

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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'Big Purple Truck' Scandal Hits Big Labor in L.A.

According to federal and local investigators, in December 2002, Martin Ludlow, then a candidate for the Los Angeles City Council, walked into the headquarters of Local 99 of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) in Los Angeles.

Together with political operative George Akili, Mr. Ludlow allegedly told then-Local 99 President Janett Humphries to put five people on the union payroll that he wanted to work full-time on his campaign.

Citing investigators' sources, the *Los Angeles Times* reported late last month that Ludlow and Akili literally provided Humphries with "five job descriptions, their terms and how much the positions were to pay [\$2600 to \$5400 a month]." And one of the positions would go to Akili himself!

Ludlow, who announced February 22 that he was close to reaching a plea bargain with the prosecutors who are investigating this and other alleged schemes, all blatantly illegal, is now at the center of a major political scandal in L.A.

But like other recent establishment media reports on the scandal, the February 24 *Times* article neglected to mention the fact that virtually all, if not all, of the 38,000 school workers in Local 99's empire are forced to pay union dues or fees in order to keep their jobs. That means, if the allegations concerning Ludlow are true, cafeteria workers, janitors, classroom aides, special education instructors, bus drivers, and warehouse operators for schools in and around L.A. were forced to pay the salaries of staffers for his City Council campaign, or be fired.

Investigators also believe Ludlow and his aides illegally directed Local 99 bosses to deploy in secret the union's forced dues-funded cell phones, computers, and phone banks for his campaign.

Like many other SEIU phone banks, Local 99's are located in trucks officially known as "Mobile Action Centers." According to the *LA Weekly*, union bosses commonly refer to them as "Big Purple Trucks," and "they are often sent to other spots around the state and even the nation for phone banking for [big] labor-backed candidates."

With the Local 99 machine's assistance, Ludlow captured a seat on the City Council in a runoff election in the spring of 2003. Two years later, after the unexpected and untimely death of L.A. County AFL-CIO chief Miguel Contreras, Ludlow resigned from the City Council to succeed him as the Federation's executive secretary-treasurer. Clearly, Ludlow believed he would wield greater power and influence in union office than he would have in public office!

Under the prevailing norms of L.A. politics, Ludlow may have reasonably calculated that he would, at worst, later have to pay a fine and apologize for rising to power through a conspiracy to criminally misuse forced dues-funded union treasuries.

But he neglected to account for the fact that his apparent cohort, Humphries, had bitter foes within Local 99 and the SEIU who could ultimately use the "Big Purple Trucks" scheme to get rid of her. Internal union politics thus led to federal and local criminal investigations. Now Ludlow has resigned his office, and reportedly vowed not to seek union or political office for 10 years and agreed to pay heavy fines and make restitution, in order to stay out of prison.

Union officials in L.A. and around the country routinely put forced dues-funded staff members on full-time duty electioneering for Big Labor's favorite political candidates, and also deploy forced dues-funded union buildings, transportation, and publications for electioneering purposes. It's understandable, therefore, that many of Ludlow's friends think he is getting a raw deal.

Ludlow's alleged mistake was to tell Local 99 officials how to spend their forced dues-money to get him elected, instead of letting them decide for themselves how to do it!

"Coordination" between Ludlow, his operatives, and Local 99 officials is what made forced-dues politicking, in this case, illegal. But it's not the real scandal. The real scandal is that federal and California labor law empower union bosses to make billions of dollars in forced dues-funded "in-kind" contributions to their favored candidates at the local, state and federal levels.

Punishing the perpetrators of the "Big Purple Trucks" conspiracy is entirely appropriate. The law is the law. But snagging Martin Ludlow and company is no solution at all to the problem of union political corruption. The first step towards a solution is elimination of all government-authorized compulsory union dues and fees.

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