

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)

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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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IAFF Union Czar's Warning: Professional Firefighters Who Serve as Volunteers on Their Own Time May Face 'Serious Consequences'

For years, officials of International Association of Firefighters (IAFF/AFL-CIO) union affiliates have used threats, fines and expulsions to deter the union rank and file from serving their own communities as volunteer firefighters when they aren't on the job.

And IAFF President Harold Schaitberger adopts a menacing tone towards the tens of thousands of firefighters who have so far refused to toe the union line:

"Although an IAFF member may make a personal choice to join a volunteer fire department," intones Mr. Schaitberger, "that personal choice is one that can have serious consequences under our [union] Constitution, including the loss of IAFF membership."

Media reports from Hartford, Conn., reveal that Mr. Schaitberger and his lieutenants are now intensifying their campaign against volunteer firefighting.

Wielding their power under state law to act as the "exclusive" (monopoly) bargaining agent for all taxpayer-funded firefighters in Hartford, IAFF officials recently succeeded in inserting an anti-volunteer provision in the city fire department's contract.

Once it takes effect, this provision will subject the city's firefighters, union members and nonmembers alike, to "discipline" – including termination for those who aren't swayed by less severe "discipline" – for "responding to fire department calls as an active member of . . . [a] volunteer fire department"

Professional firemen who donate their spare time to help their communities play key roles in many suburban and rural volunteer fire departments in Connecticut and across the country.

The new anti-volunteer contract provision in Hartford, which is patterned after similar provisions already implemented at IAFF bosses' behest in Connecticut towns such as New Britain, West Hartford, East Hartford, and Manchester, will likely force a number of volunteer fire departments either to disband or to operate while severely understaffed.

And the mayor of one small town that currently operates with an all-volunteer fire department estimates that the Hartford anti-volunteer scheme could necessitate a tax increase of "\$4 million to \$4.5 million a year" on his constituents just to maintain the service.

But the principal victims of the anti-volunteer policy are the professional firefighters who will be denied the right to serve their communities the way they choose during their off hours. Professional firefighters will also lose

pensions they receive from their volunteer activities, as well as local tax incentives and other expenses covered by many towns.

Why are IAFF kingpins so determined to crack down on volunteering, even if it's detrimental to the interests of fire departments, taxpayers, and their own rank and file?

The union brass's motive isn't hard to ascertain: The vast majority of the full-time, paid firefighters in Connecticut are forced under state law to accept the IAFF as their monopoly-bargaining agent and also forced to pay union dues to the IAFF, or be fired.

But volunteers, of course, can't be forced to fill union coffers. Replacing volunteers with professionals across Connecticut means millions of additional forced-dues dollars for the IAFF.

That's clearly a higher priority for Harold Schaitberger and his cohorts than the aspirations of ordinary firefighters. "We've been contacted by a large [number] of firefighters around the country who were pressured [by union officials] to stop volunteering or be reprimanded or kicked out of the union," National Volunteer Fire Council spokesman Craig Sharman recently told the *Christian Science Monitor*.

And now it appears Mr. Schaitberger and company are also prepared to get professional firefighters who stubbornly continue volunteering fired from their jobs!

The National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation is offering free legal aid to any and all firefighters who are prepared to challenge the anti-volunteer policies that are pending or already in effect across Connecticut. But the most effective, permanent solution for this and many other public-sector union abuses is to roll back all state labor laws that grant bullies like Harold Schaitberger monopoly-bargaining power over public-sector employees.

The National Right to Work Committee is currently working with legislative allies in states like Ohio, Indiana, Oklahoma, and Iowa to build support for measures that would roll back public-sector monopoly bargaining. And the Committee has already achieved remarkable success in recent years in blocking Big Labor-sponsored schemes to expand the number of employees subject to monopoly bargaining.

As Connecticut state Sen. William Aniskovich (R-Branford) said last November, anti-volunteer provisions in firefighter union contracts are "downright un-American." Freedom-loving citizens across the U.S. need to fight back by denying megalomaniacal union bosses the monopoly power to foist such contracts on local governments and public employees.

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