

# Rank and File Trade Unionists in Cleveland Urge Central Labor Council to Run Independent Labor Candidates for Public Office Presentation

*The following Open Letter to the Delegates of the North Shore (Ohio) AFL-CIO Federation of Labor was signed by 19 Cleveland-area unionists and distributed to the delegates of this Cleveland central labor council. The Labor Fightback Network has sent out this Open Letter, without the names of the signers, to be used as a model by labor activists nationwide to get their local unions and labor councils to open this crucial discussion on independent working class political action among their members. — U&I*

## OPEN LETTER TO THE DELEGATES OF THE NORTH SHORE AFL-CIO FEDERATION OF LABOR



In assessing the crushing defeat suffered by labor in the November 4 elections, the need to re-evaluate our election strategy is imperative. In our view, labor — together with our community partners — needs to run its own independent candidates for public office and not rely on any political party to do for us what we must do for ourselves.

In a nutshell, here is the problem. We depend on politicians in Washington to advance the interests of the working class majority. But these politicians in turn depend on big donors in order to get elected and re-elected. Big Money has always been a big factor in U.S. elections but the Supreme Court's decisions in the Citizens United and McCutcheon cases, which removed all barriers to the millionaires and billionaires — like the Koch brothers — giving unlimited sums of money to candidates have made a bad situation infinitely worse.

Even the most liberal, labor-friendly politicians sometimes cast votes that are harmful to working people. Here are two examples: In 2014, Congress approved a bipartisan farm bill that slashed \$8.6 billion for food stamp funding. *The liberals in Washington voted for the cuts.* Also, in 2013, Congress voted for a bipartisan budget that

dropped unemployment compensation for the long-term jobless. *The liberals also voted for that.*

It costs a fortune to run for Congress and the politicians make compromises to get that money from Big Business. But independent labor/community candidates could stand up to Wall Street. These independent candidates would be accountable to their base and vote for us. The opposition may have more money, but we have more people, and in the final analysis that's what counts.

And don't forget: each election cycle labor contributes hundreds of millions of dollars to the two major parties' candidates and that is money that could go instead to help fund candidates from our own ranks.

Today there are no auto workers, no steel workers, no health care workers, no building and construction trades workers, no transportation workers, etc. in Congress. Just people from the business and financial world, a few well-to-do farmers, professionals and a smattering of others. Isn't there something wrong with that picture?

We urge labor to take the lead in organizing a massive political and activist coalition that would truly represent the needs of the working class. It would be a movement based on the unions and made up of employed and

unemployed workers; African Americans, Latinos, Asians and other communities of color; women; seniors; students and youth; working farmers; and our allies in the progressive movements, including the immigrant rights, peace, environmental and climate change movements.

This worker-based coalition would contrast with the top down Democratic Party, which gets 70% of its funding from Wall Street, giant corporations and the banks, and which is controlled by wealthy special interests. Labor's recurring support for the Democratic Party has gotten us no appreciable gains.

In 2008, the election of Barack Obama to the presidency, along with Democratic Party majorities in both houses of Congress, gave rise to hope for many people. However, no legislation was passed providing for a major jobs program, infrastructure spending, labor law reform, Employee Free Choice Act (card check), a labor-backed single payer universal health care system (eliminating the for-profit, parasitic insurance companies), increase in the minimum wage, or action to ensure a clean and healthy environment. And the list goes on.

Instead, relentless pressure is coming from the administration to pass anti-worker trade legislation, which a delegate from the Steelworkers Union at last month's delegates meeting called "NAFTA on steroids."

The country also experienced growing income inequality over the past several years and the widespread cuts in pensions are driving more people into poverty.

Polls show 60% of the U.S. population favors the formation of a new, independent political party. Only 36% of eligible voters voted in the midterm elections. People are fed up with the two major parties and soundly repudiated the Democratic Party on November 4, a party we continue to support each election cycle with funding and boots on the ground. It's time for a change! It's time to develop an effective alternative!

The lack of a critical voice from labor and its allies in the electoral arena has resulted in a monopoly of power by the big corporations and their political bagmen, with Wall Street popping the champagne corks as a result of the November 4 elections.

Tough times lie ahead for the labor movement. What is urgently needed now, we believe, is a debate throughout the movement regarding what must be done to gain real clout in the political and electoral arena. Let those who advocate sticking with the Democrats (or turning to the anti-labor Republican Party) have their say. But let advocates of independent labor/community political action be heard as well.

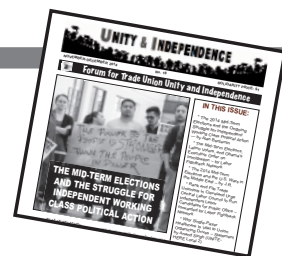
Therefore, we urge and hope that the North Shore AFL-CIO Federation of Labor will schedule such a debate in the

days ahead. Subjects that we believe should be discussed include:

1. The need for labor to develop its own independent electoral strategy;
2. Viewing elections as the culmination of year-round coalition building and mass activities on major issues, not as a separate activity;
3. Forming a Labor Representation Committee to train union members (and community leaders) as possible labor/community candidates;
4. Developing a strategic plan that lays the basis for running independent labor/community candidates, with the goal being to build a local and statewide political organization that could become an independent political/activist party;
5. Deciding what platform and issues should be paramount for labor and its community allies to better motivate and create change for the betterment and empowerment of the working class.

In solidarity,

*[Note: The Open Letter was signed by 19 Cleveland long-time union activists in their individual capacities.]*



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Donations to help fund the Labor Fightback Network based on its program of solidarity and labor-community unity are necessary for our work to continue and will be much appreciated. Please make checks payable to Labor Fightback Network and mail to the above P.O. Box or you can make a contribution online. Thanks!