The Economic Justice Mission Group Asks:
Do YOU understand the racist roots of so-called “right to work?”

To learn more, you are invited to a one-hour Zoom event, Monday April 5 at 6:30 p.m., with University of Washington Professor of Human Rights, Worker Rights, and Martin Luther King Jr. scholar Michael Honey to learn about the interconnectedness of civil rights and labor rights within Rev. Dr. King’s transformational work. And learn about Dr. King’s keen recognition of so-called “right to work” laws as a destructive force and a fraud designed solely to rob workers of an effective collective voice. Register for this event >>

The story begins in the 1940s in the South. Despite Jim Crow efforts, in some workplaces Blacks and whites worked together. Conditions were often unsafe and oppressive. Workers began talking together about how to fix their grievous work circumstances. The word “union” was spoken. Imagine! Black workers and white workers coming together to form unions in order to have a collective voice in the workplace. But this worker unity could not be tolerated by industrial titans. Vance Muse, a wealthy Texas industrialist and lobbyist who, in the 1930s, had proudly told a U.S. Senate Committee, “I am a southerner and I am for white supremacy,” devised a scheme for creating a racial divide among workers by pushing for state laws designed to undermine workers’ payment of union dues. Showing astute marketing savvy, it was decided these laws should be called “right to work” laws. (Who could be against that?!) Mr. Muse founded something called the Christian American Association to promote these worker-dividing laws. At one point he explained that if such laws were not passed, “White women and white men will be forced into organizations [labor unions] with black African apes whom they will have to call ‘brother’ or lose their jobs.” Mr. Muse’ scheme worked. Workers were divided, their collective voices dramatically diminished. And wages and working conditions suffered as worker disunity was actively promoted by moneyed interests. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King readily recognized this as a great fraud meant only to weaken and harm workers.

Fast forward to the present. Anti-union corporate titans have formed their own union, so to speak [the Virginia-based National Right to Work Committee], to promote such worker-dividing policies across the land, and this group has had NH in its crosshairs for four decades as they’ve spent untold sums lobbying in NH for passage of such a law. These out-of-state forces now believe that 2021 is their time and NH’s SB 61 is their best shot. The NH Council of Churches and religious leaders have spoken out, supported by our own Conference Minister, and have decried such efforts. (See https://nhchurches.org/sb61/) At the national religious level, Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish leaders have all spoken likewise, guided by shared moral principles regarding the dignity of all work and the importance of the voice of all workers. A Dartmouth Professor, Dr Marc Dixon, who has studied these laws from past to present, observes, “Why target unions now? Consistent across both periods, however different, is that Right-to-Work has been an important tool for organized business. It is a clear way to defund and destabilize a political opponent.”

Please join our UCC Conference’s Economic Justice Mission Group on Monday April 5 at 6:30 p.m. to learn more. Download the event flyer >>