When Ideas Become Dangerous

Many Americans are guilty of historical amnesia when it comes to the benefits we have as a result of labor unions. Today’s anti-unionism culture is growing, spread by corporations and politicians to plant ideas in the minds of the public to destroy the middle-class. The most forceful of these ideas is the one that attacks public employee unions and the negotiated benefits of members of those unions. Corporate lobbyists have spread misinformation about the “idea” of lavish public employee wages and benefits. Partly due to this, these myths are now widely accepted by the majority of citizens. Corporations and politicians continue to perpetuate myths that demonize public employees and union membership. They build on the idea and image of public employees who are greedily sucking the life out of state budgets with huge salaries and pensions. Again, it’s an idea that has been planted in the minds of American citizens to drive a wedge between the public and private sector to further fuel attempts to drive the middle-class in the race to the bottom.

Whether or not someone belongs to a union they have benefited from collective bargaining and union efforts to level the playing field among workers. To give you examples of the benefits of unions and their ability to improve working conditions for all workers lets look at well earned and rightfully bargained benefits we all enjoy – union or not. The 40-hour work week, paid vacation, paid sick leave, weekends, health care, health and safety regulations. All these and more are benefits hard fought and won by unions to improve working conditions for all Americans. Currently in the legislature there are ideas circulating that public employees are not making a shared sacrifice and must take a cut in wages and benefits, just like the private sector. A recent report released by Governor Rick Snyder plants the idea that public employees have not taken any cuts in pay and benefits, but instead by 2009 increased compensation 113% higher than the private sector. This misinformation is now a published idea which will be perpetuated in the private sector to increase hostility toward public employees and further divide the working class. This idea is dangerous to public and private sector employees because it begins the never ending cycle of driving down wages and benefits in both sectors. The corporate/political attack on unions begins; they saturate the media with the idea that belonging to a union, having a decent well-paying job with good benefits and the dignity that comes with union representation is “socialism.” The attacks continue because it is well known that a vibrant labor movement is the main protector of social programs that protect our most vulnerable citizens such as Social Security, health-care reform, unemployment compensation, Medicare and Medicaid. These can all be destroyed bit by bit with the introduction of an idea.
The attacks on public employee compensation serve as a tactic to divert attention from addressing the real problems that plague our society and our state budgets such as the cutting of taxes for the rich corporations and individuals. When the wealthiest don’t pay their fair share then we see vital public services being cut due to lack of funding. You have to ask yourself, how dangerous would the idea be if we would begin to ask the wealthiest 1% to be properly taxed? How dangerous is the idea to close tax loopholes that allow wealthy corporations to pay less in taxes? How dangerous is the idea of laws to protect the safety of workers such as ergonomics and MIOSHA safety regulations? How dangerous is the idea of the 40 hour work week, weekends, paid vacation, paid sick leave, decent health-care benefits, and employer provided pensions? How dangerous is the idea of a union to bargain collectively to protect all these benefits? The answer is very dangerous indeed if you are an employer, you would lose the ability to trample over your work force, deny them time off when they are sick, work them to the bone in attempts to increase productivity and profits, discipline and/or fire them at will and without just cause. Here’s an idea that I would like to plant in hopes it takes off like wildfire – become involved in your union and fight back! Call the radio stations when you here misinformation about public employees and unions. Write a letter to the editor when you see an article defaming public employees, tell them about your shared sacrifice – it’s called BLT, furlough days and increased co-pays and health insurance premiums. Write or call your legislator and tell them how public employees have contributed and shared in balancing this state’s budget, plant our ideas and watch them grow! If you need help writing a letter or talking points when speaking with your legislator call the Local for help at 1-800-243-1985 we’d be happy to help plant the idea.

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