



## More States Tackling Public-employee Unions

No reasonable person questions the right of workers to voluntarily organize or even to strike, provided they do not trespass on the property of businesses, obstruct traffic, or force other workers, through threats or intimidation, to join their union. In that sense, unions should be just like any other voluntary association of individuals.



This idea of voluntary association was at the heart of original trade-unionism. Skilled workers with valuable talents negotiated in a free-market transaction with businesses who needed mechanics, electricians, plumbers, and other experts. More often than not, it was statisticians who sought to use force to end non-violent and non-trespassing strikes by having these voluntary associations struck down as trusts in restraint of trade.

The thuggery of industrial unions came about as unskilled workers — who found the best jobs that they could in the factories of Ford or the steel mills of Carnegie — invaded these private businesses, marched outside so that it was difficult to enter or leave the premises, and threatened violence against any who interfered. These industrial unions were not motivated by faith in the free market of labor and capital, but rather by a need to use force to make their case.

These unions in American industry soon turned to pliable politicians, pandering for votes, who obliged by enacting laws that afforded extraordinary privileges to the unions. Inevitably, these unions formed bureaucracies and boss systems, and the labor bosses soon began to look more to union dues and the perks of office than to the welfare of their members. These overlords quickly discovered that they owned whole private armies of workers who could be persuaded to vote for contracts which — though certain in the long run to ruin their industries — made the union bosses rich, powerful, and popular, until the industries collapsed (which, of course, would be blamed on greedy corporations).

Florida Gov. Rick Scott sought to end an old privilege of public-employee unions: having state government automatically deduct their union dues and hand those monies over to the union bosses. The bill, pilloried as union-busting and anti-worker, was defeated in the Sunshine State — in which the GOP holds sizable majorities in each chamber — because Senate Republicans got cold feet. "It creates



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division and turmoil, and doesn't create jobs," Miami Republican Diaz de la Portilla claimed of the measure. Another Republican Senator, Paula Dockery of Lakeland, worried that union complaints about "fairness" should be given heavier weight: "If the bill was perceived as being more fair, members might be more willing to support it. But they have been really pressuring members and it's not working."

But across the country, Republican state legislators are beginning to take the field against statist unionism. Ohio has passed a law that limits the rights of all public-employee unions — not just teachers, as in Wisconsin — to bargain for benefits and pensions. In Louisiana, State Senator Danny Martiny has introduced a bill to prohibit state construction contracts from requiring project labor agreements (PLAs), which bring in mandatory union participation. (The Obama administration has promoted PLAs, alleging that they spur quick and efficient use of federal construction funds.) Idaho's Senator Monty Pearce, author of such a law just passed this legislative session, declared, "Idaho is a Right to Work state, and as a result of that, we are saying that no worker, to get a job, has to join a union."

The profound concern about the skyrocketing costs of public-employee unions is spreading, and other states are joining the effort to curb these unions. In Oklahoma — already a Right-to-Work state — HB 1593, which ends collective bargaining for benefits by public-employee unions, passed the legislature and has been signed by Governor Mary Fallin. Tennessee legislators are considering a measure to prevent taxpayers from being forced to pay for long-term public-employee union contracts, and Lt. Gov. Ron Ramsey is not bashful about taking on these unions, announcing, "Now it is Tennessee's turn." The New Hampshire House has recently approved a bill described by state union bosses as "Wisconsin on steroids." And Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval has made curbing public-employee unions a policy priority.

If these states are leading the charge, they are not alone. The National Conference of State Legislatures reports that a total of 744 bills targeting public-employee unions have been introduced in virtually every state across the nation. Surprisingly, even Democrats in ultra liberal states are beginning to recognize the madness of unrestricted public employee unionism in which, as these union bosses boast, "We elect our bosses." The Democrat-dominated Massachusetts House of Representatives, for instance, recently voted overwhelmingly — 111 to 42 — to strip public-employee unions of the right to negotiate for their healthcare benefits.

This action by Massachusetts Democrats will make it increasingly difficult for union bosses to blame only Republicans for their woes. Legislative victories in Wisconsin, Ohio, Idaho, and Oklahoma, along with a possible victory in Massachusetts and gubernatorial action in New Jersey, means that the political clout of these public-employee unions will begin to shrink like an ice cube on the sidewalk in July.

Fear, a favorite weapon of union bosses, loses its potency when so many politicians of both political parties across the country begin to vote to restrain public-employee union power. As the potent grip of these unions lessens — as it will when they can no longer deliver the goods — then the dues necessary to fight political battles will shrink as well. In fact, as money and power within the union systems decrease, it is almost certain that the mandarins of big labor will turn on each other, poaching each other's members, and jockeying for the front line at the public trough.

Constitutionalists recognize that forced unions, public-employee unions, and other impressed gangs are not in the best interest of freedom — or of the taxpayer, or even the pampered worker. The purpose of unions is to create quasi-moral citadels of power and privilege. When American politicians, from sea to shining sea, reject these unions, then their days are numbered.



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