

From the editorial advisory board: Public sector unions

"**Two wolves and a sheep**voting on what to have for dinner." James Bovard's critique of democracy also applies to public-sector unions. Unions and union-backed politicians are the wolves. Taxpayers are the sheep.

Public-sector union representatives "will often be on both sides of the collective bargaining table," explains law professor Stephen Bainbridge. Union leaders are on one side; their "bought and paid for politicians" are on the other. Unions fund politicians' campaigns, and the politicians reciprocate by facilitating extravagant union wages, benefits, and protections.

The "process of collective bargaining ... cannot be transplanted into the public service." warned the pro-union Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Time columnist Joe Klein adds: "Industrial unions are organized against the might and greed of ownership. Public employees unions are organized against the might and greed ... of the public?"

Public-sector unions are organized against the tax-paying public. A unionized private-sector firm risks losing customers if its union successfully strikes, protects lazy workers, resists labor-saving technologies, abuses pension policies, secures excessive job security, or demands exorbitant compensation. Not so with public-sector unions. Taxpayers are stuck paying for expensive government services.

How expensive? Wages for unionized local and state government employees exceed their nonunion counterparts by more than 11 percent, concludes labor economist James Sherk. They are also more likely to receive pensions and have their employers pay all of their medical insurance premiums. It's no surprise that highly unionized governments burden taxpayers with more debt, as Cato Institute policy analyst Chris Edwards notes.

With public-sector unions, taxpayers just get fleeced.

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