

## LAURA FLANDERS & FRIENDS

### LABOR SAFETY, PROJECT 2025, & THE FAR RIGHT'S PLOT AGAINST WORKERS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

LAURA FLANDERS: What risks do working people face this Labor Day? Aside from anxiety about the future, workers face real threats ranging from the physical to the political at the city, state, and national level. This Labor Day on "Laura Flanders and Friends," we're going to talk about all of it and I am joined for that conversation by my colleague Maximilian Alvarez of the Real News Network in Baltimore.

MAXIMILLIAN ALVAREZ: So glad to be here with you, sister Laura. Coming up we have a report from the School of Labor and Urban Studies at the City University of New York. We're also going to highlight an on the ground documentary just released from my colleague Marc Steiner here at The Real News. So Marc went down to sweltering Texas to meet with workers, organizers and elected officials who are all fighting a state bill that would repeal mandated water breaks for outdoor workers amid a record breaking global heat wave. But as we're going to discuss, this Republican led bill is about a lot more than water breaks and it reveals a whole lot about the right and corporate America's plan for taking over government completely.

LAURA FLANDERS: Well from organizing to electing, we're also going to be talking about Project 2025. By now, many of you have heard of the Heritage Foundation's 900-page action plan for the next Republican administration. It's written by a massive array of right-wing think tanks, and a lot of members of the last Trump team. A little later, James Goodwin, policy director at the Center for Progressive Reform will tell us exactly what Project 2025 has in store for workers and what the implications are for all of us. We'll come right back to James in just a bit, but first let's start with that report from the School of Labor and Urban Studies at CUNY. There's a lot of grim news out there, but as you know here at "Laura Flanders and Friends" we like to celebrate victories when we can and the independent media allies who cover them. This story from our colleague Amir Khafagy of Documented allows us to do both of those things. For a couple of years now, Amir has been covering the fate of people, especially immigrants working in construction in New York City. Deaths have been going up and so has the amount of organizing. And this spring, Amir made this report for SLU, the School of Labor and Urban Studies at the City University of New York about a victory of sorts.

- [REPORTER] We have breaking news, a wall collapses in lower Manhattan killing a construction worker, three others are injured.

- [REPORTER] A 19-year-old construction worker is dead after apparently being run over by a lift.

- [REPORTER] And breaking right now at four, a deadly accident inside a Brooklyn building. The first floor that's under construction collapsed, killing a worker.

- [AMIR KHAFAGY] New York City's construction industry is notoriously dangerous, especially for immigrant workers on non-union construction sites.

- [ANGELICA NOVOA, NEW IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT (NICE)] In New York state, Latino workers are more likely to die on the job than other non-Latino workers. And those who are Latino and immigrants are more likely to be exploited.

- [AMIR KHAFAGY] In 2022, according to the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health, 24 construction workers died on the job for reasons including inadequate safety training, lax enforcement of safety regulations and the prioritization of profits over worker wellbeing by some construction companies. Wilson Diaz who came to New York from Guatemala, has worked in construction here for four years.

- [WILSON DIAZ, CONSTRUCTION WORKER] I remember that one time we were working in a basement, but in that basement there had been some demolition done and the other workers had made holes for the pipes. And on that particular occasion, the manager was there, and it was dark, completely dark, and we were all working in that place, and I was walking and suddenly my left foot fell into a hole and the manager noticed, but he didn't say anything. And I was left with an injury in that knee, which I still have to this day.

- [AMIR KHAFAGY] The workers were also routinely without safety equipment required by law.

- [WILSON DIAZ] They would make us work in the scaffold area without any personal protective equipment. We didn't even have a harness.

- [AMIR KHAFAGY] Part of the problem is the rampant use of labor brokers who hire workers and outsource them to non-union work sites. After a worker for one of these brokers fell to his death in 2021, Wilson and a group of fellow demolition workers, mostly indigenous Guatemalans, started organizing to demand that their employer, Best Super Cleaning, increase their wages and provide a safer workplace. Best Super Cleaning did not respond to multiple requests for comment on this story. Despite a 2022 amendment to the New York Health and Essential Rights Act, giving all workers the right to form a workplace safety committee and requiring employers to recognize those

committees or face fines, Best Super Cleaning refused to respond to their workers' demands. In response, Wilson and his colleagues launched a public campaign. It took more than a year, but finally with the assistance of the Laundry Workers Center and progressive Jewish groups such as Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, in January, 2024, Best Super Cleaning finally agreed not only to recognize the workers' workplace safety committee, but also to provide the proper tools and safety equipment the work required. Now the Best Super Cleaning workers hold regular meetings to air their concerns. And if workers feel a particular job is dangerous, they have a right to refuse.

- [WILSON DIAZ] Now we can talk about what we need to stay safe. We're not putting ourselves at risk anymore. We can talk about these issues if we're in danger, if we're putting our lives or security in danger. Not just me but my fellow workers as well.

- [AMIR KHAFAGY] The struggle's not over, back at the memorial marking Fallen Worker Day, Lowell Barton, Vice President and organizing director of Laborers' Local 1010 says that while law, training and awareness are important, we still need a fundamental change in the culture.

- [LOWELL BARTON] I think more concern [has] got to be happening on every job site about the concern and safety of every single worker. Until that's a priority with making money, worker safety, it's never going to change. When worker safety becomes more important than making money on a job, then it will change.

- [AMIR KHAFAGY] Organizing can be difficult. Still, the struggle is worth it, says Wilson.

- [WILSON DIAZ] I want to say to people who perhaps at some point have felt afraid or are afraid of losing their job, well go ahead and lose it because we know very well that we have rights and that we can pressure the company and make sure our opinions in the workplace are heard.

MAXIMILLIAN ALVAREZ: The workers highlighted in this report remind us of one of the most essential labor lessons, you do not need to be in a union to act like one. Even in the most exploitative industries with the most dangerous working conditions, when workers know their rights and band together to exercise them, they can accomplish incredible things and they can drastically improve their lives.

LAURA FLANDERS: Workers in Texas are up against a particular kind of threat, and not just workers, but all sorts of people who banded together, as you said, Max, to pass legislation,

common sense legislation to protect people. You sent one of your reporters, Marc Steiner there at the Real News to Austin to find out more. Tell us about that piece.

MAXIMILLIAN ALVAREZ: Well Laura, as you know, one of the areas that we cover intensely at the Real News is labor and the lives and struggles of working people. So stories like the one that we just watched from CUNY, and that's what originally led Marc to Texas because he was there to investigate a story where the headline was basically, "Texas Republican governor Greg Abbott signs bill eliminating mandated water breaks for outdoor workers amid deadly heat wave." But talking to folks on the ground in Austin and San Antonio, Marc quickly learned that eliminating water breaks is really just the tip of the iceberg here. The reality of what opponents call the death star Bill in Texas is much more sinister as you guys will see in this clip.

- [MARC STEINER] During a record breaking heat wave that spanned the globe in the summer of 2023, with people across Texas reeling from the heat, Texas' Republican governor Greg Abbott, signed House Bill 2127, known by its opponents as the 'Death Star' bill, a bill that stripped away mandated water breaks for outdoor workers in cities like Austin.

- [DANIELA HERNANDEZ] The House Bill 2127 or what we call the 'Death Star' bill is a sweeping piece of preemption that passed during the regular legislative session that ended in May. It is the biggest transfer of power that we've ever seen from local governments to state. It essentially takes agriculture, business and commerce, insurance, labor, local government, natural resources, property and occupations, and it says, "Local governments are not allowed to legislate in these areas, unless the state gives them explicit permission to do so."

- [JIM HIGHTOWER] So the bill known as the 'Death Star' bill is not just about the fact that the state has usurped the power of every city and county in our state to be self-governing, to set their own regulations about environmental impacts, about corporate money in politics, about loan sharking, etc. But it's fundamentally a bill that usurps democracy. It takes away your right to be a self-governing people.

- [MARC STEINER] Today's right may dress its politics up in the language of populism, but if you look at what the GOP is actually doing at the policy level, how they're systematically stripping power from people and concentrating it in boardrooms and behind closed doors, cutting taxes for the rich and slashing regulations on businesses, you can see the naked machinery of authoritarianism and oligarchic rule at work. As activists and concerned citizens on the ground in Texas told me, in many ways this naked power grab is actually a sign that GOP fears the changing political attitudes among the electorate, even in a state like Texas. And the push to severely limit local governments

with a 'Death Star' bill is a desperate response to halt the progressive momentum and policy wins happening at the local level.

- [DAVID GRISCOM] Because they talk one way to the public and they pass and do really horrific things on trans rights, certainly on abortion and all of these other social issues, but if you look at the vast majority of what the Republican Party is doing right now, it is just big pro business politics.

- [RYAN POLLOCK] It's deregulation of everything, labor, environmental standards, all kinds of things that are friendlier to business so that they can operate at the cheapest possible point at the expense of the workers and the locals, people who live in these communities, the environment, all these things.

LAURA FLANDERS: You can watch Marc's full documentary from Texas at the Real News Network website, we'll make that link available. And see an in-studio discussion of Amir's piece on City Works, which is the monthly report from the School of Labor and Urban Studies at CUNY. Both of those will be at our website for those who are curious. Max, coming back to the national picture and the threats we are all thinking about related to this fall's elections, there's much more to talk about.

MAXIMILLIAN ALVAREZ: Indeed. And to help us talk about it, I'd like to bring in our incredible guest, James Goodwin. Now James, if Project 2025 was implemented today, what would that mean for unions and union workers, like especially in the public sector?

JAMES GOODWIN: We'd have no room for unions. More explicitly it talks about increasing oversight of unions, regulating them more stringently even as we deregulate employers. So I mean, like I said, there's kind of that traditional mix of old, conservative labor policy like hostility towards labor unions, but there's this new sort of thread to it of this theory of sort of the Christian view of the family and unions do not figure into that vision.

LAURA FLANDERS: Apropos of Marc's piece and going and sticking with the big picture again for a second, I am curious about this relationship between the executive and state's rights. I mean, we hear a lot from Republicans about state's rights, certainly when it comes to reproductive rights and so on. Yet, you know, everything you're saying is about concentrating power in the executive. So where does Project 2025 stand?

JAMES GOODWIN: I mean, and that's sort of the essential paradox that runs through all of Project 2025. There's this very interesting chapter that Russ Vought wrote, which for me is like essentially the thesis statement of Project 2025, and it sets up this vision of we're going to suck all this power out of the federal government and we're going to put it into the president and then,

you know, yada, yada, yada, the president is going to do all these great things and then return power to the public. What it doesn't answer is, what power gets returned to the public? What happens if the president doesn't return that power, and who gets it? Essentially this is in theory the power that's being returned is this new sort of social hierarchy, this new Christian nationalist vision of social hierarchy within the United States.

MAXIMILLIAN ALVAREZ: I want to talk about a key aspect of Project 2025, one of the linchpins of this whole project is something called Section F, to turn a bunch of government employees who have civil service protections into at-will employees who could be fired much more quickly. I was wondering if you could tell us a bit more about what Schedule F is and why it is so central to the whole Project 2025 plan, and what it would actually mean for people working in government?

JAMES GOODWIN: Yeah, so what makes the foundation of our administrative state is the people, professional, apolitical experts. This is something we started building in this country in the late 1800s to replace what was known at the time as a spoil system. These jobs were essentially done by friends of the president or people in political power, and that was just a breeding ground for corruption and incompetence. This is what Schedule F would do, is it would return us to this system. And so under this proposal we would take all these experts, these tens of thousands of scientists, engineers, attorneys, what have you, we'd fire them, who are they getting replaced with, and somebody who's only real skill is unquestioned loyalty to the president.

MAXIMILLIAN ALVAREZ: I want to ask about the National Labor Relations Board here. The NLRB is the independent government agency that oversees labor law in this country and it has been attacked and underfunded for years. So James I wanted to ask you, what are Project 2025's plans for the NLRB specifically and what should people expect Trump's approach to the NLRB to be if he becomes president again, even if he doesn't just implement the Project 2025 plan to the letter?

JAMES GOODWIN: One of the most important things that Project 2025 calls for, for independent agencies like NLRB is structural. So we have this universe of agencies that are run by officials that the president can't get rid of very easily. They have to be fired for cause. And one of the things Project 2025 wants to do is end all independent agencies, including the NLRB in order to increase presidential control over these agencies.

LAURA FLANDERS: So it's another fascinating paradox that the very administration or the very type of folks, Republicans, who say that they are against this administrative state, sound to me from what you are saying is if they're actually super good at figuring out how we could weaponize that state. I just have to ask you, James, you've been researching this stuff for a year now, this thing came out in September of 2023, it is authored by a huge array of all the right's

think tanks on every single area of concern, to me that frightened the heck outta me, that all of these folks had been brought together and agreed to participate in a single document. We do have the Republican candidate for the presidency saying, "Oh no, this has nothing to do with me. I'm nothing to do with Project 2025." He spent a lot of the summer saying that, what's the truth in that and who do you think is really behind this? Because this isn't, let's face it, the work of any one person or even any one group.

JAMES GOODWIN: It is really hard to disentangle Project 2025 from Trump, the presidential candidate. Something like 80% of the authors, the lead authors for the various chapters in Mandate for Leadership, which is the major policy playbook, are former Trump administration officials from the first term, the guys leading it, gender language intended, the guys leading it, former Trump officials, his super pacs cite it with approval, promote it with approval.

MAXIMILLIAN ALVAREZ: Have you thought in kind of creative terms of what it would be like to be say, an injured worker or one of those immigrant construction workers we saw at the top trying to organize for a health and welfare committee of their workforce, even if they don't have a union, even if they don't have a clear employer, but simply to raise concerns about dangers on the job or the folks in Texas talking about we have a right to self-government, we have a right to have the laws that we make in our locale, not rescinded by some higher office. Imagine what it's like for us, if you would, to wake up and find yourself in 2025 land, if you're any of those people, how would things be different?

JAMES GOODWIN: Oh, that's bleak. So as a worker, I wouldn't have the free time to do these sorts of things because overtime pay is gone. We're going to allow increased concentration within corporate, within different industries. So the disparities between me and my bosses, whoever they are, wherever they are, is going to be made even worse, made even bigger. My coworkers who may not look like me, who may be queer or people of color are going to be fearful to speak out against these things because they don't have recognized civil rights anymore. And because of that, I can't band together with them either informally or as part of a union. It creates division that way. And that's really the basic dynamic that Project 2025 is trying to set up as an authoritarian blueprint, is to create division within our society to make it easier for these kinds of shifts of power, concentrations of power in support of a minority... in support of a minority driven government.

MAXIMILLIAN ALVAREZ: And I mean like this really sums up like what I would call boss governance. I mean, Trump is not the first Republican to say he wants to run government like a business. Republicans have been saying that since I was a Republican 20 years ago, and long before, but this is what it actually means as someone who interviews workers in America, I can tell you most workers in America work in a dictatorship. They do not have democracy on the shop floor, they do not have democratic accountability with their bosses or managers, let alone

the ability to make demands on their employers, to improve their working conditions. I wanted to hook into that really quick James and ask like why the bosses and the corporate powers in Wall Street love Project 2025 so much just like they love the 'Death Star' bill in Texas, like how does this sync up? Like why is this a plan that corporate America champions so much in its entirety?

JAMES GOODWIN: The vision you sort of lay out for Project 2025, one way to think about it is it aspires to turn all of America into a company town, where company runs everything, every aspect of our governance, society, what have you. To be honest, if you were to take corporate America into probably like a quiet room and buy 'em a few drinks, I don't know, I think they would probably be a little conflicted about Project 2025. I think there's much of it, like the old stuff, small government, tax cuts, these sorts of things, totally on board with. I don't know how comfortable they are with the authoritarian aspects, you know, because look at Target, you celebrate Pride Month a little too much under a second Trump term, he's going to turn the Department of Justice on you or the FBI. If I'm CEO of Target, I don't like that. The crackdown on immigration, many industries depend on undocumented workers to sustain themselves. I think there's a lot in the immigration chapters on Project 2025 that the business community is not comfortable with. And so that's really in many ways what Project 2025 is meant to do, is to give the business community enough tax breaks and regulatory rollbacks to make the bitter pills of the authoritarian and Christian nationalism to go down.

LAURA FLANDERS: James Goodwin from the Center for Progressive Reform. Thanks so much for joining us, it's been great to have you with us.

JAMES GOODWIN: Thank you for having me.

LAURA FLANDERS: I learned many important things from the late great union organizer and author, Jane McAlevey, who passed away from cancer way too young this summer. Jane taught that workers, for example, were whole people, not just numbers on a balance sheet for a boss or names on a union registration card. "Workers," as she said, "were whole people with full lives and points of view." And that was important to know all of that about them as you think about organizing them for power. It's a lesson that the Heritage Foundation seems to have learned as well. In the context of Project 2025 it's important to note that there are four pillars to that program, only the first of which is that 900 page document that so many refer to and a few have read. Pillar two of the program is a recruitment project to recruit some 20,000 names for a database of personnel, well-intentioned, well-suited personnel for the next administration to draw on to fill out government jobs. Pillar number three is an online training program for those recruits. And pillar number four is a 180 day action plan that teaches those recruits how to rewrite the rules of their administration to implement the goals of the project in the first 180 days of the next administration. People is power and people power is how you make change. Heritage learned the lesson, let's hope other people did. You're my people, till the next time, stay kind,



stay curious and thanks for joining me for "Laura Flanders and Friends." I'm Laura. For more on this episode and other forward-thinking content, subscribe to our free newsletter for updates, my commentaries and our full uncut conversations. We also have a podcast, it's all at [LauraFlanders.org](http://LauraFlanders.org).