

# ALL AGAINST ONE

BY DAVID MOBERG · BAL HARBOUR, FLORIDA

**F**OR DAN RADFORD, HEAD OF the Cincinnati Central Labor Council, the presidential campaign started last fall, long before Democrats had a nominee. And it will continue unabated throughout the year with more resources, more determination, more unity and a greater variety of tactics than ever before.

Reflecting the national labor movement's strategy and resolve, Radford's work in his crucial battleground state is based in a profound fear of Bush's reelection—a fear that already is producing glimmers of hope.

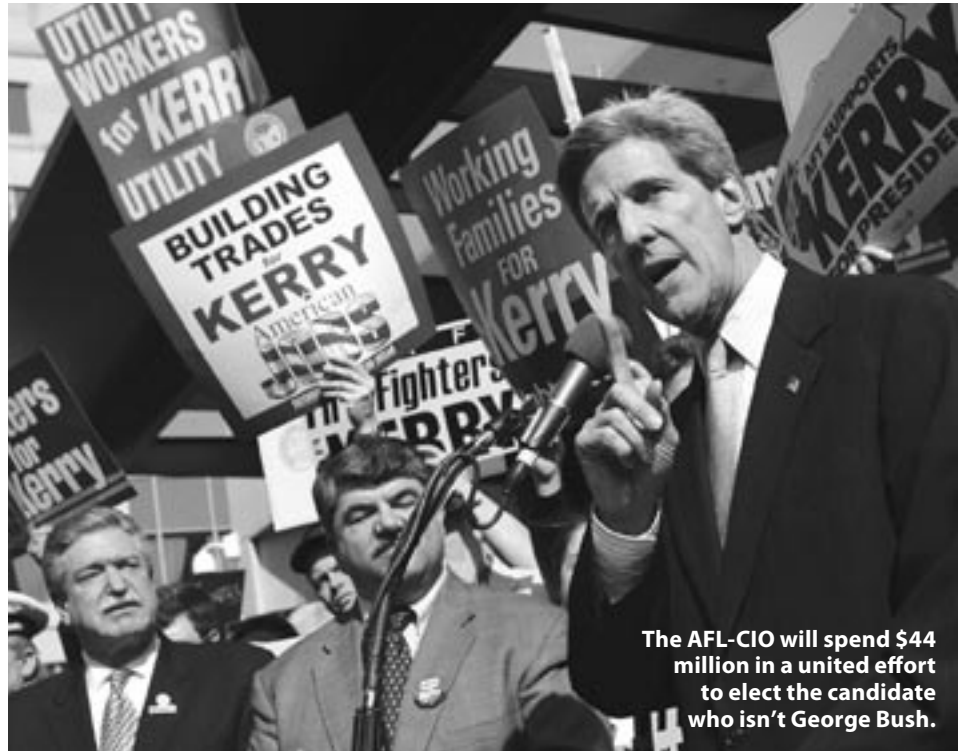
"Working families are frightened of this administration for several reasons," said Radford. "You take the issue of overtime [which could be eliminated for 8 million workers under new Bush administration rules]. They see their safety net being eroded. And they're more attuned to foreign policy. They're frightened about what's happening in Iraq."

Although Bush will try to win conservative areas of Ohio, like Cincinnati, with social wedge issues, labor there is keeping workers focused on kitchen-table issues, such as the loss of jobs, the shift of manufacturing and white-collar jobs overseas, and the growing healthcare crisis. But Radford's local labor movement also is strongly backing an initiative to overturn Cincinnati's unique ban on laws protecting gay rights.

Besides starting earlier, labor will have more than three times as many outside organizers working in Cincinnati, and members are being mobilized to campaign in their workplaces and in their neighborhoods. A pilot project of the AFL-CIO's Working America—recruiting nonunion households who share labor's general policy goals—already has signed up 35,000 local members. Other new voter education and registration efforts, such as America Coming Together, have labor support and complement union political activity. The work already has paid off, with a victory in a suburban mayoral race. "I'm more hopeful now than six months ago," he said. "I talked it then. I feel it now."

The determination and muted optimism were evident when the AFL-CIO Executive Council gathered in Florida in March. For working people, there is a crisis in jobs, healthcare, education, retirement security and future economic prospects, AFL-CIO President John Sweeney said.

"During this crisis, Bush has been AWOL," Sweeney charged. "Bush has been the worst president for working people in recent memory. He has favored giant corporations over working families at every turn."



**The AFL-CIO will spend \$44 million in a united effort to elect the candidate who isn't George Bush.**

But that anger, combined with labor's early, sophisticated and targeted political program, Sweeney said, can help unions play a critical role in John Kerry's election bid.

## Refining the focus

In the 2000 elections, labor households accounted for 26 percent of voters (36 percent in Ohio, which Gore narrowly lost after pulling his campaign out of Ohio in the last few weeks). That clout was the result of AFL-CIO efforts since Sweeney took office to boost registration, educate members on issues and get voters to the polls. This year labor is refining its program with a new focus on swing union voters—those who may shift parties or are vulnerable to Republican social issue pitches (on guns or gays, for example). Such members will be among many union members who regularly receive communication "sandwiches"—phone calls from union volunteers, followed by mailings, followed by calls discussing the mailing. The union pitch on economic issues makes a difference. Firefighters President Harold Schaitberger, the major early labor backer of Kerry, said that even though 44 percent of his members identify as Republican, roughly 62 percent to 64 percent have backed union-supported Democrats in recent elections. Already this year, he said, union political education had boosted Kerry support among members by nearly 15 percentage points.

This sophistication and the campaign's early start, will be backed

up by a more sustained effort. Union leaders at the executive council approved a special assessment that should bring in an additional \$6.5 million for political work this year, boosting AFL-CIO spending to at least \$44 million, an increase of several million from 2000. In addition, individual unions will be spending even larger amounts both mobilizing their members and supporting candidates. The Service Employees Union (SEIU), for example, plans special assessments that will raise \$60 million for political work, three times the union's expenditure in 2000, in addition to contributions from members to the union political fund—an anticipated \$11 million that can be used for candidate contributions or broader political work. Many unions also are more aggressively recruiting members for volunteer work. SEIU will pay 2004 “hero” volunteers to leave their jobs and spend from two to six months working in the 16 battleground states.

“This will be the single largest effort of any single organization other than a political party,” SEIU President Andrew Stern said of his union's effort.

### Show Us the Jobs

Labor's campaign, which also targets state and congressional races, will attempt to frame the issues of the election. At the top of the list is the Bush administration's jobs record, which at this stage is by far the No. 1 voting issue, according to a CBS poll in late February. Starting in late March, the AFL-CIO plans to take 51 workers who have lost jobs on a tour of key Midwestern states on a Show Us the Jobs Tour.

The Bush administration record—nearly 3 million jobs lost and continued anemic job growth despite other signs of economic recovery—is closely tied to another top issue with voters: the export of jobs overseas. Peter Hart Research *continued on page 30*

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Robert Downey Jr. shows the Hasty Pudding club how bad a bad girl can be.

BY KELLY KLEIMAN

## Doing Women Wrong?

The musical *Hairspray*, playing on Broadway for the past two years and now on tour, is about race relations and the growth of tolerance in 1962 Baltimore. It won a Tony Award for Best Musical, and its leading lady took home the award for Best Lead

Actress in a Musical. More notably, Harvey Fierstein won Best Lead Actor for portraying the leading lady's mother.

A man winning plaudits for portraying a woman raises a few questions: Why do we celebrate performance in drag? Isn't drag just yet another variation on a dominant group appropriating the identity of a disempowered group for its own ends?

As Erika Munk pointed out in 1985 in *The Village Voice*, "Most men in drag are no more subversive than whites in blackface were. The more women fight for autonomy, the less helpful become restatements of stereotype which have lost their critical edge and turned into means of putting women down and aside." Maybe blackface is considered an insult and drag acceptable because of some inherent difference between

them—or maybe just because no one has yet brought to bear on drag the kind of analysis that sent blackface to its unmourned death.

I should be clear that by "drag," I mean men dressing as women in public performance. The problem here is not displays of pride in being gay or the sexual meanings people assign to clothing—but the theft of female identity, the transfer from women to men of the power to represent publicly what a woman is supposed to be. In discussing drag, we talk about challenging the audience's conception of gender, or recovering the male performer's sense of the feminine. But what about those of us being impersonated? What will it take to develop that sense of shock when a man portrays Lady Bracknell?