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Recent events in Wisconsin and Ohio show that "public servants" are threatening to become our masters. In 1959, by being the first state to grant public-sector employees the right to unionize, Wisconsin entrenched a powerful political class. In order to overcome bloated pension plans and waste-encouraging workplace policies, we must now fight a class war, but it's not the "rich vs. poor" one that most people think we're fighting. To whom shall the spoils of this war go?

The spoils at stake are the diverted wealth of American taxpayers. Between the public-sector unions and the spoils sit our elected politicians with their re-election prospects dependant on directing these spoils to the "right" people.

We've seen this before. Under the 19th century's "spoils system," victorious candidates rewarded supporters with public-service jobs. With each election, government offices were purged and re-staffed with the incoming victor's supporters. That spoils system ended in 1881 when Charles Guiteau, a disappointed office-seeker, assassinated President James Garfield.

Civil-service reform was passed in 1883, focusing on job security and awarding jobs and promotions on the basis of merit. Those civil-service laws now provide more benefits and job security to public-sector employees than their peers in the private sector.

Starting in the late 1950s, public-sector unionization ushered in the modern spoils system. The new spoils are effectively permanent government jobs with Cadillac pensions charged to our collective credit card. Those jobs create a static political caste that perennially vote for - and throw its financial support behind - bigger, more stagnant (and thus less accountable) government.

But our modern system is even worse than the old one. Rather than a rotating stock of government employees kicked out with each election cycle, instead we have an entrenched set of government employees who form a powerful political constituency. At least under the old system those employees were politically accountable. Under the new system, elected officials are influenced by an essentially permanent class of government employees who still demand the spoils and predictably, spend their union dues in order to procure them.

Amid the endless complaining over corporate control of politics, we've been distracted from the real behind-the-scenes power in this country: unions. The data are irrefutable. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, since 1989, the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers have spent as much on federal

campaigns as Chevron, Exxon-Mobil, the NRA and Lockheed Martin combined.

While both parties excel at pandering to their constituencies, unions clearly have a single-party focus. The most partisan campaign contributors in this country are unions, which, according to opensecrets.org, are five of the top 10 contributors in the country and nine of the top 15. Not a single one of those nine gives less than 89 percent of its contributions to Democrats. Coming in at No. 3 on the list of largest contributors is the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the biggest public-sector behemoth of them all, which could cough up only 1 percent of its \$43.5 million in contributions to Republicans.

Democrats cannot get elected in this country without the spoils. The spoils system has not been abolished, it's only been refined into a less noticeable form. Less noticeable, that is, un-til our dysfunctional financial ledgers can no longer be ignored. Generous pensions placate public-sector unions and saddle future generations - current nonvoters - with crushing financial obligations. Politicians gratuitously use other people's money, including that of people not yet born, to maintain their elected offices.

As Wisconsin and Ohio make clear, any movement to reduce the size of government must butt heads with the latter-day beneficiaries of the spoils system. Any move to eliminate public-sector collective bargaining rights imperils more than \$100 million in campaign contributions extracted from union members and, almost always, given to Democrats. A concerted push for limited government threatens the power and influence that public-sector unions have over how we are governed.

Wisconsin inaugurated this bizarre experiment in governance by political caste rather than popular sovereignty. Like Guiteau, Garfield's angry assassin, the unions are demanding what they've been promised or more drastic actions will be taken. If the police and firefighters threaten to strike, the message will be perfectly clear: your money or your life.

We are now at a watershed moment in which another spoils system can and must be reformed.

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