

► The Need to Revitalize Democracy

Lynn Rivers

I read a surprising piece by *Mother Jones* writer Kevin Drum the other day. Quoting recent CBS News polling, Drum points out that the number of Americans who identify themselves as sympathetic to the Tea Party perspective has dropped by half (to 22%) since last November's election. Of those, more than half supported a debt-ceiling solution that was a mix of tax increases and cuts in spending. The other 45%—that's less than 10 percent of all Americans!—was willing to soldier forward with a cuts-only agenda even if it resulted in a world-wide economic meltdown. Wait a minute! Less than 10% of Americans supported the cuts-only hostage taking last month in Washington?!? Less than 10%! And yet, as a result, we came to the precipice of American debt default and Standard and Poor's eroded international trust in the American treasury by lowering its triple-A credit rating. This should be a "WTF" moment for the United States and for each of us as citizens, voters, and public employees.

There are multiple lessons to be learned from these Tea Party data as well as from the political events spawned by the 2010 elections. In a sweep of offices at all levels of government, the GOP took control of the political agenda in city councils, state capitols, and the US House of Representatives. They immediately moved forward with a wave of anti-democratizing legislation designed to stifle voter participation, wrest control of local government and services from residents and their elected representatives, and strip public workers of wages, benefits, bargaining rights, and public respect. We are watching redistricting efforts that preordain election outcomes and deprive voters of real choice. And the cost of these activities is underwritten by ultra-wealthy individuals or corporations empowered by the Supreme Court's Citizen's United decision.

These things have been on the Right's "to do" list for decades. GOP legislators at all levels have encouraged the fiction that voter fraud is a pernicious threat to our democratic system while methodically making it more and more difficult for legitimate voters to participate—particularly if the voter is poor, a minority, or, worse, a Democrat. Florida, under its new Governor Rick Scott, has passed shameful legislation to roll back very successful early voting activities and create further impediments to voter participation. Amazingly, the Governor defended the action as a "cost-saver" for local governments and then pointedly ignored the very loud and sustained outcry from city and county clerks - those actually tasked with running elections and encouraging voter participation.

This idea that a small group, whether it's the Tea Party or the Governor of a state or rich political activists with big checkbooks, can hijack the political process seems to be finally sinking in for citizens. What we have seen in the last few months are efforts to rig the political process to guarantee particular outcomes. These outcomes are supported by a minority of Americans or, in some cases, strongly opposed by a majority. If a Governor is unsuccessful in a full-on public attempt to strip teachers and government workers of their rights and benefits (think Scott Walker in Wisconsin), then backdoor tactics like Rick Snyder's Emergency Manager legislation are used to do the same thing. This legislation mocks the democratic process by taking away the power of elected local officials (and the people who chose them) by inserting an unelected "Emergency Manager" who is not accountable to local voters even though s/he has the power to break union contracts and sell off public property. Again, this kind of action is characterized by its proponents as painful but financially necessary. In fact, it is nothing more than an undemocratic power grab and attempt to force the people to tolerate actions they do not support.

All of this is being done under the cover of a barrage of lies. The other side has used misinformation and the American media echo chamber successfully for many years. The big lie, reports and "findings" designed to manipulate data to support untrue claims, and ads crafted to inflame the worst in us are routinely employed to justify undemocratic efforts. For too long, we sat on our hands thinking that these falsehoods would not gain traction. Wrong! Now we are playing catch up and have the difficult task of making folks "unlearn" the misinformation they have been fed.

So bad things are afoot—but you probably knew that. The time for outrage is overdue. Now is the time for action. While we must condemn the anti-democratic agenda and attitudes of the current crop of GOP lawmakers, we should learn from their tactics. The Tea Party developed political muscle in 2010 because its members showed up. They went to political events, they wrote letters and made phone calls, they campaigned for—and against—candidates. And they voted. Many regular Democratic voters stayed home on election day because they were angry at the party, or the President, or Jennifer Granholm, or the economy, or whatever. Other voters strayed from home and changed their usual vote because they "wanted to send a message." If you were in either of these groups, I have to ask, how's that working out for you now?

Democracy is hard but it is not complicated. Show up, speak up, call out falsehoods, counter lies with the truth, write checks, work for candidates, vote, help others vote, make sure the votes are fairly counted. And once that election is over, show up, speak up, call out falsehoods...

Lynn Rivers is a LEO member and WEMU Radio Show Host, as well as a former US Congresswoman, State Representative and Ann Arbor School Board Member.



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Welcome new lecturers to your department by becoming a mentor! Contact Janella at janellaj@leounion.org or your department rep.

► The Effects of Reduction in State Spending on Institutions

Richard Bernstein

The state of Michigan has an education crisis. Through the decertification of state spending on higher education, state politicians have chosen to move in a direction that is inconsistent with what the United States has always prided itself on in the past: the opportunity for affordable education to pursue the American Dream. As a former chair of the Wayne State University Board of Governors, I know that the effects of a reduction in state expenditures on higher education are devastating to the inner workings of the institution and to those who benefit from being able to reasonably access it.

Higher education institutions typically depend on three major sources of funding: endowments, state appropriations, and tuition. In addition to the decline in state appropriations, endowments have received fewer gifts and suffered massive investment losses. With two of their major funding sources experiencing significant losses, many university policy makers resort to raising tuition as a way to mitigate those losses, thereby increasing the proportion of the cost for higher education that students and their families must pay. Students from the lowest income families are the most severely imperiled in the ability to access higher education at the present cost.

Moreover, a reduction in state expenditures on higher education creates the need for university governors to reallocate administrative costs. During this process of reshuffling and cutting of costs, university governors place a tremendous amount of focus on workers, and not enough on university administration. Board members have more frequent interaction with the administration in comparison to other university employees because of the structure of university governance; so often the administration is able to prioritize their issues and concerns over those of other employees. In this way the administration acts as

a gatekeeper to the governing board, controlling which issues come to its attention. The needs and concerns of workers can be dismissed because board members are more attuned to the desires of the administration.

The focus for improvement needs to be on the level and number of administrative members. Workers need a more prominent presence in the governing structures of higher education institutions so that an understanding of the real problems of an institution can be expressed to state elected officials. More importantly, board members and trustees need to be held accountable by their constituency for their lack of transparency in university governance.

Richard Bernstein is a current LEO member, attorney and former member of the WSU Board of Governors.

► Right-to-Work...for less, in more hazardous conditions, with increasingly underfunded schools, public safety and services

Sheryl Edwards

A move is underway in Michigan to turn us into a "right-to-work" state. The Mackinac Center, the Michigan legislature and others are busy trying to implement their next phase in destroying workers rights and weakening the voting power of workers and the middle class in Michigan.

Right-to-work is a great phrase. A right to work. In reality, the right-to-work movement is, simply put, an attempt to abolish unions. In a right-to-work state, no one has to join a union in his or her workplace, nor does the worker have to pay a service fee. As a result of this, union strength is whittled away until unions have no power.

The arguments put forth appeal to our basic instincts: everyone can choose whether to belong to a union, and everyone has the right to work. In a right-to-work state, more jobs will be created. Manufacturers and others will relocate to a place where they don't have to deal with a union. But a cursory study of the facts does not support this argument.

Unemployment in Michigan, a non-right-to-work state, is very high. At this writing (June 2011) it is at 10.5%. But in Mississippi, a right-to-work state, the unemployment rate is 10.3%; in South Carolina, another right-to-work state, it is 10.5%. In Florida and Nevada, both right-to-work states, the unemployment rates are 10.6% and 12.4% respectively (U.S. Department of Labor). Being a right-to-work state does not guarantee more work!

What about wages? According to the U. S. Department of Labor, the median hourly wage in Michigan is \$16.26; the mean annual wage is \$43,280. In Arkansas, a right-to-work state, the median hourly wage is \$13.39; the mean annual wage is \$35,460. In Mississippi, the numbers are \$12.83 and \$33,930, respectively. Not only are wages lower (these statistics are the average of all occupations, white-, blue-, and pink-collar), but it translates to lower revenues for the state and local governments. This often results in lower funding for schools, public safety, parks and other services.

What about the quality of the workplace itself? The U.S. Department of Labor reports that out of the twenty-five states with the highest incidences of workplace accidents, nineteen were right-to-work states. Workers in right-to-work states often have little recourse when faced with an unsafe working environment.

Anyone reading this who worked for the University of Michigan prior to 2003 knows what was gained by forming a union: insurance used to be cut off the day you stopped teaching (unless you were a full-time lecturer); a lecturer could be replaced for any reason and at any time; most of us had not had a raise in more than seven years; and the full-time equivalent wage was sometimes at or below poverty level. We must do what we can to ensure that everyone in Michigan has the same right to form and maintain a union. In the next article, LEO President Bonnie Halloran outlines some of the actions you can take to head off the right-to-work movement in Michigan.

Sheryl Edwards teaches in the Political Science discipline and is the Dearborn Campus Chair.



Food for Thought

Open Letter from Michael Moore

www.michael-moore.com/words/mike-friends-blog/30-years-ago-today

Fight Forward by Michael Albert

www.zcommunications.org/fight-forward-by-michael-albert

Reviving the Strike: How Working People Can Regain Power and Transform America by Joe Burns

Brooklyn, IG Publishing, 2011, 224 pages

Why Democracy is Public: The American Dream Beats the Nightmare by George Lakoff

www.nation-ofchange.org/why-democracy-public-american-dream-beats-nightmare-1312000656

LEO Membership Meeting Week is 9/19-25. Check the calendar at leounion.org for the time/place/date on your campus.

► Politics Matters

Bonnie Halloran

Because elected officials have a direct effect on your job, your rights, and your family's and community's well-being, it is critical that you get involved in the 2012 elections. Next year, you will vote to elect the president of the United States. As we look at what is happening in Michigan, the 2012 election takes on even greater significance. Historically, whoever wins at the top of the ticket has an impact on who gets elected to the other offices on the ballot.

Looking back at Michigan in 2010, we can see that Governor Snyder's election included sweeping changes in the make-up of the state legislature. That shift in power led to a swift assault on public employees, collective bargaining rights and the funding of education. We are now fighting to protect collective bargaining rights for public employees, something that we would not have even considered a possibility three years ago. And our newly elected legislators cut funding to higher education by an astounding 15%, a cut larger than in the previous eight years combined of the Granholm administration.

Our votes do matter. LEO's Union Council believes that we must become engaged in the political process if we hope to stop, or better yet, reverse the current anti-union, anti-public employee and anti-education agenda. In light of this, LEO began sending out regular political updates, something we have never done before. Based on conversations with members over the summer, you have indicated overwhelming support for these political messages. It is also clear from our conversations, that while you generally find the information useful, relatively few of our members have taken any of the suggested actions; i.e. contacting your elected officials, attending a rally or going to a town hall meeting.

According to the political analysts at the American Federation of Teachers, this is typical behavior for

higher education union members. We vote in high numbers but are not engaged at the grass roots level.

The outcome of the 2010 Michigan elections should serve as a call to action for all of us but our vote alone is not enough. We need to engage more in the process; we have the necessary leadership skills to have an impact on our local communities. How our neighbors vote also matters and we have a story to tell about the value of public education, the vital services provided by public employees and the importance of collective bargaining rights. There are also a wide variety of political, union and interest groups that are looking for activists who are willing to educate voters on various issues. Now is the time for us to find our own niche and get involved. I will also continue sending out political updates and hope that you will be moved to take action.

More than ever, this is the year to become a political activist. The current political environment is clearly emboldening the University vis-à-vis its union workers. This summer the UM Nurses and Trades have been in protracted collective bargaining with the University over benefit take-backs, changes in retirement eligibility and redefining what qualifies for overtime compensation. In addition, the Regents, at their May meeting, passed a resolution allowing Graduate Student Research Assistants to vote on whether to unionize, against the advice of President Mary Sue Coleman. Since that time, the administration has actively campaigned against the unionization of the GSRA's, pressuring graduate students to end their involvement in the GSRA campaign. These examples are part of a larger corporate model of cutting costs by downgrading benefits and pay for the frontline workers. If this type of anti-worker and anti-union sentiment continues unabated in Michigan, I fear that, in 2013, our next round of contract negotiations will be negatively affected. Politics does matter and we need to do something about it now.

Bonnie Halloran, LEO President, is a lecturer in Anthropology on the Dearborn campus.

Timeline of Governor Snyder's Austerity Measures

Since January 1, 2011

Feb 17: Snyder's budget proposes business tax cuts, increased taxes on seniors and the working poor to pay for it

March 16: Snyder signs PA4 legislation giving broad new powers to Emergency Managers, such as dismissing elected officials, canceling legally binding contracts, and selling off public assets

May 5: House approves \$430 per pupil cut for K-12, and 15% cut for higher education

May 10: Bill proposes limited tax credits for working poor, averages \$400 less for families

May 12: \$1.7 billion in business tax cuts approved, along with income tax changes to pay for it

May 26: Final approval of 2012 state budget, four months ahead of deadline

June 30: Teacher tenure reform approved, emphasizing "effectiveness" over seniority

Get Organized!

Money Matters

In elections, voting matters but so does money. This fall is prime time for collecting PAC donations for the 2012 elections. If every part-time lecturer donated just \$10 and every full-time lecturer donated \$20, we could forward over \$10,000 to AFT Michigan to help elect candidates who support public employees, are committed to full funding of K-16, and recognize collective bargaining rights. Please send this form and a check to **LEO at 330 E. Liberty #3F, Ann Arbor, MI 48104** to help AFT Michigan support the election campaigns of these candidates.

I would like to contribute to the AFT Michigan Political Action Committee. With this form, I include a check for the following amount made out to AFT Michigan PAC: \$20__ \$10__ Other \$ _____

Signature _____

Name _____

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____



Link City

Showdown in America
showdowninamerica.org

Occupy Wall Street
occupywallst.org

October 2011
october2011.org/frontpage

How to Join a Union, from the AFL-CIO
www.aflcio.org/joinaunion/how/

How to Join a Union, from the UE
www.ueunion.org/org_steps.html

Change to Win
changetowin.org

MoveOn
moveon.org

Now is the time to stand up for sound public policies to protect education, collective bargaining and the rights of working people!

Dear Readers,

LEO Matters welcomes you back with what we hope is an issue full of useful information! As our President Bonnie Halloran writes in her piece, politics does matter, now more than ever.

As of this writing (Aug 2011) working people and families are feeling the effects of the Governor's austerity policies. To see how swiftly these policies have been implemented, check out our Timeline column.

In my life, I'm figuring out how to deal with getting my high school sophomore to and from school. The Governor's K-12 cuts have resulted in the cancelation of about half of the bus stops for the Ann Arbor high schools. Students are now expected to walk up to 1.5 miles (carrying a load of about 40 pounds of textbooks) to drop-off points, many of which are along un-safe walking routes without sidewalks. For our members living in Ann Arbor, you can't imagine making that walk in daytime on a busy road with no shoulder, much less

at 6:30am on a dark winter morning with snow.

For our members living in Flint, you may be about to feel the effects of the new Emergency Manager law, as the state treasurer's office begins a preliminary financial review on August 29, which could end in a state takeover of the city's finances and the dismissal of elected officials. Flint is the first city in Michigan to be reviewed for take-over under PA4.

Michigan-wide, unemployment benefits will be reduced from 26 weeks to 20 weeks beginning in January 2012, at a time when Michigan unemployment is on the increase and extended benefits are the most needed. This policy will affect people already in dire need.

As Lynn Rivers writes in her piece, the time for outrage is overdue, so we hope that the information provided in our Political Issue will spur our members to action.

Virginia Hamori-Ota
Incoming Editor
Department of Foreign Languages, Flint

Dear Readers,

As the outgoing Editor of *LEO Matters*, I have been invited to say a few words to you (fortunately, I was not asked for words of wisdom).

My work as Editor has meant a lot to me, satisfying some of my obsessive compulsive tendencies (medication takes care of the rest) as well as my desire to continue volunteering for LEO even after the heady days of forming the Union were well behind us. The greatest reward has been developing a vision for the newsletter's content and look, and working with LEO activists to bring it to fruition.

I want to thank the members of the Communication Committee, who generated so many wonderful ideas for this publication—often at meetings that were more fun than meetings have any right to be. And thanks also to the newsletter's writers, especially those who wrote regularly while doing lots of other things for LEO (here I'm thinking of the Union's leadership, bargaining committee/team, and organizers). Their deep commitment to making LEO work in the interest of its members deserves wide recognition.

Above all, I want to give a big shout-out to my colleague Beth Hay, the newsletter's designer (and no slouch in the editorial arts), who has been instrumental in creating *LEO Matters'* gestalt. I couldn't have asked for a more inspiring and productive partnership in bringing both a seriousness of purpose and a sense of play to the enterprise.

Finally, to those of you who read *LEO Matters* with pleasure and feel informed by what it communicates, thanks for your generosity of spirit.

As always, "E Pluribus Union."

Netta Berlin
Outgoing Editor
Classical Studies Department, Ann Arbor



LEO Links

www.leounion.org

theleosshare.blogspot.com

twitter.com/leounion

Facebook:
Lecturers' Employee Organization

LEO office phone:
734-995-1813

LEO office address:
330 E. Liberty
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

LEO office email:
office@leounion.org

Why Me?

Jamie Ward, *Language, Culture and Communication, Dearborn; Member, LEO Communications Committee and LEO Mass Communication Subcommittee*

My life inside UM: *I've taught a variety of communication and speech courses to students on the Dearborn campus. I have been fortunate enough to engage students in discussions on everything from the importance of contextualizing social media to the rhetorical arguments presented in music lyrics or television programs.*

My life outside UM: *My life is consumed by my two daughters. My oldest, 3-year-old Kaia keeps me busy with her enthusiasm for music, dance and, of course, all things princess. My youngest, 1-year-old Isabella, fascinates me daily with her ever expanding vocabulary and her curious mind.*

Why me? *As the daughter of a retired autoworker, I was taught the importance of unions at a young age. As I have moved from a Lecturer I to a Lecturer II within the university, I have LEO to thank for preparing me for participation in the annual review and for providing continued guidance throughout each semester. I agreed to participate on the Communications Committee so that I could help publicize the accomplishments of fellow LEO members and place a long overdue spotlight on all that we do.*

My favorite...quote is *"Promise me you'll always remember: You're braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think." Because... This message is a poignant reminder that we all sell ourselves short at some point. It is a motivating force that continually drives me in both my personal and professional life.*