



# The Obama Presidency: Labor's Canceled Check

***After Four Years Of Rhetoric, Labor Unions Feel That Obama Has Given Them Nothing But A "Canceled Check"***

***AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka: "For Too Long, We Have Been Left After Election Day Holding A Canceled Check Waving It About - 'Remember Us? Remember Us? Remember Us?'...Well, I Don't Know About You, But I've Had A Snootful Of That S---."*** (Nina Easton, "Obama's Labor Union Problem," [Fortune](#), 6/30/11)

## **OBAMA HAS REPEATEDLY PROCLAIMED HIS SUPPORT FOR UNIONS**

***Politico* Headline: "Obama To Labor: I'm On Your Side"** (John Maggs, "Obama To Labor: I'm On Your Side," [Politico](#), 12/17/10)

**Obama In 2011: "And I Want Everybody Here To Know, As Long As I'm In The White House I'm Going To Stand Up For Collective Bargaining."** (President Barack Obama, [Remarks By The President At Detroit Labor Day Event](#), Detroit, Michigan, 9/5/11)

***He Even Promised To Walk The Picket Line With Unions***

**Obama In 2007:** "If American workers are being denied their right to organize and collectively bargain when I'm in the White House, I'll put on a comfortable pair of shoes myself.' ... 'I'll walk on that picket line with you as president of the United States of America because workers deserve to know that somebody is standing in their corner." (Sam Hananel "PROMISES, PROMISES: Obama Shies Away From Protests," [The Associated Press](#), 3/12/11)

- **Obama:** "And if American workers are being denied their right to organize when I'm in the White House, I will put on a comfortable pair of shoes and I will walk on that picket line with you as President of the United States." (Senator Barack Obama, [Remarks In Spartanburg, South Carolina](#), 11/3/07)

**In 2008, Obama Promised To "Work A Picket Line" For Unions After They Raised Millions For His Campaign.** "In 2008, labor invested heavily in Obama's presidential campaign, mobilizing millions of volunteers and raising millions of dollars for a candidate who pledged to support workers' rights and vowed to pass the Employee Free Choice Act — a bill that would allow unions to organize employees

through signed pledge cards, a big-ticket item on labor's wish list. Obama also vowed to lace up 'comfortable shoes' and work a picket line if the movement ever needed him." (Joseph Williams, "Labor's Lost Love For Obama Returns," [Politico](#), 3/15/12)

## BUT OBAMA HAS SAT ON THE SIDELINES AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY

### *"Opportunistic Detachment" In Wisconsin*

**Obama Called Efforts In Wisconsin An "Assault On Unions."** OBAMA: "Some of what I've heard coming out of Wisconsin, where you're just making it harder for public employees to collectively bargain generally, seems like an assault on unions." (President Barack Obama, [Interview With TMZ](#), 2/17/11)

- **"The Public Backing From President Barack Obama, Meanwhile, Was A Cost-Free Love Letter To His Union Backers"** (Ben Smith and Maggie Haberman, "Labor Faces A Moment Of Truth In Wisconsin," [Politico](#), 2/21/11)

**Obama "Declined Union Invitations To Go To Wisconsin," Despite His Rhetoric From The '08 Campaign Trail.** "It didn't help that Obama declined union invitations to go to Wisconsin, where thousands of protesters mobilized against the anti-union measure. Candidate Obama had promised to 'put on sneakers' and walk a picket line himself when union rights were threatened." (Sam Hananel, "Labor Unions Adjust To New Reality Under Obama," [The Associated Press](#), 9/4/11)

- **Obama Reneged On His Campaign Promise To "Put On Sneakers" And Walk A Picket Line Himself In Defense Of Unions.** "It didn't help that Obama declined union invitations to go to Wisconsin, where thousands of protesters mobilized against the anti-union measure. Candidate Obama had promised to 'put on sneakers' and walk a picket line himself when union rights were threatened." (Sam Hananel, "Labor Unions Adjust To New Reality Under Obama," [The Associated Press](#), 9/4/11)

**Despite His Support, Obama Was "Largely A Bystander" In The Collective Bargaining Debate.** "Rose Ann DeMoro, executive director of National Nurses United, the nation's largest nurses union, called Obama 'largely a bystander' in the debate over collective bargaining. 'I think we're feeling a sense of betrayal from him and not liking it much,' she said." (Sam Hananel "PROMISES, PROMISES: Obama Shies Away From Protests," [The Associated Press](#), 3/12/11)

- **Union Requests For Administration Officials To Appear In Wisconsin Were "Rebuffed" By The White House.** "Union leaders urged Vice President Joe Biden during a White House meeting last month to go to Wisconsin and rally the faithful in their fight against Gov. Scott Walker's move to curtail collective bargaining rights for most public employees. Request rebuffed, they asked for Labor Secretary Hilda Solis. So far, however, the White House has stayed away from any trips to Madison, the state capital, or other states in the throes of union battles." (Sam Hananel, "PROMISES, PROMISES: Obama Shies Away From Protests," [The Associated Press](#), 3/12/11)
- **Democrat Strategist: Obama's Strategy Was To "Avoid Direct Engagement."** "Doug Schoen, a Democratic political strategist, said Obama's strategy seems to be 'keep your distance, avoid direct engagement, say most of the right things most of the time, and hope for resolution through sources other than your own.'" (Sam Hananel "PROMISES, PROMISES: Obama Shies Away From Protests," [The Associated Press](#), 3/12/11)

**Labor Unions' "Costly Defeat" In Wisconsin Was "Marked" By Obama's "Strategy Of Opportunistic Detachment."** "The costly defeat for the entrenched union interests that tried to oust Walker in retribution for challenging their power was marked by President Obama's refusal to lend his weight to

the campaign for fear of being stained by defeat. We'll see how well this strategy of opportunistic detachment serves in the fall as Obama reaches out to unions for support." (Bill Frezza, Op-Ed, "Governor Walker's Victory Spells Doom For Public Sector Unions," [Forbes](#), 6/5/12)

### ***The Chicago Teachers' Union Strike***

**"President Obama Has Not Chosen Sides In The Unfolding Dispute Between The Chicago Teacher's Union And Mayor Rahm Emanuel."** "President Obama has not chosen sides in the unfolding dispute between the Chicago teacher's union and Mayor Rahm Emanuel, the White House said Monday. 'His principle concern is for the students and families who are affected by the situation,' White House press secretary Jay Carney said. 'We hope that both sides are able to come together and settle this quickly,' he said." (Byron Tau, "White House: Obama Hopes Chicago Strike Is Resolved 'Quickly,'" [Politico's "44."](#) 9/10/12)

**"The Issue Is Awkward For The White House — Pitting The President's Former Chief Of Staff And Ex-Campaign Chairman Against An Important Democratic Constituency In The President's Adopted Hometown Of Chicago."** (Byron Tau, "White House: Obama Hopes Chicago Strike Is Resolved 'Quickly,'" [Politico's "44."](#) 9/10/12)

**"From The Left, Obama Is The Target Of An Online Petition" Urging Him To Side With The Strikers.** "From the left, Obama is the target of an online petition, urging him to fulfill this promise he made during a 2007 campaign speech in Spartanburg, S.C.: 'If American workers are being denied their right to organize and collectively bargain when I'm in the White House, I'll put on a comfortable pair of shoes myself, I'll walk on that picket line with you as President of the (USA). Because workers deserve to know that somebody is standing in their corner.'" (Edward McClelland, "Teachers' Strike Puts Obama In Political Bind," [NBC Chicago](#), 9/10/12)

**"So Far, White House Officials Have Avoided Taking Sides."** "So far, White House officials have avoided taking sides. White House spokesman Jay Carney said Monday that the president was aware of the situation but had not 'expressed any opinion or made any assessment about this particular incident.'" (Teresa Watanabe, Noreen S. Ahmed-Ullah and Kathleen Hennessey, "Chicago Teachers Strike Echoes National Debate On Accountability," [Los Angeles Times](#), 9/11/12)

**Century Foundation Senior Fellow Richard Kahlenberg: "Obama Administration Has Adopted A Center-Right Position On Issues Like Nonunion Charter Schools And Performance Pay. The Places Where Teachers' Unions Used To Look For Support Are No Longer Coming Through For Them."** "'They're getting very little support from some Democrats,' he said. 'The Obama administration has adopted a center-right position on issues like nonunion charter schools and performance pay. The places where teachers' unions used to look for support are no longer coming through for them.'" (Steven Greenhouse, "In Standoff, Latest Sign Of Unions Under Siege," [The New York Times](#), 9/10/12)

**Chicago Teachers Union Member John Cusick: "Unions Have Endorsed President Obama But The Rank-And-File Teachers Across The Nation Are So Frustrated And Angry About These Education Policies, Privatization Of The Education."** "'Unions have endorsed President Obama but the rank-and-file teachers across the nation are so frustrated and angry about these education policies, privatization of the education,' John Cusick, a striking fifth-grade teacher and union delegate at Chicago's William H. Ray Elementary School in Hyde Park, said yesterday." (William McQuillen, "Obama Caught Between Schools Overhaul, Striking Union Supporters," [Bloomberg News](#), 9/11/12)

## **LABOR UNIONS FEEL DISAPPOINTED BY THE OBAMA PRESIDENCY**

**Unions Are Frustrated That Obama "Did Not Deliver" During His First Two Years In Office.** "Almost all of them are frustrated that Obama did not deliver on more of his promises to labor while Democrats enjoyed substantial majorities in both the House and the Senate." (George E. Condon Jr., "Obama Meets With Labor Leaders,"

[National Journal](#), 12/17/10)

- **Obama Failed To Deliver For Unions Despite Entering Office With “Democratic Majorities In The House And Senate, As Good A Scenario As Labor Could Have Anticipated.”** “He entered office with Democratic majorities in the House and Senate, as good a scenario as labor could have anticipated. But within a year of the president’s 2009 Inauguration, labor’s agenda had stalled, in part because of White House preoccupation with the cratering economy, the Wall Street meltdown and the housing collapse, as well as the uphill battle over the health care bill.” (Joseph Williams, “Labor’s Lost Love For Obama Returns,” [Politico](#), 3/15/12)

**Labor Workers Are “Angry With The Pace Of Changes” Promised By Obama During Campaign.**

“President Barack Obama vowed Wednesday to keep fighting for union-friendly legislation, as he urged labor leaders to go to the polls for Democrats in the upcoming elections... But workers around the country are angry with the pace of changes the president promised on the campaign.” (Kendra Marr, “Obama Pledges Labor Support,” [Politico](#), 8/4/10)

**“While Unions Remain The Backbone Of The Democratic Party’s Voter Turnout Operations And Its On-The-Ground Campaign Organization, They Are Increasingly Marginalized On Capitol Hill.”**

“Organized labor has been losing this battle for three decades. While unions remain the backbone of the Democratic Party’s voter turnout operations and its on-the-ground campaign organization, they are increasingly marginalized on Capitol Hill. Adding insult to injury, labor is losing the battle for fraud-prevention laws to the very sectors who perpetrated those wrongs only a decade ago.” (Zach Carter And Ryan Grim, “Obama JOBS Act Leaves Labor Fuming In Democratic Feud,” [The Huffington Post](#), 4/5/12)

**Maf Misbah Uddin, A Member Of The New York Delegation And A Union Official: “We Need To Hear What [Obama] Is Going To Do. We Need Something To Be Hopeful About.”** UDDIN: “Romney says he will create 12 million new jobs. We need something like that. We need to hear what [Obama] is going to do. We need something to be hopeful about.” (Ben White, “DNC 2012: Even Party Faithful Demand More On Economy,” [Politico](#), 9/3/12)

- **“Obama’s Biggest Mistake Was Tackling Health Care Reform Instead Of Focusing Exclusively On The Economy For The First Two Years Of His Presidency.”** “Uddin said Obama’s biggest mistake was tackling health care reform instead of focusing exclusively on the economy for the first two years of his presidency. And he said Obama should make a renewed pledge to work on nothing but job creation in his second term. ‘He maybe did not have enough focus on that the first time,’ Uddin said.” (Ben White, “DNC 2012: Even Party Faithful Demand More On Economy,” [Politico](#), 9/3/12)
- **Maf Misbah Uddin Is The Treasurer For New York City’s Largest Public Employee Union “District Council 37.”** ([DC 37](#), Accessed 9/3/12)

**Industrial Worker Of The World Member, Kevin Dugan: “I Would Give Obama An F, He’s Done Nothing For Labor.”** “‘I would give Obama an F,’ said Kevin Dugan, a member of the Industrial Workers of the World who was sitting outside the church in one of a circle of folding chairs that said ‘solidarity’ on the back. ‘He’s done nothing for labor; he said almost nothing during the Wisconsin thing, and during the recall for [Gov.] Scott Walker, he didn’t do anything.’” (Alana Semuels, “‘Hug A Union Thug’: Labor Puts On Happy Face At DNC”, [Los Angeles Times](#), 9/4/12)