



unions
right-to-work laws

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DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- At the beginning of the video, Mr. Chougule asks, “How would you like to fund politicians with whom you strongly disagree? ...For decades millions of state and local government workers – police, firefighters, teachers, and others – have been forced to make that choice. And who forces them? Public-sector unions; that is, unions who represent public-sector employees.” Why do you think that unions force people who do some of the most important and noble work for our country to make such a choice? Would you want to have to make such a choice? Why or why not?
- Mr. Chougule goes on to note that, “[President Franklin] Roosevelt recognized that public-sector unions could hold the government hostage at will. They could simply threaten to walk off the job if they didn’t get what they wanted. Sanitation workers, for example, could put public health at risk by refusing to collect the garbage. Other public employees would have similarly disruptive power. This was, Roosevelt believed, ‘unthinkable and intolerable.’ In 1943 New York State’s highest court agreed, calling government unions “not only incompatible with the spirit of democracy, but inconsistent with every principle upon which our government is founded.” Why do you think that the court meant when characterizing the idea of government unions as ‘incompatible with the spirit of democracy?’ In what other ways could public unions be bad for society?
- Later in the video, Mr. Chougule reminds us that, “In order to win the support of union leadership in the 1960 presidential election, he [President Kennedy] promised to allow federal employees to unionize - and fulfilled that promise with Executive Order 10988 in 1962. It was a shrewd political move, but a bad deal for the country – and its consequences are still being felt today, as public-sector unionization spread rapidly in the decades that followed.” Why do you think that President Kennedy actually fulfilled this campaign promise once he had already been elected? Do you agree with President Kennedy’s action allowing public employees to unionize? Why or why not?
- Bringing to light one of the most devastating effects of public unionization, Mr. Chougule points out that, “Pensions barely exist in the private sector anymore. They’re much too expensive. But they’re standard for public-sector unions, and have bankrupted cities like Detroit – and have government-union-heavy states like Illinois on the brink of financial calamity. Unfunded pension obligations – that is, money that the government doesn’t have but has promised to government retirees – are anywhere from four to six trillion dollars nationwide.” Why do you think that public unions continue to severely hurt the communities that their members are supposed to be serving by ruining those communities financially- i.e. why do public unions value the retirement conditions of their membership over what’s best for the entire community (in addition to neglecting to acknowledge that hurting the financial well-being of the community at large also hurts their members too)?
- Towards the conclusion of the video, Mr. Chougule explains that, “When joining and paying the union becomes voluntary, the same thing invariably happens: workers leave in droves. And thus the union’s ability to manipulate the system, declines sharply.” Why do you think that so many workers leave unions when they are not forced to be in those unions anymore? In what ways does the union’s ability to ‘manipulate the system’ decline when members leave? Do you think that union membership for public employees should be voluntary? Why or why not?

EXTEND THE LEARNING:

CASE STUDY: Air Traffic Controllers

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “Reagan Starts Firing Air Traffic Controllers,” then answer the questions that follow.

- What were the air traffic controllers striking for? How many of them refused to return to work and were fired? How many flights had been grounded due to the strike? Who is Robert Poli, and what happened to him? What was the future employment status of the fired controllers? What happened to PATCO? What was the long-term consequence of public-sector union’s ability to collectively bargain after the controller’s were fired?
- How badly do you think that the illegally striking air traffic controllers put the flying public at risk? Explain. Do you agree with President Reagan’s action to fire the air traffic controllers? Why or why not? Why do you think that President Reagan took such a hardline stance against the illegal strikers? What would you have done if you were in President Reagan’ shoes at the time? Why do you think that so many of the controllers refused to go back to work? Do you think that the union leadership failed the members who were fired from their jobs? Why or why not?
- Do you think that this case is a good example of why government employees should not unionize? Why or why not? What are some other ways, besides collective bargaining or unionizing, that government employees can end up with better working conditions? Explain.



QUIZ

PUBLIC UNION: PUBLIC ENEMY

1. President Franklin Roosevelt was a very strong supporter of _____.
 - a. public-sector unions
 - b. private-sector unions
 - c. transit-sector unions
 - d. no unions

2. Executive Order 10988 _____.
 - a. dismantled private-sector unions
 - b. prohibited racial discrimination
 - c. interned the Japanese
 - d. allowed federal employees to unionize

3. Pension plans for public-sector union employees _____.
 - a. are relatively low
 - b. keep the elderly off of Social Security
 - c. are successful in Illinois
 - d. have bankrupted cities like Detroit

4. What was the US Supreme Court's ruling in *Janus v. The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees*?
 - a. Private employees can be compelled to pay union dues against their will.
 - b. Public employees can be compelled to pay union dues against their will.
 - c. Public employees cannot be compelled to pay union dues against their will.
 - d. Private employees cannot be compelled to pay union dues against their will.

5. For most of American history, everyone thought that unionizing government workers was a good idea.
 - a. True
 - b. False



QUIZ - ANSWER KEY

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Reagan Starts Firing Air Traffic Controllers



Posted By: Daryl Worthington Posted date: August 04, 2015 in: News

US President Ronald Reagan began firing 11,359 air traffic controllers who were striking in violation of an order for them to return to work, on 5th August, 1981.

The event is regarded as a landmark example of the strict domestic and economic policies of Reagan's administration. From his election campaign onward, Reagan had promised reductions in government spending, reductions in capital gains and incomes tax, reductions in government regulation, and reductions in inflation through strict controls on the money supply.

Associated with these economic policies, and crucial for their successful implementation, was a domestic policy which took a firm position on trade unionism and strike action. Coming early in Reagan's first term as President of the United States, the air traffic controllers strike was an opportunity to make an important statement about his stance on unionisation.

13,000 Air-traffic controllers in the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Association (PATCO) had gone on strike on 3rd August, 1981, after negotiations with the federal government had failed to secure the pay rise and shortened work week they had demanded.

The mass strike was extensive enough to almost cripple air travel in the United States, grounding 7,000 flights and leaving passengers stranded. With millions of Americans badly affected by the flight cancellations, Reagan ordered the air-traffic controllers to return to work within 48 hours or lose their jobs.

A mark of the force with which the strikers would be dealt with was shown in the fate of Robert Poli, PATCO's president. On the day the strikes started he was found in contempt by a federal judge, and fined \$1000 for each day of the strike.

Reagan's actions were legal by US law. The air-traffic controllers were employees of the federal government, and thus banned from striking. In terms of precedent however, Reagan's actions were unusually harsh. Air traffic controllers and other unions representing federal employees had struck under previous presidents and had no action taken against them.

On 5th August Reagan carried out his threat, and ordered the federal government to start firing the 11,359 strikers who had not returned to work. A life time ban was also placed on the controllers who had not returned to work within the deadline, meaning the Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) was prohibited from ever rehiring them (this ban was only lifted in 1993, during the presidency of Bill Clinton). PATCO lost its status as a recognised trade union, despite having supported Reagan during his presidential campaign.

Undoubtedly Reagan's ruthless response made the statement he wanted. However, the move was also incredibly risky. The FAA was forced to rush recruit new staff, many of which lacked the experience of those who had been fired. Some of Reagan's advisers feared a major air disaster in the aftermath of the sackings, an event which would have been devastating to his credibility. As it was, it took the FAA ten years to return to the levels of staffing it had prior to the strike. The US government eventually spent more on replacing the strikers than it would have on accepting PATCO's demands.

In the broader trend of American history Reagan's treatment of the strikers was a key turning point, the effects of which can still be felt today. Other politicians soon took Reagan's example in dealing with public sector unions. Reagan may have been responding to an illegal strike, but it saw a trend developing which saw public sector unions' ability to bargain in anyway diminish dramatically.