

Union organizers play dirty

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Americans will be treated to a fresh round of union rhetoric this Labor Day weekend about the constant struggles of workers trying to form a union.

In reality, however, it is union organizers who are struggling unsuccessfully to make the case for unionization.

An array of union special privileges enshrined in state and federal law has encouraged union officials to neglect improving their product, so a new approach is necessary if they want workers to buy what they are selling. Yet union officials appear to be heading in the entirely opposite direction -- seeking even more powers and privileges to force employees into dues-paying union ranks.

Last month, top union bosses argued among themselves at the AFL-CIO's Chicago convention about strategy and tactics as they wrestled for control of more than \$10 billion in compulsory union dues collected from workers every year.

In announcing their unions' departure from the AFL-CIO, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) chief Andrew Stern and Teamsters boss James Hoffa declared that union officials must ramp up militant organizing tactics -- and top-down organizing in particular. Top-down organizing involves all-out blitzes against nonunion companies, including barrages of negative publicity, costly lawsuits and political pressure until management agrees to cooperate with union organizers in coercing workers to join the union and beginning to bargain without even so much as a vote.

As SEIU Local 32BJ President Mike Fishman told the Wall Street Journal last week, "We don't do elections." And, at least from his perspective, for very good reason. When given a choice to vote in secret through a traditional secret ballot election conducted by the National Labor Relations Board, employees are increasingly rejecting unionization. Today, a shocking 75 percent of new union members are organized without an NLRB election.

But the in-your-face alternative of top-down organizing has triggered numerous legal complaints by workers documenting everything from bribes to stalking to threats against those who resist unionization. Under these schemes, union organizers browbeat workers into signing union authorization cards that are then counted as votes in favor of unionization.

While Hoffa and Stern clamor for more militant organizing, AFL-CIO chief John Sweeney has vowed to continue funneling large sums of compulsory dues dollars into partisan politics. A primary goal of this effort is to enact laws at the state and federal level to make it easier to force workers into unions.

One such attempt is the ironically named "Employee Free Choice Act," introduced by Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., and Rep. George Miller, D-Calif., which would bar secret ballot representation elections unless union officials consent to them. The bill would eliminate workers' ability to make their decisions in the privacy of a voting booth, and open the door for union operatives to take whatever steps they deem necessary to get workers to sign authorization cards.

Endorsement of this legislation, according to the AFL-CIO, is the closest thing it has to a litmus test in deciding whom to support for political office.

Meanwhile, Miller and 15 other supporters of the Kennedy-Miller bill hypocritically pressured Mexico's labor commissioner to institute a mandatory secret ballot election process for unionization in Mexico, writing "We feel that the secret ballot is absolutely necessary in order to ensure that workers are not intimidated into voting for a union they might not otherwise choose."

Apparently they believe that America's workers don't deserve the same rights.

Instead of amassing new special privileges and developing new techniques to cudgel more employees into union ranks, union bosses should focus their energies on improving their product in order to attract workers' voluntary support. This is Big Labor's best hope to bolster union membership.

Samuel Gompers, founder of the American Federation of Labor, foreshadowed these developments more than 80 years ago. Too weak to speak from the podium, Gompers asked that these words of warning be read on his behalf at his final AFL convention in 1924: "I want to urge devotion to the fundamentals of human liberty -- the principles of voluntarism. No lasting gain has ever come from compulsion. If we seek to force, we but tear apart that which, united, is invincible."

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