

Forced-Unionism Abuses Exposed

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

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Vol. 5, No. 2– February 2006

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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What Planet Is Auto Workers Union Chief Ron Gettelfinger Living On?

On January 17, just days before the Ford Motor Co. announced that it would eliminate at least 25,000 U.S. jobs as part of its second restructuring in four years, United Auto Workers (UAW) union international President Ron Gettelfinger gave a bizarre speech in Dearborn, Mich.

Appearing before a major industry gathering, Mr. Gettelfinger didn't seem to have an inkling as to the principle causes behind the impending cutbacks at Ford or the eradication of 30,000 U.S. jobs announced in November by fellow Big Three auto and truck maker General Motors.

Since, under federal labor law, Mr. Gettelfinger and other UAW union officials wield "exclusive" (monopoly) power to negotiate production employees' contracts with management at all of the Big Three companies and at many automotive-parts manufacturers, his apparent ignorance is alarming.

In his lengthy remarks, Mr. Gettelfinger completely failed to respond to the many auto industry observers who have bemoaned the rigid work rules and job classifications and stunningly inefficient health-insurance and pension systems negotiated by UAW bosses.

A host of counterproductive UAW-negotiated contract provisions have rendered the Big Three and many unionized parts suppliers uncompetitive, but do little or nothing to protect workers' incomes, access to medical coverage, or pension security.

In light of the crisis faced by unionized U.S. auto companies, Mr. Gettelfinger could have taken the opportunity to promise that the UAW union hierarchy would sign off on major changes in work rules and job classifications. Or he could at least have tried to explain why, in his opinion, auto industry observers are wrong and such changes aren't needed.

Instead, he decided to pummel a straw man.

Mr. Gettelfinger outrageously claimed that opponents of union monopoly control over employees and UAW bosses' excesses "argue that the only way to keep manufacturing jobs in the United States is to slash the wages of American workers to near poverty level" and terminate employer-funded "health care and retirement security."

Of course, he didn't furnish any actual quotes, because no prominent critic of compulsory unionism or auto industry actor or pundit of any stripe has ever said anything remotely like that.

The fact is, anyone who knows the first thing about the auto industry knows that a host of auto-industry firms are currently adding U.S. jobs while steadily increasing wages and furnishing excellent health and retirement benefits! These companies succeed largely by motivating employees to help improve factories' productivity and flexibility. They negotiate with individual employees directly, not through a UAW monopoly-bargaining agent.

According to the Washington, D.C.-based Bureau of National Affairs, between 1999 and 2004, the number of nonunion jobs in motor vehicle and motor-vehicle equipment manufacturing increased by an extraordinary 20.5%, or 166,000.

Meanwhile, the number of jobs in the sector that are under the control of UAW and other union officials plummeted by 14%, or 70,000!

Nonunion American employees of auto firms like Toyota, Nissan, BMW, Mercedes and Hyundai receive pay and benefits similar to those of Big Three companies. Their experience makes it crystal clear that American manufacturing employees can maintain and improve their living standards even as they successfully vie for jobs with workers all over the world.

But they can't if they are straight-jacketed by the sort of counterproductive union work rules that the UAW continues to insist on, even as more and more UAW-"represented" workers' jobs disappear.

U.S. production employees of Ford, GM, DaimlerChrysler, and other unionized auto-industry firms can only hope that Ron Gettelfinger was simply being dishonest last month when he griped to his Dearborn audience that these firms' problem is that their competition provides low wages and no benefits.

That would make Mr. Gettelfinger a bald-faced liar, which does him no credit.

But if you had to choose between a liar and a hallucinator to head an organization that wields monopoly power to negotiate your employment contract, wouldn't you choose the liar?

Until elected officials in Washington have mercy on the beleaguered employees of the Big Three and UAW-hamstrung parts-firms like Delphi by revoking the federal authorization for union monopoly bargaining, these employees' jobs will hinge on the decisions of UAW officials. It's better for everyone if these officials know the truth about auto industry jobs – even if they won't admit what the truth is.

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