

Forced-Unionism Abuses Exposed

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

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Vol. 2, No. 12 – December 2003

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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Brave New York City Principals Risk Retaliation by Testifying About How Union Monopoly Control Damages Their Schools

For many years, National Right to Work Committee members have known that state laws granting union officials monopoly power to bargain the contracts of teachers and other public school employees lead to lower student achievement, skyrocketing costs for taxpayers, and inequitable treatment for teachers who are especially talented and conscientious or have skills that are in short supply.

Unfortunately, because most of the state and local elected officials who are responsible for how schools are run are either politically beholden to teacher union bosses or too weak-kneed to face their wrath, most of the abuses connected to union monopoly bargaining in public education never get exposed in a legislative chamber.

That's why the four days of hearings held last month by New York City Councilwoman Eva Moskowitz (D-Manhattan), who is normally a forced-unionism apologist, were truly historic.

Giving testimony that threw Big Apple teacher union czarina Randi Weingarten into a fit of rage, Queens PS 49 principal Tony Lombardi accused Ms. Weingarten's United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the largest affiliate of the million-member American Federation of Teachers (AFT) union, of trying to create a "parallel management structure."

Mr. Lombardi admitted he had cut a deal to transfer bad teachers to other schools because UFT union boss-negotiated work rules made it too difficult and time-consuming to fire them.

Several other principals were so fearful of UFT retaliation that they testified anonymously on tape, with their voices disguised.

According to Ms. Moskowitz, many more principals as well as a number of professional-minded teachers were willing to criticize union work rules privately, but were too intimidated to deliver even anonymous testimony. They reportedly told her: "I'm not that brave," "I might be blacklisted," or "Are you kidding?"

While Ms. Weingarten apparently wielded her monopoly power over teachers to keep the vast majority of her critics within the system quiet, she could not silence the eloquent testimony provided by the 316-page UFT contract and memorandum of understanding.

A summary furnished by Ms. Moskowitz shows that this anti-taxpayer, anti-schoolchild contract prohibits scheduling middle and high school teachers to teach more than 3.75 hours a day, requires schools to consult with the local union chapter committee before setting the agenda for a faculty conference, and requires that a majority of teachers hired by schools that choose a so-called "school-based management system" be "selected by the UFT chapter."

Yet another outrageous provision mandates that teachers cannot be assigned to patrol hallways, cafeterias, or school yards. After this wasteful rule was imposed in 1995, the city had to hire thousands of additional school aides, who like Big Apple teachers are forced to pay union dues as a job condition.

According to the state Department of Education, this work rule alone costs the city well over \$100 million a year.

In many instances, Ms. Weingarten did not even try to defend particular work rules in the UFT contract. Instead, she made the telling rationalization that any problems caused by such rules were not the UFT hierarchy's fault because a series of mayors and city negotiators had agreed to them.

But that begs the question of why hard-nosed fellows like former New York City Mayors Ed Koch (D) and Rudy Giuliani (R) would cut deals that were obviously not in the best interest of the taxpayers and parents who elected them.

The obvious answer, unacknowledged even by the teacher union critics at Ms. Moskowitz' hearing, is that the state labor law provisions empowering union bosses to act as the sole spokesmen for teachers and other school employees have left Mr. Koch, Mr. Giuliani, and all other New York City mayors with such a weak hand that they are simply unable, regardless of their good intentions, to protect the public interest.

The real culprit in the Big Apple's public education fiasco is the legislators in Albany who imposed union monopoly bargaining on schools across the state during the 1960's.

This fiasco offers a compelling illustration of why the National Right to Work Committee continues fighting today to block the imposition of teacher union monopoly bargaining in all 16 states that have yet to authorize it, and to roll back state monopoly-bargaining laws wherever possible.

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