



Gains in Right to Work Legislation

With both houses of its legislature approving a measure calling for an end to a labor union monopoly, and Governor Scott Walker signing it, Wisconsin recently joined 24 other states and became a “right-to-work” state. This means that Wisconsin has banned what is termed a “closed shop,” where an employee must join a union (or pay union dues even without formal union membership) if the labor union has been chosen as the agent for more than half of the employees in a particular site.



In recent years, both [Michigan](#) and [Indiana](#) preceded Wisconsin’s decision. Labor union power continues to decline. In the 1950s, approximately 35 percent of workers nationally paid dues to a labor union. By the end of the 1980s, that percentage had shrunk to less than half that percentage. And it has continued to recede. Part of the reason for the decline is traceable to factories closing down and fleeing overseas, encouraged to do so by NAFTA and other so-called trade agreements. When a factory closes, it hardly matters whether a labor union represents workers; they are no longer working. Some who lost their jobs have correctly figured out that liberals who support compulsory unionism are the very same individuals who supported the trade agreements, such as NAFTA, that cost them their employment.

During a heyday of union power in the immediate post-World War II years, Congress passed the important Taft-Hartley labor law. President Truman vetoed the measure, but Congress successfully overrode his veto. Section 14 (b) of this law, always fought against by labor union leaders, authorized states to adopt right-to-work legislation. This provision permitted an employee to refuse union membership as a matter of choice. In states that never passed such legislation, an employee in a unionized place could refuse union membership, but he or she still had to pay union dues. Labor unions have traditionally been huge supporters — both organizationally and financially — of liberal politicians and causes. Forcing workers to pay union dues would mean that some who personally supported conservatives and their causes were being forced to support what they abhorred. Not much freedom there.

Labor unions certainly have a right to exist. If working conditions are intolerable, or pay rates are deemed too low, a person has two choices: a) quit that job and find another, or b) invite labor organizers to come and generate support for a labor union. But forcing people to join a labor union as a condition of employment, which remains the practice in half the states, should never be allowed. In some states, the right-to-work provision (the cancellation of compulsory union membership) exists as part of the state’s constitution. Other states don’t have such a provision in their constitutions and legislation has to be enacted to do away with compulsory unionism.

The state where union membership is least is North Carolina (2.9 percent) with Arkansas a close second. The state with the highest number of union members in its workforce is New York (23.2 percent) with Alaska a close second. The area of the nation where right to work prevails is the southeast. And this is where large corporations are building new plants and creating new jobs. Also,



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unemployment rates are lower in right-to-work states. Especially is this the case with automobile manufacturers who have established new plants in right-to-work states.

The issue boils down to compulsion versus freedom. In the United States, freedom is supposed to prevail. Wisconsin, Indiana, Michigan, and 22 other states have shown themselves partisans for freedom.

John F. McManus is president of [The John Birch Society](#) and publisher of The New American. This column appeared originally at the [insideJBS](#) blog and is reprinted here with permission.



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