legal right to abortion by women.

It will make your head spin when you look at the list of proposed legislation — some of which is just red meat thrown in to feed the crazies. It isn’t difficult to predict that the current legislature will approve the removal of any limits to campaign contributions.

This current attack on unions is vicious and echos the long history of business opposition to organized labor. I think back to the days when organizing a union was actually illegal and coal companies hired armed thugs. These were the good old days of unfettered capitalism. People who are not in the work force or who work at non-union jobs need to realize that it is unions that advocate for many of the rights that they also have, such as an eight-hour day, health and safety regulations and other limitations on employer abuse.

Some in the upper middle-class make a little more money than most of us and believe that what they have is because of virtuous living and not from inheritance and class privilege.

David and Charles Koch have originated a movement of billionaires that reflects their own narrow political and self-interested views. Today they control state legislatures, a majority in Congress and soon they might even win the Presidency. These two got their start as members of the John Birch Society. This was an early right wing group that many seniors like me can remember as a fringe group that accused Dwight Eisenhower of being part of the communist conspiracy. Their father was a founding member. Their ideas have moved from the fringe into the mainstream thanks to billions spent organizing. We now have in this country a political system that is a plutocracy. Those who have the

money are calling the shots.

In the end, Right to Work is all about an agenda far from us that has little to do with jobs for West Virginians. We know that the president of the West Virginia Senate flew out to Palm Springs to brag and speak to an undisclosed group of donors about what he is doing for them. (You can bet that the money will be shoveled into West Virginia to make him governor.) This takeover of state governments is part of a long-range plan developed by people who do not care about West Virginia. They do not care about jobs in West Virginia. As in Wisconsin, we are victims of the unseen hand of the wealthy Koch donor network in its attempt to break the power of unions in West Virginia.

Thanks to Senate President Bill Cole, the Statehouse Republicans march in lockstep. Legislators who oppose the radical agenda supported by the Koch group and our Chamber of Commerce do so while facing great pressures. We should thank them.

In the near future these Republican leaders who went along with Bill Cole will be faced by voters back home who can now know about what used to happen in secrecy. The legislators have offended many, and people are beginning to catch on to the money trail behind these big giveaways to greedy corporations.

Let's hope that the voters opt to reverse the damage that these billionaires are doing in West Virginia and elsewhere. Political change is in the air, and I believe the voters will be making some changes in West Virginia.

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