

Larry Sand: If unions do so much for members, why bully?

By [LARRY SAND](#)

2013-02-20 14:39:37



The Michigan Education Association had its apple cart turned upside down when the Wolverine State went "right-to-work" in December. This means that, unlike California and 25 other states, a worker doesn't have to pay union dues as a condition of employment.

My introduction to union coercion came in 2005, when, as a middle school teacher in Los Angeles, I joined the Prop. 75 campaign. That initiative would have prohibited public employee labor organizations from collecting the part of union dues which goes for politics without prior consent of the employee. Sensing a disruption in their forced dues gravy train, the California Teachers Association went into overdrive. It raised union dues on its members for a three-year period and mortgaged their offices in Sacramento, then used the millions they accumulated to scare teachers and the public – ominously warning them of imaginary horrors that would be visited on them if the proposition passed.

Teachers unions are forever telling its members how much the union does for them in the way of wages, job benefits, etc. You would think that an organization that does so much for its members wouldn't have to resort to bullying to keep them in the fold. But the unions know that without forcing the issue, many teachers would just say, "No." For instance, in Wisconsin, after Act 10 came into law allowing teachers to quit their union, about 30 percent have already quit with more to follow this June when their contracts expire.

Also, typically unspoken in the unions' talking points is the fact that while union members in forced union states may make more than their counterparts in RTW states, the costs of goods and services are far lower in these states, the result being a net gain for the employee. The unions also don't tell you that workers are flocking to RTW states, which have a lower unemployment rate than in states that are dominated by unions.

In Michigan, a skittish MEA is doing what it can to intimidate teachers. First, they are scrambling to get new contracts for teachers all over the state before March when the new RTW law takes effect. Also, MEA boss Steve Cook issued a threat that any teacher who decides to bail in March will be sued. According to a Wall Street Journal editorial,

"Members who indicate they wish to resign membership in March, or whenever, will be told they can only do so in August," Mr. Cook writes in the three-page memo obtained by the West Michigan Policy Forum. "We will use any legal means at our disposal to collect the dues owed under signed membership forms from any members who withhold dues prior to terminating their membership in August for the following fiscal year."

Got that, comrade?

If nothing else, recent events have shown without a shred of doubt, the union is about maintaining its power and collecting every last penny they claim is owed to them. All the lofty talk about the children is just so much camouflage for their real agenda – accumulating money and power.

Another expression bandied about by the unions is the term "free rider." They try to gain sympathy by suggesting that those in RTW states who don't voluntarily join are getting something valuable for free. This specious argument really needs to be countered. Many teachers would happily say, "I don't want any part of the union and the perks it may get me. I think I have a valuable service to offer and want to negotiate my own contract." Seems reasonable, right? Well, that decision is not up to the teacher. As Heritage Foundation's James Sherk points out,

Unions object that right-to-work is actually "right-to-freeload." The AFL-CIO argues "unions are forced by law to protect all workers, even those who don't contribute financially toward the expenses incurred by providing those protections." They contend they should not have to represent workers who do not pay their "fair share."

It is a compelling argument, but untrue. The National Labor Relations Act does not mandate unions exclusively represent all employees, but permits them to electively do so. Under the Act, unions can also negotiate "members-only" contracts that only cover dues-paying members. They do not have to represent other employees.

Teacher union watchdog Mike Antonucci adds,

The very first thing any new union wants is exclusivity. No other unions are allowed to negotiate on behalf of people in the bargaining unit. Unit members cannot hire their own agent, nor can they represent themselves.

So those deemed free riders by the unions are really forced riders.

Having seen the union's lies and intimidating ways up close and personal, I am hardly surprised at MEA's hardball tactics. But it seems that the voters in states like Michigan and Wisconsin have awakened, perhaps signaling that worker freedom just may be the wave of the future.

Larry Sand, a retired teacher who taught in Los Angeles and NYC public schools for 28 years, is the president of the California Teachers Empowerment Network.