

WORKING CLASS HEROES



In what is increasingly being viewed as the next front line in the national right-wing-big business war on worker's rights and their standard of living, union workers are gearing up for a fight to block six anti-labor bills from being passed. Four of these bills being considered would make collective bargaining illegal and outlaw union dues deductions from paychecks. One anti-civil service bill would strip thousands of state workers of their protections in committee and the sixth bill, targeting the minimum wage, would put an initiative on the ballot to lower wages for tip workers from \$4.65 per hour to \$2.13 per hour and lower wages for employees who are under 20 years old to \$3 per hour less than the current minimum wage. Reminiscent of a similar law in Wisconsin, which pioneered the idea of singling out the people who work for their government and denying them the right to collective bargaining, the Arizona union bills have, however, been dubbed as worse in that, unlike Wisconsin, all government employees, including police and firefighters are affected. State Sen. Rick Murphy, a Republican who is sponsoring the bills, say, "It seems as though those employees or at least the unions that represent them don't care what the burden is on the taxpayer as long as they get theirs". Nick Dranias of the Phoenix-based Goldwater Institute adds, "You're not in government, you know, to collect a fat paycheck. You're in government to serve. And if you get paid reasonably, that's nice, but the moment you feel the need to organize collectively and create laws like collective-bargaining laws that give you special privileges to negotiate and extract compensation not seen in the private sector, you've gone too far." The Goldwater Institute is a Phoenix-based, right-wing think tank that has influenced the legislature for years. Workers representing several unions have expressed anger and frustration at the governor, the legislature and the American Legislative Exchange (ALEC), who drafted the anti-union bills. Unions are also rallying together to stage a large-scale demonstration at the state Capitol on March 1st. An on-line petition, which has already collected more than 12,000 signatures to date and which will be delivered to the governor and the legislature, is also underway. Senate Minority Leader David Schapira says the bills are purely political and attributes them to the fact that union leaders tend to support Democrats over Republicans. He goes on to say, "These bills are clearly the most anti-worker, anti-middle class, anti-union bills in the history of the country". While it is generally acknowledged that unions do go to extremes in demanding untenable wage-and-benefits agreements, their fundamental purpose in maintaining fairness for workers cannot be denied. Rebekah Friend, executive director and secretary-treasurer of the Arizona AFL-CIO says, "Corporate America sees an opportunity to severely weaken or eliminate unions and ALEC is working with conservative lawmakers in Arizona to make this happen". Cyndi Chacon, a bookkeeper and member of Office and Professional Employees International Union Local 30, adds, "Through shadowy organizations like ALEC, large corporations are using their vast financial resources and power to take political control of our democracy".