

Democrats put unions first

By Michael Costello for the Tribune

Who would have guessed that the New York City Sanitation Department union's work slowdown during the Great Blizzard of 2011 would set the high water mark for public sector union civic responsibility? Since then, public sector union behavior has only gone downhill. In Wisconsin, a state facing a yawning multibillion-dollar deficit, the governor and the state legislature have attacked the problem where it is, in the excessive compensation paid to state employees. The unions engaged in an illegal strike and behaved as though they were millions of years behind the rest of us on the evolutionary scale.

In Wisconsin, as elsewhere in the United States, the partnership between public sector unions and the Democratic Party has bankrupted the treasury.

In the private sector, the negotiations between unions and management are necessarily adversarial. Management's role is to represent the best interests of the company. The union's role is to get the best deal it can for its membership. But the Democratic Party-public sector union merger has created a situation where no one represents the best interests of the taxpayer. When public sector unions and Democrats sit across the table from each other, the discussions revolve around how much money to take from the taxpayers and how to divide the plunder. And even though collective bargaining corruption has given us a multitrillion-dollar pension deficit, the ironically misnamed Democratic Party refuses to address the problem.

Democrats are so dependent upon compulsory union dues that, when the Supreme Court struck down Washington unions' authority to force their membership to donate to Democrats, the Washington Democratic Party rammed a law through the Legislature restoring that power using the emergency clause, meaning that it could not be overturned by the initiative process.

Compulsory political contributions and insulation from the voters hardly seems democratic.

But the Democrats and their allied unions have run out of other people's money. Double-digit unemployment has forced the private sector to make sacrifices that the public sector refuses to share. When the plunderers make it clear that, in their view, the people who actually generate revenue should just fork over more, without complaint, the vote will go against them, as it did last November. Wisconsin's public sector unions are attempting to portray themselves as victims, but all that does is expose how extravagantly compensated public sector workers are when compared to the people forced to pay them.

California is an outstanding example of where most states are headed if public sector unions are not reined in. Salaries and benefits consume 80 percent of the California budget. Today, more than 5,000 retired California teachers draw annual pensions in excess of \$100,000. Nearly 20,000 collect more than \$75,000. And it is nearly impossible to fire an incompetent teacher. Teachers bad enough to expose their school districts to lawsuits are simply put out to pasture with full pay.

In a recent budget cut, the University of California raised the minimum retirement age from 50 to 55. Not only could one previously retire at 50 with 75 percent of full benefits, but employees could retire while contributing as little as 2 percent to their own retirement accounts. Few in the private sector would consider having to wait until 55 to retire as a sacrifice.

In Wisconsin's biggest city, Milwaukee, the average teacher's annual compensation exceeds \$100,000,

for nine month's work. And that compensation is wildly skewed toward benefits, with fully 44 percent of compensation in the form of benefits. This means that the burden of paying for it will fall upon the shoulders of those now in the classroom. If they truly cared about their pupils, teachers would take that into consideration.

This fiscal crisis has exposed government for what it has become - a massive wealth transfer program. Income redistribution accounts for fully two-thirds of the federal budget

In 1937 Franklin D. Roosevelt anticipated Wisconsin: "I want to emphasize my conviction that militant tactics have no place" in the public sector. "A strike of public employees manifests nothing less than an intent on their part to prevent or obstruct the operations of government."

But FDR could never have anticipated that the biggest problem with public sector unions would be the corruption of the collective bargaining process. Roosevelt was a partisan, but he still placed his country first. Today's Democratic Party puts its own lust for power first, which is why even the president of the United States has chosen to squander his office's prestige.

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