

Big Labor Targets Tennessee Police, Firemen

Harold Schaitberger Wants More Conscripts For His Political Army

Harold Schaitberger, president of the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF/AFL-CIO) union, is clearly determined to transform the IAFF into a nationwide political juggernaut on a par with any other union.

More than a year ago, Mr. Schaitberger set out to handpick the next U.S. President.

In September 2003, Mr. Schaitberger became the first national Big Labor boss to put his union's electioneering machine behind U.S. Sen. John Kerry's (Mass.) bid for the Democratic Party's 2004 presidential nomination.

And he makes no bones about the fact that he currently views partisan presidential politics as the number one "job" of IAFF officials, whose salaries are paid largely by dues that public-safety workers are forced to pay as a job condition.

This March Mr. Schaitberger told a conference of union officers:

"Let's continue to work like h*** to elect the Fire Fighters candidate [Mr. Kerry]."

"Brothers and sisters -- if we do our job we will change the occupant of the White House and send George W. Bush back to Crawford, Texas."

More Monopoly-Bargaining Power Means More Big Labor Political Power

Mr. Schaitberger's bid to use firefighters' and emergency medics' hard-earned money to install Mr. Kerry in the White House may or may not succeed.

If it falls short, a key reason will be that the legislatures of 27 states have either flat out refused to grant union officials monopoly power over public employment, or have acquiesced to a somewhat limited form of "exclusive" bargaining.

Monopoly-bargaining laws force public-safety employees, including union members and nonmembers alike, to allow union officials to negotiate their pay, benefits, and working conditions.

Although monopoly bargaining alone does not legally force a worker to join a union, it obviously does put him or her "under powerful compulsion to join," as then-top AFL-CIO lawyer Thomas Harris admitted back in the 1960s.

"At least in Right to Work states, Big



International Association of Firefighters union czar Harold Schaitberger (right) knows that he may build an even bigger

political machine by winning enactment of more state public-safety monopoly bargaining laws.

Labor can't get workers fired for refusal to join or pay 'dues' to an unwanted union," noted Matthew Leen, vice president of the National Right to Work Committee.

"But if state labor law at the same time authorizes union officials to represent the only 'employee' perspective in contract negotiations, the Right to Work is seriously undermined.

"Under such circumstances, the vast majority of firemen and police are understandably reluctant to oppose or even question the union.

"Many public employees join the union even though they don't really want to. Then power-thirsty union bosses like Harold Schaitberger use these workers' dues money to build their political machines in state after state."

Target: Tennessee

"That's why Mr. Schaitberger and his lieutenants are determined to get public-safety monopoly bargaining written into the laws of all 50 states," Mr. Leen continued.

"And right now Right to Work Tennessee is one of their top targets. In the Tennessee Legislature's 2003-2004 session, Right to Work allies blocked a public-safety monopoly-bargaining scheme [H.B.1678] from coming to the state House floor.

"But now Mr. Schaitberger and the

AFL-CIO hierarchy have deployed battalions of paid union staffers for electioneering in Tennessee. Their goal is to install a Legislature that will rubber-stamp public-safety monopoly bargaining next year.

"The union bosses know that if they can get monopoly control over public-safety employees in jurisdictions across the state now, it will be much easier for them to swing Tennessee for Big Labor candidates like John Kerry in the future."

But the Murfreesboro-based Tennessee Right to Work Committee, assisted by the National Right to Work Committee, is fighting back.

The Tennessee group recently surveyed every major-party candidate for the state House and Senate regarding where they stand on public-safety monopoly bargaining and other Right to Work issues.

Because of pro-Right to Work Tennesseans' impressive record of activism, nominees for most of the legislative seats being contested this year have already vowed to oppose schemes like H.B.1678.

"The last step, now being implemented, is to inform Right to Work supporters about where their candidates stand and mobilize them to keep up the pressure until Election Day," said Mr. Leen.

"This is a tough battle, but I'm confident it can be won." 