

State Would Do Better If Workers Were Free to Choose

March 1, 2012

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In today's globally competitive marketplace and with all of the legal protections afforded workers, forcing workers to join a union to get a job is radical and undermines Ohio's competitiveness. Ohioans should be free to choose whether to join a union to get a job. It is a core, mainstream American right, after all.

The fact is, Ohio's unions were utterly powerless against the shifting sands of global competition and technological progress. As Europe and Japan fully recovered from the devastation of World War II and developing nations reaped the benefits of open-trade policies, America's near monopoly in production ended, as did the monopoly that allowed unions to drive up labor costs to inflated levels. As a result of worldwide competition, the United Auto Workers union now accepts a two-tiered pay system in which new members make substantially less than old members for doing the same work.

It isn't just inflated compensation costs that are problematic. Unions also bring work-rule inefficiencies that pose undue burdens. Hostess, the maker of Wonder Bread and Twinkies, is drowning under the union inflexibility that requires two separate trucks and two separate union members to unpack the two products traveling to the same store.

Because of the unions' efforts in the early half of the 1900s, all American workers today are covered by hundreds of laws that protect them from arbitrary, capricious and illegal conduct by their employers. Unions simply aren't necessary anymore.

Economically, Ohio isn't faring very well with unions. In 1930, Ohio's per capita income was the 12th highest. Today, it is the 33rd highest. In just the past decade, as Ohioans experienced a per-capita increase in personal income of 26 percent, workers in worker-freedom states saw a 38 percent increase.

From 1990 to 2012, worker-freedom states averaged 36 percent net job growth compared to 12 percent in forced-unionization states. Except for Nevada, the 11 states with the highest net job growth also have a unionization rate of 10 percent or lower. The 15 states with the weakest job growth are all forced-unionization states, with all but two having unionization rates above 13 percent. In what may be the most jaw-dropping figure, despite possessing 65 million fewer people, worker-freedom states netted 11,275,400 jobs, compared with forced-unionization states that added only 7,182,900 jobs.

Over the past 10 years, the percentage change in private-sector gross domestic product in worker-freedom states averaged 25 percent, as forced-unionization states came in 8 percent lower (it was 10 percent lower in manufacturing). Ohio had the 50th worst. Sixty-five percent of the top 20 states were worker-freedom states, while 75 percent of the 20 worst states were forced-unionization states.

Yes, northern unionized states still possess a slightly higher per-capita personal income (11.5 percent), but the difference is down from 78.3 percent in 1960.

Did you ever wonder why there is not a single state that protects worker freedoms that is considering a return to forced unionization? To the contrary, activities are under way across the forced-unionization states to free workers from this yoke.

Indiana recently adopted worker-freedom legislation because Gov. Mitch Daniels, not known as a radical, acknowledged that protecting worker freedom increases a state's competitiveness and stems the loss of companies and jobs that flee to more friendly environments. Ohio workers and companies deserve the same freedom and ability to compete.

So what is really the radical position today? Forcing Ohioans to join unions or allowing them to choose? Historically, freedom always beats force.

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