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Summary

Labor Day commemorates the efforts of workers uniting for their common interests in the face of gross exploitation. But in states like Oregon, where union dues are extracted from workers as a condition of employment and funneled into political causes the worker may not support, unions violate the civil rights of their members.

Word count: 705

“Labor unions are the only private entities in the country empowered by government to force American workers to hand over money as a condition of employment.”

Workers unite! — Against forced dues

By Jami Lund

Historically, Labor Day has commemorated the efforts of workers to unite for their common interests in the face of gross exploitation. However in recent decades, “representing workers” has become a multi-billion dollar industry with all the flaws of a monopoly: lack of accountability, financial excess, and a disregard for individual rights

Labor unions are the only private entities in the country empowered by government to force American workers to hand over money as a condition of employment. This yields billions of dollars in revenue every year to the disposal of union officials, who spend large amounts of it promoting their own political agenda.

Not surprisingly, labor unions have become the most potent political force in America today. Their political activities include get-out-the-vote drives; direct mass mailings; email list-building; contributions to candidates, ballot initiatives, and political and ideological organizations; paid political staff; coordinated campaigning with political parties; National Education Association (NEA) delegations at state and national party conventions; phone banking, television, newspaper and radio campaigns; and much more. Labor unions are organized to elect or defeat candidates at nearly every level of public office.

There would be nothing inherently wrong with this political machinery except for one thing: it is paid for with automatic and sizable deductions from workers’ paychecks. It is a simple matter of free speech that all politics should be paid for with voluntary contributions. Thomas Jefferson hit the mark several centuries ago when he said, “To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves, is sinful and tyrannical.”

There is a reason many union officials don’t like having to ask for their political contributions. In Washington, 91 percent of the NEA’s members refuse to voluntarily contribute even one dollar per month to the union’s political action committee now that the state’s paycheck protection law gives them a choice.

Unfettered ability to take money from workers has brought a corresponding lack

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of accountability to labor unions. The political ambitions of union officials are often at odds with the beliefs and interests of their membership.

Examples of union officials contributing money to political causes members do not support have become all too common. In Washington state, for instance, labor unions spent more than \$400,000 in the 1999 election cycle trying to defeat a popular tax relief measure, despite their own internal polls showing that sixty percent of their membership supported it.

In 2000, delegates at the NEA's annual convention realized many of the union's 2.6 million members supported George W. Bush in the presidential race. So the union developed an aggressive campaign to "move" 800,000 members to Al Gore's camp, and spent millions of dollars taken from their members to carry it out.

All told, labor unions spent \$50.8 million in admitted direct contributions to national campaigns in the 2000 elections. That amount does not include unreported "indirect" contributions. The AFL-CIO alone claims to have activated 1,000 grassroots coordinators and made five million phone calls, none of which is reported as a direct contribution.

Voluntary unions have an important role in speaking on behalf of workers. But in states like Washington and Oregon, with laws allowing unions to take wages from workers as a condition of employment, officials have spent this easy money in violation of workers' free speech rights.

In the case of the National Education Association, these violations prompted the Evergreen Freedom Foundation to fight numerous court battles on behalf of teachers against their union. Our investigations have led to two lawsuits filed by our attorney general against the NEA's Washington state affiliate, a Superior Court ruling of intentional and willful violations of teachers' rights, and more than one million dollars in penalties against the union, including repayment to teachers of more than half a million dollars illegally taken from their paychecks.

Frankly, what union officials do to their members may be the last institutionalized civil rights violations remaining in our nation. We cannot assume that those profiting from this activity will ever dismantle the illicit system. To the contrary, they often use pressure and intimidation to maintain it. That is why it's up to citizens to speak out against this exploitation

After all, isn't that what Labor Day—and liberty—are all about?

Jami Lund is a project manager for the Evergreen Freedom Foundation, a Washington state-based policy research organization, and an associate of Cascade Policy Institute, a Portland, Oregon think tank.

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Please contact:

Angela Eckhardt
Director of Publications
Cascade Policy Institute
813 SW Alder Street, Suite 450
Portland, Oregon 97205

Phone: (503) 242-0900
Fax: (503) 242-3822

www.cascadepolicy.org
angela@cascadepolicy.org