

Forced-Unionism Abuses Exposed

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

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Vol. 5, No. 5 – May, 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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Labor Board Accuses UAW Bosses, Company Of Retaliating Against Whistleblower

Americans who even casually follow business news know that unionized domestic motor-vehicle and motor-vehicle-parts manufacturing businesses are hemorrhaging cash and jobs.

In 2005, the United Autoworkers (UAW/AFL-CIO) union hierarchy wielded "exclusive" bargaining power to negotiate the contracts of just 404,000 motor-vehicle industry employees, compared to 481,000 in 2000 and 592,000 in 1995-96, according to the Washington, D.C.-based Bureau of National Affairs.

Financially shell-shocked automakers GM and Ford have already announced they will cut additional tens of thousands of unionized workers' jobs over the next few years. Bankrupt and near-bankrupt unionized parts makers like Delphi, Collins and Aikman, Dana and Lear are also continuing to slash employment.

All of the above has been widely reported. But there is another, much more positive story about American employees and motor-vehicle industry jobs that deserves far more media attention than it's so far gotten. In the face of ferocious international competition, nonunion motor-vehicle industry jobs in the U.S., especially in the 22 Right to Work states, have grown from 687,000 in 1995-96 to 829,000 in 2000 and 984,000 in 2005!

Why are nonunion American auto employees able to compete successfully in the international marketplace when their unionized counterparts can't? The pay for nonunion American employees of "transplant" firms like Toyota, Nissan, BMW, Mercedes and Hyundai is very similar to what UAW-controlled employees receive. The transplants also offer excellent health and retirement benefits, while doing a far better job of containing costs than the extremely inefficient Ford and GM plans.

But nonunion employees' biggest competitive advantage is that their contracts reward individual effort, flexibility and productivity, whereas UAW contracts focus on job classifications and seniority.

Forbes publisher Rich Karlgaard recently capsulized the detrimental impact bad incentives, perpetuated by UAW bosses wielding monopoly power over employees, have on performance when he pointed out the contrasting absenteeism rates in UAW-controlled and nonunion American factories.

Toyota and Nissan workers in Right to Work Tennessee and Alabama “have an average daily absentee rate of 2%,” wrote Mr. Karlgaard in a column this March. But “[u]p in Michigan, . . . the average daily absentee rate in a union auto factory is 10% to 12%.”

Further evidence that compulsory unionism undermines both employees’ material well being and their dignity in the workplace is furnished in two recent legal actions initiated by autoworkers at UAW-controlled Freightliner facilities in North Carolina.

In a federal racketeering suit launched in January, five employees from three different factories charge that UAW union bosses secretly agreed in advance to allow Freightliner managers to impose limitations on wages, cancel an employee profit sharing bonus, and increase employees’ share of health care costs. In exchange, the company allegedly agreed to help the union bosses get monopoly-bargaining power over the employees.

And just last month, a regional director for the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) filed a formal complaint against Freightliner, a Daimler/Chrysler subsidiary, for unfair labor practices. The complaint charges that both UAW officials and the company retaliated against an employee at Freightliner’s truck cab and chassis facility in Gastonia, N.C., for questioning a pattern of special treatment given to union officials by the company.

In a December 2005 e-mail, the employee, Kristi Jones, observed that union stewards appeared to be exempt from participating in 10-minute “huddle meetings” that are mandatory for other employees and from a requirement that workers sign in formally when working overtime, and questioned whether they would also be exempt from a new policy regarding safety glasses. Subsequently, she was suspended, demoted, threatened, and stripped of her position as a team leader.

In both the federal racketeering and the NLRB cases, employees are being represented by attorneys for the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation.

The recent economic news regarding massive job reductions and benefit cutbacks at GM, Ford, Delphi, and other unionized motor-vehicle manufacturers and the personal testimony of employees like Kristi Jones show that federally-authorized union monopoly bargaining lowers job security and promotes inequitable treatment of employees. These results are the opposite of what Congress promised when it officially sanctioned union monopolies in the 1935 National Labor Relations Act (NLRA).

It’s long past time for Congress to revise the NLRA and revoke UAW and other union bosses’ privilege to “represent” workers who don’t want to be represented by a union. That’s the single most important step elected officials in Washington can take to help the beleaguered employees of the UAW bosses’ shrinking automotive empire.

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