

If you think “right to work” is bad, consider the prospect of Scott Walker’s Wisconsin Act 10 going national.

Editor’s note: The source of this article is the January 2017 issue of Newsletter of the AFL-CIO Central New York Labor Council.

Many union members worry that the Republican Congress “on testosterone” might try to pass federal “right to work” legislation. No question, that is a real possibility, and we in the labor movement and Democrats at all levels must be ready to fight “to the death” to safeguard workers’ right to organize. Nothing less than the survival of the labor movement is at stake. Here is some information worth reading and thinking about.

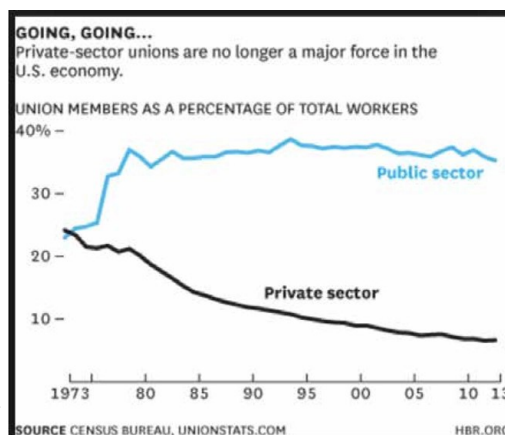
Right to work laws: First you must be clear as to what “right to work” is (and is not). It’s marketing. It is a clever and misleading phrase that has **ABSOLUTELY NOTHING** whatsoever to do with the right of a person to find or hold a job. It is most definitely not a general guarantee of employment to people seeking work. “Right to work” has nothing to do with hiring and the lack of such a law does not deprive anyone of the right to find and hold a job. “Right to work” is a strategy by big business and its allies to weaken or eliminate labor unions. Under “right to work,” labor unions cannot require an employee to join the union or to pay dues as a condition of employment. So in effect “right to work” laws simply give an employee the right to be a “free rider” or a free loader — to enjoy the benefits and protections of union membership without paying for them. A free loader just lets co-workers pay the tab. It’s a union busting technique plain and simple, and sadly it works. As of this time, there are already 26 “right to work” states (see map on page 2). Amazingly, Wisconsin and Michigan are among them.

The mindset behind “right to work” legislation makes sense when you consider the fact that a union, as the sole bargaining agent for employees, has a legal responsibility (called the duty of

fair representation) to represent all persons in the bargaining unit. And that responsibility holds **regardless of whether the employee is a dues payer or not**. That’s why “agency fees” came into being for public employees. Agency fees require employees to pay for the representation they receive from the union but exempt them from paying the portion of dues that funds political activity. But agency fees are under attack. They only survived the recent challenge in the Fredrickson case because the Supreme Court had a vacancy due to Antonin Scalia’s death and the court deadlocked. New challenges are anxiously waiting in line for Scalia’s replacement, Judge Neil Gorsuch, to be appointed. Since Judge Neil Gorsuch appointment is all but certain, it’s safe to say that agency fee’s days are numbered, and the equivalent of “right to work” is likely to soon come to public employee unions. That will change the employment universe for teachers and civil service employees, among others. The plot of union membership since the 50s (shown below) clearly shows why public employee unions are the next target. Stay tuned.

Wisconsin’s Act 10: This is the bill Governor Scott Walker and the Republican state legislature pushed through early in Walker’s first term as

governor. Its purpose was supposedly to deal with a state budget crisis, but it was union busting plain and simple. The bill made major changes to limit collective bargaining for most public employees to wages only, and the total wage increase cannot exceed a cap based on the consumer price index (CPI) unless specifically approved by referendum. Contracts are limited to one year and wages are frozen until the new contract is settled. Collective bargaining units must take annual votes to maintain certification as a union. Employers are prohibited from collecting union dues (so no payroll deduction) and members of collective bargaining units are **not** to be required to pay dues. It’s “right to work” laws on steroids. In a clever divide and conquer approach, local law enforcement, fire employees, state troopers and inspectors, are exempt from these changes. The effect of Act 10 on union membership in Wisconsin is shown below.



Sadly, there’s more to Act 10. The bill prohibits limited term employees from being eligible for health insurance or participation in the Wisconsin Retirement System. If the Governor has declared a state of emergency, the bill authorizes appointing authorities to terminate any employees that are absent for three days without approval of the employer (Continued on page 2.)

VITAMIN D DEFICIENCY

By Frances S. Hilliard, RN, MS

Since 1921, when it was first identified by research scientists, Vitamin D has been known for its important role in the body's calcium balance and maintenance of bone health. Vitamin D is essential for strong bones, mainly because it is necessary for the body's ability to absorb calcium and phosphorus; two elements that help develop the structure and strength of bones. It is now known that Vitamin D is also important for many other reasons, including immunity, muscle strength, cardiovascular function, healthy lungs, anti-cancer effects, and brain development in children. Low levels of Vitamin D are associated with increased mortality from cardiovascular disease, cognitive impairment in older adults, cancer, and increased severity of asthma in children. Research is also showing that this vitamin may play a significant role in the prevention and management of several medical conditions, such as hypertension, diabetes, and multiple sclerosis.

Your body can manufacture Vitamin D when the skin is exposed to sunlight. Following sun exposure, a number of chemical processes within the body then change this vitamin into a form that can be utilized by the cells. The liver is very important to these processes. Both the Vitamin D produced from skin exposure to sunlight, as well as any Vitamin D ingested in foods or dietary supplements, are converted by the liver to a substance called 25 (OH) D. When you have blood tests to measure your Vit-

amin D levels, these tests actually indicate the amount of 25 (OH) D present in the bloodstream.

Vitamin D deficiency can result from a number of different factors:

- Inadequate dietary intake of Vitamin D. This often occurs in people who adhere to a vegan diet, because such diets do not include common animal-based sources of the vitamin (fish, eggs, fortified milk, and beef liver).



- Limited exposure to sunlight. This has become more prevalent because of the attention being brought to sun exposure as a cause of skin cancers. More individuals are avoiding the sun and/or applying sunscreen, which blocks Vitamin D production. Other factors involved are the geographic area in which you live (especially distance from the equator and altitude) and the color of your skin (darker pigmentation means more melanin in the skin, which allows less absorption of UVB light and therefore less Vitamin D production).

- Pregnancy
- Being very overweight or obese, conditions which impair absorption of

Vitamin D from the gastrointestinal tract.

The symptoms of Vitamin D deficiency are often quite vague, and may include fatigue and generalized aches and pains. A number of individuals experience no symptoms at all. As the deficiency becomes more pronounced, definitive symptoms often appear, including bone pain, weakness, and frequent infections. The only sure way to tell if you are deficient

in Vitamin D is to have a blood test which will measure the level of 25 (OH) D. If this level is below normal, you will need Vitamin D supplements, with the exact dosage dependent upon the degree of deficiency detected.

Resources

Kurt A. Kennel, MD, et al. "Vitamin D

Deficiency in Adults: When to Test and How to Treat." Mayo Clinic Proceedings, August, 2010.

www.mayoclinicproceedings.com

U. S. Preventive Services Task Force. "Final Recommendation Statement on Vitamin D Deficiency Screening, 2014."

www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/Page/Document/RecommendationStatementFinal/vitamin-d-deficiency-screening

Vitamin D Council. "Information on the Latest Vitamin D News and Research." www.vitamindcouncil.org

Web MD. "Vitamin D Deficiency." www.webmd.com/diet/guide/vitamin-d-deficiency

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