

Forced-Unionism Abuses Exposed

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

National Right to Work Committee® • 8001 Braddock Road • Springfield, Va. 22160
www.nrtwc.org • (703) 321-9820 • (703) 321-7143 (fax)

Vol. 6, No. 3 – March 2007

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.

* * *

'UNITE HERE!' or 'Incite, Smear'?

You'd think that top bosses of the somewhat preciously named union UNITE HERE! would have learned their lesson last year when a California jury rendered a \$17.3 million judgment against the union's operatives for employing illegal tactics to seize monopoly-bargaining power over workers.

But now it appears that UNITE HERE! organizers may once again be resorting to criminal tactics as they battle to corral into their union employees of a Madison, Wis.-based company that launders hospital linens.

On February 16, St. Mary's Hospital in Madison sued the UNITE HERE! hierarchy, alleging that union operative Aimee Jennings had contacted patients and illegally incited them not to pay their hospital bills. According to a wire story filed by Wisconsin reporter Ed Trevelen, the hospital charges that at least one "patient who had agreed to make payments on a bill owed to St. Mary's" defaulted on her payments "after meeting with Jennings."

Jennings also allegedly incited individuals "who had contracts with St. Mary's not to pay any money required by those contracts." The lawsuit does not specify how union agents obtained the names and contact information of patients, former patients, and clients, but hospital spokesman Steve Sparks told Trevelen that St. Mary's had not given UNITE HERE! the information.

What did St. Mary's ever do to incur such Big Labor fury? UNITE HERE! officials publicly acknowledge they are angry at the hospital because it is the single largest customer of Superior Health Linen, and has resisted union-boss demands to put pressure on this small Madison firm to drop all opposition to the forced unionization of its employees.

At first blush, even Big Labor critics may find it hard to believe that a UNITE HERE! operative would incite patients of a nonprofit hospital to default on their debts as a means of unionizing the hospital's laundry service. But UNITE HERE! organizers already have been convicted of carrying out a similar illegal scheme in California.

In the spring of 2005, the hierarchy of the 450,000-member union viciously attacked a Golden State nonprofit network of doctors and hospitals known as Sutter Health for contracting out its laundry services to the St. Louis-based Angelica Textile Services Inc.

Union bosses had been trying to intimidate Sutter into announcing it would end its relationship with Angelica unless the latter, already a partially unionized firm, consented to help UNITE HERE! acquire “exclusive” (monopoly) bargaining power over the rest of its front-line employees.

When Sutter balked, the union brass sent out a mass direct-mail hit piece to 11,000 women of childbearing age in northern California, which falsely and recklessly claimed that Sutter hospitals did not ensure their bed linens are free of “blood, feces, and harmful pathogens.” But Sutter refused to be intimidated. Instead, the firm sued for libel.

And, in late July 2006, a jury in Placer County, Calif., found that UNITE HERE! organizers had acted with “fraud, malice, or oppression.” The jury ordered union officials to fork over nearly \$17.3 million for harming Sutter Health’s business and reputation.

Union lawyers have said they will appeal the California verdict and are expected to vigorously contest the lawsuit filed in Wisconsin last month. But the fact that UNITE HERE! Senior Associate Legal Counsel Brent Garren dismisses, as he did last month, charges of illegal incitement as an attack on union organizers’ “free speech” suggests that contempt for the law is widespread among the union brass.

For years, UNITE HERE! officials have been frequent practitioners of the “cram-down” organizing approach. In “cram-down” campaigns, union bosses browbeat companies into helping organize employees through accusations of regulatory violations, negative PR campaigns, and other types of pressure.

Gross abuses are common in “cram-down” organizing drives. But only rarely are union officials held responsible. The fact that health-care providers like Sutter and St. Mary’s have recently begun fighting to hold union officials accountable in court is definitely a hopeful development.

But the fundamental remedy for “cram-down” organizing abuses is for Congress to remove union officials’ incentive to commit them by repealing all provisions in federal labor law that authorize union officials to act as the monopoly-bargaining agent over a group of employees, including union members and nonmembers alike, in employment contract negotiations. Once union bosses are barred from wielding monopoly-bargaining power over employees, they will have no incentive to commit criminal acts against employers to get such power.

#