

Sleight of hand at work in conservative's right to work amendment

Written by State Senator Jeff Hayden
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There's a move afoot that if successful, will likely lead to you getting a smaller paycheck.

But for something that would hurt you that much, you couldn't tell by the name of the proposal, because it's called "Right to Work." Right-wing legislators are hoping you'll fall for melliferous name enough to amend Minnesota's constitution in this fall's election.

Currently, if your workplace is represented by a union, you can choose to join the union at full benefit, and pay the full dues. If you do not wish to join a union, you can become a fair-share employee, where you pay only the costs of the union's costs related to negotiating your pay and benefits.

What "Right-to-Work" does is allow employees to pay the union nothing. Sounds like a good deal, right?

Not at all. Some states have this system in place, especially in the Deep South. Without the ability to collect enough money to represent all employees, the advantage in negotiations shifts to the employer. Wages and benefits stagnate, and eventually, the union is voted out. Once employees lose an equal footing in negotiating their pay and working conditions, both fall dramatically.

The situation the right-wing wants to create in getting "right-to-work" enacted would be like

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making paying taxes optional, (which, come to think about it, they might also support.) If too many people drop out, the services and infrastructure we all share would eventually go away.

The threat of lower pay, benefits and workplace rights isn't just a theory, its reality. In states that have "right-to-work" in place now, the average worker, regardless of union membership, earns \$5,500 less per year than the average Minnesota worker. Poverty rates are higher, and so is unemployment.

If you are a union member, you probably already know what a threat this amendment is. But it is just a big a threat to non-union members.

Here's why. Unions negotiate with employers and work at the legislative level to enact livable wages, health care plans, pensions, days off, breaks, weekends, holidays, workplace safety – virtually everything that made the workplace of today different from the sweatshops of the nineteenth century. Even if you're not a union member, you benefit from their work. Unions, by bringing together working people to advocate for the shared cause of decent pay and dignity are literally holding up the economic roof for all of us.

If unions are weakened to the point where they can no longer fulfill this function, the ax will not just fall on them, but for everyone.

"Right to work" is a falsehood. It's not even correct to call it, as some have, a "right to work for less," because that implies there is some notion of free choice.

Plain and simple, it's a return to the pre-union pay and working conditions of the Industrial Revolution. It will make the split between the ultra-rich and the rest of us even worse. It will reduce our voice not just in the workplace, but in legislative bodies from Minnesota to Washington.