



Written by [Wallis W. Wood](#) on December 22, 2012

“Right to Work” Wins in Michigan

Union bosses in Michigan thought they had pulled off a real coup when they managed to get a measure on the November ballot that would have enshrined their power in the State constitution. Imagine their shock when voters overwhelmingly rejected the amendment.

That was just the beginning of the bad news for the maestros of compulsory unionism. Emboldened by the measure’s defeat, Republicans in the state legislature promptly introduced legislation that would make Michigan the 24th “right-to-work” state in the nation.



Union activists called on their supporters to march on the state capital to protest the proposal. Thousands of supporters showed up in Lansing in response. All of them were pretty noisy; a few were actually amusing, including the ones who put up four giant inflatable rats on the Capitol lawn bearing the names of Governor Rick Snyder and three Republican legislators.

But all was definitely not fun and games. A hospitality tent put up by Americans for Prosperity, one of the groups supporting the measure, was attacked by union partisans and torn down. At least one conservative supporter was physically attacked. A street vendor was called an “Uncle Tom” and worse and had his cart trashed for daring to sell hot dogs to the measure’s supporters.

But all the protests and threats — including one Democratic legislator who said that if the measure passed “there will be blood” — couldn’t prevent a vote from being taken. The legislation passed easily and a few hours later was signed into law by Snyder. The Governor previously had declined to support right-to-work legislation but said he changed his mind when he saw how a similar measure encouraged new jobs in other states.

The week before the vote in Michigan, President Barack Obama flew to the state and tried to rally support for the unions. “What we shouldn’t be doing,” the president proclaimed, “is trying to take away your rights to bargain for better wages and working conditions.”

Of course, Obama knows that right-to-work legislation does no such thing. It doesn’t prevent anyone from joining a union, if someone wishes to do so. It doesn’t preclude unions from negotiating pay and working conditions with management, either.

What such legislation does do, however, is give an individual the choice to join or not join, to pay or not pay. And that freedom to choose is what the union bosses can’t stand. They know that if workers aren’t forced to join a union and pay dues, huge numbers won’t. That not only means they have less power in the workplace, it also means they have less money to give to politicians, whom they count on to pass legislation that protects their power.

It’s hard to ignore the fact that more and more manufacturing plants have moved to right-to-work States. Autoworkers had to have noticed when BMW built a plant in South Carolina, Mercedes-Benz did



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the same thing in Alabama, and Volkswagen and Nissan Motor Co. began assembling automobiles in Tennessee. Meanwhile, two of the Big Three automobile companies in Detroit declared bankruptcy and had to be rescued by Uncle Sam.

The results in the workplace support Snyder's comments. In the past 30 years, total employment in right-to-work states grew by 71 percent, while employment in non-right-to-work states expanded less than half as much, a mere 32 percent. The differences are even more dramatic for the past decade. Since 2001, right-to-work states added 2.4 percent more workers, while employment in other states actually declined by 3.4 percent. During the same period, wages rose in right-to-work states by 12.5 percent, compared to 3.1 percent in union states.

No wonder that a whole bunch of people have been voting with their feet. Between 2000 and 2010, five million people moved from compulsory union states to right-to-work states. I don't know if they all found jobs, but I'll bet most of them did. So it appears that right-to-work is not only good for business, it's good for workers, too.

The defeat in Michigan has to be a tremendous letdown for the United Auto Workers. The union was formed in the state and at one time had more than one million members. Today, its national membership is down to about 380,000. Now that workers in Michigan there can opt out of the union and know that they will still keep their job, UAW numbers — and revenue — are bound to decline even further.

Still, until recently, the right-to-work movement was pretty moribund. Prior to this year, Oklahoma was the last state to pass such legislation. And that was more than a decade ago — way back in 2001.

But that's when union leaders made a huge mistake. Confident of their support in Washington, they tried to get Congress to pass "card-check" legislation. The measure would have done away with a secret ballot for elections on whether to unionize. Thanks to conservative gains, especially in the House of Representatives, the measure never got approved.

So then they tried another approach. They filed suit against Boeing Corp. for having the unmitigated gall to build an aircraft assembly plant in South Carolina, a right-to-work state.

Lafe Solomon, a pro-union lawyer whom Barack Obama appointed general counsel to the National Labor Relations Board, issued a complaint against Boeing for what he called an "unfair labor" practice. Public reaction to this union/Washington gambit was extremely unfavorable. Prior to 2008, Gallup polls showed 60 percent approval of unions in America. That number had been pretty consistent going back 30 years.

But in 2009, the approval number had fallen to 48 percent. Today, it's only 52 percent. So it should come as no surprise that more and more states want to jump on the right-to-work bandwagon. The National Right to Work Committee reports that in the past two years, right-to-work legislation has been submitted in 19 states. The measures have passed in two of them, Indiana and Michigan.

In Washington, Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.) said he will introduce the National Right to Work Act in the new Congress soon after it convenes. I'm sure Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) will make certain it never comes to a vote on the Senate floor — at least not next year.

But it's impossible not to see which way the wind is blowing. And once enough Americans support freedom of choice in the workplace and see how it benefits them, maybe they'll want the same thing for their healthcare — and even the education of their children.



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So don't despair, conservatives. If right-to-work can pass in Michigan, pro-freedom legislation is possible almost anywhere. Sooner or later, even in Washington, D.C.

Until next time, keep some powder dry.

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