

Saturday, July 11, 2009

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Today I marched with an estimated 1500 labor supporters who rallied in the state's capital today in support of the national Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), in anticipation of a meeting that the rally's organizers - heavy hitters from organized labor - had with U.S. Senator Blanche Lincoln. Earlier in the day, supporters had rallied then traveled by bus from Texarkana, Fort Smith, and Pine Bluff to gather in Little Rock for the march.

The crowd was rallied at the historic Little Rock Central High School, site of the 1957 integration crisis that saw the Arkansas National Guard federalized by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Organizers of the rally drew comparisons between civil rights crusaders' fight for justice, and the current struggle for freedom of choice in the workplace. The crowd responded heartily to addresses by AFL-CIO **Secretary-Treasurer Rich Trumka**, **Judge Wendell Griffin**, state **Senator Joyce Elliott**, and other labor representatives.



Judge Griffin speaks to the group rallied at Central High School in downtown Little Rock

From Central High School, the rally participants marched to Daisy Bates Avenue, down to Martin Luther King Drive, and on to the steps of the Arkansas Capitol, where they were rallied again by a mix of labor leaders from across the country, local labor officials, and interfaith leaders in the community.



Hundreds rally at the Arkansas Capitol building in support of the EFCA
The event drew labor participants from across the country and region, and officers high in the hierarchy of the the rally's sponsors, the AFL-CIO and United Steel Workers. Trumka, the incoming president of the organization, addressed the crowd at Central High and on the steps of the Capitol. Arkansas AFL-CIO **President Alan Hughes** and Steelworkers International **President Leo Gerard** also addressed the crowd. Following the rally, the USW hosted a catfish fry at the AEA headquarters near the Capitol. It was delicious.



Among those present from Northwest Arkansas were UAYD member **Fernando Garcia**, who also works at the Workers' Justice Center in Springdale with **Ana Aguayo**, of the UA chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). **Chris Burks**, President of the Young Democrats of Arkansas, was also at the rally. I also got a chance to meet **President David Hardt**, of the Young Democrats of America.



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