

# We Can Turn This Economic Crisis Around

*Here is the address of U.S. Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) to the LaRouche PAC Town Hall Meeting in Detroit, on March 23, 2005.*

Thank you very much. Good evening. Thanks Dennis; to our speakers, Bob Bowen, Eugene Morey, the president of UAW local 849, and Nick Feden: I want to express my appreciation for being invited here to be on this panel.

I come to you as—I come out of a working family, and I am also a Democrat. We are in a two-party system. And so, what I want to share with you tonight, at my first invitation to speak before you, is the fact that a brilliant economic theory, unconnected to the political system is not going to go anywhere. I'm surprised that you're even growing your numbers—and I think that you are. But the fact of the matter is, is that my view of American politics, is that, people do not move on political theories. I would daresay that maybe—well, there are only a few people that have any idea that there is a Bretton Woods, there was a Bretton Woods monetary system, *much less*, why it was superior.

And so, I come here tonight with an invitation: An invitation to take these arguments, the book, the weekly newsletter, and let's get it out into the debate. Because—the reason I say that, is that, if you have to adopt this view to get in the organization, that's all you're going to have—is people that have adopted this view. The truth of the matter is, that many people have not adopted this view, and don't even know about it. And are likely not ever to become aware of the pros and cons, unless we do a lot of work. And this is what I've been doing for a number of years.

We got up to 60% of the voter turnout in Michigan—and we celebrated! We hadn't seen 60% in so long, we were afraid we were going to be below 50%. And that gives you a very strong signal as to how disconnected most people are from *all* political theory, and *all* political parties.

And so, what I would like to do with you, is to begin to debate these issues. I know that they're taken as gospel. But, unless they can stand the test of debate, they're just a great view held by a number of people, who believe one thing. But that's not going to sell it. And so, what I want to do, is, extend the discussion: What we need, is discussions about this, and where we are, and where are we going.

And so, since I have a few minutes, I want to give you my idea of where I think we as working people ought to be going; where we ought to be going in Michigan, and in the United States, and in the world for that matter.

I do think that there is a global economic and political challenge. But, I do not think that it's new. We've been exploited and used, and the class warfare in America has *always* gone on. I mean, it took the New Deal to legalize unions; collective bargaining was not even likely, before that time. And right now, there's an attack on collective bargaining, out of this world, that's going on, in every way—chipping away at the right of people not to have to negotiate one person with a corporation, as opposed to having a collective bargaining system.

And so, I think there are a number of things like this. Our education system, the "Leave No Child Behind" President: Out of the more than 150 budget cuts proposed in the FY06 budget, most of them came out of the education. Most of them are education cuts, which now have many of our cities, if not most of them, in terrible situations. And what we need to do, is to begin to learn how these things can be changed. But, before that, we want to try to agree on what we want, before we try to change them.

## Open Up the Political Process

I've just heard a comment—to me it is very important, that we begin to bring people into the political process, because ideas—particularly economic and political ideas—are not going to work without a party. Now, I happen to believe that these last two elections were very crucial: Here we have the same person [who] wins two elections, each time, by one state. In 2000, it was several hundred votes that turned it (with a little help from the United States Supreme Court). In 2004, it was another one state, with 20 Electoral votes: that if 60,000 people had voted differently, the outcome would be different.

And so, I join with those who say, "Let's realize that this wasn't a mandate." These two elections were extremely close, even after all the electoral misdeeds—we had two secretaries of state [Florida and Ohio] that will go down in American history. What we need to do, is realize that, with a little bit more effort, we can turn this thing around.

And so, my major goal is to deal with getting people to understand that if you believe in yourself, you believe in your right to vote. And that you believe your vote can make a difference. Because, clearly, these last two Presidential elections prove that your vote can and would make a difference.

Now, it makes a big difference as to who's the President of the United States. It wouldn't have changed the economic situation that was described. But we'd have a far great opportunity to be effecting the change that we argue about, if we didn't have the most conservative President and group in the 20th Century now in power. It makes a big difference.

And so, I'm anxious to work with you on these and other issues.

Now, obviously Social Security, and privatization thereof, is an easy one, that we can knock out of the ballpark, and are. When the regular media is telling everybody that the President's trips around the country—and Cheney'll be in

Michigan tomorrow—they're not going to make any difference. Conservative Congressmen are hiding: The last thing they would do, is hold a town hall meeting on the privatization of the Social Security. The seniors know better. The young people know better. They know that stocks in America don't just keep going up. They have some very sharp dips, that you can't predict—not even the money managers can predict. And when those things dip—as they cyclically do—lots of people lose billions of dollars.

And so, it's hard to think that you can make more money out of Social Security. The whole idea of Social Security, was to give you security. And what they're saying, is: Let's take the 'security' out of the Social Security, and gamble that you've got more sense, or your money manager (who by the way will be charging you for that service), knows more than the U.S. government buying U.S. Treasury notes, at a very fixed rate, but a very steady rate.

And so, I think there's more to it, than where we are.

## **We Need Universal Health Care**

Another issue that is very dear to my heart, is health care. We need a national, universal health-care system, that includes everybody! It is absolutely amazing, that, to me, this is not the biggest and easiest organizing tool that we have, legislatively, at our disposal. Because everybody, almost, is being negatively affected, unless you're at the upper 1 or 2%, which just got a \$1.3 trillion tax cut.

Plus, adding on the cost of the Iraq war, which is ongoing, and the defense budget, which is at an all-time high, we begin to understand that the Reagan strategy is now being used by President Bush.

What is it? That strategy is to cut the budget by investing in war, and by investing in tax cuts for the wealthy. And then, we come up short, and guess what gets cut? The over 150 programs that they're cutting now; [they] tell us that the war requires it, but we can also afford the tax cut as well, and of course, we can't.

So, I think health care—and I've introduced H.R. 676; I invite you to my website to look at it, I'd like to hold meetings and discussions, so we can determine how we deal with this: More and more people are now coming to the conclusion, and I'm thankful for many people, in at least a dozen labor unions, who have now come out for it, including the UAW, SEIU, and many other organizations, that realize that there are no more givebacks for them to make at bargaining sessions. Because, as the president of UAW said, "My people aren't going to give up any more." He said, "I don't know who's going to be negotiating the next time this contract comes up." And we're at a real crisis in creating a national health-care [system].

I use this term "crisis" advisedly, because, too often it's used politically to mean that you have to do something that the person that called it a crisis is telling you have to do, because things are going to go real bad.

## **Revive the Peace Movement**

I think that there ought to be a movement in which we revive the peace organizations, peace activists, and the people against war, to end the war that is going on here, that has gone on way too long. And I'm going to be going to New York for the first big national rally—I think it's May 18. And we'd like to invite as many people as can, to join us, and that we begin holding our Federal leaders accountable for their actions connected with the war. This is a war, conveniently not against a country or countries—although they're already looking at other countries that are being publicly talked about as invasion targets—but this is a "war against terrorism."

My brothers and sisters, there has always been terrorism, historically. I mean, to "war against terrorism," means that you're in a wartime situation for which there's no end in sight! We'll never come out of it. And so, now that we've found out how this administration got people in the Congress to go for the war, we now realize that there's no way we're going to stay there for "a little while longer and get out"; it's going to take some very radical thinking about how we close this thing down, without causing even more death and destruction in the Middle East than we have.

Now, let me talk about one little part of our foreign policy, that's the little, tiny impoverished country of Haiti: the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, which I started going to, oh, ten or twelve years ago, and had great hopes for. And we now find that we have helped chase out the government, Aristide. We've brought the rebels back, and given them legitimacy. We're now even trying to hold an election, where the country's in total turmoil. And it seems to me that this is something close enough, and small enough, for us to really begin to focus in on, in a very important way.

## **Civil Rights**

I want to close with the mention of Martin Luther King, which I was happy that was done here. Amelia Robinson [whose message to the meeting was read earlier], I think is the same lady in Selma that was Amelia Boynton, whom I have known for many years. I'm glad to find out that that's true. And I've gone to these marches every year over the Edmund Pettus Bridge, where Governor Wallace ordered his troops to attack and kill those workers that dared march—to register and vote! That was all that the march was about. And Congressman John Lewis has kept this annual celebration alive, and we all are very proud of that.

But, to me, we need to breathe life, not only into our young people, who are the least voting-age segment of our population. But we've got to make people understand, that, notwithstanding Ashcroft and his successor, [and] a conservative United States Supreme Court, that we can win our country back. And the way to win it back, is to begin to open up our dialogue as to what I want, and how I would get there; what you want, how you'd get there; what the labor movement

wants, and how they would get there. Because, in a political system that we're in, dogmatism will not carry the day. The fact that you think you're right, know you're right—that's okay, you just—. I mean, inside the Democratic Party, there's a wide consensus—sometimes too wide for me—but there are a lot of conservatives and moderates in the party. And we've got to win them over, without chasing them out. We've got to get the 40% of the people in Detroit and Michigan that *didn't vote*, to vote. I think they would vote with us, if they could believe in the system. We've got to get candidates in office, that mean what they say, and will do something to make people want to continue to vote. If you really don't believe it's going to change anything, people say, "Why vote?"

And so, we have this—what I call a—not just a big "race problem," because is still a factor here. And I was so glad to hear those newly revised Spirituals coming from the singing group which sounded professional. Really, you ought to do a CD on that. Because it was really that good—don't you think they were really good? I mean you don't hear that kind of singing *anywhere*, even in the churches, because that was really very wonderful.

But, closing on this one question, I leave you with, because I'm always anxious to get views: Why is it, that in elections, there are so many people that unwittingly vote against their own best interests? This has fascinated me, because it's more than a political question. It's a sociological question, and a psychological question: How you can walk in there, here's a person that tells you he supports the wealthy, the corporations; he goes for outsourcing; he wants to turn back the clock on civil rights laws; he won't grant D.C. [the District of Columbia] the right to elect Congressmen; he supports tax cuts for the wealthiest; he slashes the budget—and then, a lot of people who are the direct victims of that philosophy, walk out and vote for George Bush! I mean, it's the most incredible thing, I have ever—. And I keep studying it. Because, I believe there must be an answer to this. And by the way, if I can't find an answer to it, or you can't help me, we're going to be in big trouble, because Bretton Woods isn't going to mean anything under those circumstances.

Thank you for inviting me today. I look forward to the discussion.

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