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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Top Union Boss Huffs and Puffs, But Cannot Blow the Facts Down

It doesn't take a Sherlock Holmes or an Hercule Poirot to deduce that state policies promoting "exclusive" union bargaining and forced union dues and fees in the public sector have played a major role in driving multiple states to the verge of insolvency this year. All it takes is the willingness to look at, and respect, the facts.

In 2009, according to respected labor economists Barry Hirsch and David Macpherson, 41% of public employees nationwide were subject to a contract negotiated by their employer with a union monopoly-bargaining agent.

However, in 22 states, none of which authorize forced union dues for government employees and most of which don't authorize public-sector union monopoly bargaining, either, fewer than 30% of public servants were unionized. *Not one* of these 22 low public-sector-unionization states was to be found on *Business Insider*'s list, published just last month, of the nine states "most likely to default."

And *Business Insider* ranked Illinois, California, Michigan, New York, New Jersey, Nevada, Massachusetts and Wisconsin as the worst default risks for a totally objective reason: Traders who wish to buy protection against the possibility of default by these nine states have to pay higher premiums (technically known as "CDS spreads") than do traders seeking protection against default risk for any of the other 41.

The Hirsch-Macpherson data show that an average of 61% of public-sector employees in the nine worst default-risk states were under union monopoly bargaining in 2009. That is, overall public-sector unionization was *20 percentage points higher* than in the typical state. All but one of these states, Nevada, had public-sector unionization at least 15% higher than the national average in 2009. Nevada was also the only one of the nine not to authorize public-sector forced union dues and fees.

In the nine worst default-risk states, from 1999 to 2009, aggregate private-sector jobs fell by 4.2%, but heavily unionized state and local government jobs increased by 9.0%. Since annual state and local government employee compensation costs nationwide come to $1.1 trillion, or half of all state and local government spending, it's not hard to see that the Big Labor-driven, seemingly relentless growth in government payrolls is a fiscal catastrophe for states like California, Illinois, and New Jersey.

But to Gerald McEntee, president of the mammoth American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees union (AFSCME/AFL-CIO), even calling attention to the fact that for years government payrolls have grown while private payrolls have shriveled is tantamount to an "assault on public employees."

In a commentary bearing that heading, prepared last month for readers of the *Huffington Post*, among other audiences, Mr. McEntee thundered that the only acceptable solution to the intimidating fiscal problems faced by states like California, Illinois, and New Jersey is for elected officials to squeeze even more taxes out of beleaguered private-sector employees and businesses.

For Mr. McEntee, the idea that state budgets might be balanced largely by rolling back unwarranted increases in government payroll expenditures that occurred over the past decade isn't even worthy of discussion. But for all his bluster, he can't keep New Yorkers, for example, from noticing that, while the number of Empire State pupils enrolled in K-12 public schools fell by more than 121,000 between the 2000-01 and 2008-09 school years, schools *added* 14,746 teachers and 8655 non-teaching professionals to their payrolls.

Gerald McEntee and his government union cohorts can't prevent the facts from getting out. Nor can they do much about the fact that public sentiment in state after state is turning strongly against public-sector union kingpins who fight elected officials' attempts to get government employee compensations costs back under control.

But the government union hierarchy could have the last laugh if fed-up taxpayers and their allies limit themselves to going after bloated public-sector payrolls, unsustainable public pension plans, and other symptoms of monopolistic unionism, rather than the problem itself.

State laws empowering government union officials to negotiate the contract terms for all the front-line employees at a public agency, even those who haven't joined the union and want nothing to do with it, are behind the messes in Sacramento, Springfield and Trenton. Closely related state labor laws that authorize the firing of public servants for refusal to pay dues or fees to an unwanted union make matters even worse.

Long-term solutions to state budget crises will require addressing the core problems of union monopoly bargaining and forced union dues in the public sector.

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