

National Daily Features Independent Teachers

Headline: 'Nonunion Teacher Groups Cost NEA Membership and Clout'

Twenty-nine years ago this fall, then-National Right to Work Committee President Reed Larson helped establish Concerned Educators Against Forced Unionism (CEAFU), a group dedicated to protecting the free choice of school and university employees.

The new group's immediate goal was to beat back the wave of forced unionism that was then engulfing U.S. public education.

In 1975, many education observers believed that industrial-style union monopoly, under which employees are forced by law to accept union officials as their "exclusive" workplace bargaining agents, would soon prevail in every state in the country.

However, thanks largely to the efforts of Committee members and independent teachers, the teacher forced-unionism steamroller began to lose momentum in the late seventies. Over the past 20 years, just one state -- New Mexico -- has enacted a new teacher monopoly-bargaining law.

Rise of Independent Teacher Groups Encouraged and Facilitated by CEAFU

Sixteen states, including influential and fast-growing ones such as Texas, North Carolina, Georgia and Virginia, continue to hold fast and refuse to hand union bosses monopoly power over teachers and other school employees, despite the massive, forced dues-fueled political clout of teacher union bosses.

Another challenge to teacher union bosses' monopoly power is the

emergence, encouraged and facilitated by CEAFU over the past two decades, of dozens of local, state and nationwide independent professional teacher organizations.

While the national school-reform movement has long recognized independent teacher groups as a key constituency, the national media have been slow to catch on.

But on July 28 the *Wall Street Journal's* news department (which, unlike the *Journal's* editorial page, only rarely focuses on chinks in Big Labor's armor) ran a front-page story on the "rise of nonunion teacher associations."

Independent Education Leaders Have No Desire to Corral Teachers Into Their Groups

Reporter Daniel Golden wrote: "The rise of nonunion teacher associations is helping to erode the longstanding clout of the NEA [National Education Association], the nation's biggest union, with 2.7 million members.

"Rival nonunion groups have amassed at least 250,000 . . . members in 18 states -- including recent start-ups in Washington state, Arkansas, Alabama and Virginia -- by offering lower dues, a less-confrontational attitude toward school boards and fewer social pronouncements than the NEA."

Mr. Golden went on to explain that the NEA hierarchy's "travails have broad significance for education in the U.S."

Time after time, NEA bosses have wielded their forced dues-generated political clout to block or undermine a

wide array of education reforms, including raising academic standards, pay-for-performance, charter schools and vouchers.

Unlike the officials of the NEA and the 1.3 million-member American Federation of Teachers (AFT/AFL-CIO) union, leaders of independent educator groups do not wish to force any teacher or other school employee to join, pay dues, or accept unwanted "representation" in his or her dealings with school boards.

Another important difference between teacher union bosses and leaders of independent groups is that the latter do not use rank-and-file teachers' hard-earned dues money to promote their personal agendas on issues unrelated to education.

Linda Schnakenberg, president-elect of the independent Missouri State Teachers Association and a high school English teacher, explained to Mr. Golden:

"The NEA seems radical in everything, pushy, aggressive, and not in a positive way. I don't think a teachers' organization has any business being involved in issues like birth control and gun control."

Current CEAFU Leader Credits Vision of Reed Larson

"Until CEAFU was established in the mid-seventies, no one had ever tried to mobilize teachers to fight Big Labor monopoly-bargaining schemes in education," noted CEAFU Director Cathy Jones.

"But in recent years teachers in Missouri, Kentucky and other states have, once given the opportunity, shown themselves to be formidable foes of forced-unionism power grabs.

"And this never could have happened but for the vision of Reed Larson and the other founders of CEAFU."

Today CEAFU and the independent teacher groups it assists are the primary obstacles to teacher union bosses' total takeover of American public schools.

But CEAFU's battle to roll back union bosses' monopoly power over the teaching profession in states where they already wield it is only beginning.

Since 2001, CEAFU has been a project of the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation. If you would like to help CEAFU, financially or personally, contact Ms. Jones at 703-321-8519. ☎



Linda Schnakenberg

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-- Linda Schnakenberg,
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