

Kennedy Measure Targets Graduate Students

Forced Union Dues 'One of the Chief Perils to Academic Freedom'

Big Labor politicians evidently never take a respite from their quest to find new groups of Americans who can be corralled into unions.

Just last month, union-label U.S. Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Congressman George Miller (D-Calif.) identified graduate students at private universities as yet another class of people who must not be denied the "benefits" of being forced to accept a union as their monopoly-bargaining agent and pay union dues.

Legislation (S.2891 and H.R.5838) introduced by Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Miller on April 17 would set up industrial-style unions with "exclusive" (monopoly) bargaining power over graduate students who work part-time as teaching assistants, research assistants, or proctors.

Graduate students have for decades been exempt from the federal labor-law provisions that authorize union monopoly bargaining because the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) has regarded their jobs as TA's, RA's and proctors as primarily a means of advancing their education, not of earning a living.

(Over the past 34 years, the NLRB has deviated from this view only once, in a

precedent-smashing 2000 decision by the Clinton Board that was itself overturned just four years later.)

But S.2891/H.R.5838 would reclassify graduate students who earn a stipend for work that also trains them for an academic career as "employees" so that they can be forced to accept a particular union as their monopoly-bargaining agent in their dealings with the university.

Effectively, that would pave the way for union officials to force millions of now-independent graduate students to fork over dues or fees to an unwanted union, or be denied the right to work as TA's, RA's, or proctors.

At a University, Forced Dues Violate 'the Right To Work With One's Mind'

As the late world-renowned political philosopher and author Russell Kirk, editor of *The University Bookman*, once said, the imposition of forced union dues at a university is "one of the chief perils to academic freedom" because it violates "the right to work with one's mind."

In a February 1977 article for *National Review* magazine, he elaborated that, while the right of all employees "not to pay tribute to a union is important in itself," the stakes are especially high in the field of education.

Forced unionism is deeply detrimental to the quality of educational institutions, argued Dr. Kirk, because it empowers self-serving union officials to divert resources from serious subjects like literature and physics in order to gratify their own appetites.

Unfortunately, a number of private colleges and universities across the country have since ignored Dr. Kirk's sound counsel and succumbed to Big Labor demands for the forced unionization of professors and other full-time employees.

At public universities today, faculty union monopolies are even mandated by law in several states.

And university employees are increasingly subject to monopoly-bargaining control by the hierarchies of industrial unions, such as the United Autoworkers (UAW), that have no historical connection whatsoever to higher education.

Real Reform Would Abolish Monopoly Bargaining, Forced Union Dues


"Genuine reform would eliminate monopoly bargaining and forced union dues in higher education," said National Right to Work Committee President Mark Mix.

"Real reform would also give higher-education employees who don't wish to join a union the option of negotiating their contracts individually, or through an alternative union.

"But S.2891 and H.R.5838 would instead extend pro-forced unionism policies to cover tens of thousands of grad students who have been exempt from them up to now. This is a big step in the wrong direction."

Mr. Mix vowed that the Committee and its 2.2 million members would do everything necessary to ensure that S.2891 and H.R.5838 do not become law.

Committee legislative staffers are already contacting members of both chambers of Congress to urge them to oppose this legislation on all votes.

Committee members who wish to reinforce the message may do so by using the Capitol Hill switchboard, 202-224-3121 or 202-225-3121, to get in touch with their U.S. representatives and senators. 



Union-label Sen. Ted Kennedy and Congressman George Miller are determined to see that graduate students

receive the "benefit" of being forced to accept an unwanted union as their monopoly-bargaining agent.

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