

## Higher Education: The Next Battleground?

By Adolph Reed Jr.

The right-wing's political strategy relies on labeling groups and marking them—other than the rich or corporations, of course—as either greedy, selfish losers or lazy, worthless losers who are using government to take advantage of the rest of “us.” Who the “us” is varies depending on who right-wing politicians and pundits find it useful to demonize at the moment.

Their objective is always the same: to stoke public resentment toward some working people they claim are using collective action through government, unions or other organizations to

receive privileges that others don't. And, their larger goal in turning us all against one another in this way, one little group at a time, is to destroy any notion that there can be a standard for what people deserve other than the pattern of a few winners and many losers produced by the market.

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Partly because it is rapidly becoming a new frontier for cor-

poratization, much like health care in the early 1990s, the higher education sector is emerging as a significant battleground in this assault on the idea of social solidarity.

The idea that the working class should have access to colleges and universities has long been a bane to a section of the right wing, both because they want to maintain higher education as a preserve for the affluent and because they fear that colleges can be breeding grounds for an “adversary culture” that leads people to challenge ruling class power. They, along with the Christian right, also want to foist ideological conservatism

on curricula and faculty hiring decisions. Free-market purists want to privatize all public institutions and break all workers' abilities to act collectively, and corporate looters stand poised to profiteer from the market opportunities thus created. (Can you imagine Halliburton University?)

The right has worked for a long time to choke off access to college. Beginning with the Reagan administration, federal student aid has fallen farther and farther behind tuition and fees increases. A 2005 Cato Institute report laid out a plan and rationale for completing the job.

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## South Carolina Ballot Campaign Update

“Democrats Struggle to Fill Statewide Ballot.” So ran a front-page headline in this week's *Greenville News* about the party's lack of candidates for four of the nine statewide offices on the ballot this November.

And, around the country, pundits increasingly lament or rejoice in the growing consensus that the Democratic Party can't seem to find a coherent message that resonates with voters. The Labor Party has a broad, bold message; one that is resonating well with working people in South Carolina.

But in South Carolina, the Labor Party has more than the right message. The state of

the Democratic Party presents an opportunity to run candidates in two-way races instead of the typical third party protest candidacies. It is an opportunity to engage in electoral politics as the second party.

Ballot access is of course the necessary first hurdle to testing the electoral waters. During February, the drive to collect the required 10,000 signatures of registered voters took hold in Greenville/Anderson and in Florence as well as on three additional college campuses. The campaign now has a solid presence in nearly every significant population center in the state. And SC AFL-CIO staffer Linda Houck and Kurt Infinger, a former organizer for the

Sheetmetal Workers—continue to coordinate Party-building work in the state's labor movement.

Fundraisers across the country (including Philadelphia and Chicago in February), as well as individual contributions, demonstrate the enthusiasm the campaign has generated and of course allow work toward the petition gathering goal to continue. March fundraisers are planned for New York, New Jersey and San Francisco.

“Even though, or perhaps because, it is in such an unlikely place, the Labor Party's South Carolina initiative has the potential to spark a real independent politics nationally. And it removes the all too often used

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excuse that we have to cater to conservatism on social issues,” Dr. Quentin Young, a founder of the Physicians for National Health Program told those gathered for the fundraiser he and others hosted in Chicago.

To assist the campaign, please see the box on page three. For more information, visit [www.thelaborparty.org](http://www.thelaborparty.org)

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## LABORPARTY news

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Editor Katherine Isaacs

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**Higher Education: Battleground, continued from page one**

Claiming that the worsening crisis of affordability stems from the attempt to assist those who can't afford to pay on their own, the report recommends eliminating all government-supported financial aid. Tellingly, the report's author acknowledges that, while immediate, cold-turkey elimination would be ideal, it wouldn't be a politically prudent objective. He proposed instead a gradual phasing out over twelve years. As if on cue, Congress and the Bush administration just enacted legislation that will cut \$12 billion from student loan programs over the next five years.

Under cover of the misnamed Academic Bill of Rights activists have tried to impose conservative ideology on curricula and faculties. These proposals have been introduced in Congress and more than fifteen states. Often they're crafted in a language of free speech, but their real intent is to empower legislatures to intervene in teaching and learning, even to the point of holding witch hunt-like hearings to probe alleged abuses. Some versions would permit students to seek legal action against professors whose courses affront their ideological sensibilities, for example, by refusal in a biology class to accept creationism as an alternative to evolution.

So far these efforts have been beaten back or tabled in most legislatures. However, they're intended ultimately to fuel a view among the public that universities are run by narrow-minded and dictatorially elitist professors who are hostile to popular interests and concerns and who impose their "political-correct" views tyrannically.

The longer-term goal of proponents of these initiatives is to destroy universities as sites for independent, critical thought and scholarship. Scapegoating pro-

fessors also facilitates breaking faculty unions and cutting public spending on higher education. Like nurses and doctors with regard to standards of health care, faculty unions and associations are crucial bulwarks against privatization and efforts to dilute education in the name of profit-seeking.

Cutbacks in state allocations have induced public colleges and universities to pursue private funding, to the extent that many, if not most, such institutions receive only a minority—often less than a quarter—of their annual budgets from public funds. Dependence on private, typically corporate funding threatens to distort the academic mission in exactly the same way that for-profit medicine perverts the health care system.

*Can you imagine  
Halliburton University?*

Corporatization spurs erosion of faculty autonomy. Right-wing pundits routinely denounce tenure and seek to demonize faculty as a pampered group of workers who enjoy a benefit that insulates them from market pressures as few other workers are. Yet, fewer and fewer professors enjoy the protections of tenure. Only about one-fourth of all faculty currently hold tenured or tenure-track jobs. Academic employment is growing most rapidly in adjunct, part-time or non-tenure track full-time positions. This is what the new corporate academic administrators see as "flexibility."

Perhaps the most insidious threat to both stable faculty employment and the quality and integrity of higher education in general is the rapidly growing private, for-profit education sector. These entities, like the massive University of Phoenix and many others that are less well known, are driven entirely by the

profit motive and have no commitment to higher education as a coherent, potentially broadening and personally enriching experience.

They have no regular faculty and rely on badly exploited adjuncts and centrally pre-packaged courses and lectures. All too frequently they advertise inflated or plainly deceptive promises of job placement to lure students in and saddle them with long-term debt for training that doesn't live up to the expectations it fosters.

From the standpoint of the right, that's all fine. In their vision, regular colleges and universities, to whatever extent they remain, will be the province of the wealthy. The rest of us will have the private, for-profits, which redefine the content of a college education as purely and immediately tied to the labor market—that is, education as what employers may want us to be rather than what we might like to pursue for ourselves. This redefinition provides an illusion of democratizing access. The reality will be quite the opposite—strikingly different notions of higher education for working people and the wealthy.

Our enemies are counting on being able to pull this off through their familiar techniques of scapegoating and generating social panic directed against one or another demonized population. If they succeed, they'll not only have subordinated education more thoroughly to the dominance of the market; they will also have far greater control over all kinds of research as well as what counts as knowledge, including the interpretation of history. In other words, they'll be in a stronger position to consolidate and rationalize corporate rule.

**More Information:**  
[www.freehighered.org](http://www.freehighered.org)

# Bold Plan for Health Care in Ohio

Dudzic, continued from page four

Health care activists in Ohio have a bold plan to win single payer health care—similar to the Labor Party’s Just Health Care—at the state level.

“We wanted to pursue a bold initiative that would transform the entire health care system in Ohio at a time when many advocates of health care reform were focusing on ‘small victories’ and incremental reforms,” says Jerry Gordon, Single Payer Action Network (SPAN) Secretary and Labor Party activist.

SPAN’s broad coalition of labor and advocacy organizations includes the Ohio AFL-CIO, United Steelworkers (USW) District 1, UAW Region 2-B, CWA District 4 and UFCW Region 4 and the Physicians for a National Health Program.

On April 8, USW President Leo Gerard will address SPAN’s third annual conference. Also in the works is a rally at the State House on May 6 to urge the General Assembly to act without delay in legislating health care coverage for all Ohioans.

The strategy in Ohio is to use the state’s initiative process to put legislation on the ballot and

thereby break the health care industry’s stranglehold on the state assembly.

The Ohio initiative process is a complex, three-step procedure. First, the state Attorney General must approve the language of the proposed bill. Then organizers must present to the General Assembly petitions signed by registered voters equal to at least 3 percent of the number of voters in the most recent gubernatorial election. In addition, the signatures must be gathered from at least 44 of Ohio’s 88 counties.

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*“In Ohio, we are done with pleading with the so-called representatives of the people. We intend to use the ballot to take back the health care system from the greedy corporations that control it.”*

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The General Assembly then has four months to act on the proposed legislation. If the Assembly fails to act or rejects the proposed legislation, organizers have 90 days to submit new petitions that once again

meet the 3 percent/44 county requirements. Voters who sign the first petition may not sign the second. Once past this hurdle, the bill is placed on the ballot in the next general election.

The Attorney General has certified SPAN’s proposed bill—the Health Care for All Ohioans Act. Last summer, SPAN began the petition-gathering drive in earnest, with the goal of submitting the required petitions by the end of 2006. If, as expected, the General Assembly refuses to act, and the second round of petitioning is successful, the bill will be on the November 2007 ballot.

Under the leadership of UNITE HERE Midwest Joint Board vice-president and Labor Party National Council member Noel Beasley, the Ohio Council of UNITE HERE has become one of SPAN’s biggest boosters.

The council has assigned Bob Kurtycz, former President of Local 1422, to work full-time on the campaign for passage of the Health Care for All Ohioans Act.

“When I got out of high school ten years ago,” says Kurtycz, “there were many factory jobs to choose from. They were good jobs with good benefits.

“But then, one after another, the plants started closing. Ohio has lost over 250,000 jobs since George Bush took office. Over 70 percent of all Ohioans get their health care from their employers. So what do you think happened to those 250,000 workers and their families?

“Those of us lucky enough to still have jobs don’t have it much better. You get a cost-of-living raise only to find out that your out-of-pocket costs for health care go up. Or your employer explains that the raises aren’t coming at all due to the rising costs of health care.

It is no wonder that a recent CBS/*New York Times* poll found that 70 percent of Americans believe that lobbyists routinely bribe members of Congress. And I wouldn’t be surprised that a similar percentage understands that both political parties are complicit in this scheme.

The truth is that most Americans have come to the conclusion that politics is unspeakably corrupt and not even remotely concerned with their interests.

In the absence of any real alternatives, these attitudes usually breed cynicism and complacency. But in places like South Carolina and Ohio, Labor Party activists are finding out that people will respond enthusiastically to a new vision of politics independent of the corporations and their lobbyists.

Our job is to build the kind of party whose principles are not for sale and whose candidates are held accountable to a working class constituency.

Sure, that’s a tough job. But look at it this way: it’s better than waiting around until you win the Powerball!

“In Ohio, we are done with pleading with the so-called representatives of the people. We intend to use the ballot to take back the health care system from the greedy corporations that control it.

“The movement in Ohio is like nothing I have ever seen. If we can achieve health care for all in Ohio—the biggest swing state in America—then it certainly can become a reality for every state of the union. We could change the terms of debate to issues of the working class.”

**MORE INFORMATION:  
WWW.SPANOHIO.ORG**

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- ★ Email [fundraise@thelaborparty.org](mailto:fundraise@thelaborparty.org) about fundraisers in your area.
- ★ Spread the word! Encourage co-workers and friends to contribute.
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### UNIONS CAN:

- ★ Contribute to the Labor Party Political Fund (LPPF) - the 527 political committee of the Labor Party! Unions are encouraged to contribute funds from their soft-money PACs to the LPPF. Make checks payable to Labor Party Political Fund and mail to 1532 16th ST NW, Washington, DC 20036.
- ★ Continue to contribute general treasury money directly to the Labor Party to continue support of our non-electoral issue campaigns.

**WE NEED THESE FUNDS NOW MORE THAN EVER!**

Contributions to the Labor Party and the Labor Party Political Fund are not tax-deductible

# Waiting for Powerball?

Mark Dudzic, National Organizer

Who could begrudge the eight Nebraska meatpackers who just split the record Powerball jackpot? After all, they worked the graveyard shift at the Con Agra plant where the average wage is between \$9 and \$10 per hour. Anyone who puts up with those conditions for a few years deserves \$15.5 million.

After all the hype is put aside, however, we all know that playing the lotto is a sucker's game. The whole system was created by state governments to get money from poor people to fund government programs that they won't ask the rich to pay for. The old-fashioned numbers runner paid better odds. On the whole, people would be much better off just saving the money they spend on it. Better yet, they could invest it in union dues and do something about those \$9 per hour wages.

There are better ways to hit the jackpot, though. While the press was fussing over the lucky meatpackers, most missed the story about how the pharmaceutical and insurance industries got lucky with the Medicare drug benefit. In a report just released by the Center for Economic and Policy Research, economist Dean Baker calculates that the waste and inefficiency built into the drug bill will add more than \$800 billion to the cost of prescription drugs over the next ten years.

Baker's analysis is not premised on any radical attacks on private enterprise. He simply calculated what would be saved if the new law had just applied the same administrative controls and procedures that the Veterans Administration currently uses in their drug purchasing program. And, of course, these numbers just cover the cost to the taxpayer. They don't include the administrative nightmares that seniors must navigate just to get their benefit nor the giant "donut hole" in their coverage.

As the folk wisdom goes, some people make their own luck. That was certainly the case with the Medicare drug bill. It was passed in the middle of the night with open extortion and bribery taking place on the very floor of Congress. The outcome of that vote was just as fixed as if you or I paid off the person who draws the winning lotto numbers.

The crafting of legislation to directly benefit specific businesses has become standard procedure in Washington. As Bill Moyers recently pointed out, there are currently 34,787 registered lobbyists in Washington, DC. That's 65 lobbyists for every member of Congress! Together they spend more than \$200 million per month. And that doesn't count all the additional monies spent at the state and local level.

The Nebraska Powerball winners told heartwarming stories about what they will do with their winnings. One said he would help out his family members in Vietnam. Another plans to go back to college. Others talked of early retirements or of pursuing their passion for NASCAR racing.

Imagine how heartwarming it would be if the American people found a way to win back the \$800 billion windfall that was given to the insurance and drug companies. For that kind of money you could pay the college tuition for anyone in America who wants to attend a public college with enough left over to fund a comprehensive early childhood education program. Or we could have a real drug benefit for seniors and cover millions of the uninsured to boot.

But that's not the way the game is played. In the current session of Congress, similar giveaways have benefited the credit card industry, asbestos manufacturers, the oil and gas industry, defense contractors and railroads. And those are just the ones that the press bothered to report on.

Nor does it take into account the cost to the American people of these same corporate lobbyists blocking any significant reforms in health care, education, worker rights or other issues that would make a real difference in people's lives.

This is what politics has been reduced to. Every day, a new corporation hits the jackpot. Meanwhile, the incomes of most families are in decline, millions go without health care, hurricane survivors live 12 to a room and the war in Iraq enters its fourth year with no plan to bring it to an end.

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## NO COMMENT

“We're a right-to-work state. You need to be careful when you talk about ports, because you're talking about unions. If any industry came into this area that is unionized, I'd fight it tooth and nail.”

– Senator Hugh Leatherman (R-Florence, SC) in response to the possibility of bringing cargo container jobs to the county with the highest unemployment in South Carolina