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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Union Monopolists Bankrupt California's Local Governments

A year ago this month, a 55% to 45% majority of California voters sent an unmistakable message that they were fed up with the Tax & Spend, pro-union monopoly policies long favored by the state's elected officials.

According to a *Washington Post* exit poll, most rank-and-file union members and their families joined with the broad coalition of citizens who voted to recall Big Labor Gov. Gray Davis (D) less than one year into his second term. The poll also showed that union household members had overwhelmingly rejected the AFL-CIO hierarchy's "back-up" plan to replace Davis with union-label Lt. Gov. Cruz Bustamante (D).

This seemed to be a major defeat for the California union bosses who openly admitted to spending $5 million (mostly from treasury funds consisting primarily of union dues and "fees" that workers are forced to pay, or be fired) to keep control of the governorship.

Unfortunately, despite ongoing efforts by popular GOP Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to rein in excessive government spending and protect private businesses and their employees, greedy public-sector union bosses continue to wield their political clout to foist new permanent, multi-billion-dollar spending commitments on California taxpayers.

Neither Big Labor Democratic politicians nor Big Labor-appeasing Republican politicians appear to be chastened by the results of last year's recall election.

And some of the worst offenders are three self-styled "fiscal conservative" Republicans who sit on the Board of Supervisors of Orange County, located on California's coast between Los Angeles and San Diego.

On August 24, Tom Wilson (chairman), Bill Campbell, and Jim Silva disregarded the reservations of fellow GOP Supervisors Chris Norby and Chuck Smith and rubber-stamped a union boss-crafted proposal that will immediately add $300 million in liability to an Orange County government pension system that is already a billion dollars underfunded.

The trio accepted, without investigation, union officials' highly optimistic assumption about the long-term rate of return of the pension fund, which was the sole basis for implausible Big Labor claims that their retirement deal wouldn't cost taxpayers anything.

As *Orange County Register* columnist Steven Greenhut later reported, Wilson offered only "ad hominem attacks on critics, including [Orange County] Treasurer John Moorlach, instead of engaging their arguments."

Of all people, Moorlach doesn't deserve to be insulted for speaking up about fiscal matters. A decade ago, as *Los Angeles Times* columnist Dana Parsons recently recalled, his was "the lone and much criticized-voice warning that Orange County's highly touted investment portfolio risked financial meltdown – months before the county would declare the largest municipal bankruptcy in U.S. history . . . ."

Why did Supervisors Wilson, Campbell, and Silva defer to the "expert" opinion of union officials about the impact on taxpayers of their pension scheme while scornfully discounting the views of a genuine expert with a stellar track record?

"It's a political problem," Moorlach explained to Greenhut.

"We have electeds who seem to believe the line that it doesn't cost anything. But now we have cities up north that are sucking air. They've increased benefits so much, and now they can't afford to pay them. They are looking at layoffs, tax increases, and all the stuff we had to do after bankruptcy."

Moorlach, who is so outraged by the irresponsibility of the current Board majority that he is planning to run for supervisor himself in two years, deserves commendation for seeking to protect Orange County taxpayers as well as possible under current California laws. However, in order for California's state and local taxpayers to get a truly fair shake, the Golden State's public-sector monopoly-bargaining law must first be repealed.

Like similar statutes in other states, California's monopoly-bargaining law grants union officials monopoly power to negotiate with public employers the contracts of employees whose salaries and benefits are bankrolled by taxpayers.

This system practically guarantees that taxpayers' interests will be shortchanged. Elected officials and their surrogates have an almost overwhelming incentive to offer sweetheart deals to government union officials whose true cost to taxpayers often won't become obvious for years. Meanwhile, the politicians get the union political machine's support in return.

Terminating government union officials' special privilege to provide the sole "employee" voice in contract negotiations won't be easy in California or in any other state.

But rolling back public-sector monopoly bargaining is critical to the Golden State's long-term efforts to revive its private sector and become, once again, a hospitable place for taxpayers and independent-minded employees.

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