

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 Bosses Take 'Food From Mouths of Hungry Schoolchildren'

Parents of elementary schoolchildren may fondly remember Gladys Gutzman, the "Queen of Snacks" in author Barbara Park's Junie B. Jones books for young readers.

Effervescent Junie B. ("The B stands for Beatrice. Except I don't like Beatrice. I just like B and that's all.") loves Mrs. Gutzman because she brings cookies to her kindergarten classroom every school day. In one story, Junie B. even decides to rename herself "Pinkie Gladys Gutzman"!

Not just for Junie B., but also for millions of real children across America, snack time is the high point of the school day. Unfortunately, for union officials in Hartford, Conn., snack time has now become the subject of a power struggle. Last month, a grievance filed by the megalomaniacal bosses of Local 566 of Council 4 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME/AFL-CIO) union forced the Hartford school system to stop providing snacks to roughly 1000 children in a variety of after-school programs.

Why would AFSCME union bosses want, as education blogger Mike Antonucci caustically put it, to take "food from the mouths of hungry schoolchildren"?

It's simple. AFSCME bosses demand that, before they give permission to the school district to hand out snacks to children in after-school or Saturday programs, the district must see to it that they get thousands of extra dollars in forced-dues revenue in return for their "cooperation."

Although personnel for federally-funded weekday and "Super Saturday" programs preparing youngsters to take the Nutmeg State's standardized exams, known as the Connecticut Mastery Tests, as well as for homework, dance and other programs, are perfectly happy to hand out the snacks themselves, AFSCME bosses insist that is illegal. Instead, they contend, the Hartford district must call in food service workers to hand out the snacks.

In order to comply with union officials' demand without sustaining exorbitant overtime expenses, the district would almost certainly have to hire more food service workers. And since,

under Connecticut state law, public-school cafeteria workers are routinely compelled to pay union dues or fees to AFSCME, or be fired, more cafeteria workers means more forced-dues money for Local 566, Council 4, and national AFSCME bosses.

A Big Labor-“friendly” arbitration panel has already sided with the AFSCME hierarchy. In addition to the 1000 children who have already been denied their snacks, another 1200 will stop getting their cheese and peanut butter crackers, cereal, milk and juice this month unless the school system somehow finds a way around the arbitration panel’s order.

“We want to feed these children, but the union leadership is not letting us,” district spokesman Terry D’Italia told the *Hartford Courant*. “The [federal] grant is very specific and does not contemplate food service workers being paid to serve the food. That would not be feasible.”

Council 4 spokesman Larry Dorman doesn’t care. He indicated to the *Courant* that the arbitration panel’s ruling proves that he and other AFSCME officials are in the right. If schoolchildren who stay for after-school programs and may eat lunch as early as 10 AM have to wait until dinner to eat again, that isn’t his problem!

Hartford parent activist Kathy Evans, the program development director for an organization that oversees after-school programs for roughly 700 children, can’t fathom union officials’ mentality.

“We know how hungry [children] are after school,” she told the *Courant*. “They certainly can’t concentrate and they’d be miserable without something in their stomachs. I think it’s terrible that, because of adult issues, the kids aren’t getting snacks after school.”

Gladys Gutzman also would not approve of Connecticut AFSCME bosses’ antics. In the *Boss of Lunch*, she shows how unconcerned she is about protecting Big Labor’s turf and forced-dues revenue by recruiting Junie B., a union nonmember, to hand out baloney sandwiches in the school cafeteria, just to keep the little girl out of trouble.

If only Mr. Dorman and his AFSCME cohorts were endowed with as much common sense. Until they acquire it, Connecticut elected officials would be well advised to remove union officials’ incentive to cancel snack time by canceling Big Labor’s legal privilege to collect forced dues from cafeteria workers and other school employees.

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