

Al Sharpton and the Unions

The infamous preacher/politician/TV host gets money and more from organized labor

By Carl F. Horowitz

Summary: From the “Subway Vigilante” and Tawana Brawley cases to the Pigs in a Blanket movement, the Rev. Al Sharpton has been a controversial public figure for more than three decades, first in New York and then nationwide. Today, he is one of the most influential people in the country, closely tied to the mayor of the nation’s largest city and to the President of the United States. And much of his influence and his financing can be traced to his ties to labor unions.

Al Sharpton has spent decades bringing attention to real and (in most cases) imaginary abuses committed by law enforcement officials and their allies. He has brought together mobs to demand the imprisonment of innocent people on such charges as rape and murder. He and his followers have filled the air with threats of “no justice, no peace,” and they have defined “justice” without regard to the truth. He is considered the father of the Pigs in a Blanket movement that in recent months has inspired shootings of police officers from New York to Missouri to Texas to Kentucky.

He depends on the largesse of Big Business. He has his own TV show on the MSNBC “news” channel, and is a top advisor to, and unofficial agent of, President Barack Obama. *Politico* in 2014 called him the President’s “go-to” person on race. By May 2015, he had visited the President and/or his senior appointees at the White House more than 100 times. Since taking office, the President twice has been the featured speaker at the annual convention of Sharpton’s nonprofit organization, National Action Network.

And, for much of his funding and organizational support, Sharpton depends on labor unions. Without realizing it, millions of Americans who pay union dues—voluntarily or involuntarily—help make the Al Sharpton phenomenon a reality.



Supported by unions, Al Sharpton—seen with his close associates President Obama, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, and former Attorney General Eric Holder—fathered the Pigs in a Blanket movement that smears police officers and fosters violence.

On the Left

On issues big and small, Sharpton has taken a Far Left position. He called for the diversion of pension funds into infrastructure projects and other “investments,” long a pet goal of his mentor, the Reverend Jesse Jackson. In 2001, he was arrested while protesting U.S. Navy practice bombings on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques, along with other public figures such as Robert Kennedy Jr., the actor Edward James Olmos, and Dennis Rivera, then head of the nation’s largest union local, Local 1199 (SEIU Healthcare Workers East).

In 2003, he likened the Democratic Leadership Council—the party faction once headed by Bill Clinton—to segregationists. “They don’t call themselves the Dixiecrats now, they call themselves the DLC,” he said.

In subsequent years, he seemed to be everywhere, running for president in 2003-2004,

then establishing his organization, National Action Network, as a touchstone in national Democratic politics.

Sharpton declared the Second Amendment outdated, noting that “People do not have the right to unregulated rights in this country.” When radio commentator Rush Limbaugh tried to buy part of the St. Louis Rams football team, Sharpton attempted to block the deal, an effort that was successful.

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When leaders in Indiana sought to protect the right of caterers and photographers to refuse to participate in weddings for religious reasons—a right supported 82%-10% in one recent national poll—Sharpton likened this religious-freedom effort to “slavery,” “Jim Crow,” and denying “women’s right to vote.”

In May of this year, when floods killed 13 people in Texas and six in Oklahoma, he tweeted: “Do you think the Texas Flooding is related to climate control or God’s rebuke?” He recently called “climate change” a “civil rights issue” and said “it is an issue of justice, and it is an issue of human rights. African Americans are at a higher risk of being close, or predisposed to areas of carbon, as well as other poisonous pollution in the air. And we have a disproportionate interest because we suffer disproportionately.” (Carbon dioxide, the gas that is the primary target of current “climate change” policies, is present in the atmosphere worldwide and is harmless to humans.)

Regarding the Iran nuclear weapons deal, Sharpton called on “ministers in black churches nationwide” to back the deal from their pulpits. “We have a disproportionate interest,” he said, “being that if there is a war, our community is always disproportionately part of the armed services, and that a lot of the debate is by people who will not have family members who will be at risk.” (According to military historian Victor Davis Hanson, there is no evidence that African Americans are more at risk than other groups with regard to the dangers of military service.)

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Labor Watch is published by Capital Research Center, a non-partisan education and research organization classified by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) public charity. Reprints are available for \$2.50 prepaid to Capital Research Center.

Often, Sharpton’s focus is on issues that are at the top of the unions’ agenda. In 2011, he joined with Lee Saunders, then secretary-treasurer of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees union (AFSCME), to protest a Georgia law meant to crack down on people who enter the U.S. illegally or remain in the country after their visas have expired. Sharpton said he was working to protect citizens who might be profiled. “They’ll start with Latinos, say they look like illegal Mexicans. Then it’ll be blacks, saying they look like illegal Caribbean.”

Also attending the rally were members of Jobs with Justice (a front for the Service Employees International Union), the Atlanta/North Georgia Labor Council, and Teamsters Local 728. AFSCME’s Saunders, by the way, is now the union’s president. He is also a board member of National Action Network.

Also in 2011, Sharpton took a stand against governors who were trying to put a lid on the power of public employees’ unions. Gov. John Kasich (R-Ohio) attempted to curb abuses by public-sector unions. Kasich’s reforms, in the form of Senate Bill 5, passed the state legislature and were signed into law, but eventually overturned in a statewide referendum. Sharpton was a leader of the effort to block the Kasich reforms. He came to Cleveland, where he spoke at the Greater Abyssinia Baptist Church against Senate Bill 5. Sharpton was joined by AFSCME’s Lee Saunders.

As reported in the newspaper *Call & Post*:

Sharpton used strong words to push against Republican Ohio Governor John Kasich and members of the Ohio legislature who are trying to limit collective bargaining. “They’ve brought in a right wing that is now trying to change everything that protects us and the progress we have made,” said Sharpton at the breakfast gathering. . . . “Where we thought we were talking about deficits, they were talking about union busting and robbing people of the civil rights of collective bargaining.”

Monday afternoon Rev. Sharpton spoke at Cleveland City Hall along with Congressman Dennis Kucinich, Cleveland City Council members, and Saunders. Sharpton held a news conference on

the front steps of Cleveland City Hall. There, he told reporters that those against Senate Bill 5 were waging a war on the proposal. “As we combine the civil rights and labor communities along with congressional leaders like Dennis Kucinich, we are sure we can fight this,” said Sharpton, as other local leaders flanked him and applauded his words.

Sharpton ended his evening at Local 310 Hall where he had a standing-room-only crowd. “Workers should not be robbed of the civil right to organize,” says Sharpton. He says he will do whatever it takes to protect workers including challenging it in court. Reverend Al Sharpton is standing united with Northeast Ohioans worried about their fate if Senate Bill 5 (SB5) becomes law. “I come to Ohio to tell you, Governor, that our strength doesn’t come from what you see, our strength comes from what you can’t see,” said Rev. Sharpton.

The *Toledo Blade* described another segment of Sharpton’s anti-Senate Bill 5 tour, which was part of a national pro-union campaign:

The fight over public union power isn’t just a labor struggle, the Rev. Al Sharpton and national union leaders said yesterday at Toledo’s Roy C. Start High School. It’s a civil rights battle, they said.

The event, along with a breakfast meeting at Pinewood Tabernacle Church, were stops on a tour by Mr. Sharpton and top labor leaders of labor battleground sites across the country. The events were billed as part of a “fight against the coordinated attack on public services.”

Mr. Sharpton was in Cleveland Monday, calling for a “war” against the Republican-backed legislation now before the Ohio House that would strip Ohio’s public union members of the right to collective bargaining—a bill supported by Gov. John Kasich. Mr. Sharpton said yesterday that threats to labor rights are a civil rights issue and that the legislation would hurt not just teachers but also their students’ futures and the community at large. He

and union leaders praised Start's high graduation rate and said the proposed legislation could roll back the school's success. "This is what we are fighting to maintain," Mr. Sharpton said of Start [High School]. "If we make it difficult for teachers to work, if we denigrate them, we turn schools like this around."

Keep in mind that Sharpton was talking about "collective bargaining rights" for government employee unions—rights that were historically opposed by such pro-union figures as President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the first president of the AFL-CIO, George Meany, who believed it was "impossible to bargain collectively with the government."

When Gov. Chris Christie (R-N.J.), in an effort to balance the state budget, proposed reforms related to teacher tenure and government employees' pension and health benefits, Sharpton rallied opposition. "We have committed to going all over this country to deal with the reality that we cannot balance the deficits and the budgets that we didn't cause on the backs of working-class people," he said at a rally. He was joined at the event by AFSCME's Lee Saunders and Randi Weingarten, head of the American Federation of Teachers.

In a 2011 *Huffington Post* column, Sharpton went after Gov. Scott Walker (R-Wisc.):

Madison, Wisconsin—arguably the center of labor movements and unions—is under attack. In one of the largest and troubling setbacks to workers' rights, Republican Gov. Scott Walker has proposed regressive legislation that not only dismantles the ability of civil employees to oppose unjust practices, but it essentially demonizes each individual's self-worth. As thousands continue to gather in Wisconsin to protest laws that would require them to pay more for their pensions and health insurance, similar action is taking place in New Mexico and around the country as unions face continued assault. The nation, in effect, is at a pivotal moment not seen since the days of the great civil rights movement....

Last week, I was in New Mexico with Lee Saunders, International Secretary-Treasurer for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), as we addressed

a similar attack on workers in that state. . . . [W]e must ensure that other states and municipalities do not begin to undermine the people who clean our streets, collect our garbage, teach our children, deliver our mail and tremendously help us all on a daily basis.

One night in 2012, Sharpton used his TV show, *Politics Nation*, as a forum to attack the Right to Work legislation then up for consideration in Michigan. He called it "an extreme attack on core democratic policies." He claimed that "billionaire conservatives" were behind the effort and that "their goal is the same it was then: cripple unions to pad their corporate profits and take down a key source of support for the Democratic Party." The following night, Sharpton huffed: "Threats, intimidation, undemocratic moves. Right now, Michigan is the center of the right-wing attack on workers' rights, and we must fight it."

When National Action Network held a major event in Los Angeles, a NAN press release made clear the continuing ties between Sharpton's group and the union movement:

Dr. [Martin Luther] King visited Los Angeles in the aftermath of the Watts Riots to decry the violence; today, Rev. Al Sharpton and the Los Angeles Chapter of National Action Network are working in the same tradition to carry on Dr. King's vision of equality. Proceeds from the event will go towards funding NAN's 2015 Technology Tour, which will create tech academies in five cities across the U.S., including New York, Atlanta, Detroit, Los Angeles and Oakland. Sponsors include: AFSCME Local 393/AFL-CIO; Charter Communications, Inc.; The Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO; SEIU Local 2015; UDW: The Homecare Providers Union, United Domestic Workers of America.

Today, Sharpton plays a prominent role in efforts by unions to raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour—which would have the effect of making millions of entry-level workers potentially unemployable.

Corporate sponsors

Sharpton's National Action Network was founded in 1991 and now takes in at least \$5 million a year.

Nevertheless, NAN and other Sharpton-controlled organizations are in poor financial shape. Federal and New York State tax liens against Sharpton and his nonprofit and for-profit organizations now total around \$4.5 million.

National Action Network's 2013 filing with the IRS showed a negative asset balance of \$1.33 million. That's one of several reasons why the nonprofit watchdog group Charity Navigator recently placed NAN on its watch list. Even personal loans from Sharpton, totaling almost \$329,000, haven't put his group in the black.

Still, lots of money is coming in, especially from Big Business. Individual donations are part of the revenue stream, but more significant are institutional donations. A NAN-sponsored policy conference on Capitol Hill in July was bankrolled by PepsiCo; participants got a free company logo notebook and nylon tote bag in the bargain. And the sponsor (i.e., donor) lists for NAN conferences over the years are corporation-heavy, including such names as Home Depot, Ford, Chrysler, Facebook, McDonald's, Walmart, Johnson & Johnson, Macy's, the News Corporation, Coca-Cola, Toyota, UPS, JPMorganChase, Anheuser-Busch, FedEx, Denny's, Comcast, Colgate-Palmolive, American Honda, AT&T, and Verizon. [For more on the support of corporations and foundations for Sharpton's organization, see *Labor Watch's* sister publication, *Foundation Watch*, May 2010.]

These companies believe such generosity buys them immunity from boycotts, lawsuits, and adverse publicity. Of course, such payoffs often whet the shakedown artist's appetite for more. (An appeaser, Churchill said, is one who "feeds a crocodile hoping it will eat him last.") If anything can be said on behalf of such corporate timidity, at least it is rooted in self-interest more than ideological solidarity.

Sharpton's shakedown operation was spotlighted last January in an article by Isabel Vincent and Melissa Klein of the *New York Post*:

Want to influence a casino bid? Polish your corporate image? Not be labeled a racist? Then you need to pay Al Sharpton.

For more than a decade, corporations

have shelled out thousands of dollars in donations and consulting fees to Sharpton's National Action Network. What they get in return is the reverend's supposed sway in the black community or, more often, his silence. . . .

Sony Pictures co-chair Amy Pascal met with the activist preacher after leaked emails showed her making racially charged comments about President Obama. . . . Pascal and her team were said to be "shaking in their boots" and "afraid of the Rev," the *Post* reported. No payments to NAN have been announced, but Sharpton and Pascal agreed to form a "working group" to focus on racial bias in Hollywood. . . . Sharpton notably did not publicly assert his support for Pascal after the meeting—what observers say seems like a typical Sharpton "shakedown" in the making. Pay him in cash or power, critics say, and you buy his support or silence. . . .

Sharpton, who now boasts a close relationship with Obama and [New York City] Mayor Bill de Blasio, is in a stronger negotiating position than ever. "Once Sharpton's on board, he plays the race card all the way through," said a source who has worked with the Harlem preacher. "He just keeps asking for more and more money."

A few of the examples cited in the *Post* article:

[National Action Network] had repeatedly and without success asked GM for donations for six years beginning in August 2000, a GM spokesman told the *Post*. Then, in 2006, Sharpton threatened a boycott of GM over the planned closing of an African-American-owned dealership in The Bronx. He picketed outside GM's Fifth Avenue headquarters. GM wrote checks to NAN for \$5,000 in 2007 and another \$5,000 in 2008.

Sharpton targeted American Honda in 2003 for not hiring enough African-Americans in management positions. "We support those that support us," Sharpton wrote to the company. "We cannot be silent while African-Americans spend hard-earned dollars with a company that does not hire, promote or

do business with us in a statistically significant manner." Two months later, car company leaders met with Sharpton, and Honda began to sponsor NAN's events. The protests stopped.

Sharpton landed a gig as a \$25,000-a-year adviser to Pepsi after he threatened a consumer boycott of the soda company in 1998, saying its ads did not portray African-Americans. He held the position until 2007.

Union backing

Another category of institutional donor to Sharpton is the unions. Whether or not rank-and-file members are aware of it, their dues payments have helped make possible his many campaigns. And the flow of cash from a wide range of labor organizations into National Action Network's coffers continues.

Jason Hart of Watchdog.org wrote in April:

Would you believe taxpayer money taken from government workers' paychecks was sent to MSNBC host Al Sharpton? It was.

AFSCME donated \$126,500 to Sharpton's National Action Network, one of many examples of AFSCME spending member dues on polarizing "progressive" causes. In the government union's 2014 report to the U.S. Department of Labor, AFSCME disclosed \$64,585,115 in "Political Activities and Lobbying" spending.

The union also reported more than \$1 million in donations to political nonprofits—including Sharpton's—as "Contributions, Gifts and Grants."

Last May, Jillian Kay Melchior reported in *National Review Online*:

Since *PoliticsNation* [Sharpton's TV show] debuted on MSNBC on August 29, 2011, Al Sharpton's nonprofit National Action Network has collected more than \$2.38 million in contributions from unions, according to Department of Labor records. Meanwhile, Sharpton has often used his show to promote pro-labor viewpoints, also inviting union leadership on as guests.

"The civil-rights movement, the labor movement, the human-rights move-

ment is all one thing," Sharpton said in May 2014, echoing the Amalgamated Transit Union's cries against cuts in transportation spending. Just two months prior, the Amalgamated Transit Union had given National Action Network a \$15,000 contribution. . . .

In 2010, before Sharpton's show debuted, National Action Network had offered "the opportunity to appear bi-monthly on Reverend Sharpton's nationally syndicated radio show" in exchange for a donation of \$100,000 or more, according to records from the nonprofit reviewed by *National Review*. A source close to Sharpton notes that "MSNBC's rules are more stringent than syndicated radio shows" but also adds: "I think Sharpton's providing a vehicle for pro-labor organizations gives him access to dollars, that's for sure."

Lee Saunders sits on the board of National Action Network, and he's also president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Workers, which has given Sharpton's nonprofit \$541,500 in donations since *PoliticsNation* launched, according to Department of Labor records. Saunders has appeared twice on *PoliticsNation* in the last 16 months. . . .

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, has also appeared twice in the past 16 months. AFT's headquarters and New York Local 2 have given Sharpton's nonprofit \$445,000 since August 29, 2011, records show.

Service Employees International Union's [Local 1199] president, George Gresham, has also made appearances on Sharpton's show. [SEIU headquarters] has given National Action Network \$436,133 over the past four years, the Department of Labor reports. . . .

Sharpton's MSNBC program, *PoliticsNation*, recently lost its Monday-through-Friday slot and will now be relegated to Sunday mornings.

A 2014 investigation by Jason Hart for Media Trackers revealed that NAN received more than \$3.6 million from unions during 2005-13, including about \$1.16 million that had been donated in Fiscal Year 2013.

The 20 largest union disbursements to National Action Network in 2013

<i>Organization name</i>	<i>Amount</i>
American Federation of Teachers	\$250,000
AFSCME	216,500
National Education Association	100,000
United Auto Workers	50,000
American Federation of Government Employees	50,000
Service Employees International Union	50,000
SEIU Local 1199	50,000
American Federation of Teachers	50,000
New York Hotel Trades Council	35,000
American Federation of Teachers Local 2	35,000
UNITE HERE	30,000
AFL-CIO	25,000
American Federation of Government Employees	25,000
Laborers (LIUNA)	25,000
American Postal Workers Union	25,000
SEIU Local 6434	25,000
Machinists and Aerospace Workers	22,000
American Federation of Government Employees	15,000
Sheet Metal Workers	15,000
Utility Workers	15,000

Note: All donations are from a union's headquarters, unless otherwise indicated. Certain unions are repeat donors. Source: Jason Hart, "MSNBC Host Al Sharpton Rakes in Union Cash," mediatrackers.org, April 11, 2014.

Al Sharpton virtually embodies demagoguery in American public life. For three decades, the New York City-based minister, politician, and talk show host has occupied the national stage, applying character assassination and political brinksmanship to achieving his ideal of social and racial "justice." Through his nonprofit group, National Action Network (NAN), he has attracted extensive financial and moral support, much of it from unions.

Do the grassroots members of these union care, or even know, where their money is going?

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Addendum: Unions and the civil rights movement

There was a time when labor unions and the civil rights movement were quite different from today.

There was a time when many union leaders were intensely patriotic and generally supportive of the free-market system or, at least, a "mixed" economy. Among those who favored socialism, the favored form was usually democratic socialism, rather than the totalitarianism of Cuba, China, and the Soviet Union.

There was a time when many leaders of the civil rights movement was committed to peaceful protest and to racial equality under law. Yes, both the union movement and the civil rights movement had strong elements of the Left, but there was resistance to left-wing extremism. (For example, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP fought efforts by Frank Marshall Davis—future mentor to a teenager named Barack Obama—to put Communists in control of the Hawaiian branch of the organization.)

Unions had been formed to create labor cartels—to limit the supply of labor, thereby raising wages—and, to some degree, to limit black entry into the labor force. [See *Labor Watch*, June 2014.] But by the 1960s, unions often allied themselves with civil rights organizations.

It is easy to forget that the August 1963 March on Washington, at which Martin Luther King gave his "I Have a Dream" speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial, was as much a union rally as a civil rights rally. Formally known as the "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom," its two principal organizers, both African-American, were A. Philip Randolph (founder-president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, president of the Negro American Labor Council,

and a vice president of the AFL-CIO) and Bayard Rustin, a pacifist activist of the Left and head of the AFL-CIO's A. Philip Randolph Institute. Randolph himself had been trying to hold such an event since the early 1940s. His eventual success owed much to help from certain white union officials, most of all, United Auto Workers President Walter Reuther. Union activists worked closely with King, NAACP President Roy Wilkins, National Urban League President Whitney Young, and other prominent civil rights leaders to make the march a reality.

Martin Luther King, in fact, met his tragic end while working as a *de facto* union negotiator. He came to Memphis in March 1968 at the invitation of local black ministers who had chosen to back AFSCME Local 1733, at the time locked in a bitter battle with the City of Memphis over wages and working conditions for sanitation workers, who were overwhelmingly black. The local, having been granted a charter by the parent union several years earlier, had been unable to persuade Mayor Henry Loeb and his administration to enter into contract negotiations, even though the City Council had authorized bargaining to take place. The result was a more than two-month strike during which King visited Memphis three times to persuade the administration to recognize the union.

His third visit culminated in his assassination. Less than two weeks later, following a silent mass demonstration led by Coretta Scott King, the city administration relented and accepted the City Council's recognition of the union.

There is an element of historical continuity here. Prior to the Memphis crisis, a barely adolescent New York City preacher, Alfred Charles Sharpton Jr., had begun working as a volunteer in the Brooklyn office of Operation Breadbasket, a multi-city project of Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference designed to pressure white business owners to hire more blacks and otherwise promote black interests. The campaign would presage what came to be known as affirmative action. The two, King and Sharpton, met on occasion. Following King's assassination, Sharpton was determined to carry on King's work, as he saw King's work. Whether or not he has succeeded is a matter of contention.

—CFH

Liar, liar, cities on fire

By Steven J. Allen

Over the past three decades, Al Sharpton has used deception to make himself rich and powerful.

Sharpton first came to the attention of many New Yorkers in the 1984 case of Bernhard Goetz. Goetz, sitting in a New York City subway car, was surrounded by four robbers, three of whom carried sharpened screwdrivers; he defended himself, shooting them with a .38-caliber pistol, and fled the scene. After a massive manhunt in which the mayor called out 1,350 extra policemen, Goetz, dubbed the “Subway Vigilante,” turned himself in, and Sharpton demanded that the “racist” serve jail time. Goetz was ultimately acquitted on four counts of attempted murder but served eight months for carrying an unlicensed firearm.

“The Reverend Al” became a national figure in 1987, after Tawana Brawley, a 15-year-old African-American girl, was discovered in a garbage bag, smeared in feces and with racial epithets written on her body in charcoal. Brawley claimed to have been raped by six white men, some of whom were police officers. Sharpton led protests and accused several individuals of involvement in the crime, including prosecutor Steven Pagnones. He called New York Governor Mario Cuomo (D.) a “racist” and compared state Attorney General Robert Abrams (D.) to Hitler. Brawley’s supporters suggested that the Mafia, the KKK, and the Irish Republican Army may have been involved. The whole thing turned out to be a hoax. Sharpton was sued successfully by those he accused, and his supporters paid the damages.

In 1990, Sharpton strongly supported the efforts of a fellow radical activist, Sonny Carson, who led a boycott of Korean-owned groceries in Brooklyn. *The New Republic* reported that, during the boycott, “not far from the boycott line, a black teen smashed the skull of a Vietnamese resident with a claw hammer, and his accomplices chanted, ‘Koreans go home.’”

There were the Crown Heights riots, as described by Ben Shapiro of Breitbart News and TruthRevolt.com:

In 1991, after a Chasidic Jew accidentally killed a young black child

in a car accident, Sharpton went to Crown Heights, where he spoke at the funeral for the child. There, he said that “diamond merchants” had “blood of innocent babies” on their hands. He also said, “If the Jews want to get it on, tell them to pin their yarmulkes back and come over to my house.” The Crown Heights riots led to the death of Yankel Rosenbaum, an Orthodox Jewish student. Rosenbaum’s brother told TruthRevolt, “He has never apologized, he has never offered any sincere remorse for the atrocious things he has done by way of terrible racist behavior and lies, for inciting racial events. Anybody who takes a look at that person and wants to spend advertising dollars on him should take a hard look at their moral stance in terms of their position in business, in commerce, and in the community.”

In one march after the Crown Heights riots, Sharpton led some 400 protesters through the neighborhood, his followers chanting, “no justice, no peace!” One of the protest banners read: “Hitler did not do the job.” During the riots, an estimated 43 civilians and 152 police officers were injured, in addition to the rabbinical student who was killed by rioters chanting, “Kill the Jew!”

Then there was the case of Freddy’s Fashion Mart, as described by Ben Shapiro:

In 1995, Freddy’s Fashion Mart raised rent on a black-owned music store. That was because Freddy’s Fashion Mart had its own rent raised by a black landlord in Harlem. But that didn’t stop Sharpton from blaming Freddy’s Fashion Mart, accusing them of racism. “We will not stand by and allow them to move this brother so that some white interloper can expand his business,” Sharpton said. Protesters yelled, “Burn down the Jew store.” One of the protesters then shot four employees of Freddy’s and set the store on fire. As [columnist] Jeff Jacoby wrote in 2003, “If Sharpton were a white skinhead, he would be a political leper, spurned everywhere but the fringe.”

The Rev. Sharpton seems to show up whenever the Left needs a good lie—for

example, in the case of George Zimmerman, a Florida man of Latino heritage who defended himself from a vicious attack (apparently a mistaken gay-bashing) and was falsely charged with murder.

Then there was Ferguson. Michael Brown, age 18, robbed a convenience store in Ferguson, Missouri, near St. Louis; he roughed up an Indian-American store clerk half his size and walked away. Some ten minutes later, Brown was confronted by a police officer, Darren Wilson, who was on the lookout for the robbery suspect. Brown assaulted Wilson and attempted to take the officers’ gun, which discharged inside the police car. Brown, 6’4” and almost 300 pounds, ran, then turned around and charged the officer. Following an investigation by the Obama Justice Department, the police officer was found to have been entirely justified in shooting Brown. The Justice Department examined all the witnesses, and those whose stories stood up to scrutiny were all African-American, and all backed up Wilson’s version of events.

Yet the tale spread that Brown was shot while holding up his hands in surrender. (That version apparently originated with Brown’s accomplice in the robbery, who was running away and did not actually see the fatal shot fired.) Sharpton and his associates turned the “hands up, don’t shoot” gesture into a symbol for alleged police abuses; it appeared in that context on national magazine covers, was replicated by performers at the Grammy Awards, was seen at Democratic Party meetings and countless protests, and became part of the national culture.

David Hogberg, an alumnus of the Capital Research Center, interviewed Thomas Sowell, the renowned economist at the Hoover Institution, for an article for *FrontPage* magazine. Sowell, who is African-American, laid much of the blame for violent “protest” at the feet of Sharpton and his close associate, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio.

DH: Some of the protesters in New York City chanted, “What do we want? Dead cops! When do we want it? Now!” To what degree are they responsible for the two cops who were shot to death?

TS: To a degree, they are. If you stir up hostility against a group, in this

case police, terrible things are going to happen. Some people express their hostility in words, some in other ways. But you can be sure that across a broad spectrum of people there will be those who will use violence. I love it when the left says that these were peaceful demonstrations in Ferguson that got out of hand. Well, going in, it's as predictable as the swallows coming back to Capistrano: If you are going to have a mass of people whipped up by demagogues like Sharpton and others, if these people are told that the world is against them, and the protest occurs at night, somebody is going to start doing something violent. And I can't believe that the people who organized this are so naïve that it has never occurred to them that violence might happen.

DH: To what degree, if any, are people like Al Sharpton and Bill de Blasio responsible for those dead cops?

TS: To a considerable degree because, again, they set the atmosphere. When you go out and stir all of this stuff up, of course you are responsible. You can't turn this stuff on and off. When you open the floodgates, you can't tell the water where to go. The ultimate responsibility, obviously, is the man who pulled the trigger. But what I'm saying is that when you set this kind of stuff in motion, you know that violence is a likely outcome.

The likely outcome

In New York City, two police officers, Wenjian Liu and Rafael Ramos, were shot to death in revenge for the Ferguson incident and for the death of Eric Garner, who died after struggling with police while resisting arrest for selling untaxed cigarettes. The killer posted on Instagram: "I'm putting Wings on Pigs Today ... They Take 1 of Ours ... Lets Take 2 of Theirs." When Mayor de Blasio [see *Labor Watch*, May 2014] visited the hospital where the officers were pronounced dead, and again at one of the funerals, fellow officers turned their backs on the mayor. Some of the officers specifically cited de Blasio's close relationship with Sharpton in assigning him some of the blame for the revenge killing.

In Ferguson, two St. Louis-area police officers were shot in revenge for Brown's

death, but survived. In Harris County, Texas (Houston), a sheriff's deputy was shot execution-style while pumping gas; "Our assumption is that he was a target because he wore a uniform," said the sheriff, Ron Hickman, who linked the shooting to the anti-cop campaign. Then, as Chuck Ross reported in the *Daily Caller*:

A Missouri man who shot and killed a Kentucky state trooper during a traffic stop [September 13] was an apparent Black Lives Matter sympathizer who protested in the days after the shooting death of Michael Brown last year and attended the 18-year-old's funeral, social media posts show.

Joseph Thomas Johnson-Shanks, 25, shot Kentucky State Police Trooper Joseph Cameron Ponder after a high-speed chase on Interstate 24 . . .

Shanks is from Florissant, Mo., a St. Louis suburb near Ferguson, where Brown was fatally shot by police officer Darren Wilson on Aug. 9, 2014. A Facebook account that appears to belong to Johnson-Shanks shows that he took part in the protests that followed the shooting. Pictures show him adopting the "hands up, don't shoot" pose which became the rallying cry following the shooting. . . .

Johnson-Shanks also snapped photos of civil rights leader Al Sharpton, who rallied in Ferguson following the shooting.

Black Lives Matter, by the way, is the group that seized the stage from a presidential candidate, U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), to demand a moment of silence to honor the robber Michael Brown; that forced another candidate, former Gov. Martin O'Malley (D-Md.), to apologize for insisting that "all lives matter"; that chanted, "Pigs in a blanket, fry 'em like bacon," during a recent march in Missouri; and that demands the imprisonment of former policeman Darren Wilson, an innocent man. (Ironically, about a dozen BLM members stormed the stage and seized the microphone in December at a protest led by Sharpton. One radical website declared that Sharpton, along with talk show host and entrepreneur Oprah Winfrey, are "scared witless that the Black Lives Matter mobilization will become a sustained, independent political movement—one that challenges both the rich white rulers and

their junior partners in the Black Miseducation Class." As often happens in protest movements, the older generation is seen by younger members as insufficiently radical.)

Ultimately, the effect of Sharpton and the Pigs in a Blanket movement is felt not just by police but by all victims of crime. Heather Mac Donald of the Manhattan Institute wrote in the *Wall Street Journal*:

A virulent antipolice campaign over the past year—initially fueled by a since-discredited narrative about a police shooting in Ferguson, Mo.—has made police officers reluctant to do their jobs. The Black Lives Matter movement proclaims that the police are a lethal threat to blacks and that the criminal-justice system is pervaded by racial bias. The media amplify that message on an almost daily basis. Officers now worry about becoming the latest racist cop of the week, losing their job or being indicted if a good-faith encounter with a suspect goes awry or is merely distorted by an incomplete cellphone video.

With police so discouraged, violent crime has surged in at least 35 American cities this year. The alarming murder increase prompted an emergency meeting of the Major Cities Chiefs Association last month. Homicides were up 76% in Milwaukee, 60% in St. Louis, and 56% in Baltimore through mid-August, compared with the same period in 2014; murder was up 47% in Minneapolis and 36% in Houston through mid-July.

Lies matter. Sometimes lies get people killed. Does Al Sharpton care?

Dr. Steven J. Allen (J.D., Ph.D.) is editor of Labor Watch.

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**Many thanks,
Terrence Scanlon
President**

LaborNotes

Kentucky is one of only three states that elect governors in 2015, and Right to Work is a key issue. **Gov. Steve Beshear** (D), who opposes RTW, is retiring. The Democratic candidate is state **Attorney General Jack Conway**, who likewise opposes RTW, while Kentucky AFL-CIO president **Bill Londrigan** has attacked GOP candidate **Matt Bevin** as a “**Scott Walker** clone,” comparing him to the **Wisconsin** governor who reformed labor laws in his state. “He [Bevin] is everything that we’re opposed to along those lines,” Londrigan said.

In **Mississippi**, a Right to Work state, **Gov. Phil Bryant** (R) is running for re-election. He has signed legislation that protects companies and individuals from harassment during unionization drives, prohibits union picketers from blocking entrances and sidewalks, and blocks local governments from forcing employers into “labor peace” agreements. “Mississippi has some of the lowest union participation in the country, and these bills send a message that we will not tolerate efforts like intimidation,” he said when signing the bills. He also signed a measure protecting employers’ right to do criminal background checks. His opponent is **Robert Gray**, a truckdriver and political unknown whose own mother didn’t know he was running before she saw his name on the ballot. He won the Democratic nomination by 20 points, apparently because he was first on the ballot and the only male candidate.

The **Louisiana** governor’s race includes **U.S. Sen. David Vitter** (R), a strong Right to Work supporter at the national level, as well as **Lt. Gov. Jay Dardenne** (R), **House Minority Leader John Bel Edwards** (D), and **Public Service Commissioner** (and former Lt. Governor) **Scott Angelle** (R). Louisiana has been a Right to Work state for almost 40 years, and that’s not expected to change regardless of who wins.

In **Missouri**, RTW supporters failed on September 16 to override a RTW veto by the state’s Democratic governor. “House members voted 96 to 63 in favor of an override of **Gov. Jay Nixon**’s veto, 13 votes short of the two-thirds majority needed to send the bill to the Senate. But the outcome, cheered by union members, was not expected to end the state’s debate. So-called right-to-work policies have been enacted elsewhere in the Midwest, long a bastion of union organizing, and are poised to be a major issue in Missouri’s 2016 election for governor,” the **New York Times** reported.

But the Missouri legislature did succeed in overriding Nixon’s veto of a bill to block local minimum wage hikes, which effectively make it illegal for many unskilled workers to get jobs. The Senate vote was 23 to 9, the House vote 114 to 46. The measure also blocked local requirements for paid vacation or sick leave. The local board in **St. Louis** had voted to raise the minimum to \$11 an hour. In Kansas City, the council had voted to raise the minimum to \$13 an hour by 2020, and a \$15 measure was set for a referendum.

Minimum wage hikes in the Seattle area are having an effect, reported **Sean Williams** of **Motley Fool**: “Some businesses in **Seattle** have begun tacking on a ‘living wage surcharge.’ **MasterPark**, an airport parking service in nearby **SeaTac**, now adds \$0.99-per-day charge for consumers and makes sure to separate the charge out on consumers’ receipts to ensure they understand where the higher fees are coming from.”

Supporters of the Seattle hike claimed it would help people leave welfare, but, according to **Fox News**, “there may be a hitch in the plan. Evidence is surfacing that some workers are asking their bosses for fewer hours as their wages rise—in a bid to keep overall income down so they don’t lose public subsidies for things like food, child care and rent. **Full Life Care**, a home nursing nonprofit, told **KIRO-TV** in Seattle that several workers want to work less.” Said radio commentator **Jason Rantz**: “If they cut down their hours to stay on those subsidies because the \$15 per hour minimum wage didn’t actually help get them out of poverty, all you’ve done is put a burden on the business and given false hope to a lot of people.”

Key union leaders are reportedly urging **Vice President Joe Biden** to get into the presidential race. **Richard Trumka**, head of the nation’s largest union organization, the **AFL-CIO**, said in early September, “The field is still wide open,” and Biden would be a “good candidate” and “good President.” **Hillary Clinton**, he said, would “make a great president” but needs “to really figure out how to energize workers.” Trumka may have tipped his hand regarding his preference, when he walked with Biden at events on Labor Day.

There’s a degree of irony in Trumka’s signals that he might support the Vice President. In 1988, when Trumka was president of the **United Mine Workers**, Biden was forced out of the race for President after committing a number of falsehoods and plagiarisms, including his false claim of being from a family of coal miners. He spoke numerous times on the campaign trail of being the first person in his family to attend college and of having “ancestors who worked in the coal mines of northeast **Pennsylvania** and would come after 12 hours and play football for four hours”—details that, except for the Pennsylvania setting, had been lifted by Biden from the life story of a left-wing British politician named **Neil Kinnock**. (The “football” in the original story was, of course, soccer.)