

Forced-Unionism Abuses Exposed

The facts Big Labor bosses would rather you didn't hear about.

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Compulsory unionism breeds corruption. In each issue of "Exposed," the National Right to Work Committee will highlight yet another example of union-boss abuse spawned and perpetuated by Big Labor's government-granted privilege to force workers to pay union dues, or be fired.

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Electricians Union Bosses Bully Philadelphia Schools

For years, national teacher union officials, joined by the bosses of their statewide Pennsylvania and Philadelphia subsidiaries, have conducted a high-pitched and largely successful PR campaign to increase transfers of state and federal taxpayer dollars into Philadelphia's abysmal public schools.

No one seriously contests the "abysmal" label. One out of two students in Philadelphia drops out before finishing high school. And SAT scores for those who do graduate from inner-city schools average about 300 points below the 2000 national mean of 1019.

Although per pupil spending in Philadelphia is actually higher than in most Pennsylvania school districts, teacher union chieftains like American Federation of Teachers (AFT) union President Sandra Feldman continue stubbornly to claim that "inadequate" funds account for Philadelphia schools' manifold failings.

So you might think that Ms. Feldman and her union lieutenants would be furious at someone who is now trying to bilk the Philadelphia School District out of up to \$7 million that could otherwise go to raise teachers' salaries and reduce class sizes.

In reality, however, the AFT union brass hasn't yet had a word to say in public about a multimillion-dollar electricians union lawsuit against the school district.

John Dougherty, the business manager of Local 98 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) union, is suing in Commonwealth Court to force the school district to pay \$45 an hour in labor costs for the 1998 installation of telecommunications equipment in school classrooms.

The school district and the normally union-friendly state prevailing wage board think that \$45 is out of line, given that Mr. Dougherty admittedly charges private-sector contractors only between \$22 and \$33 an hour for telecommunications-related labor. School district official Robert Westwall estimates taxpayers will have to fork over \$6 to \$7 million if Mr. Dougherty wins his suit.

But Mr. Dougherty claims that "state policy" requires that the taxpayers who finance school construction be gouged for up to 105% more than for-profit businesses.

Though the obvious victims in Mr. Dougherty's latest escapade are schoolchildren, teachers, school administrators and taxpayers, over the years his thuggish tactics have proven even more harmful to workers and small businesses.

The monopoly over the building trades held by Mr. Dougherty and other construction union bosses within the city is a key reason that "new housing construction in Philadelphia is virtually nonexistent," according to builders and city officials cited in a *Philadelphia Inquirer* report last August.

During the 1990's, the *Inquirer* pointed out, more than 8500 homes were built each year in the Philadelphia suburbs, compared to just 160 per-year in the city, and fewer than 50 of these were unsubsidized, free-standing, single-family homes.

Because of the decline in nonresidential construction and near-elimination of residential construction, the 3500 electricians who are forced under federal law to pay union dues to Local 98 to be referred for union jobs have less and less available work.

But electricians who try to work nonunion are often threatened and attacked by union militants, according to National Labor Relations Board attorneys.

When telecommunications contractor Sam Schetrompf sought to do a city job in 1997, the NLRB charges, three thugs surrounded his company van, punctured the tires with an ice pick, and smashed the windows -- all as a 19-year-old Schetrompf employee sat inside.

Later, Local 98 board member Edward Coppinger allegedly "smashed his finger into Mr. Schetrompf's chest and pushed him through the [building] doorway, stating, 'You son of a bitch, I told you you can't work in this city. This is my building.'"

The federally-supported construction union monopoly in Philadelphia fosters abuses that are a threat to citizens of all ages and walks of life.

To break up this and other harmful union monopolies, the National Right to Work Committee is fighting in Congress to pass the National Right to Work Act (H.R.1109/S.873), which would protect all private-sector employees' freedom to earn a living without being forced to join or pay dues to a union.