

Count the Votes at Gerawan!

Farmworkers and the new civil rights struggle—the decertification of bad unions

By Matt Patterson

Summary: *It's a basic civil right: the ability of union members to get rid of a union if it no longer serves its members effectively. Today, that right is being denied to a group of farmworkers in California by officials who refuse to count the votes the workers cast in a decertification election. That denial of rights shows just how little respect the United Farm Workers, founded by Cesar Chavez, gives to its members.*

On August 26, 2014, more than 1,000 angry farmworkers stormed a state labor board office in Visalia, California. For more than three hours, the mostly Latino, mostly immigrant crowd chanted for justice, carrying signs and wearing brightly colored shirts that advertised their cause.

Protests are nothing new in labor relations, of course. But these workers were not union members agitating for higher wages or better conditions. These workers, employed by the Fresno-based Gerawan Farming, Inc., were angrily denouncing California labor authorities for forcing them into a union, the United Farm Workers (UFW). They were protesting collusion between labor bosses and government bureaucrats to impose collective bargaining contracts on them against their will. They were voicing their rejection of the union. They already had high wages and excellent working conditions, they said. They didn't need the union, and wanted to dissociate themselves from the union.

They voted on decertification in November 2013. As of this writing, *the votes have yet to be counted.*

The Gerawan workers stand at the forefront of a new and growing front in the broad struggle to advance civil liberties in the



Cesar Chavez used to lead protests by members of the United Farm Workers (left). Now, workers protest the refusal to count votes on decertifying the union.

United States: Workers fighting for the right *not* to join a union.

The rise of the United Farm Workers

The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) of 1936 established the labor regime that is in effect in the United States to this day. The NLRA gave unions sweeping organizational powers while simultaneously placing severe restrictions on how employers may respond to unionization drives.

With the NLRA, the federal government granted unions effective monopolies on labor. But the agriculture sector was excluded (for a variety of reasons, including, some speculate, to placate Southern politicians dependent on the support of cotton and tobacco manufacturers). The exclusion of the agriculture sector created a vacuum in labor law. Into this vacuum stepped Cesar Chavez.

Chavez, born in Yuma, Arizona, in 1927, began his career as a “community organizer” when he was hired to work for the

Community Service Organization (CSO), a group formed by prominent activist Fred Ross. Ross had run labor camps for migrants, including one that, prior to his tenure, had served as an inspiration for *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Ross was a disciple of Saul Alinsky, the father of left-wing “community organizing.” In 1947, he was hired by Alinsky to organize Mexican-Americans in Los Angeles. Ross formed the CSO to help Latino immigrants navigate the ins and outs of daily life in 1950s California.

Chavez was hired by CSO in 1952. In the early 1960s, he and a small band formed

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the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA)—part community organizing network, part (unofficial) labor union aimed at mobilizing California’s large fieldworker population, the vast majority of whom, then as now, originate from areas south of the U.S-Mexican border.

In 1965, a rival group of largely Filipino laborers, the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), walked off the job in grape fields in Delano, California. The NFWA, led by Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and Gilbert Padilla, voted to join the strike, which gained national attention as “The Cause” (*la causa!*). In 1966 Chavez made a renowned trek from Delano to the state capital, Sacramento, and the NFWA and AWOC merged and became the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC).

In 1968, Chavez began a hunger strike at the union headquarters in Delano to bring attention to *la causa*. The move generated support from Robert F. Kennedy, who was running for president. In return for his support, Chavez’s union formally endorsed Kennedy and provided his campaign with crucial support in the run-up to the critical California primary, which Kennedy won. (Kennedy was assassinated just after his victory speech.)

In a multi-year strike against the grape growers, Chavez proved a master at using public-relations tactics to build support for a union effort. An estimated 14 million Americans supported a boycott in sympathy with Chavez and his union, refraining from purchasing California grapes. It

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worked: In 1969, Delano grape growers caved and signed contracts with UFOC. In 1972, UFOC was subsumed into the AFL-CIO to become the United Farm Workers (UFW) Union.

By 1972, the boycott tactic was Standard Operating Procedure. *Time* magazine noted that year:

At the Democratic National Convention in July, the phrase “boycott lettuce” became almost a password. It fell fervently from the lips of any number of heads of delegations, and it was finally consummated as a cause when Ted Kennedy, at the peak of convention excitement, began his speech: “Greetings, fellow lettuce boycotters!”

The idea was to spark a boycott of iceberg lettuce . . . in support of Cesar Chavez’s two-year-old strike against growers in California.

The UFW faced violent competition from the Teamsters Union, which was organizing workers from the lettuce fields of Salinas. A history of the UFW at PBS.org describes the ugly inter-union conflict:

The AFL-CIO pledged full support and sent millions of dollars in aid. The Teamsters responded with crews of bikers and toughs hired in Los Angeles to intimidate and attack strikers. Thousands of farmworkers and supporters were jailed, and finally, two UFW strikers were killed on the picket line.

The UFW faced other hurdles in its struggle to dominate California labor. Though the union won many elections in the 1970s and 1980s, union leaders were unable to capitalize on those victories to produce a sufficient numbers of contracts. The California Agricultural Labor Relations Act, passed in 1975, diminished the union’s ability to use boycotts in its organizing drives, the very tool that proved so potent against the Delano grape growers.

In addition, throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, the UFW was continually plagued with intra-union power struggles as Chavez and other leaders vied for control and debated the future and focus of their organization.

The night of April 22-23, 1993, Chavez died, apparently in his sleep, near Yuma, Arizona, not far from where he had been born 66 years earlier. Union legend has it that the many pressures of forming and running the UFW, including many hunger strikes, contributed to his death.

Upon Chavez’s death, Arturo S. Rodriguez became the UFW’s second president. He remains UFW president to this day.

The Chavez legacy

In California, Chavez has taken on the halo of a sanctified hero, like his idol Gandhi, with countless streets, public places, and charitable organizations bearing his name. The union eagerly exploits and promotes his reputation for tireless and selfless work on behalf of California’s migrant farm community.

But in the years since his death, numerous researchers have peeked behind the UFW curtain and uncovered a different view of Cesar Chavez. The profile of Chavez that emerges from these alternate narratives is that of a power-hungry narcissist who painstakingly built a cult of personality around himself and called it a union.

Chavez’s often-open contempt for the rank-and-file farmworkers has proven especially shocking to many former supporters and sympathizers.

Michael D. Yates, who worked for the UFW in 1977, wrote in the left-wing publication *Monthly Review*:

Chavez used every dirty trick in the book to defeat the worker leaders. He slandered them. He sent goons, including his criminal cousin, Manuel Chavez, to threaten and beat them. The union may even have engineered the automobile accident of farm worker leader Cleofas Guzman that left him paralyzed.

In his often despairing review of Miriam Pawel’s book *The Union of Their Dreams: Power, Hope, and Struggle in Cesar Chavez’s Farm Worker Movement*, Yates admits that Pawel had uncovered

plenty of evidence of Chavez’s disdain, distrust, even dislike of the rank-and-file for whom he had presumably built his movement. In many unions,

talented workers get elected to local union office, and from there, they can actively participate in national union affairs, and sometimes get elected or appointed to higher union office.

But, Yates notes,

This was impossible in the UFW, because there were never any local unions. Chavez made all appointments to the staff and tightly controlled those who sat on the UFW board . . . It prevented the formation of power bases that might challenge Chavez.

Whatever the quirks of Chavez's personality, this is the question that ultimately matters, especially to farm workers in the fields today who are considering UFW membership: Does the UFW really represent California field labor? The answer is no.

Shrinking membership

Hundreds of thousands of laborers toil in the Golden State's abundant fields—450,000 workers, according to a 2006 estimate. The union counts a paltry 10,000 as members, just over two percent.

This low percentage is surprising given the UFW's decades-long history of intense organizing and its often-outsized political influence. It is especially surprising given the relatively light competition the UFW has faced in targeting California's vast agriculture sector. In 2012, Golden State farms took in \$42.6 billion, accounting for 11.3 percent of America's total cash farm receipts, according to the California Department of Food and Agriculture. In fact, more than half of the fruits, vegetables, and nuts grown in the U.S. come from California.

But the vast majority of the state's 8,500 farms and ranches do not have collective bargaining agreements with the UFW. In fact, as of 2006, only an estimated 20-30 farms had contracts with the union, with some of those farms outside California.

UFW membership has plummeted. It was an estimated 50,000-80,000 in the 1970s (according to PBS; the union is notoriously tight-lipped in these matters). It is roughly 10,000 today. To stanch the bleeding, union officials have turned to gimmicks for raising money, such as offering annual

"memberships" for a fee of \$40 and providing workers with laminated membership cards that handily double as ID cards.

The union has also openly and actively pursued a variety of non-representational activities, such as instituting charitable organizations for housing and other basic needs. For example, over the course of 15 years, the National Farm Workers Service Center (NFSC) raised \$230 million for low-income housing across three states. According to a *Los Angeles Times* report, though, few actual farmworkers were beneficiaries of that housing, which ironically (and infuriatingly, to many union supporters) was built largely with non-union labor. Paul Chavez, son of Cesar and president of the Cesar Chavez Foundation, is described as giving a half-hearted defense of this use of non-union labor:

Chavez said that only by paying lower, nonunion wages can he hope to meet the Service Center's ambitious goal of housing 100,000 people in the next decade.

It's a case of a union leaders admitting that union labor is unaffordable.

UFW's tangled web of finances

Union president Arturo Rodriguez received \$94,129 in pay and benefits in 2013, while UFW regional director Armando Elenes made \$107,994.

The union claims to have paid out some significant sums in 2013 to certain individuals as "cash donations," including a \$75,232 gift to one Maria Thaddeus of Fort Collins, Colorado, whose address is listed as "missing." Who Ms. Thaddeus is, and what she did to deserve such a large donation from the United Farm Workers, is unclear. (An e-mail to the union's executive office requesting information about these donations was unanswered at press time.)

Like most unions, the UFW has been heavily engaged in political activity. But the nature of the UFW's political activity is the reverse of most unions. The *Los Angeles Times* noted:

Most unions contribute money to candidates; the UFW collects it instead. Most unions give money to their political action committees; the United Farm Workers PAC pays the union.

According to its most recent filing with the U.S. Department of Labor, the UFW possessed net assets of approximately \$2.62 million in 2013. That year, the union took in roughly \$7.12 million, including \$3.74 million in agency fees and dues (though how that amount is split between the two categories is unclear).

UFW membership saw a steady decline from the 1980 until the first decade of the 21st century. Then the union's ranks held steady at around 5,000 members from 2002 to 2012.

Yet the union's most recent LM-2 form—a form that is filed each year with the U.S. Department of Labor—claims 10,278 members and 339 "agency fee payers" for a total of 10,617 "members/fee payers." From 2012 to 2013, therefore, the union claims its membership shot up from 4,443 to over 10,000.

The UFW v. Silvia Lopez

What explains this sudden spike in membership in one year? It's possible that the union decided to count workers from Fresno-based Gerawan Farming, Inc. on its rolls. If so, that would be highly controversial, because those workers are currently engaged in a fierce and protracted legal effort to extricate themselves from association with the union.

The UFW won a representation election at Gerawan in 1990. Gerawan is a family-owned operation that has been harvesting in California's Central Valley for more than six decades. One of the nation's largest tree fruit producers, it employs up to 5,000 workers each year (not necessarily all at once; the daily workforce varies depending on the season).

Management contested that election, and it wasn't until 1992 that state labor authorities certified the results. Union bosses and Gerawan had one bargaining session, but agreed on no contract.

And then the UFW vanished. As CNBC reported, "The UFW never came back, there was never any contract, and Gerawan Farming went back to business." For almost 20 years nothing was heard from the union, and no dues were collected from Gerawan's employees. Meanwhile, older workers retired or moved on, replaced

by waves of younger workers, many of whom return season after season with their family members, multiple generations working alongside one another.

Then suddenly, in October 2012, owner Dan Gerawan received a letter from the UFW, saying it was ready to negotiate a new contract. According to CNBC's Jane Wells:

Unlike the early '90s, the UFW is now able to take advantage of newer laws in California that force both sides to accept a contract through mandated arbitration by the California Agricultural Labor Relations Board [ALRB]. Gerawan said once arbitration began, the union "proposed wage increases that were ridiculous."

Silvia Lopez, a single mother and 15-year veteran of the Gerawan fields, was shocked when she was told that she had been working at a unionized company, and appalled that she would be forced to pay three percent of her wages in union dues. Lopez was adamant that she did not want the UFW at Gerawan. "The company has always been very fair," she said. "They have never robbed the sweat of their workers, they've never robbed even a minute of our time. Our checks always have been paid."

In fact, Gerawan was already paying wages well above the industry average. With the imposition of three percent union dues, what UFW leaders were actually demanding was that the workers labor for less money. That was a position that won them no favors among the Gerawan crew.

Still, since the UFW had previously won a representation election, and since California is not a Right to Work state (a state in which the law allows workers to opt out of union dues and/or membership), the only way for Lopez to get out from under the thumb of the union was decertification. So that's what she set out to achieve.

In October 2013, Lopez gathered and turned in between 2,700 and 2,800 signatures from co-workers in a petition to decertify to the state labor board, the ALRB. The board, however, refused the signatures, claiming too many were of questionable legitimacy. ALRB re-

gional director Silas Shawver claimed, "There were some serious problems with signatures submitted that appeared to be fraudulent."

Lopez went to work again collecting signatures and returned within days with a new petition bearing 3,000 names. The board, notorious for its pro-union sympathies, balked. Sources have told the Center for Worker Freedom that Gov. Jerry Brown intervened personally and pressured the board into allowing the Gerawan workers a decertification election. (Brown created the ALRB in the 1970s during his first stint as governor.)

Waiting... waiting...

Voting took place on November 5, 2013. Those ballots have never been counted and, today, are locked up in an ALRB safe, likely at the board's regional headquarters in Visalia.

The board claims the votes cannot be counted until the various unfair labor practice charges lobbed at Gerawan by the UFW can be investigated. Conveniently for the union, the board also claims to have run out of funds to investigate. In the meantime, the board and the union want to force a contract on the Gerawan workers through the states' mandatory arbitration process.

The workers are challenging the ALRB's decision not to count their votes. Last February, they filed suit against the ALRB (i.e., against its board members and regional appointees) for violating their civil liberties. In July, a federal judge assessing the merits of the case ruled the suit could move forward. Lopez celebrated the decision in a statement released through her attorney:

I am happy that I will get to face the members of the ALRB and regional director at a trial. My co-workers' and my rights have been denied for more than 280 days. It's not right. I'm glad that the judge saw that I have a real case and will let part of my lawsuit move forward. All the farmworkers want is to have our votes counted. We will not stop fighting to have our voices heard and our rights protected.

Certainly the actions of the board constitute a gross violation of any number of Constitu-

tional protections. The 14th Amendment promises that no state shall "deprive any person of life, liberty, or property." By forcing workers into a union contract that will extract three percent of their wages against their will, the state of California is undeniably depriving these workers of their property.

Then there is the First Amendment, which prohibits abridgements of freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. The idea that government could refuse to count the votes from an election, and force people to be members of an organization against their will, would doubtless have horrified the Framers of the U.S. Constitution.

The ALRB has continued to slander the workers and Gerawan management with charges that the company is forcing/intimidating its workers into resisting the union. Those charges infuriate Silvia Lopez. On August 26, she and about a thousand of her co-workers loaded onto buses after working a full day in the fields and descended en masse on the ALRB regional office in Visalia. They held signs reading "Count our Votes!" and they sported shirts emblazoned with the text of the First Amendment and the image of Lady Liberty.

The workers chanted "Don't take our money!" They gave speeches, and waved an American flag for more than three hours. (The Center for Worker Freedom provided logistical support, including coordinating with local authorities to ensure a safe and peaceful demonstration.) Ms. Lopez presented an ALRB official with a petition bearing nearly 1,000 signatures from Gerawan workers stating that they had not been intimidated or coerced into anti-union activity. The protest drew local, state, and international media coverage, bringing the ALRB and its abuses to the attention of the public.

The protests reverberated in the state capital, thanks in part to a Center for Worker Freedom advertising campaign in Sacramento. Throughout September, CFW ran a series of more than a dozen digital and print billboards addressed to Gov. Jerry Brown, urging him to rein in the agency that he created.

One message that loomed over Sacramento freeways showed an infant and read “Dear Governor Brown: Take Responsibility for Your Baby, Make the ALRB Count the Votes at Gerawan.” Another showed a picture of Lopez with red tape over her mouth labeled “ALRB” and read: “Freedom of Speech Includes Fresno Farm Workers.”

On September 28, Jerry Brown quietly vetoed the union-backed Senate Bill 25, which would essentially have done to every farmworker in the state what is being done to the Gerawan workers in Fresno. It was widely believed that Brown would sign the bill. The fact that he did not, and that he issued a brief statement that night saying that labor election disputes “should be dealt with so the process is balanced and fair,” is perhaps an encouraging sign that the Governor is becoming increasingly troubled by the rogue agency he created four decades ago.

On the ALRB payroll

On September 29, the two parties in the dispute, the UFW/ALRB on one side and the workers/Gerawan on the other, met before an administrative judge in Fresno to plead their respective cases. The hearing was scheduled to continue for quite some time, possibly through January, and was expected to bring forth dozens of witnesses, including Lopez.

A major problem arose: The judge charged with mediating this dispute, Mark Soble, is on the payroll of one of the parties of the dispute. The Center for Worker Freedom reported data gathered and published by Transparent California showing that Soble received over \$142,000 in pay and benefits from the ALRB in 2013. Since 2011, he has been paid over \$357,000 by the agency, calling into doubt his ability to act as a fair and impartial arbiter in the matter.

In fact, Soble’s sympathies were made apparent on the opening day of the hearing, as he angrily waved a press release from the Center for Worker Freedom advertising a press conference. The press conference had been scheduled for the following Wednesday, across the hall from the hearings at the Radisson Hotel in Fresno. Numerous public officials were invited, including Assemblyman Jim Patterson and Fresno city council members, as well

as workers, including Ms. Lopez. The aim was to help give the workers and their supporters a platform on which to present their plight to the public.

In the hearing’s opening moments that Monday, Soble demanded to know if Lopez was behind the planned press conference. Farmworkers present at the hearing said later that they felt intimidated by the Judge’s comments, and feared they would face legal reprisal were they to speak at the press conference. Nevertheless, the press conference took place without incident on October 1, when Ms. Lopez excused herself from the hearing and addressed more than 200 workers, reporters, and elected officials. (The entire press conference can be viewed at <http://workerfreedom.org/ca-farmworkers-motivate-and-inspire-elected-officials>.)

The judge, like the union and the board before him, underestimated Ms. Lopez, who refuses to surrender the rights granted her by the United States Constitution.

Conclusion

For the UFW, the attempt to take Gerawan by force has been a PR disaster. But the union has had little choice. The organization began and run by Cesar Chavez, and run into the ground by his successors and family members, is facing an existential crisis. Bleeding cash and members, the union needs Gerawan, regardless of the rights or principles that must be destroyed in the process.

Today, the union is desperate for help from other unions, but sources have told CWF that the UFW is being shut out. It has long had a reputation in organized labor as a group that is quick to ask for help, but slow to give it. “They always have their hand out,” noted an insider. Yates, the former UFW staffer who wrote about this union for the *Monthly Review*, noted, “In a labor movement notorious for corruption and shortchanging the membership, the United Farm Workers has secured a place on the union wall of infamy.”

The irony is that many of the Gerawan workers came to America for more freedom, not less, and for more economic opportunity, not less. In many regions of Mexico and Central and South America,

powerful cartels carve up economies with the aid of public officials at the expense of workers and businesses, who get shaken down and shut out. Many of these workers believed it would be different—better—in America. They were wrong.

Still, the Gerawan workers, and others across the country who resist forced unionization, have a tremendous opportunity to advance the cause of civil liberty. The right to work—that is, to work without being forced to pay dues to an unnecessary, predatory third party—is the new civil rights struggle.

California Assemblyman Jim Patterson, who has been championing Ms. Lopez’s cause for more than a year, told CWF: “Silvia and the hundreds of farm workers who are fighting this battle to have their votes counted are the civil rights leaders of our time.... They will not be stopped or silenced by the ALRB or anyone and soon 3,000 voices will become 30,000 voices all with the same message, ‘the UFW doesn’t represent us.’”

For Democratic Party politicians and left-wing activists, there is a tremendous opportunity in the Gerawan mess—a chance to prove that they have the courage of their convictions. Liberals would howl in outrage if workers were forced by Republican officials into dues-paying membership in the National Rifle Association, and rightly so. If liberals really want to take the side of workers, they will be consistent, and demand that the workers’ votes be counted.

Unions, like any other organization, should attract members willingly, by persuasion, by demonstrating the value of their services. When they force people into associating with them, it exposes the hollowness of their promises and the fact that opposition to freedom is at the core of their ideology. It exposes just how little respect they have for their members and for those they would have as members.

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LaborNotes



In **Jefferson County, Colorado**, a **Denver** suburb, thousands of high school students—egged on by the local teachers' union—walked out of school to protest *in favor* of the dumbing down of guidelines for Advanced Placement history classes. Some of them partially disrobed to draw attention to themselves [see photos]. The new guidelines leave out **James Madison**, **Ben Franklin**, and **Martin Luther King Jr.** while promoting a false version of history—that America was founded not by people seeking freedom but by colonialists, racists, and slavers. In the guidelines, the actual origins of racism and slavery in the **Western Hemisphere** are ignored for reasons of Political Correctness, and the origin of the world anti-slavery movement among people of **English** descent in **Pennsylvania** is, of course, ignored.



The **Jefferson County Education Association** has recently fought with reformers on the school board over contract negotiations; the JCEA wants negotiations to be conducted behind closed doors, and demanded that raises go even to the 3% least effective teachers. The protests are intended to make the reformers look bad, and predictably, the **New York Times** and **CBS News**, among others, ran stories attacking the reformers as censors.

James R. Grossman, executive director of the **American Historical Association**, defended the guidelines in the **New York Times** as “call[ing] for a dialogue with the past,” and he wrote that they reflect the fact that “This fall, whites will constitute a minority of public-school students in the U.S.” (which is neither true nor relevant). **David Kalahar** of the **University of Colorado Boulder**, in **The American Thinker**, traced the dumbing-down effort to an American History conference held in Italy in 1997, where 78 historians (half of them non-Americans) gathered to “create a new American History.” That conference was funded by the **Rockefeller**, **Ford**, and **Mellon** foundations.

A **Pioneer Institute** report asked: “How can one understand the civil rights movement . . . without understanding [**Martin Luther**] **King**’s philosophy of non-violence and civil disobedience?” But the **College Board**, which is in charge of AP (and whose new president was the architect of **Common Core**), defended the protests: “These students recognize that the social order can—and sometimes must—be disrupted in the pursuit of liberty and justice.” And, one supposes, ignorance.

The labor reforms pushed by **Gov. Scott Walker** (R-Wisc.) appear to be having an effect. As noted by **Fox News**, Walker’s legislation requires the **Wisconsin Education Association Council** to “mount a recertification drive every year to ensure that a majority wants its representation. The Act also prevents public sector employers from automatically collecting dues and passing them along to unions. Since June 2011, teacher enrollment in the WEAC has dropped nearly a third from nearly 100,000 members, and the smaller union **AFT** [American Federation of Teachers]-Wisconsin has fallen more than half from its peak membership of 16,000.” Walker’s having a tough time in his re-election campaign, though. As of mid-October, he was ahead in the **RealClearPolitics** average of polls by only 47.7 to 47.3 percent.

United Auto Workers Local 31 dedicated a page of its website to list the names and work stations of employees who exercised their right not to join the union. Almost 30 workers at the **Fairfax, Kansas General Motors** plant are on the so-called “Scab List.” Likewise, **UAW Local 1853** published a “Scab Report” listing the names and work stations of more than 40 workers at the GM plant in **Spring Hill, Tennessee**. A sign at the plant reads: “The following individuals are NON-dues paying workers. They have chosen to STOP paying Union Dues and still reap the rewards of your negotiated benefits. If you work near one of these people listed please explain the importance of Solidarity and the power of collective bargaining.”

Dream Defenders is a front group for the **Service Employees International Union**, which is considered the union closest to the **President**. (The executive director, **Phillip Agnew**, is a paid organizer for SEIU, according to the **Daily Caller**.) **Dream Defenders**, which has received funding from the **George Soros**-backed **Tides Foundation**, created a political ad to take advantage of recent, tragic incidents in **Missouri**. In the commercial—part of DD’s “Vest or Vote” campaign—a mother straps a bullet-proof vest to her son so that “you’re going to be safe” from being shot by police. “On November 4,” the ad proclaims, “you have a choice: Vest or Vote.”

A larger effort to exploit the tragedies, the “**Ferguson October**” campaign, hosted “a series of public events—marches, convenings and panels— to build momentum for a nationwide movement against police violence,” according to the campaign’s website. Sponsors include the **American Federation of Government Employees Local 3354**, the SEIU-front **Center for Working Families** and other SEIU affiliates, the **International Socialist Organization**, the **New Energy Coalition**, the **National Domestic Workers Alliance**, **Socialist Alternative**, **Sierra Club’s Student Coalition**, and **FANG** (Fighting Against Natural Gas).