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Unions protect workers' hard-earned benefits

On June 27, 2018, the Supreme Court ruled in a 5-4 decision that public sector unions could not collect a fee from non-members for services the union provides to all members of a collective bargaining unit even though the union is required to do so under the law.

Since the decision, corporate funded anti-union forces have launched an aggressive offensive urging public employees to withdraw their membership. One organization, New Choice NY, recently targeted Capital Region employees through direct contact and expensive newspaper ads complete with withdrawal forms.”

The organization claims to be an “independent, non-profit, nonpartisan effort” but it is actually affiliated with Americans for Fair Treatment and the Commonwealth Foundation. These groups are part of the State Policy Network (SPN) which is a web of right-wing “think tanks” and tax-exempt groups in 49 states, Puerto Rico and the United Kingdom. It is one of many organizations funded by the Charles G. Koch Foundation and other corporate interests.

It is the same group that has launched “Right-to-Work” campaigns in a number of states as well as backing the recent anti-union Supreme Court Janus decision designed to weaken public sector unions throughout the nation.

SPN and its affiliates, including New Choice NY, has organized a massive effort to convince union members to stop paying dues through media advertising as well as through direct mail and phone contacts.

While SPN argues that their goal is to protect workers’ “First Amendment rights of free speech and free-

dom of association,” their internal communications tell a far different story. Speaking about the Janus case, SPN president and CEO Tracie Sharp said, “Once this ruling comes down – and we expect it to come down in our favor – everything will change. The door to pass a dream list of free-market reforms is going to open for us.”

The Michigan director of the SPN affiliate, Americans for Prosperity, chaired nationally by David Koch, said, “We fight these battles on taxes and regulations but really what we would like to see is to take the unions out at the knees so they don’t have the resources to fight these battles.”

This agenda was further unmasked when Wisconsin State Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald explained that “this battle” is about eliminating unions so that “the money is not there” for the labor movement.

The sheer irony of the New Choice NY Times Union ad was their point that workers will be able to keep “Your Pension, Your Healthcare, Your Benefits, Your Raises.” Does any employee really believe that they would enjoy these hard-earned benefits if it was not for their union? For reference, compare benefits with those in states without a strong public sector voice for workers.

The ultimate effect of weakening a union by diminishing its membership base is not a road to “freedom and prosperity” as these right-wing, anti-union organizations assert, but a path to the past when employees had no voice in determining the terms and conditions of employment. The real losers will be the workers and their families.

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