

Taking Employee Wages To Hijack Elections

Update 2000

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June 2001

Using involuntary contributions, “Big Labor” has transformed itself from a coalition of representative organizations into the most enormous and powerful force in the state!

Introduction

Simply put, people don't notice money taken from their paychecks before they receive it as much as they notice money they receive and then voluntarily choose to spend or give away. That's why labor union officials love automatic payroll deduction. Unions (like the IRS, but unlike any other organization) are permitted to take a portion of workers' salaries before those workers ever see it. On the surface, this seems like a convenient method of funding collective bargaining and contract administration activities. But its deceptive and subtle nature gives labor unions virtually unscrutinized access to workers' hard-earned wages.

Many union officials use this access to raid workers' paychecks and amass huge political war chests. This enables them to liberally fund their own political goals, ignoring the right of members to withhold money from political causes they don't support. It is an egregious violation of the fundamental right to free speech, which includes freedom from compelled speech.

With pockets bulging from their exploitation of American workers, labor unions are able to operate as a *de facto* political party to sway public opinion and compromise elections. This injustice must be corrected. Involuntary political contributions must be prohibited.

“Why should unions bother with PACs if they can just open their treasuries to the campaigns? Gifts in the coming election will deserve some scrutiny.”

The Spokesman-Review, March 11, 1998
Our View: “Settlement a farce”
by John Webster

Union Impact In Election 2000

"[U]nions flexed serious muscle at the climax of the 2000 campaign, demonstrating anew their indispensable role within the Democratic Party. Without labor's high turnout, Al Gore probably would have lost Pennsylvania and Michigan. Without labor, the Democrats would have never achieved virtual parity in the Senate."¹

The 1999–2000 election cycle demonstrates the massive power exerted by labor unions. Organized labor greatly influenced the outcome of last November's election at the federal, state and local levels.

Witness first the breathtakingly close presidential contest. Labor unions made this presidential race a top priority, and undertook extraordinary electioneering efforts. One of the many examples of union efforts was the National Education Association's (NEA) contribution of more than \$1 million in direct, reported expenditures supporting Al Gore *in the first 18 days of October alone.*²

Other nationwide races were also affected by the clout of Big Labor. Of eleven gubernatorial candidates supported by the NEA, nine won. The NEA also designated 27 Congressional races where "a Democratic candidate...had a shot at beating a Republican." The union assigned a full-time field representative to work on each of the targeted races,³ and won 16 of the 27 for a net gain of 8 Democratic seats.

In Washington State, Senator Slade Gorton's seat, and that formerly held by Congressman Jack Metcalf, were both lost due to Labor's use of forced union dues. The Republicans also lost their bid for control of the state Senate and House, thanks in large part to \$1.6 million contributed to specific candidates by labor unions. In addition, unions spent more than \$2.4 million on initiative campaigns.

Top Ten Union Contribution Recipients—Washington State, 2000

Candidate	Office	Party	Amount
Gary F. Locke	Governor	Democrat	\$62,390
Mike J. Cooper	State Representative	Democrat	\$40,195
Johnny R. Lovick	State Representative	Democrat	\$34,700
Geoffrey H. Simpson	State Representative	Democrat	\$34,525
Elizabeth A. Loomis	State Representative	Democrat	\$32,550
Hans M. Dunshee	State Representative	Democrat	\$32,090
Tami Green	State Representative	Democrat	\$31,485
Richard G. Hildreth	State Representative	Democrat	\$30,750
James M. Kastama	State Representative	Democrat	\$30,600
Christopher A. Hurst	State Representative	Democrat	\$27,990

These dollar amounts consist only of available *reported* figures. According to labor unions, “the money we spend is the smallest thing we bring to the table.” That may be true because “these unions are also spending millions on ‘some 1,000 grassroots coordinators, up from 230 in 1996. [. . .] 5 million phone calls, 50% more than in 1996.’”⁴

Unions: A Political Party Funded With Involuntary Contributions

In a wholesale departure from original, professional objectives, labor unions in recent decades have minimized traditional collective bargaining and grievance resolution in exchange for the power and publicity of political force. This force involves money, staffing resources, and political ambition that matches or even exceeds the nation’s two major parties.

Labor unions taken as a collective whole are remarkably similar to bona fide political parties. The notable distinctions, however, are troubling. For example, a traditional party is subject to strict financial scrutiny through public disclosure requirements, while the expenditures and contributions of labor unions are largely free from public scrutiny. Also, a traditional party is limited to spending what it receives from voluntary donors; labor unions have free access to the paychecks of unconsenting workers. In fact, when union officials feel particularly threatened by a candidate or initiative, they often levy a special “assessment” on their members, effectively forcing rank and file laborers to contribute through mandatory political “fund-raising” operations.

“The WEA spends hundreds of thousands of school workers’ dollars politicking—and not just on issues such as teacher pay or classroom sizes. From funding candidates, the large majority of whom are Democrats, to fighting various state initiatives and promoting other ones, the union is a major player in the state’s political money game.”

Columbian, September 29, 2000

There are indications, though, that this grand-scale raiding of member dues has had a detrimental effect on union membership:

The percentage of American workers belonging to unions fell last year to 13.5 percent, its lowest point in six decades. In releasing its survey of union membership last week, the Bureau of Labor Statistics also found that the number of union members declined by 200,000 last year to 16.3 million, a discouraging development for the labor movement at a time it is straining to reverse the decline. [. . .]

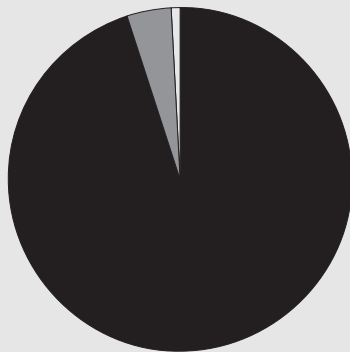
*Several labor leaders asserted that unions organized fewer members last year because they threw so much money, energy and manpower into electoral politics.*⁵ (emphasis added)

Organizations should never be prohibited from advocating and advancing the beliefs and interests of their members in the realm of politics and legislation, or in the court of public opinion. However, they must be limited to the resources they receive from voluntary donors who share similar ideologies. Most are—including political parties, corporations and political action committees. In contrast, labor officials have license to compel involuntary contributions, drawing from what they seem to think is a bottomless well of working-class paychecks to fund their own political ambitions. This practice ignores the diversity of ideas among union members and supplants it with a totalitarian approach to influencing elections.

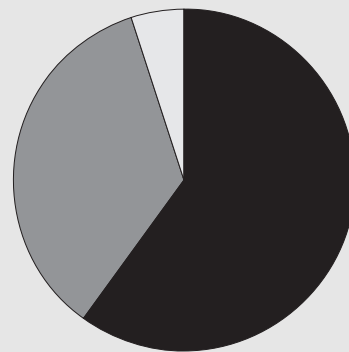
Proving this disturbing fact are reports showing that 40 percent of union workers nationwide voted against presidential candidate Al Gore. Yet union leadership universally endorsed Al Gore. Consequently, political contributions taken from all members' dues were used to support a candidate more than 40 percent of them opposed.⁶ Permitting union officials to commandeer wages for forced contributions is a blatant injustice. It is contrary to the principles of liberty and individuality that America stands for. Union officials don't seem to care.

Washington State Unions Ignore Diversity of Members' Beliefs

DEMOCRAT CANDIDATES	\$1,259,697.00
Republican Candidates	\$53,424.00
Independent Candidates	\$11,450.00



Union Leaders
SPENDING
on Candidates



Union Household
VOTING
in 2000 Election

- Supported Democrat Candidate
- Supported Republican Candidate
- Supported Independent Candidate

What union officials do care about is advancing their own political agenda no matter what the cost. Their militancy in achieving this goal has earned them more influence than our two major political parties.

Typical Functions of a Major Party Also Performed on Large Scale by the Unrecognized “Big Labor Party”

Dem.	GOP	Big Labor	Party Activity
Yes	Yes	YES!	Conduct general opinion polls and member surveys
Yes	Yes	YES!	Collect and maintain lists of sympathetic registered voters
Yes	Yes	YES!	Locate and groom political candidates from within the organization
Yes	Yes	YES!	Hire professional public relations consultants and campaign staff
Yes	Yes	YES!	Endorse or oppose candidates and initiatives
Yes	Yes	YES!	Engage in signature gathering efforts
Yes	Yes	YES!	Finance salaries for professional fund-raising staff in support of particular candidates
Yes	Yes	YES!	Set-up and operate phone banks
Yes	Yes	YES!	Conduct massive direct mail and/or email campaigns
Yes	Yes	YES!	Produce sophisticated media advertising (print, broadcast, and internet campaigns)
Yes	Yes	YES!	Execute voter registration and “get-out-the-vote” drives
Yes	Yes	YES!	Recruit and mobilize volunteers
NO	NO	YES!	<i>Principal fund raising practice consists of DIRECT PAYROLL DEDUCTION from worker’s wages without employees permission</i>
Yes	Yes	NO!	<i>Close public scrutiny of political activities via political contributions reporting requirements</i>

Why Unions Hate Asking Consent for Political Contributions

Labor officials are often unable to get voluntary funds for their election affecting efforts. That’s why they use involuntary contributions (i.e., funds obtained through automatic payroll deductions).

Union payroll withholding is a national practice and some states have taken steps to protect the rights of workers by enacting “paycheck protection” statutes. These laws prohibit using funds obtained through payroll withholding for political activities without prior authorization, and often result in a dramatic decline in union political funds.

In Washington—the first state in the nation to enact paycheck protection—membership in the Washington Education Association’s political action committee (WEA-PAC) dropped dramatically from 82 percent enrollment before the law took effect to 11 percent after. Even now, after several years of aggressive recruiting by union officials, voluntary PAC enrollment remains at a paltry 13 percent. Prior to paycheck protection, enrollment and re-enrollment in the PAC was automatic for all members of the union. A member who objected was required to go through a complicated annual “opt out” process.

It is easy to see why union officials have such a militant desire to keep workers from exercising their rights. Since worker choice clearly threatens the political ambitions of WEA, officials have ignored members’ wishes and found ways to manipulate spending.

First, although WEA-PAC was prohibited from taking involuntary contributions, WEA officials decided to make up lost revenue by making contributions to WEA-PAC directly from the WEA general fund. The Evergreen Freedom Foundation challenged this circumvention of the law by filing suit against the union in 1997. Currently a date for oral argument is being scheduled for this lawsuit.

WEA officials use the following tactics to get around the law:

- Make political contributions directly from the general fund or create segregated funds to obscure political spending.
- Send dues to an out-of-state parent organization (National Education Association) for in-state election affecting purposes.
- Campaign via internal political communications.
- Organize massive campaign infrastructures and grass-roots campaigns.

The Worst Union Offenders

Manipulation by the union monopoly to justify political spending and circumvent attempts to safeguard worker’s rights is a national problem. Union officials at every level express indifference, or even hostility, toward the political ideas of union members. Organized labor was able to spend astronomical amounts to influence the 2000 elections. Only reported contributions can be accurately calculated, but untold hundreds of thousands of dollars in unreported expenditures were also contributed. Some estimates of Big Labor’s total nationwide political contributions (reported and unreported) range as high as \$800 million!⁷

The chart reporting direct union giving in Washington state demonstrates the incredible political muscle labor leaders flexed to influence the 2000 elections. The numbers are based

on Washington's Public Disclosure Commission reports. The chart lists only *reported* contributions of the top union contributors in the 2000 election cycle—those with the poorest record of honoring members' rights.

Union (Includes national, state & local of named union)	Direct Giving	Indirect Giving	Campaign to Members	Staff Efforts
National Education Association	\$1,733,619	?	?	?
Amalgamated Transit Union	\$334,789	?	?	?
International Association of Fire Fighters	\$212,928	?	?	?
Washington Federation of State Employees - AFSCME	\$205,835	?	?	?
Washington State Labor Council AFL-CIO	\$205,473	?	?	?
Laborers' International Union of North America	\$179,500	?	?	?
Washington State Public School Employees	\$161,613	?	?	?
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers	\$119,250	?	?	?
United Food and Commercial Workers	\$92,600	?	?	?
International Brotherhood of Teamsters	\$83,350	?	?	?
United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America	\$81,065	?	?	?
International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers	\$64,475	?	?	?
Washington State Council of County and City Employees – AFSCME	\$58,575	?	?	?
Police (Various Unions, Guilds, and Associations)	\$53,275	?	?	?
International Union of Operating Engineers	\$50,225	?	?	?
United Transportation Union	\$49,050	?	?	?
Washington Public Employees Association	\$45,975	?	?	?
International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers	\$39,895	?	?	?
Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO	\$37,200	?	?	?
Service Employees International Union	\$36,709	?	?	?
International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union	\$36,000	?	?	?
Intl Assoc of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers	\$35,075	?	?	?
Retired Public Employees Council - AFSCME	\$20,975	?	?	?
American Federation of Teachers	\$20,360	?	?	?
Communication Workers of America	\$14,550	?	?	?
Marine Engineers Beneficial Association	\$14,100	?	?	?
Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry	\$14,100	?	?	?
Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical and Energy Workers Intl Union	\$12,250	?	?	?
No affiliation, unidentified or misc. unions totaling less than \$1,000 in 99-00	\$10,550	?	?	?
Sheet Metal Workers' International Association	\$9,800	?	?	?
Painters and Allied Trades	\$7,350	?	?	?
Association of Western Pulp and Paper Workers	\$5,200	?	?	?
Steelworkers of America	\$4,900	?	?	?
Maritime Trades Dept AFL-CIO	\$4,300	?	?	?
Elevator Constructors	\$3,050	?	?	?
Heat and Frost Insulators and Asbestos Workers	\$2,600	?	?	?
Office and Professional Employees	\$2,350	?	?	?
Operative Platerers' and Cement Masons' Int Assoc of the US & Canada	\$1,200	?	?	?
Grand Total	\$4,065,210	?	?	?

Individually, unions may be an unknown and unnoticed political factor, but organized labor as a whole was one of the largest financiers of the 2000 Washington State elections. Most people are aware that unions are involved to some degree in politics, but few are aware of the magnitude of labor's impact, or the distance labor leaders are willing to go to maintain their grip on political power.

Labor officials have insatiable political ambition and are driven to advance their agenda regardless of cost. The top two unions on the list illustrate this point perfectly. In 2000, both the National Education Association (NEA) and the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) placed a "special assessment" (a/k/a dues increase) on their members via their local affiliates. Stripped of all rhetoric and legalese, these assessments were no more than forced political fund-raising for the ATU and NEA.

NEA – National Education Association

NEA officials decided in July 2000 to levy a "special assessment" on all members to collect an additional \$12.5 million per year for five years. The special assessment is directly funneled into a contingency fund created to finance "*media campaigns*," campaigns for and against *ballot initiatives*, and responses to "*legislative crises*."⁸ In the course of five years, this assessment will net union officials \$62.5 million dollars from the paychecks of NEA's 2.6 million members!

According to the official bylaw adopted to implement this increase:

"Sixty percent (60%) of the money allocated to the Ballot Measure/Legislative Crises and Media Campaign Fund during each membership year shall be available to assist state affiliates in dealing with ballot measures and legislative crises, and forty percent (40%) shall be available for national and state media campaigns to advance the cause of public education and publicize the role of the association and its affiliates in improving the quality of public education."

"State Attorney General Christine Gregoire should throw the book at the WEA, which once again is playing fast and loose with money it has no authority to spend for political purposes."

Seattle Post-Intelligencer, October 11, 2000

Despite the NEA's attempt to innocently characterize the "contingency" fund, the \$65 million is to be used for election affecting activities.⁹ As the table shows, these funds have already been extremely useful to the NEA, and officials were quite effective in applying the special assessment windfall to elections in the 2000 campaign. Ultimately, *teachers' wages were involuntarily taken and blatantly used to hijack elections!*

NEA Batting 1000!!! Using Involuntary Contributions to Influence Ballot Measures

State	Ballot Measure	NEA Support/Oppose	Amount Spent	RESULT
California	Proposition 38	Oppose	\$4,500,000	NEA Won
Michigan	Proposition 1	Oppose	\$1,700,000	NEA Won
Arizona	Proposition 301	Support	\$500,000	NEA Won
Washington	Initiative 732	Support	\$500,000	NEA Won
Massachusetts	Question 4	Oppose	\$175,000*	NEA Won
Massachusetts	Question 6	Support	\$175,000*	NEA Won
Arkansas	Question 4	Oppose	\$25,000	NEA Won
South Dakota	Amendment E	Support	\$5,000	NEA Won

Remember that in Washington state, the paycheck protection statute specifically prohibits using funds obtained by wage deductions for political purposes. Yet the NEA decided to circumvent the clear intent of the law and levy the special assessment on Washington state teachers along with teachers across the country. NEA leaders explain this violation with the “serial number” theory, asserting that Washington state dollars will not be used for political purposes. However, standard accounting procedures say all dollars contributed to a fund become part of the whole and cannot be separated out. Even if this were a viable accounting practice, it remains that Washington teachers are having their dues diverted from their paychecks and used for political purposes.

ATU – Amalgamated Transit Union

Washington’s Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) faced enormous pressure this election cycle when a transportation tax reallocation initiative (I-745) qualified for the ballot. I-745 required lawmakers to allocate transportation-generated revenue based on a model that matched actual usage. It required 90 percent of all state transportation funding to be spent on construction and maintenance of roads, leaving 10 percent of the state’s transportation budget available for funding alternative transportation. This constituted a 65 percent shift from previous priorities.

Because ATU members work in the alternative transportation industry, I-745 meant a significant loss in funding and ATU officials were quick to oppose it. They even organized a political committee for the sole purpose of defeating I-745. Washington’s local ATU affiliates were then forced to fund the political committee via a \$50.00 per member “special assessment,” raising more than \$300,000.

The largest ATU local affiliate in Washington decided to hold a vote on whether or not to levy the special assessment. Of its 3,400 members, only 1,069 (less than half) voted to

approve the assessment. An additional 566 voted NO to levying the assessment and 1,200 members did not vote at all. Thus, 62 percent of ATU members in that particular local either did not vote or expressly opposed the assessment. ATU leaders weren't concerned

“WEA executives have played fast and loose with state campaign laws for many years. In doing so, they've embarrassed their members and thumbed their nose at the public.

It's past time for WEA members—the men and women teaching in our public schools—to demand that their union leaders abide by the law and the will of the state's voters. The continuous illegal activities by WEA tarnish the profession the union is supposed to serve.”

South County Journal, September 28, 2000

about the desires of union members or the law prohibiting unauthorized deduction of wages for politics. Instead the ATU leadership simply decided that a partial “yes” vote justified taking money from every member's paycheck.

Further, members who opposed the increase contacted union officials and notified them that an assessment for politics without written permission was illegal under state law. Union leaders told these concerned members that the prohibition of unauthorized deductions applied only to situations where the funds are being forwarded to a political action committee—an erroneous statement. The law is clear: payroll deductions that will be used to make political contributions may not be made without written authorization from every employee.

Faced with the very real threat of a substantial loss of funding, ATU leaders resorted to foul play. Rather than comply with statutory provisions requiring authorization from members, ATU leadership ran roughshod over workers' rights to obtain funding for what they believed was necessary.

What Can Be Done?

How can you add your voice to the cry for justice? There are several ways:

1. Hold candidates accountable for taking advantage of exploited workers.

Ask candidates where they got campaign funds. Show public disapproval for those who climbed on the backs of working men and women to get elected to office. Support candidates who stand for workers, not union officials.

2. If you are a member, work within your union.

You can change your union from the inside. Sometimes attentive and active workers can restrain officials from political activity by shining a light into previously dark cor-

ners of activity. Or, you can also take steps to withdraw from membership, even in a mandatory union shop. This allows you to recapture the portion of your dues used for political activity.

3. Tell others about the ongoing injustice.

Send letters to the editor of your local paper and talk to those you know who should be concerned about overreaching union activity.

4. Let your lawmakers know you care about the issue.

Lawmakers have power to require scrutiny of union activity and to prevent involuntary political contributions, but many of them will not because they benefit from coerced union contributions. Citizens need to put the pressure on lawmakers to let them know that union manipulation of working men and women is an injustice that must be stopped.

Notes

1. Polman, Dick. "Labor Leaders Feeling Out Unions Future in New Political Era" *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 16, 2001.
2. Archer, Jeff. "NEA, AFT Leave mark on Congress, Ballot Measures" *Education Week*, November 15, 2000.
3. Archer, Jeff. "NEA, AFT Dig Down to Details In Effort to Mobilize Members" *Education Week*, November 1, 2000
4. Rosenthal, Steve. AFL-CIO Political Director, quoted in *USA Today*, October 30, 2000.
5. Greenhouse, Steven. "Unions Hit Lowest Point in 6 Decades." *New York Times*, January 21, 2001.
6. Thomma, Steven. "As Bush Era Unfolds, Labor Fighting to Hold its Ground." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 14, 2001. Also, statistics compiled from CNN Exit Poll Data provided by Voter News Service.
7. National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation
8. See NEA Bylaw 2—7.n.
9. Archer, Jeff. "NEA Dips into new Funds to Aid Campaigns" *Education Week*, September 27, 2000.