

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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Teacher Union Boss Takes 'Lion's Share of the Credit' For Stopping Tax Relief

The Maine Education Association (MEA) teacher union hierarchy has a name for Pine Tree State citizens who, unhappy with the fact that they have to fork over a higher share of their incomes in state and local taxes (13.5%, compared to the national average of 10.6%) than the citizens of any other state in the nation, voted last month in favor of the Taxpayers' Bill of Rights (TABOR) ballot initiative.

The name is "foes of public education."

Maine's TABOR initiative was by any reasonable standard a modest proposal to restrain the growth of state and local government. Generally, it would have allowed real government spending in Maine to continue to increase, just not as rapidly as it has risen in recent years.

With regard to education in particular, TABOR would have permitted school districts to increase spending by at least enough to keep up with inflation and enrollment increases – and by even more if local voters agreed in a referendum. But in their zeal to prevent any meaningful tax relief in Maine, teacher union officials have regularly ignored such facts.

Leading off a press release distributed after TABOR was defeated by a relatively narrow 54% to 46% margin, the MEA brass continued to snarl at those who dare to disagree with their pro-Tax & Spend stand: "The 2006 election confirms that the friends of public education in Maine outnumber its foes. The key indicator was the defeat of Question 1, the TABOR initiative"

Union President Chris Galgay doesn't hesitate to acknowledge that public support for TABOR was strong enough that it would have been enacted were it not for the ferocious and lavishly funded opposition of the MEA, a state affiliate of the gigantic, 3.2 million-member National Education Association (NEA) teacher union. By the MEA press release's own account, NEA and MEA bosses poured "close to \$1 million in cash and staff for Campaign 2006 in Maine, with the bulk of it going to defeat TABOR."

“[I]t is safe to say,” boasted Mr. Galgay last month, “that NEA-MEA . . . deserves the lion’s share of the credit for the defeat of TABOR. . . . It was our political muscle and expertise that carried the campaign”

What the press release and Mr. Galgay didn’t point out, not surprisingly, is that the vast majority of the millions of dollars that NEA-MEA and other government unions spent to stop TABOR and tighten their control over the Legislature was extracted from union dues and fees that teachers and other public employees are forced to pay in order to keep their jobs in Maine and many other states.

This was a good investment for the government union brass. Untrammled by TABOR, Big Labor politicians in Maine are likely to continue jacking up already sky-high government spending at a rapid pace, and that will allow the number of forced dues-paying employees on public payrolls to continue to soar.

But the majority of Maine employees and business owners, whose incomes depend largely on the performance of the Pine Tree State’s anemic private-sector economy, face more tough times ahead. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, between 1994 and 2004, the number of 25-34 year-olds in Maine fell by a stinging 20.2% as a consequence of the Big Labor-dominated state’s failure to attract and retain businesses and good jobs. And this unfortunate trend isn’t likely to change as long as Chris Galgay and Co. are calling the shots in Maine politics.

In order to implement significant and sustained tax relief and other needed economic reforms, Maine employees and employers need first to tackle the problem of compulsory union dues and fees. Forced unionism provided the ammunition government union bosses needed to defeat TABOR. That’s why taking away this ammunition by passing a state Right to Work law that prohibits the collection of forced union dues and fees as a condition of employment is the linchpin of tax relief and economic revival.

Of course, Big Labor bosses will fight tooth and nail to block any effort to pass a Right to Work measure in the Maine Legislature. But the state’s status quo is dismal enough that this fundamental reform may be viable in the near future. No wonder that, despite his recent victory, Mr. Galgay is still so testy about the large number of “foes” he has across the state!

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