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**Rev. James M. Lawson, Jr.**

**“Labor, Racism,  
and Justice in the  
21st Century”**

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**The 2015 Jerry Wurf  
Memorial Lecture**



**The Labor and Worklife Program  
Harvard Law School**

JERRY WURF MEMORIAL FUND (1982)  
Harvard Trade Union Program, Harvard Law School

The Jerry Wurf Memorial Fund was established in memory of Jerry Wurf, the late President of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). Its income is used to initiate programs and activities that “reflect Jerry Wurf’s belief in the dignity of work, and his commitment to improving the quality of lives of working people, to free open thought and debate about public policy issues, to informed political action...and to reflect his interests in the quality of management in public service, especially as it assures the ability of workers to do their jobs with maximum effect and efficiency in environments sensitive to their needs and activities.”

# Jerry Wurf Memorial Lecture

## February 19, 2015

Rev. James M. Lawson, Jr.  
“Labor, Racism, and Justice  
in the 21st Century”

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**Naomi Walker,  
Assistant to the President of AFSCME**



Naomi Walker

Hi, good afternoon. Who's ready for spring? I am glad to see all of you here today. The Jerry Wurf Memorial Fund, which is sponsoring this forum today, was established in honor of Jerry Wurf, who was one of AFSCME's presidents from 1964 till 1981. These were really incredibly formative years for our union and also nationally for this nation. President Wurf was a true champion of workers' rights and fought hard for the right for workers in the public service to be able to collectively bargain. And he was also a staunch advocate for civil rights and knew today's speaker well.

The Wurf Fund provides scholarships that allow AFSCME staff and leaders to attend the 6-week Harvard Trade Union Program. The Wurf Fund also supports AFSCME participants in the senior management and government program here at Harvard, which is really important because it allows the voices of public services workers to be heard essentially by their bosses, by the managers of public services all around the country. In addition, the Wurf Fund also supports the Union Scholars Program, which is a scholarship program for college students and people of color. It also provides an internship program so they get a stipend, and they get the opportunity to be outdoors organizing workers.

And today we have with us, Mildred Wurf, who was president Wurf's wife and his daughter, Abigail. So, may I ask them to stand? Give them

a big hand. And Mrs. Wurf is a former AFSCME staffer with AFSCME District Council 37. I just learned today she actually helped establish the first education program for the union to really educate members who were being organized about the value of the union and what it meant to be a union member. And she provides important leadership on the Advisory Board of the Fund.

I'm really happy to have the honor of introducing to you Reverend James Lawson, who is our speaker today. Reverend Lawson is a strategic leader, a pastor and a teacher in the art and strategy of non-violent action. He taught activists in the Civil Rights movement to withstand the brutal assaults of the segregationists without retaliating. And many of his protégés, including Diane Nash and John Lewis, went on to become leaders within the movement. He was a leader of the freedom rides and was a close ally of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. And he is particularly near and dear to AFSCME's heart because of his role and successful work in Memphis in 1968 to lead a strategy committee that was helping the black sanitation workers who were struggling to join a union and the fight for decent wages and safe working conditions and a union contract.

He kept working with unions, faith and civil rights leaders; he mobilized community support for the workers; and he persuaded Dr. King to come to Memphis to support the workers and to really generate some national attention for the sanitation workers strike. And that strike and the battle for dignity that those workers underwent is really still a core touch stone for AFSCME. It's a fight that

so resonates deeply within our union. In the lobby of our headquarters, we have one of the original signs, the “I Am a Man” sign that’s really iconic from that fight. It’s still such a powerful sign, and we still carry it today in a lot of the rallies and pickets. Jerry Wurf was AFSCME’s president during that strike and was deeply involved in the Memphis strike. So in talking about Reverend Lawson’s role in Memphis, President Wurf said what Lawson never understood was the degree to which he was hated by the establishment in Memphis, and they feared him for the most interesting of all reasons. He was a totally moral man you can’t manipulate, and you can’t buy, and you can’t hustle. So since 1974, Reverend Lawson has lived in LA, he’s pastored a church there, and he founded and has been working with Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice, which brings people of faith together with workers to fight for the right of workers to join unions. He’s worked with a whole range of unions from UNITE HERE, Local 11, Justice for Janitors, domestic workers, county and mental health workers, and the Quest for Economic Justice. And for the past 10 years, he’s been working with UCLA’s labor center. Kent Wong is the leader there and been teaching about movements and organizing. So today Reverend Lawson is here with us to talk about race and labor and justice in the 21st century. So let’s all join in giving a big hand to Rev. Lawson.

**Keynote Address**  
**Rev. James M. Lawson, Jr.**

I want to thank Naomi for the very kind remarks and tell you how very pleased I am to be here to be able to accept the invitation to come to this event. I have to admit that I did not know anything about the Jerry Wurf Memorial Fund or Memorial Forum, until I was contacted by Jack Trumbour. I was really very, very, pleased. I was delighted to hear of the Jerry Wurf Forum and Fund and the segment of labor studies here at Harvard, because my personal sense is that there probably are few people in the labor movement, few people in politics, few people in religious institutions in the United States to head this fight who in my judgment have the sense of passion for human life and for truth and justice as did Jerry Wurf.

It was a great, great, great important part of my life to have had a chance to come to see AFSCME in 1968. I think February of 1968. And to meet not only President Wurf, but also other members of the staff, international and elsewhere. And so in many ways, since that time, I have been shaped by that vision of what the union can be. I have been shaped by Jerry, he was a wonderful, ordinary man engaged in an extraordinary mission and work. We had numerous meetings, of course, as some of you who know of struggle or strike or movement would know. And I think the union suggested that we gather every weekday morning at 7 am for breakfast and talk. And that's what we did, so I had the extraordinary opportunity to visit with Jerry Wurf on a person to person basis.



Rev. James M.  
Lawson, Jr.



Naomi Walker and  
Rev. Lawson

I pushed him around quite a bit, I should tell you because we were totally committed to the strike of the sanitation workers. But I pushed him especially because a large part of my youth just simply was dismayed that the AFL would support the Cold War, which, in spite of the nonsense being written about it and all, and our having won it, and so forth. No one won it, because it was a war and it taught a whole world to despise some people, other people. It was rooted in so-called anti-communism, and one of the favorite scholars of the 20th century and religion and the bible is a man by the name of Karl Barth, who was born in Germany, but left during the Nazi period to live and work out of Switzerland. He wrote some of the major documents that, I guess in theological school, they still read. Karl Barth said back in 1939 that the anti-communism of the west is akin to racism. That it re-teaches the despising of people in the name of enmity. I still maintain that when you put whole categories of people in classifications rather than seeing them fundamentally as human beings, people who were birthed by creation, by the universe, by God, if you will, by the creative force of life that people are not to be labeled in any way, especially in ways that then allows you to despise, rather than accept your own humanity. That allows you to isolate and oppress and subject to all sorts of tyranny, rather than to see the common humanity, and to care for that common humanity and operate out of it.

So I pushed Jerry around on that score because I was a high school student in World War II, and think that what we in the United States in 1939 to 1945 did was a phenomenal thing. We basically organized the whole world, and produced the



equipment and the materials and the ships and the guns and the planes to turn back that war and to fight it on four continents, in fact, and to basically win that war, supplying the Soviet Union and building sufficient numbers of freighters, one a day at one time in the early '40s. One freighter a day was being built in the United States, and those freighters became a long line, like a train going up through the North Sea towards the Soviet Union to supply. Then in '45, when the war is won, by '47, we start the Cold War, and we started all over again.

Most, if not all Americans, still suffer from the strange teachings of that Cold War. The African National Congress was a terrorist group. The 1980s administration of the United States said that Nelson Mandela should have been hung. In 1947, India, under the magnificent leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, an intellectual who became the first Prime Minister of the new nation, having for the first time broken the power of the British Empire over them. Nehru was isolated because he did not agree with the Cold War. He thought there were other options for India and other options for the people of color in the world rather than getting engaged in that hateful, despising entity that refused to see people around the world for who they are.

And we suffer today in the United States from our inability to see the human race. To see the human family and to figure out that there are far better ways to work than the way in which our nation is working as a whole. I don't mean to get into that, but I pushed Jerry Wurf around on that issue. I pushed him around on the Viet Nam War in 1968.

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It’s not necessarily that I’m opposed to every war, I supported World War II as a high school youngster, vehemently, enthusiastically. But very clearly, the Viet Nam War was just a disastrous war, and I watched it begin to take form from the end of World War II, 1945. I saw it begin to emerge. First we paid the expenses of the French Army to move back into that Southeast Asian part of the world. Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the allies that agreed, that if Ho Chi Minh supported the war effort against the Japanese, he would be allowed to organize Viet Nam. He wrote a constitution with his people based on the United States Constitution.

First, we financed the French going back in. Ho Chi Minh forces resisted. In ‘55, President Eisenhower was approached by John Foster Dulles who invited the President to send troops to Viet Nam on behalf of the French. By that time, we were paying 100 percent of that war. So, we systematically pushed ourselves in, and may I just say, that in that war it was several Harvard PhDs who were leading the administration. I am not fussing at Harvard. But it was several Harvard PhDs. There was Robert McNamara, a Harvard MBA; Kissinger, a Harvard PhD in Government who was an advisor; and the Bundy brothers, including the Harvard Dean of Faculty McGeorge and the Harvard Law School product William, who were all part of the shapers of that unnecessary war. It set the world back, sisters and brothers, that’s my point. It’s sowed seeds of suspicion about human beings. We have not yet gotten over it.

In any case I found Brother Wurf a soul brother in so many different ways. I can never forget

the passion with which he participated in many conversations in the strategic effort. I can never forget the passion with which he supported 1,300 workers who gave him, gave AFSCME no warning whatsoever of going on strike in the middle of February. Not the middle of July. In all the rest of it, he so passionately defended their right to organize, so passionately helped to see to it that became a victory for those 1,300 men and for Memphis and for the nation as a whole. So I'm more than pleased to be a part of this lectureship in the name of Jerry Wurf.

I'm going to try to talk very briefly. I didn't pull my watch out, so I don't know if there is a clock there. Let me see what I can do in a short, brief time. I want to speak on labor, racism and justice.

All work, according to Martin Luther King, Jr., has dignity. And it's not just about making a living. That's an important ingredient. We human beings are so formed. We're so involved that we have to work to be a human being.

If it's not just personal work, the work for caring for ourselves, our children, our family. It also has to include the necessity of working in order to sustain ourselves. Sustain our neighbors, sustain our communities. We humans contribute to the advancement of the human race by working. We make our own personal contributions to the stability of life and to the possibilities of life through our work, no matter how menial that work may be or how boring that work might be. All forms of work are essential. Work has its own dignity; and those of us who are able to work, we gain dignity from accomplishing purpose of work.



We can shape and form our lives, our strengths, our powers, and our character. We can not only make a living, but we can also make a life. And there is nothing more important for any of us than to shape this infinite gift that we still do not quite understand, period. This gift of life. Our own. And to exploit its possibilities of mind, body and soul and spirit and energy and creativity and arts.



We human beings need to come to understand -- no matter, not to be arrogant and rude, and nationalistic or bigoted -- we are a special species. Ernst Mayr, a biologist from the 20th century, had said that there has probably been in the earth's life, the nearly 4-5 billion years earth of ours, narrowly 50 billion living species. And that of those 50 billion living species, we human beings on this journey for more than a million years, at least, are the only species that's learned to sing, to paint, to talk, to build an airplane, to build villages, to establish families, communities. The only species of the 50 billion species. That in itself ought to tell us a little bit about the fact that our gift of life is not accidental, or by chance, but it's a marvelous part of how this universe came about. And that's, of course, why I remain a theologian, and all because our discovery of who we are, and what we are and how we are. Nothing is more exciting than that, in my judgement. Nothing is more exciting than that.

Just in the last 60 years alone, through telescopes and space ships, we know that the universe is beyond the grasp of any single person. If you pick up some of the books of the images from the universe, millions and millions of millions of just absolutely gorgeous, stunning images we now

have, knowing, as some cosmologists, I think, that we are a universe of many universes. Maybe 200 billion universes in our space that we know nothing about. That alone, suggests, you see, the extent to which our gift of life is extraordinary, and we human beings have not tapped what that means.

And so, to make a long story short, I want to try to say that the experiment to have a democratic society is the most important experiment the human race has launched, probably ever. To lift human life to a level where we have the capacity to govern ourselves and to live with one another and to create cooperation rather than war and violence is the great frontier for the 21st century and beyond. And in that act of shaping democratic society, unions are absolutely essential. Which means that the Scott Walkers and the Chamber of Commerce, do not really want democratic society. To have democratic society, you must have people who are informed and engaged, who are tapping some of the resources of their own gift of life and love. And therefore have contributions to make.

I think the labor movement in the United States, AFL-CIO, must begin to attack the Scott Walkers as being anti-democratic and anti-American, and anti-Constitution because they want to wipe out the right of working people to organize for themselves. So that their lives can make a contribution to developing our understanding of being a people who are in an experiment. Of developing a different kind of society, not top down, but grassroots up. Not the almighty and all powerful governing and demanding and engaging in tyranny, but with the idealism and the freedom of the people who know.

You have to have an engaged citizenry.

All of those people in our country who are diminishing education, public education, who call for reform when it's really a call for making public education a part of the profit pool for the kind of capitalism they want. All those who are refusing to see that we need a fully employed society, where everyone can work and will work if given the chance and opportunity. And indeed, we must work and do the work that 315 million people feel our society needs. And not primarily turn the economy over to those who think human economy was born in the last hundred years and therefore ought to be for the benefit of the mighty. For the benefit of the 1%. For the benefit of the big investment organizations and the like, including Harvard University.

So, with that in mind, therefore, to me it's critical that we who support the labor movement, the AFL-CIO, AFSCME, will do what we can do to make the labor movement come to life in every way possible. To turn back the people who think that we don't need unions. We need them more desperately today than we have ever needed them. How many Americans know that it's unionism, the labor people and families and workers across this country, who gave us the two-day weekend? Capitalism did not do that in the United States. The Chambers of Commerce were not even interested in it. It's working people. And the union movement from the 1930s to the 50s and 60s that produced the two-day weekend, produced the 40-hour week, that produced Social Security, that produced the rights of working people to organize and the rest of it. That helped to create the infrastructure in

many parts of the country through the federal tax dollar for our use in the world.

I want to just emphasize the need to educate this country to fight the enemies who want to eradicate, not just the right, but the freedom of all working people in our land to get organized in associations in their communities. That can become engaged in a clear fashion to help our society to become what we all would want it to become. And so the second major point I want to make then is this: I want to make an analysis of our country as it is now and why we have to have a hard-headed philosophy of the times in which we live. It's my contention, that much of what we see going on in Congress and much of what we see going on in the country is because of our history that has caused us to become a very ideological people, whether we know it or not or like it or not.



I want to lift up four major ideologies that have the rootage in the last four or five hundred years in the settlement of this country and continue to dominate too much of the thinking. These four ideologies are: racism, sexism, violence, and the fourth one, for the lack of a better term, I call plantation capitalism. Racism, sexism, violence, and plantation capitalism. Now of course you know that plantation capitalism became the form of capitalism reached in the 16th century expansion of Western civilization and the exploration and discovery that the world was bigger than what they knew it to be and all. Racism, sexism, violence, and plantation capitalism.... and I insisted all four of these evolved in the United States to make us where we are today.



Mildred Wurf and  
daughter Abigail

And I maintain that you cannot be for the dismantling of the economic injustices in our society. inequality, if you are not committed to the eradication of racism. I maintain that you cannot be for the equality of women if you are not for also the eradication of violence. Violence is a part of the engine that put racism in place. That kept sexism from European society in place. That helped to fertilize plantation capitalism.

They are interconnected in various ways. First of all, the interconnected ideology is not an intellectual notion that has questions and answers or doubts and fears, that has an historic background to it. It is primarily a belief system that has really no intellectual, philosophical, spiritual or political roots out of the human database. So, it's a belief system in which you have to contort your own thinking to believe. Racism, people of color are inferior to light skin or white skin people. You can't have that based upon biology or zoology. You can't have it based upon the reality of life, even in our own country. It is strictly a closed belief system that people often do not even know that they have. It's an ideological system. Women are inferior. It's again, an ideological belief system. It has no bases in biology. Some scholars maintain that the oppression of women began maybe three to five thousand years ago, only. And that the really ancient world had a mixture of ways in which men and women connected to each other and the villages and the rest of it. And that's unraveled in many ways in paleontological studies and the like. It is a belief system that cannot be upheld.

But it's a system that stayed in place by violence. After all, the settlement in this country meant that



we, no, let me say it another way. To be an advocate and a lover of our people, this 315 million people, and of our land, and our experience, means that we have to accept the fact that at least in one period in the 17th century, we were hanging and burning and torturing women because we said they were witches. That's a part of our history. Recent women scholars in the 20th century have been going back and digging out the diaries and the letters and the official court reports and what not where this has occurred They have discovered that apparently many of the witches were women, who in fact, had developed independence from the conventional male dominated society.

This is not too unusual. We've always had troubles in our male chauvinist system of women who develop independent sense and independent grasp of themselves. The point I would make to you is that we human beings are peculiarly made. If you are not equal to me, then there is, according to psychiatry, a great doubt in the depth of my being. That perhaps I'm really not what I claim to be.

James Baldwin said it this way: that what the white man does not know about the black man, the white man does not know about himself. Me, I reverse that in a way. I maintain to be human and alive is to basically know the essential things you need to know about every man and women anywhere in the world. You do not have to be of their creed. You do not have to be of their country. You do not have to be of the complexion of their group. But if you have the stuff of human beings in you, you're gonna have the most important tool for understanding human beings anywhere in the world. And especially those who are near to you

and around you.

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*“Plantation  
Capitalism was  
based on the  
old notion that  
some people  
deserve to  
collect wealth  
and to have  
wealth, and  
other people  
should let it  
happen, and  
other people  
should be  
willing for them  
to collect the  
wealth from  
them.”*

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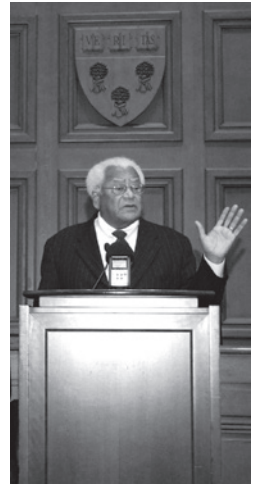
Violence has the ideology. Some people only understand violence. There is a well-known Christian psychologist who has a huge empire in the United States, and he says babies, young babies even, and children and young people must be punished in order for them to learn right from wrong. That’s the old notion. Some people only understand violence, and therefore you can only operate with them on that foundation. It used to be said in the United States all the time, perhaps it’s still being said. The only good Indian is a dead Indian.

Then my third, my fourth rather, plantation capitalism. Plantation Capitalism was based on the old notion that some people deserve to collect wealth and to have wealth, and other people should let it happen, and other people should be willing for them to collect the wealth from them. An ideological perspective of human beings. Plantation Capitalism said, as the Portuguese moved into Mozambique, that we have the right for these resources that we see, and you Africans must cooperate with us so that we can take these resources and take them back to Portugal and the rest of it. Slavery in the United States said a slave is not a human being. That’s ideological. A slave is a commodity. A slave is a form of attracting and building wealth on your land and for your land. And every single one of these ideological issues is very clear.

And then the second thing about all four of these is they produced all sorts of systems of oppression and tyranny. If you look at each one of them,

you'll discover the ways in which procedures and patterns when some people talk about the value system, they seem not to recognize that the value system of slavery is very much in the thinking of American politics and the American economy. More than 50 percent of the jobs that have been produced in the Clinton administration, the Bush administration, and the Obama administration are jobs in the poverty category of life. The workers who work in those jobs still need food stamps. They have food insecurity. Their children become a part of the 25 percent of American children who live in poverty even though there is an adult in their household working hard. None of this, you see, penetrates the business pages of our country. But, if we who know that life can be different, do not understand a hard analysis of where we came from and what produces some of the things we see and hear today, we are not going to be able to devise a way by which we can organize to change it.

The late John F Kennedy said this about ideology: The great enemy of truth is very often not the lie, deliberate, contrived and dishonest, but the myth persistent and unrealistic. Too often we hold fast to the clichés of our forbearers. We subject all facts to a prefabricated set of interpretations so we can enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought. Just think for a few moments of the many, many opinions that are entered into public discourse in the United States that are rooted, not at all, in experience. The 47 percent all want to be given stuff from the society. That is just one example of this: The military diagnosis of ISIS which says that the only possibility are



military possibilities, while the president and a few scholars around the country say that these will not be resolved by military choices, at all. We live by these ideologies, and they keep us from doing the hard work of creating our society as we want it to be.

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*“...it’s important,... that we who want change,... recognize the labor movement of the 20th century as no other force in our nation created the so-called middle class.”*

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And so that’s why it’s important, it seems to me, that we who want change, who see the need for change, recognize the labor movement of the 20th century as no other force in our nation created the so-called middle class. Eradicated 10 cents an hour for making shoes. Eradicated child labor, though it is coming back in full force. And made it possible for millions of people in the 20th century to achieve a standard and level of life most of us in this room are beneficiaries. No matter our background, of what labor, labor unions and working people did for this society to create equality and equity in our land.

And the other major thing that I want to point to is the Civil Rights movement as another great movement of the 20th century that has helped to shape our country. Now I don’t like to use the term “the Civil Rights Movement,” though I use it, because it is an historical term coming out of the post-Civil War period in Congress. Very often when the media talks about the Civil Rights movement, like this year, the 50th year of the Selma Montgomery march, the Civil Rights movement becomes a way of preserving racism, Jim Crow Law, and segregation because it helps even black folk to think civil rights is about the advancement of the negro, if I can use the language of the ‘60s.

So you read all sorts of articles about the Civil

Rights movement, and there is no thought of the fact that it was far more than that. The Constitution of the United States was always interpreted by the Supreme Court as excluding poor white men, the Indian, the women, Black people, the Mexican, the Chinese on the East Coast and the West Coast. It was always interpreted by the Supreme Court as being exclusive. The strategy on the part of the NAACP to clean up the Constitution and make it become more inclusive was a strategy that won in the '50s and the '60s and the '70s. Victories at the Supreme Court for the first time translated the Constitution as being inclusive of all residents.

Most of our land has no idea that that's the reality of the history of the Supreme Court in the last 60-70 years. The present Supreme Court is there precisely because the forces of regression and retrogression and hurt and racism and sexism in the United States organized, calling the Supreme Courts of the '60s, "Activists." Then replacing them with the people we have today. Five of the people we have today represent the conservative, the racist, the Federalist Society, and the Tea Party choices for the Supreme Court. None of whom have very much of an understanding of the Constitution. All of whom basically opposed the Supreme Court decisions that came out of the Civil Rights movement that said the Constitution applies to all residents of the nation, even the immigrant. That's what this fight is over in the Supreme Court today.

And they will reverse, because the history of understanding the Constitution from 1789 until the mid- '50-60s of the 20th century, is this: We have the Constitution, we interpret it in a way that

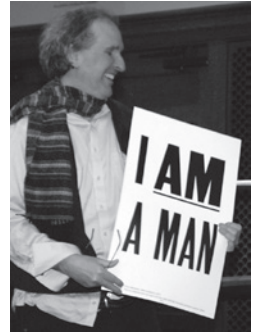
excludes more than the majority of the people. Hence, a Negro has no rights that the white man needs to acknowledge. This is an 1896 decision. Across-the-board, we have to see the influence of the ideological stance that we have grown up in.

But the Civil Rights movement is an omnibus name. Many dimensions of it. At least 20 different dimensions that I can see and read about. What do you do about the desegregation of sports that began around 1947? What do you do about the desegregation of music and entertainment that was very active in the '60s? I don't think any books have been written about it yet. What do you do about the work that young people play in the movement? Not just SNCC but long before SNCC was organized. The students who carried on a boycott of Coca Cola in 1957-59 in South Carolina? It's an omnibus movement, with 20 different dimensions. Most of which have not had any basic study made of them since. I can say the law schools have done greater work with the legal strategy that the NAACP devised.

And some universities have done a great deal of work on the desegregation of schools toward which we have not yet accomplished. So that's why I want to put the focus on one dimension of this civil rights movement. That is the dimension I call the Rosa Parks dimension, or the American Revolutionary dimension, or I call it the Black Freedom movement of the South, or I call it sometimes, the Martin Luther King wing of the movement. That is the wing of people who with the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott decided that we had certain deep human values and that we ought to make those values count for resisting Jim Crow

law and life in the United States. And so, I hold up the non-violent direct action movement, which Congressman John Lewis calls the American Non-Violent Movement.

The year is 1953-1973. The Civil Rights movement's beginnings go way back into the heart of slavery. But the '50s and '60s had a primary engine. That engine was the non-violent direct action. Where we went into the enemy's camp. We confronted the enemy with our character and our bodies. With courage to face the tension of racism, the tensions of fear and to demand in almost every instance of the local movements that I know about, the slogans were: Freedom, Equality, Justice, not Civil Rights.



In this Memphis sanitation strike, the men eventually made their slogan: I Am A Man, I am a Human Being. The dignity of human life that needs to be acknowledged by all. That's important, it seems to me for us to see to understand their movement. That movement did become a major movement for changing this country's life. It became the movement for challenging the status quo and for creating images of change that are valid, even today. So I want then thirdly, just simply to lift up the fact of the value of non-violent struggle. Non-violent philosophy. The value of non-violent tactics. I feel strongly that in the '30s and '40s and '50s the union movement became strong because they used non-violent tactics. Strikes, sit downs, lock ins, lock outs, picket lines, boycotts. They confronted the society with tactics that spoke for themselves and enabled many people to recognize the justice of the cause for working people. If we are to see a vigorous fight against the enemies of

the working people of this nation, the AFL-CIO, in my judgment, and AFSCME will have to do some deep soul searching about the possibilities of non-violent struggle and of the resurgence of the tactics.

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*“I feel strongly that in the ‘30s and ‘40s and ‘50s the union movement became strong because they used non-violent tactics. Strikes, sit downs, lock ins, lock outs, picket lines, boycotts.”*

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No doubt things have changed. No doubt there are a lot of legal parameters that have to be examined. But I am still convinced that if there is deep strategic thinking about organizing and using these tactics that the unionism in the United States will flourish in ways that it has never flourished in the past. Non-violence is not about the enemy. I want to say that. The pacifists in the United States have often preached, locally and otherwise, about loving the enemy. And of course, many of the pacifists who have come out of religious or biblical backgrounds know that there is that notion that you have to treat the alien like you treat yourself and your own people. You have to treat the enemy as you would treat yourself. Those are, in fact, the words of Jesus of Nazareth. But the whole teaching of non-violence in my judgment is not about the treatment of the opponent. I think the first emphasis of non-violence is for each person to discover the life, love, energy and power that is in their own life.

First, that’s the place where it begins. The theorists of non-violent struggle have long said that before people will change their society, they must withdraw their consent from the powers that be. This is what Gandhi said. It’s what any number of political theorists have said. Even a tyrant has to have the consent of the people whom he or she is tyrannizing. A dictator must have the passive willingness of the people to go along with the



dictatorship to make it work. The first time people begin to say no in their minds, in their hearts, then the tyranny begins to crumble. When Gandhi returned to India in 1914, a hero because of the work he did in South Africa where he coined the term non-violence and said it is power, it is love. He surprised the Congress Party including the Nehru family because Gandhi said, to the astonishment of many people, a hundred thousand British troops cannot occupy India with 350 million people if it were not for the cooperation and the consent of the 350 million people. Does that make sense? So he worked from the angle that he must stir up in people a sense that they will not cooperate any longer with the Raj, the British government. He withdrew their consent. He got them to say no.

And as that whole nation said no, especially in 1930, the British recognized that time was limited in India, as its premier colony. So, this is what I am trying to push. Non-violence means, first of all, we help one another to empower ourselves with what the gift of life really means. That it is a form of power. Aristotle, the father of philosophy, said that power is the capacity to accomplish purpose. We human beings have been given that from our birth. Watch a new born baby for six months, or a year. The power is the capacity to accomplish purpose. The first frontier of non-violent struggle is to help empower the people.

Then I would say to you that the second level is to get a community for justice and truth and equality in our nation that is a community that appreciates its diversity. That respects one another. That wants to ennoble and advance the gifts of life that we all bring to the struggle.

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*“Even a tyrant has to have the consent of the people whom he or she is tyrannizing... The first time people begin to say no in their minds, in their hearts, then the tyranny begins to crumble.”*

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One of my favorite stories of a non-violent battle is from Poland, where the workers at the Gdansk shipyard started a massive strike. The first ten years, it went nowhere. Then a group of the organizers including the president who was elected in 1988, Lech Walesa, decided they were going to reorganize. They agreed that they were going to do it non-violently the next time. So the year of 1980 and the '80s, they put together a ten million member union in Poland called, "Solidarity." And in their strikes, they decided they weren't going to leave their shipyards or their factories. They would stay inside the factories. They would build a community inside the factories in which they would all work together making certain the factory is safe, making certain it's clean. Caring for their food and one another. Not even cussing at each other, but to build within the factory, within the shipyard a fellowship and acknowledgement of the common humanity no matter what the differences were.

And thus, to organize the negotiations, to organize their structures so that when in 1985 or 1986 the government arrested some eight thousand of them, proceeded to torture them in prison and the rest of it. The movement held firm. It could not be diminished until finally in 1987 the government came back and called for negotiations. And out of that negotiation, and in those negotiations, Solidarity added another fact. We will have a Parliamentary election. The first one since 1945 or before. And in that Parliamentary election, the authoritarian government and the one party rule, the Communist Party, were voted out by a 10-1 margin which no one in the world anticipated.

And the Polish people were able to begin again to launch their effort towards self-rule.

The first level is people. Ordinary people. I've seen this happen. In Local 11 in Los Angeles. They will become the voices for change for the community, in their families, in their neighborhoods, in their congregations even. And then the second level is the strategic work by which we build a community in the United States that wants equality, liberty, and justice for all. That wants what we in the Civil Rights movement call: the Beloved Community. That is to establish a society, which I think has a great history in the United States. Establish a society of self-government where every boy and every girl matter.

Unionism, it seems to me, like the church, needs massive revolutionary change. Here is the Ferguson issue daunting our country and the rest. The police unions are still hanging on to being kind of a craft trade union, instead of community union. And they exploit the notion that the police, law enforcement people represent the most dangerous job in America. Well, in the year 2010, 82 children under the age of 5, were killed by guns. All across the United States the police union, they should contain many of the experts of how you deal with this issue of the gun, but name me a police union that's decided it's a community union, a union for the people, after all. We pretend that law enforcement is protecting the citizens of the country, but we are not protecting the children and young people who die. More than 2,000 of them in the United States a year die by guns.

Yet the police unions say nothing about what we

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*“Unionism, it seems to me, like the church, needs massive revolutionary change.”*

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the American people can do to make this change. Even though their motto is: Serve and Protect.

I leave this with you. The need for the union movement to re-think the way it battles the Chamber of Commerce. Go after the enemy in a fashion that empowers people so that perhaps by the mid-21st century, we can see the movements of struggle of millions and millions of people who, in the street, in the factory, in the workplace, in the community places, can push the power structure of this nation, with a power they did not anticipate. And can help, again, move us away from the resistance movement that is turning back the clock towards pushing the clock forward. It is my contention that the Tea Party forces that represent the worst elements of America, racism, sexism, violence, and plantation capitalism, will not win. If we go after the working people of our country and push movement again..... 2020 till 2040, where we engender a people's power that can confront the Koch brothers and the Chamber of Commerce alike and help this experiment in democracy to be preserved and to go forward. Thank you.

## Question and Answers

*Question:* Carl Roper, National Organiser, Trades Union Congress (Liverpool, England): It's a real privilege to be in the same room as you and to hear you speak. Just a comment, I only found out a few years ago that the great March on Washington that Rev. King gave his famous "I Have a Dream Speech" was originally called the march for jobs. It was organized by the civil rights movement and labor. How do we get back to that alliance and forge an alliance that can take on the enemies that you so articulately described?

*Lawson:* In the 1963 March on Washington, I was in the strategy committee in Birmingham, because that was the year of the Birmingham campaign and the direct action movement to desegregate Birmingham. I was in the strategy committee meeting when the issue of next steps came up. This was in April of 1963 where some people were proposing we move the Birmingham campaign to Washington, DC. Well, to make a long story short, we decided that we would have a March on Washington, as soon as it could be done. We asked Martin Luther King, Jr, who was in the meeting, and Bayard Rustin, who was in the meeting, to approach A. Philip Randolph as the key person for it. Martin King was asked to contact the NAACP, the Urban League, CORE, and other groups to talk to those presidents about the possibility of having a united march. And so, that's basically how that unity came about. They invited the National Council of Churches, the AFL-CIO would not come in, but Walter Reuther would come in and did come in. And so therefore



Carl Roper



Mildred Wurf

A. Philip Randolph became the chair, and at the time, there were people in those organizations who did not want Bayard Rustin around. We did not call Bayard Rustin a gay person. I never heard anyone call Bayard a queer even. He was a colleague and a friend. There was at least one person in this leadership group who did not want to be involved with Bayard Rustin. So A. Philip Randolph was officially asked to be the chairman, and he immediately said that Bayard Rustin will be my chief executive. So it went forward.

I think that is exactly right. In the 1960s and 1970s, we did have such large marches in Washington DC. We need now to increasingly have such things happen in major centers where there are labor councils and various people who can work to make that happen. We do need something like that to happen again.

*Question:* Mildred Wurf, former Director of Public Policy for the Girls Clubs of America: I wanted to thank you very much for the kind words you said about Jerry Wurf. And I wanted further to tell you, perhaps to your pleasure, that when you said you battered him about Viet Nam, my daughter leaned over and said to me “But Pop was opposed to the war in Viet Nam.” And I think, in 1968 he probably was not, but by the time she was knowledgeable about any of this, I think you had persuaded him.

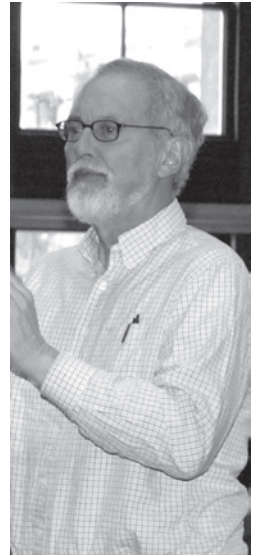
*Lawson:* Yes, he did become a part of the Labor Committee against the War.

*Wurf:* He became the only voice in the AFL-CIO who voted against Meany’s position regularly from that point on and was quite a leader in the anti-Viet Nam War movement.

You may take credit from that. In 1968, I forbade the television or the news to be on or the word Viet Nam to be used in the household because I was very opposed to the war at the time when he was not. So thank you very much.

*Question:* Greg Gigg, Teamster, Local 25, and resident of Somerville, MA: I am wondering about other forces that you see are speaking up for change. Is Pope Francis a figure for change in your estimation? He has made many good statements, but some contradictory statements. Can leaders like the Pope be a force for change and bringing that dialogue forward?

*Lawson:* I have no doubt that Francis is a force for change in our world. I appreciate him giving some of the leadership that he's done. But I think that we have to increasingly stop looking for saviors, and we have to start seeing ourselves, each of us, millions collecting the strength of life that will unite with other people so we can establish what some scholars have called, "People Power." It's all right for leadership to emerge of that kind of type that emerge out of the grassroots struggle itself. I do not think that you can have social groups, even families without leaders probably emerging. That is people who have certain talent and skill, people who have a good work ethic, people who are prepared to make the sacrifices of the common target. They are always going to emerge. On every professional football team, you get emerging someone who is the real leader. The quarterback should be, but very often a defensive person, a cornerback or tackle, will become the leader of the team on offense or defense because they have the work ethics, they have the ability to



Greg Gigg

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*“I think that we have to increasingly stop looking for saviors, and we have to start seeing ourselves, each of us, millions collecting the strength of life that will unite with other people so we can establish what some scholars have called, ‘People Power.’”*

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help build the other people on the team towards working together and pushing together, all of that kind of stuff. There will always be generals and what not, but we ought not to look for generals. We should let the generals come out of the struggles in which we are engaged. I maintain that unionism, creating organizations that working people are in and where they have a concern for their families and for their schools and for their health care and all of these matters for the environment in which they live, that has to become more and more the people’s movement. Non-violence says that kind of people’s movement is what generates a power that will cause transformation on the task that you are looking for. I can give many illustrations of this both from the point of view of labor and in the movements I was a part of.

*Question:* George Mokray, renewable energy and environmental activist: For the last couple of years we have been reading about Gandhi and economics. I have had the privilege to ask Representative Lewis and Bob Moses whether they learned anything about Gandhi and economics during the Civil Rights struggle while they were studying non-violence. Both of them said no. I am wondering why, if Gandhi said, *swadeshi*, the local economic activity, was the soul of *satyagraha*, of non-violent truth force. Why is it that the Civil Rights movement in the United States adopted non-violence, but did not adopt *swadeshi* and did not look at Gandhi and economics?

*Lawson:* Thank you. The Black community, leaders, clergy, and even labor people like Bill Lucy were of the mind that you had to start black businesses of different kinds, black shops owned by families. That



notion was always being pushed, was comparable to Gandhi's notion of the decentralization of the economy or that villages could be places where the economy could be promoted and developed. I think that economically we need to remember that people like Rupert Murdoch did not create wealth through the work of people. He bought wealth, he inherited a newspaper in Australia, had good bank credit, and so he bought another newspaper, another radio network, and another newspaper. His empire was not built upon his own sweat and creative energy related to building wealth.

In the United States, up through World War II, the wealth had been produced by family-owned businesses and farmers. That's where the wealth came from. So that a Gannett corporation then bought up lots of newspapers that were originally owned by families and produced a certain wealth in Massillon, OH or Cambridge or lots of cities around the country where all newspapers were generally owned by someone in the community who had almost always a journalistic community's motivation for starting the newspaper. Gannett then buys them up. The present economy, in my judgment, is much more of plantation capitalism than after World War II. So it seems to me there are some models that could be better than our current model. I know full well that in the United States there are rural, some suburban, and urban areas that have been undeveloped because the financial powers want a big buck and a big return on what their investments are. Part of our own situation is because of the lack of government, and I think state and local governments are more into that issue than is the federal government. The issue of what

is going on in the economy in their society. There are a number of ways of getting de-centralization. But none of that is going to happen without mass movements that challenge the status quo.



Rev. Lawson with  
Dr. Elaine Bernard

*Question:* Elaine Bernard, Executive Director, Labor and Worklife Program, Harvard Law School: Rev. Lawson, you have been involved in the struggle for justice for decades. What originally kindled your fire? Where did it come from, and how were you able to sustain it? Because at different times we have seen people get angry for a short period of time, they get involved in the struggle, and then they seem to disappear. Often in the labor movement we are interested in not just mobilizing, but really transforming people and thinking a little about what is it, how does it start? Maybe your personal story about how it started, and what has sustained it all these years?

*Lawson:* Well, I think that, number one, we must go back to early teachings of the human family. One of the major teachings that I think is critical is in the Hebrew Scriptures which says that in Creation God made human kind, God made human beings. You can add evolution to that and what we know about science and all; but, in God's image, God made male and female, God made them, God said they are blessed, so God said it was good. So you have the concept that each person has an inward being. Hebrew Scriptures especially maintain that inward being is shaped by heart, which was another word for the self, by the soul, which is supposed to be the root integrative force in individual life, by the mind, and by the full capacity, the full strength. So these dimensions are important.

So I tend to in my teachings, to insist that that ancient teaching to be found in other world religions, is not something we should give up and vanquish with the times in which we live. It is important for us to know the source of where we come from.

The second thing I would say is a part of that means we have to learn who we are. What therefore our life is about. How we want to use life. The trigger for me was at age four, when my family moved to Massillon, OH and on the streets of Massillon, OH, I heard my first racial insults and epithets, and I learned how to fight with my fists. But what that pushed in me very hard was listening to my family and enjoying the family that we had, and recognizing I had to make a choice. Am I a human being? Or am I what the society is trying to describe me as being. I made the choice: I am a person. I am a human being. That has made a great difference to me. That is the second point I would like to make. I come to see now that my personal characteristics were not about racism, but about how I use the strength of my life to help the human values of life emerge.

Thirdly, the papers are very often full with the importance of not being stressed by life, of developing some habits that allow you to take care of yourself. So I have been fortunate, since I've always been an athlete, I continue to exercise and walk. That's one thing. But as a follower of Jesus, which is a way I understand myself, not as a Christian, but as a follower of Jesus, I try to pray and reflect and meditate and study and read and think. That has been an important ingredient.

Then a fourth ingredient is valuing and relishing the family. My first family, as I look back I recognized that I had one of the best childhoods I could have ever had and teenage years the same. I try to see that as a value for vision and what not. So one of the gifts of life is there are so many ways that we human beings can use to stay alive. That nurture us and help us to move on.

So I never expected to be here today. I expected to be dead before I was 40. It has been hard sometimes to understand how I made it to 86. I find it hard sometimes to get up and move, and the aches and pains and all that. It's hard to be 86 physically. Sometimes I have to lean against the wall to put my pants on in the morning. Whoever heard of that? I never even dreamt that would be part of the way of living today. I think there are many, many resources out here we can use to keep moving and to keep struggling. I do not know which has been most important because all of them have been important.

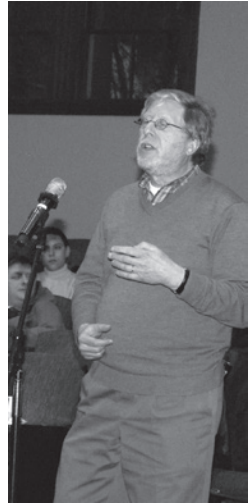
*Question:* Larry Beeferman, Pensions and Capital Stewardship Project, Labor and Worklife Program: I have a question to follow up on memory of violence. Michael Moore in one of his movies about guns in the U.S. and Canada said that violence was a part of the American experience, and he linked that to the perceived need to have guns because it was built in to fit the American character. I was wondering, is part of the problem that the historical violence is not part of the narrative? That Americans don't have the memory. There is no conversation about it. That they can't in fact confront it. The truth and reconciliation commission, so called, in South Africa, and maybe in Rwanda, are an attempt to

put some very difficult and dreadful experiences on the table. Is part of the task to revive or bring up historical memory among other things, as it relates to violence? Is that part of the solution?

*Lawson:* Well, I think that memories are important. We have selective memories or we have amnesia. I happen to think that our history as a people is one of the richest histories we can know anything about. We're the only country in the world where our 315 million people come from all the continents of the earth. Native Americans, Mexican Americans, people from Africa, Europe, and Asia. Maybe that's a gift that says if we can do it, then others can have a sense of modeling as what this can be. The other problem is, that violence has been mythologized. There is such a thing as the mythology of violence.

If we do an examination of violence in our country, you can't say that the violence is ennobling anyone. Or ennobling human relationships and human understanding.

Secondly, the violence is not giving people power. For example, we have almost more guns than we have people in the United States. Some people have a dozen guns in their collection at home, so having a gun does not mean you have power. You are still at the mercy of anyone who decides to assault you, because the police and the FBI say if you have a gun in your pocket when you are attacked, the larger chance is that you will get injured or killed if you go after the gun. If you have a gun in your home and there is an attack on your home, the chances are, they have these statistics and they claim these statistics are clear,



Larry Beeferman

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*“The violence is not giving people power... it’s a mythological notion that we say it has power. We’re more afraid in the United States today than I’ve ever seen us.”*

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so you really don’t have strength. The violence that is corporate violence does not solve problems. Structural violence does not solve problems. The violence of 100 years in Northeast Africa, where we call Palestine, Israel, and Iraq, has not produced a nobler people. It has not solved the problems of housing or education or illiteracy or medicine in the area. It’s not stopped the ideas that we say are ruthless, terrible ideas, because the fighting goes on.

At what point in the United States do we ask the question, the question that Obama asked about increasing our military participation in Syria, is it effective? So it’s not just memory, it’s the mythology. Violence says it’s the best way to make change. Well, it does make change by killing and injuring, destroying and devastating. But if you are looking for other kinds of change, that is equality, violence does not bring about equality. Violence has not brought about stability or tranquility or peace, for people who think they want social peace. Violence has not fulfilled its promise to us. That’s the reality. Again, it’s a mythological notion that we say it has power. We’re more afraid in the United States today than I’ve ever seen us. I lived through World War II, and I don’t remember being fearful as a kid, or as a high school student. We have millions of people who think killing the terrorists in Iraq and Syria will keep them from coming here. You said the same thing about the Cold War, same thing about Viet Nam. We need to finally insist that violence is not effective.

Dr. King and I talked about non-violence. We said, one, it’s the moral thing to do. We said, secondly, it’s the pragmatic thing to do. We said, thirdly, that

non-violence had deep roots in our spirituality that we ought to hang on to. But the pragmatism was right there. In Nashville in 1959, in organizing the national campaign, should I just have simply recruited the football players at Fisk University and Tennessee State? If we had organized ourselves and disciplined ourselves, and then we would go downtown to pull down all of the white only and colored only signs. Pragmatically it would have been chaos. In order to do it, I would have had to have been prepared to have sufficient numbers of men to beat the local police department. I knew that in 1958 and '59. And if we beat the local police department, we would then have to take on the state police. If you are going to start out using violence to make changes, look at the pragmatic strategic side of it. Will it accomplish what you think it will accomplish? You cannot name in the last 50 years, where violent operations have brought more justice, or more nobility of life.

Worst of all, you cannot describe situations of violence where the women and children have not been the worst victims. They are the people most devastated by the violence, which is true right now. It's not just memory; it's the fact that violence has a sort of mythological hold on us. So we now organize our police forces so they have SWAT teams if there is a hostage situation. A nineteen month baby is shot and killed by the police in a hostage situation in Los Angeles. Does that make sense? There are better ways of getting the hostages freed in most situations than that. Violence promises what violence has not delivered. World War II was an effective form of violence. We defeated the enemy, and we re-

organized the world as we wanted to re-organize it, which is a dynamic of war. But that was the last war where the victor could re-organize life and the world as they wanted to..



Jim Schmitz

*Question:* Jim Schmitz, former Director of Organizing, AFSCME who serves on the Wurf committee: I wanted to ask you about the pace of social change. As organizers, we often struggle to sustain hope and to sustain our committees and our movements to have hope for change. Recently, for example, the marriage equality movement, we see what appears to be relatively rapid change. I'm just curious, of your thoughts of what determines the pace of social change?

*Lawson:* Marriage equality was very much like the divorce thing in my youth and young adulthood, especially. The churches all inveighed against divorce, Roman Catholics and Protestants. Nevada passed a no fault divorce, so people from all over the country flew to Nevada and got their marriages voided. Eventually, then, every state put in no fault divorce rules. The common sense is adults ought to be able to form their own family units on whatever bases they wanted to form it if that did not interfere with the health and well-being of other people. I formed that common sense back in the 1960s in response to the laws in the South, the anti-miscegenation laws.

That's what the slave families did, incidentally. They would many times not be able to marry due to state law. They formed family units anyway. They tried to care for the children, so the whole process was different. They fought back in their own way. So I see that as what the LGBT's struggle is about.



So we of the churches will have these old rules in our books, and the states will one by one say they have no constitutional bases for banning two men or two women deciding they want to be married and establish their own family. So it's a very different issue. It's a simpler issue in that way. It's also true that those who are opposed to it lie when they say that the bible supports one on one. Most of the traditional marriages of the bible was one man, one or more women, who were property, and one or more mistresses. Go read the bible. The bible is filled with that. The religious people try to pretend, but there is maybe one verse on one man and one woman making a good marriage. Worse than that, the woman got her identity from the male, the father, the brother or the uncle, and had no other identity aside from the male.

*Question:* Hi. Thank you so much for coming. You made a really interesting point earlier about the importance of decentralization of this political and economic system that we have in the U.S. I might be wrong, if that was your point, but that's what I got from it. In getting the mom and pops shop support as opposed to this focus on industrialization and supporting big business. And I think in your experience, the expansion of federal power, of the national government's power has been so integral to both the labor movement and the civil rights movement. And I think the expansion of the commerce clause power of Congress was based on labor and employment cases and the concept of Congress's ability to regulate an interstate manufacturing operation, which then allowed Congress to go into desegregating schools in *Brown v. Board*. So in a lot of ways the expansion

of federal power has really been an asset to the labor and civil rights movements that you've been working on and with. On the other hand, now we have the issue of maybe the national government being less in tune with the local and state needs of workers like many of the people who have spoken before. So how do we reconcile the very state and local needs of the workforce with this history of the expansion of federal power having such a benefit to strengthening the middle-class and bringing workers out of poverty?

*Lawson:* I'm not sure that's a problem for the labor movement, of the AFL-CIO, because I think that the AFL-CIO has tied too much of its thinking to the Democratic Party. And the Democratic Party is largely untrustworthy of working people in the United States. So I don't know what strategic thinking would be in the labor movement if the Democratic Party were left out of it. And if the labor movement went after building its own power, its own structure. I'm not calling now for another political party or anything like that. I'm just simply saying, I know from the past that always the Democratic Party has moved into our midst and urged us a different way from what we were doing. As early as 1961, with the Freedom Rides, the Kennedy administration moved in and said you all should stop demonstrating. Get out of the street. Do voting registration and you'll solve these problems? So, that split things, because some people said yes, we must go with that, and in fact, the Democratic Party did indeed help to get started the voter education project in the South, which John Lewis later became the executive director for. Brought in hundreds of thousands dollars

to push this thing. I was not in that camp. I felt that the direct action movement was just getting started and that we needed to do direct action. But from 1961 on, we were being pushed by the Democratic Party elements sometimes officially, Robert Kennedy and John Kennedy directly with King and directly with some of us pushing for their way.

The immigration movement of which I was a part, had been working in that group for 10, 15, 20 years. In 2006 we were on the verge of a huge people's movement in this country around immigration. And the Democratic Party stepped in. I went to some of those national meetings in DC. Immigration staff people have a large network, and the Democratic Party kept saying you must come to Congress and lobby. Well, you really can't lobby for justice in our Congress. Number one, there are too many other lobbyists who are there before you. For 30 or 40 years the Pentagon has had a professional member of the armed forces assigned in Washington to every single congressional office. For at least 30 years, maybe longer than that, so you have to climb over the pharmaceutical company, the bankers, the insurance companies, the manufacturers, the Chamber of Commerce. There must be, I'm not sure how many lobbyists there are in Congress alone. So when a Jim Lawson goes to Congress to try to lobby, I've got to, first of all, see if I can get some room to get the other lobbyists out of the way. They are almost always in opposition to what I want to see happen. And labor has not been able to really do lobbying. Now the AFL-CIO is the only agency of a national character that always supports every piece of legislation

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*“The AFL-CIO has tied too much of its thinking to the Democratic Party.”*

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that is for the people. Invariably, I think that's true, in my lifetime. The Chamber of Commerce never wants a minimum wage law. Never wants a universal health care. Never wants affordable housing. Never wants to clean up the scam acts in the economy against ordinary people. Never wants to clean them up.



But I think there has to be developed a strategy of change that separates itself from the Democratic Party. And I don't mean separate itself in some kind of iron clad, steel way, but the fortunes of the Democratic Party are their fortunes -- and working people are not a part of that fortune. I don't believe for a second that the Democratic Party is an arbiter of the concern to eliminate segregation and racism, or economic equality in this country. Of course I wish them well, but they can't be the source of the strategy for any agency who wants change in America. I don't know how that's going to happen. I know that we black people somewhere along the way have to find a strategy that pushes the Democratic Party from where it is today.

*Question:* I was just wondering what your opinion is about the Moral Monday movement with Reverend Barber, out of North Carolina. Whether that serves as any glimmer of hope for the future of working and oppressed people?

*Lawson:* Well I've known Bill Barber for 15 years, maybe. And I've known of his work and I have been a supporter of it. He has really done a yeoman task in the organizing of that state, and I think the Moral Monday movement as he and the other 15 organizations have woven it, offer an important model for fighting some of things that

they are fighting. I have no doubt about that in my own mind. But when you are going to challenge a state government, you have to recognize that state government has enormous resources, and probably you have to organize 500 thousand people, or a million people. Theirs is a protracted struggle, in my mind. But in non-violent direct action there are levels of power that the number of the people you are able to pull into the campaign is an essential question. And numbers become very important. Now the Dream Act people have with small numbers tapped levers of power, created executive orders for change in immigration. They are marvelous. You don't always have to have numbers to make things happen. But, against certain kinds of targets, I think you do have to have numbers. Moral Monday, I maintain, is an excellent illustration of a pattern of strategic plan. Bill managed to get 15 North Carolina state organizations to agree to one additional agenda item in addition to what they all are working on. So they each have pledged themselves, committed themselves to continue their own work, but then they add to their work all of them, the agenda of the Moral Monday. And that's a good plan, I think.

[Much applause]





