

# 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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## **California Union Bosses Wage War Against 'Illegitimate' Volunteer Work**

This summer a legislative roadblock in Sacramento, Calif., could halt creek restoration projects up and down the state, as well as park construction, library renovations, and Habitat for Humanity programs that build homes for the poor.

Incredibly, under current California law, if a nonprofit group receives any taxpayer funding for a charitable venture, and pays even one of the workers on the project, the project may not accept any volunteer help at all, and all workers must be paid the so-called "prevailing" (i.e., union) wage.

Citizens who are glad to volunteer must nonetheless be paid the "prevailing" wage. And if public funds to cover the massive added cost aren't available, then trees don't get planted, trash in parks doesn't get hauled away, schools get by without aides, museums operate without docents, and libraries cancel storytelling time.

California's anti-volunteer law has been around for several years, but wasn't strictly enforced until recently, when Laborers Union bosses in Redding, Calif., successfully used it to sue the nonprofit Sacramento Watersheds Action Group (SWAG) for employing volunteers on a state-funded project to clean up a canyon and build a trail. SWAG was fined \$33,000 and ordered to provide \$17,000 in "back pay" to Shasta College students and other young people who thought they were volunteers!

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and his administration strongly favor changing the anti-volunteer law, but say they now have no choice but to keep enforcing it until it's changed.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that Californians across the political spectrum are outraged about the law, that may not happen soon. What's behind the apparent political logjam in the

California State Senate, which is so obviously detrimental to the interests of the Golden State and its citizens? Union lobbyists' grim determination to wipe out the scourge of "illegitimate" volunteer work.

In a May 2 commentary on Big Labor's so-far successful effort to block enactment in its current form of A.B. 2690, a measure that would let volunteers work side by side with skilled laborers earning the "prevailing" wage on all public works, *Sacramento Bee* columnist Daniel Weintraub rhetorically asked:

"[W]hat is legitimate volunteer work, other than work that a citizen agrees to do for free, without coercion, out of a desire to benefit his or her community?" Mr. Weintraub continued: "Whether it's picking weeds, moving brush or using my personal grader to level a playing field, I ought to be able to do it without fear of running afoul of labor laws."

But California building-trades union bosses disagree. Their spokesman Jim Lewis claims the union brass wouldn't oppose a change in the law allowing for "legitimate volunteer work." But in practically the same breath he thunders that "work that requires the use of skilled labor, heavy equipment, and so on" must be "reimbursed under the prevailing wage law . . . ."

In other words, if you have any skills that are especially valuable to a volunteer organization, it's "illegitimate" for you to volunteer to do what you do best.

According to the loony criteria elucidated by Mr. Lewis, A.B. 2690, a measure designed to repeal California's anti-volunteer law and let volunteer groups function as they did before Laborers Union bosses declared war on SWAG, is unacceptable. But union lobbyists aren't so foolish as to think they can stop this measure by openly opposing it.

On May 26, after being held up for weeks by Big Labor opposition, A.B. 2690 won approval by the California Assembly in a unanimous vote. But as this month's *Exposed* goes to press June 4, it has yet even to be assigned to a Senate committee. A spokesman for the Rules Committee told a National Right to Work staff member he had no idea when this bill would be assigned to a committee.

While the union-label politicians who run the California Senate decide whether or not they should risk a public backlash by obeying union lobbyists and burying A.B. 2690, or make a rare stand for common sense, trail and creek restoration projects, school programs and beach cleanups are being put on hold.

California union bosses' real motivation for trying to protect the anti-volunteer law isn't hard to discern. Volunteer workers don't have to pay compulsory union dues to keep their jobs. But most paid workers on public projects in California are forced-dues payers.

Big Labor's ongoing crusade to see that no good deed in California goes unpunished is yet another example of how government authorized compulsory union dues corrupt the political process and furnish unscrupulous union bosses with an enormous incentive to act against the public interest. And it demonstrates yet again why the National Right to Work Committee is determined to wipe out all forms of compulsory unionism.