

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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Michigan Teacher Union Czarina Complains That \$1.4 Billion Tax Hike Is Not 'Sufficient'

Many Michigan citizens are up in arms right now about the \$1.4 billion in tax increases that their state legislators adopted under duress October 1, with Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm poised to allow most of the state government to be shut down unless the legislators acquiesced to her demand for more tax revenue.

The tax hike package includes a 12% increase in the state's income tax rate, a mark-up that will be paid by the vast majority of Michiganders with full-time, year-round jobs, and a new 6% tax on a host of business and personal services, including consulting, office administration, interior design, landscaping, courier and messenger, document preparation, skiing, massages and manicures.

Opposition to the Granholm tax package is very widespread. A scientific statewide poll, conducted less than a week before the tax hike was rubber-stamped, found that citizens who are likely to vote in Michigan's state and federal elections next year supported, by an overwhelming 71% to 22% margin, closing "most" of the state's current \$1.75 billion annual budget shortfall by reducing spending rather than raising taxes.

And popular anger regarding the tax hike is understandably exacerbated by the fact that Michiganders are already suffering from the highest unemployment rate (7.4%, with 70,000 net jobs lost since July 2006) and the third highest home foreclosure rate (14,000 new filings in July) among the 50 states.

According to the nonpartisan, Washington, D.C.-based Tax Foundation, state and local taxes already siphon off 11.2% of Michigan citizens' personal income – above the national average even though revenues are undoubtedly artificially depressed due to the state's reeling economy.

Of all the public critics of the Granholm tax increase, only one is complaining that the governor and the Legislature aren't doing enough to jack up the share of Michiganders' earnings

that go into the tax till. That critic is Iris Salters, president of the Michigan Education Association (MEA/NEA), by far the biggest teacher union in the Wolverine State.

Ms. Salters charges that “political leaders in Lansing” have “made a devastating mistake” by raising taxes nearly \$3.50 for every \$1 in proposed spending reductions, instead of raising taxes still more without making even token spending reductions. Legislators, “cowering in the face of political consequences,” failed to “raise sufficient revenues,” she grumbles.

Of course, in her press releases and op-eds, Ms. Salters ignores the clear evidence that state and local government spending, especially in the area that most concerns her, public schools, has been skyrocketing in recent years and could certainly have safely been pruned to balance the state budget.

For example, the most recent available federal data show that between the 2000-2001 and 2004-2005 school years, while the number of school children in Michigan K-12 public schools grew by just 1.3%, K-12 public school employment grew by 8.6%.

And under Michigan’s pro-compulsory unionism labor laws, the vast majority of front-line employees on public schools’ rapidly expanding payrolls are forced to fork over hundreds of dollars a year in union dues either to MEA bosses or to the bosses of the state’s second biggest teacher union, AFT Michigan (formerly the Michigan Federation of Teachers).

The fact that the ranks of forced dues-paying public school employees are growing seven times faster than those of public school children doesn’t appear to have improved educational outcomes. Michigan’s performance on the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress fell or remained the same in both reading and mathematics.

But Gov. Granholm and majorities in both chambers of the Legislature nevertheless opted to keep furnishing more fuel to the teacher union gravy train by increasing taxpayers’ already hefty burden.

Virtually all the state’s Democratic elected officials and a few Big Labor-appeasing Republicans know that, in return for their largesse with taxpayers’ money, the MEA and AFT Michigan brass will funnel back a large share of the forced dues and fees they collect into phone banks, get-out-the-vote drives, propaganda mailings, and other “in-kind” reelection support for the politicians who support higher taxes.

The cold comfort for Michigan taxpayers is that legislators were at least concerned enough about voter backlash that they decided to hand Iris Salters and other union bigwigs “only” 75%, rather than 100%, of what they were demanding.

And the real comfort for Michigan taxpayers and other citizens is that their Legislature’s latest antics will serve as a new spur for the already expanding campaign to protect Michigan employees, both public- and private-sector, from Big Labor exploitation by passing a state Right to Work law that prohibits all compulsory union dues and fees.

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