

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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‘The Mayor Says . . . “Joe, I’ve Got 10 to 12 Million to Spend. You Tell Me Where”’

With Pittsburgh tossed by summer tempests late last month, it seemed like an inopportune time for Big Labor-politician Tom Murphy, the former mayor of the former Steel City, to skate.

But that’s just what he did. Shocking and angering many Pittsburghers who had been following the two-year criminal investigation into a secret deal then-Mayor Murphy had forged with local firefighters union boss Joe King in May 2001, U.S. Attorney Mary Beth Buchanan announced in a June 26 news release that, if Murphy now testifies about the deal, he won’t be indicted. At the same time, Buchanan pointedly refused to clear Murphy of wrongdoing.

According to Buchanan’s news release, Murphy no longer denies that he used his position as mayor and millions of dollars in taxpayers’ money to provide a sweetheart contract to King in exchange for the latter’s political endorsement and “in-kind” campaign support. (In Pennsylvania and many other states, such Big Labor campaign support is financed mostly with union dues and fees that, under state law, employees are forced to pay, or be fired.)

In May 2001, Murphy faced a stiff challenge for his party’s nomination for a second term as mayor from then-City Council President Bob O’Connor. And King’s union, Local 1 of the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF/AFL-CIO), had already endorsed O’Connor.

Then Murphy made King an offer. To secure his reelection, he promised IAFF Local 1 up to \$12 million in contract “goodies” (the term used by the Pittsburgh *Post-Gazette* when the story first broke). King promptly switched Local 1’s endorsement to Murphy, who went on to win the primary by fewer than 700 votes. And the sweetheart deal between Murphy and King was rubber-stamped by third-party arbitrators.

King's sudden selection of a new beneficiary for his forced-dues political machine seemed suspicious from the get-go to many Pittsburgh political observers.

But for a long time it seemed impossible to prove that a crooked deal had happened – until three years later, when the volatile King became convinced that Murphy was renegeing on the deal they had cut in secret. On April 12, 2004, the firefighters union boss sent a furious open letter to Murphy in which he spilled the beans:

“If you have any credibility, tell the truth about 2001, when you had me diversify \$10 million to \$12 million in my contract. The only condition was to have the contract awarded by arbitration, so as you stated: The other unions cannot know that you/I agreed to these terms.”

Interviewed by the *Post-Gazette* shortly after he had ignited a firestorm by forwarding his letter to Murphy to the local media, King told the same story:

“The mayor says to me [in 2001], ‘OK, Joe, I’ve got 10 to 12 million to spend. You tell me where to put it in the contract.’ Then [in 2003 and 2004] Murphy says expenses are far exceeding revenues. If he knew this, then why did he make this deal with me?”

King was so bent on punishing what he viewed as Murphy's double-cross that he seemed willing to expose himself as well as the mayor to possible prosecution for bribery. But perhaps King realized already that the risk was not too great. In Pennsylvania, like in other states with public-sector monopoly-bargaining laws, it really is quite difficult for prosecutors to distinguish between “legitimate” government labor negotiations and flat-out bribery.

State monopoly-bargaining laws hand politically active union bosses “exclusive” power to bargain with elected officials or their agents over public employees' working conditions. The system practically guarantees that union bosses will regularly be offered more lucrative taxpayer-funded contracts on condition that the union political machine's support is granted in return.

This looks and smells like bribery. But prosecuting such corruption is very difficult, not only because it often can't be proven (except when a vindictive and big-mouthed union boss like Joe King later spells out what happened) that there was a *quid pro quo*, but also because consistent prosecution would mean indicting hundreds and hundreds of elected officials in monopoly-bargaining states.

Hauling a substantial share of America's elected officials into criminal court may sound like an appealing idea to many citizens, but most do not view it as a practical way to stop the conspiracies against taxpayers that are regularly forged by politicians and government union bosses. And the problem could become even worse if Congress enacts pending legislation (S. 513 and H.R. 1249) that would actually mandate union monopoly bargaining over state and local public-safety employees.

The difficult, but genuine solution is first to stop Congress from expanding public-sector monopoly bargaining, and then to roll it back in the Pennsylvania Legislature and other legislatures across the country.