

Unions for public employees

This article is from the "Among Friends" section of the Church of God Big Sandy's Web site, churchofgodbigandy.com. It was posted for the weekend of Feb. 26-27, 2011.

By Dave Havir

BIG SANDY, Texas—When John the Baptist was baptizing individuals, some tax collectors asked him: "Master, what shall we do?" (Luke 3:12).

He replied: "Exact no more than that which is appointed you" (verse 13).

The purpose of this article is to give some information about the role of unions for public employees within the United States.

For the record, I know that there are dedicated and hard-working public employees and that some realistic public employees are far more frustrated with the corrupt system than the general public is.

Like them, I see challenges in the system that handicap some of the individual public employees. Yet, also like them, I see a system that is fleecing the country for political gain.

Today, I present the following five articles to those of you who have the time and the interest.



An editorial by Bill Markin titled "Doin' the Madison Mis-Step" was posted at americanthinker.com on Feb. 22, 2011. Following is the article.

In the peculiar Kabuki dance that comprises public political posturing these days, the Democrat/public employee union/left-wing activist alliance may have made a major miscalculation that will haunt them in the upcoming elections.

Maybe they were momentarily overwhelmed with nostalgia for the sixties. Maybe they all fell asleep listening to an Alinsky audiobook, and were driven by subliminal suggestions. Or perhaps they were just jealous of the success of the Tea Party rallies (a condition psychologists refer to as "T.P. Envy").

Regardless of the reason, I think there's a strong probability that the mad-

ness that has been on display in Madison, Wisconsin, will have the exact opposite of the effect they'd hoped for.

Clearly, their purpose in undertaking this circus was . . . well . . . actually, I'm not sure exactly what they thought they were going to accomplish.

They could have thought that they were going to intimidate the legislature, especially by appearing outside their homes and frightening their families. While such an experience must surely be unpleasant, anyone who has survived in the rough-and-tumble world of politics—even at the level of a state legislature—doesn't seem the kind who would buckle under to the pressure from a mob of angry teachers, most of whom probably can't control their classrooms, let alone the state legislature.

Their more likely intention, I would think, would be to influence and mobilize public opinion, and if that is the case, this is where they may have totally miscalculated.

I think most people have at least a somewhat sympathetic view toward teachers in general. As a famous person once said, they're our friends and neighbors. In my mind, the word "teacher" still brings back fond memories of my first-grade teacher, Miss Clark, a kindly little old lady who wore hideous housedresses and big black shoes that tied and who seemed totally devoted to her work.

But as I watched the coverage from Madison, it wasn't Miss Clark I was seeing. It didn't resemble my friends or neighbors. I certainly didn't see the kind of people I want to entrust with the future of our nation—even if you don't count the ones carrying the "Workers of the World Unite" signs.

What I saw was a self-centered mob, flaunting their total disregard for our current—and common—situation. All across America, we are facing a potential financial crisis unlike anything our nation has ever seen before. For decades, we've been living beyond our means, both individually and collectively.

When you live on borrowed money, you're living on borrowed time. And ours is running out. Rapidly.

From my years in business, I know very well the pressures of making a payroll and keeping lights on and the doors open in times of economic pressure, and the difficult decisions that must be made, because there is only a finite amount of money to work with.

I made the hard decisions because it was my money—and my future and my family's future—that was at stake.

In some fortunate states, a handful of very brave elected officials are willing to suffer the slings and arrows of outrage that go hand in hand with the hard decisions necessary to restore fiscal responsibility to the public sector. At a time when most of us have already had to cope with the realities of economic distress, the sight of hundreds and thousands of teachers acting like . . . well . . . acting like a bunch of spoiled children . . . doesn't seem calculated to

evoke a great deal of sympathy.

This is especially true when you think about what they've done to deserve this privileged status. Is it because of their outstanding work in turning out students prepared to make their contribution to America's continued growth and prosperity?

Hardly.

Our educational system has become a money pit where funding levels bear no relationship to results. No, the simple truth is that they've earned this exalted status not as a reward for excellence but through extortion, by coercive collective bargaining, a monopoly status that fosters inefficiency, waste and mediocrity, and making generous contributions of time and money to a political party that has become little more than an operating arm of the teacher and other public employee unions.

Don't get me wrong. There are many very dedicated and hard-working teachers out there, many of whom are far more frustrated with the system than the general public is. But I doubt they're the ones parading across our TV screens. Or, if they are, at least not willingly.

Maybe it's just a reflection of the fact that when you only have one play in your playbook, that's the one you call. This time, however, they're not demonstrating against greedy capitalists, faceless corporations or evil landlords. They're demonstrating against all of the rest of us, including the ones that work twelve months a year for smaller salaries and fewer benefits, and have stood by as our job security, pensions and savings, and even a lot of our hopes and dreams, have been eroded by runaway government spending and debt at every level. If that isn't bad enough, they're using our children and grandchildren as bargaining chips in their cynical gambit.

And now, they're taking this pathetic show on the road to other states.

This time their strategy will backfire, and the vast majority of people will see through their cliché signs and hollow slogans. Because this time, it's their money and their futures and their families' futures that are at stake.

This time . . . I hope . . . it's the teachers' unions that get taught a lesson.



Looking back to 2006, here is an article by John Berthoud titled "NEA: 30 Years of Lobbying Democrats" that was posted at humanevents.com on Jan. 23, 2006. Following are excerpts of the article.

This year [2006] marks the 30th anniversary of the decision by the National Education Association (NEA) to become a major player in politics. While 1976 was the first year that the nation's largest teachers' union endorsed a presidential candidate (Jimmy Carter, who was promising to deliver creation of the union's cherished federal Department of Education), it wasn't long before the

NEA's political activity became a major part of its *raison d'être*.

Over these past three decades, the NEA has carpet-bombed the political landscape with money. In just the one-year period from September 2004 through August 2005, the NEA spent \$25 million on political activities and lobbying, and another \$65.5 million on contributions, gifts and grants.

From 1990 through 2002, the NEA was the nation's second biggest political giver. (Unions comprised six of the 10 top political contributors.)

The NEA's political support goes almost exclusively to the Democratic Party. Between 1990 and 2002, 95 percent of NEA candidate and party donations went to Democrats. After the 1976 Carter endorsement, they've been strong backers of every subsequent Democratic presidential nominee. As University of Virginia political scientist Larry Sabato once observed, "It's fair to say that the Democrats would be nowhere without them."

What have the NEA's tens of millions of dollars bought? The first prize was the 1980 establishment of the Department of Education itself. In subsequent years, there have been repeated hikes in education spending at the federal, state and local levels.

The congressional debate over creating the Department of Education—which took place relatively soon after the NEA started its move to become a major political force—showed that there once was great diversity of opinion among congressional Democrats regarding education policy. In 1979, many Democrats openly voiced opposition to this top union priority. But imagine a Democrat in Congress today saying what former Democratic Rep. Pat Schroeder of Colorado said then: "No matter what anyone says, the Department of Education will . . . meddle in everything. I do not want that." Schroeder, of course, was a very liberal Democrat.

Or imagine a Democrat saying today what Democratic Rep. Joe Earley of Massachusetts said then: "A national department may actually impede the innovation of local programs as it attempts to establish uniformity throughout the nation."

More Spending

After several decades of massive NEA political spending, this diversity has disappeared from the Democratic Party. Today, any elected Democrat who wishes to move up in the party's ranks realizes he must toe the NEA line on education policy. That means supporting ever-escalating spending, opposing school choice, advocating smaller class size (i.e., hiring more teachers) and blocking all efforts at accountability, such as merit pay. Recognizing the power of the NEA, many Republicans shy away from speaking the truth on these issues as well.

Beyond aiding politicians directly, the NEA sends cash to groups that hold meetings and dinners for elected officials. For example, in a 12-month period beginning in September 2004, the NEA sent \$5,000 to the National Conference of Black Mayors and \$8,200 to the National Conference of State

Legislatures' Foundation for State Legislatures.

The NEA also provides funding to policy and advocacy groups, netting handsome returns. In the September 2004 to August 2005 period, the union shipped \$45,000 to League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). LULAC in turn urged that yet more money be pumped into public schools. The NEA also sent \$45,000 to the Economic Policy Institute, which has produced studies and statements arguing for—you guessed it—lots more spending on public schools.



Looking back to 2010, here are excerpts from an article titled "NEA disclosure" that was posted at independentmindedteacher.org on Oct. 12, 2010. Following is the article.

New federal rules have required large labor unions to report in greater detail how they spend their money. The new requirements affect the National Education Association (NEA), the 2.7 million-member teachers' union. Of the \$341 million the organization received from September 2004 to August 2005, \$295 million came from member dues. The extensive report filed with the U.S. Department of Labor reveals much about how NEA spent the money of dues-paying members.

Political Activities and Liberal Interest Groups

In its disclosure to the U.S. Department of Labor, NEA reported spending \$25 million on "political activities and lobbying," \$65.5 million on "contributions, gifts, and grants," and \$56.8 million on "union administration." NEA's expenses include millions of dollars given directly to political campaigns and parties, liberal interest groups and other organizations that have nothing to do with education, and political consultants. The following is a partial list of these expenditures (the Education Intelligence Agency's report from December 19, 2005 provided direction for most of the source material):

- Political Campaign and Party Contributions \$500,000 to Protect our Public Schools, to campaign against public charter schools in Washington State
- \$400,000 to the Fund to Protect Social Security, to fight pension reform for private-sector workers
- \$300,000 to Citizens United to Protect Our Public Safety, to oppose property tax limits in Maine
- \$250,000 to Alliance for Nevada's Working Families, "to support ballot measure to increase minimum wage"
- \$249,000 to the Floridians for All Committee, "to help redirect Florida politics in a more progressive, Democratic direction"

- \$200,000 to Trust Lands for Education Committee, to support an Arizona education funding initiative
- \$100,000 to Oklahoma Kids Count Coalition to support an initiative to fund schools through a state lottery system
- \$25,750 to the Democratic Leadership Council
- \$25,000 to the North Carolina Democratic Party Building Fund
- \$20,000 to the Wisconsin Citizen Action Fund, a liberal grassroots organizing group
- \$14,000 to the Missouri Progressive Vote Coalition
- \$10,000 to Rock the Vote Education Fund
- \$233,477 to the Colorado Education Association (CEA) to fund a political ballot initiative campaign (NEA gave a total of \$9.25 million to affiliates in 42 states for direct political activities)

Liberal Interest Groups and Non-Education Entities

- \$2,500,000 to Communities for Quality Education, dedicated to educating citizens about the dangers of No Child Left Behind
- \$51,200 to People for the American Way, a liberal advocacy group
- \$45,000 to the Economic Policy Institute, a liberal think tank
- \$45,000 to the League of United Latin American Citizens, a group promoting liberal immigration policies
- \$39,940 to the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation
- \$35,000 to the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute
- \$30,000 to the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association
- \$25,000 to the National Coalition on Health Care
- \$15,000 to the Human Rights Campaign, which lobbies for “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equal rights”
- \$13,000 to the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights
- \$7,900 to the National Council of La Raza
- \$6,000 to the Council on Foreign Relations
- \$5,000 to the National Conference of Black Mayors
- \$5,000 to AIDS Walk Washington
- \$5,000 to the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFL-CIO)

- \$5,000 to Amnesty International
- \$5,000 to Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation Media Awards
- \$5,000 to Gay, Lesbian and Straight Educational Network (GLSEN)
- \$5,000 to the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
- \$5,000 to the National Women’s Law Center
- \$5,000 to the Rainbow PUSH Coalition, run by Rev. Jesse Jackson
- Political Consultation, Strategy, and Outreach \$5,070,192 to Democratic political consultants and strategists: Denver-based Media Strategies and Research (\$2,966,123); Malchow, Schlackman, Hoppey, & Cooper (\$542,-398); Winning Directions (\$413,291); Terris & Barnes (\$368,038); Greenberg Quinlan Rosner (\$302,760); the Mellman Group (\$106,400); Blaemire Communications (\$99,034); Harstad Strategic Research (\$97,000); Ballot Initiative Strategy Center (\$75,000); Jennings Policy Strategies (\$60,000); and Brazile & Associates (\$40,148)
- \$200,000 to Valis Associates for the purpose of reaching out to the Republican Party
- \$150,437 to Public Affairs Support Services, for political fundraising consultation
- \$70,010 to Mission Strategies, Inc., for public relations imaging
- \$55,000 to the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation for a voter registration drive
- \$31,291 to Source Group LLC and B-Line Express for “opposition and anti-privatization” work

High-Paid Union Officials

The NEA’s payroll includes more than 600 employees and officers, about half of whom took home more than \$100,000 in 2004-05. NEA President Reg Weaver made \$370,000 in salary and allowances, while Vice-President Dennis Van Roekel earned \$273,000 and Secretary-Treasurer Lily Eskelsen \$272,000. NEA paid current CEA Executive Director David Duvall more than \$160,000 during the year.



An editorial by Steve McCann titled “Government Worker Unions: The Long Good-Bye” was posted at americanthinker.com on Feb. 20, 2011. Following is the article.

The “Madison Uprising” is the beginning of the end of the incestuous relationship between government and the unions. That fact has been recognized

by the public sector unions and the Democratic Party and is why they have pulled out all the stops and reverted to their 1960's playbook in order to maintain the status quo. However, it is a battle that the unions and the Democratic Party will lose regardless of the immediate outcome in Wisconsin.

The Democratic Party has sold its soul to the public sector unions. In the 2010 mid-term election, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees poured over \$87 million dollars into the election. (A new spending record). AFSCME's \$87 million was greater than the campaign spending by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (\$75 million) and American Crossroads (\$65 million). Other public sector unions also ratcheted up their spending such as SEIU (\$44 million) and the National Education Association (\$40 million).

The three major public sector unions spent over \$171 million in the 2010 election plus an estimated \$250 million equivalent value of so-called volunteer activity such as get out the vote efforts, door-to-door campaigning and poll watching.

There is nothing wrong with private people or organizations, including private unions, spending money on political campaigns as institutional sources are disclosed. However, AFSCME, the NEA, the AFT (American Federation of Teachers) or the public union sector of SEIU are government employees. Their salaries are paid by the taxpayers and a portion of their salaries go to union dues which are slush funds for political activity and the promotion of left-wing causes. In 2008 the NEA and the AFT made contributions and grants totaling over \$96 million of union dues; all to liberal organizations irrespective of the desires of the rank and file or the taxpayer.

It is wholly inappropriate for public employees to spend dues money on political contributions. Public officials are chosen through popular elections and the government employee should be indifferent as to the outcome of the election. However, by maintaining such a heavy hand in not only monetary contributions but election activity the politician becomes too dependent upon the union largess and is essentially blackmailed into acquiescing to all the demands of the union, particularly pay and benefits which have sky-rocketed and are now unsustainable.

President Franklin Roosevelt, the Progressive icon, recognized this problem back in 1937. In a letter to Luther Steward, then President of the National Federation of Federal Employees, he wrote that "meticulous attention should be paid to the special relationships and obligations of public servants to the public itself and to the Government." He went on to say that government employees should not have bargaining rights or a closed shop similar to private sector unions.

However, since the public sector unions were granted those rights beginning in the 1960's they have achieved the virtual ownership, together with the private sector unions, of the Democratic Party. In the 2010 election cycle, per the Center for Responsive Politics, AFSCME donated 99.5 percent of contributions to Democrats; the NEA donated 96 percent and the AFT, 99.7 percent.

These dues were funneled to Democratic candidates who promised to raise workers' salaries and hire more public sector workers—even though statistics show that total compensation for federal and state workers is nearly 50 percent higher than for private sector employees.

Government workers have access to elected officials during negotiations to set wages and benefits and can hold the promise of campaign contributions over these politicians' heads during negotiations. There is, in effect, no one representing the taxpayer who is the source of all income to the government.

This means runaway compensation for government workers, higher taxes for the general public and higher deficits. The taxes go from the electorate to government paychecks to union dues—then to more campaign contributions until the state, municipality or the federal government faces bankruptcy.

The clout of this unholy alliance was further on display when the unions were able to siphon off roughly \$160 billion of the 2009 stimulus to save the jobs of state and local workers.

The unseemly goings-on in Wisconsin portray, in microcosm, the disastrous policy of allowing government workers to unionize and bargain for wages and benefits. The unions are fighting to preserve their source of income and clout (i.e., union dues) and the Democrats have shown the world their cowardice and dependence by slinking out if the state in order to maintain their bought status.

By these actions they have drawn back the curtain for all to see the true nature of this incestuous relationship and the impact on the future of the country.

It has taken Wisconsin and the near bankruptcy of the country and of many states and municipalities to finally awaken the American people to this fraud and theft. They must demand that public-sector unions can only be associations that can seek better workplace conditions or to facilitate employer-employee disputes but cannot have bargaining rights or mandatory dues.



An editorial by C. Edmund Wright titled "End Public Sector Unions . . . Period" was posted at americanthinker.com on Feb. 20, 2011. Following is the article.

It's about time. I've been waiting for this debate to mature for 15 years.

The battles in Wisconsin and New Jersey over public sector union benefits are merely financial precursors to a much bigger ideological war that has been on the horizon now for years, if not decades. When you acknowledge the coming battle, you realize that Governors Walker and Christie—courageously as they are behaving—are only nibbling at the edges of the real issue.

And the real issue is whether public sector unions should even be allowed to exist. Frankly, when even a modicum of common sense is infused into the

equation, the answer is a resounding no. And the foundational reason is simple. There is no one at the bargaining table representing the folks who are actually going to pay whatever is negotiated.

Gee, what could possibly go wrong?

Well, let's see what went wrong: California, New Jersey, Illinois, Michigan, Chicago, New York State, New York City, Wisconsin . . . on and on I could go including almost every city and state where government workers are unionized.

Oh, and have you seen pictures of Detroit lately?

The problem is that our country has been lulled to sleep over decades of hearing that government workers are dedicated and low paid public servants who trade good pay for security. And every time a union pay debate came up, it seemed like only cops and fire fighters and teachers were mentioned. No one stopped to think that most government workers are actually bureaucratic charmers like those we see at the DMV and other government offices—and not “heroic teachers” or crime fighters.

But as long as the private sector was humming along, there was no reason for reality to permeate that myth in most people's minds. But the reality is that government workers long ago passed private sector workers in pay and benefits, and now the compensation is more like 150 percent or even double, factoring in all the benefits, including more vacation days than private sector workers enjoy. And, of course, the inestimable value of job security remains intact and strengthened—while all of us in the private sector deal daily with the risk-reward constraints of reality that are only getting riskier.

And along the way—with a public school teacher-educated population that understands virtually nothing about economics—the sheer idiocy of the concept of government unions escaped almost everybody. It's almost as if the union teachers were lying to their students about economics on purpose.

Consider: Unions exist primarily for the function of collective bargaining, where the union bosses will negotiate on behalf of all the workers with the management of a company over pay and benefits and other conditions. This built-in adversarial relationship along with the realities of a limited resource—known as operating revenues—does a pretty good job for the most part of keeping contracts in line.

The union bosses represent the workers. Management represents everybody else, including the stockholders, vendors, customers and potential customers of the company. In other words, management represents everyone whose interests are served by keeping payroll costs down.

In the case of a government workforce, those whose interests are served by keeping costs down would include all who pay taxes and fees to said government. In other words, the universe of folks represented by management is far larger than that represented by the union. This inherent tension is the

invisible hand of reality that keeps collective bargaining in line.

However, public sector “collective bargaining” is a bad joke, given that there are chairs on only one side of the bargaining table. The bigger universe of interested parties has zero representation in the process. There is no natural force working to keep costs in line.

Moreover, quite often the very politicians who are “negotiating” with the public unions are politicians who have been financed by those same unions. At least Bernie Madoff ripped off his clients with some panache. No such style is even required in a public sector union negotiation when the folks in charge are bought and paid for Democrats.

Under any circumstances and in any economy, it is simply a matter of time before these costs reach a tipping point. We are at that time. There is simply no more money to give to these public sector unions—period.

And that is why we are seeing what we are seeing in Madison this week, and it is why we have seen the emergence of Chris Christie as a national phenomenon. And I welcome it. Things are finally so bad—that they are good. And by good, I mean that folks now cannot help but pay attention to the issue of public sector unions.

I submit that the very existence of these unions has only been allowed to happen because it’s the kind of issue an electorate is never forced to confront—until they are forced to confront it. And now they are. There is, as Charles Krauthammer said, a bit of an earthquake in the country. People are sensing that the nation is spinning off a cliff.

And of course it is, and public sector unions are one huge reason why. This conclusion is inescapable. And when you understand that, you understand that public sector unions cannot be allowed to exist. If they are, we will never turn back from the cliff.



[More articles about unions for public employees can be found in the Eye on the World Section of the Web site for this weekend.]