

## The Role of Politics in Unions

Politics play more of a role in unions than most people would like to believe. A prime example can be found in Wisconsin in 2011. Thousands of teachers from Wisconsin and surrounding states swarmed to Madison to protest Governor Walker's bill to eliminate collective bargaining rights. The passing of Act 10 changed the future of teachers in Wisconsin. Could politics really hold such an influential role in how unions function and have so much of a bearing on the strength of a union? If there was ever any doubt what role politics play in unions, this action showed just how much of an influence they really have.

Governor Walker indicated his decision to make Wisconsin a Right to Work state was to improve the state financially, which a lot of people found hard to believe. Since unions and their members typically support the Democratic Party, it seemed obvious to many what the political implications would be. With significantly less union members, there would be less union dues being paid. Because the union would then be receiving less money, they would have less funding to put toward campaigning for Democratic candidates, which would also decrease the funding used to encourage others to vote Democratic and in turn decreasing the chances of Democratic candidate's re-election.

Over the past fifteen years or so, it has been recognized by those both for and against the unions that the Democratic Party strongly supports labor unions and what they stand for. The unions greatly supported the re-election of President Barack Obama. President Obama made a visit to Michigan to show his disagreement to the state's Right to Work measures. President Obama stated, "What we should not do is

take away your right to bargain for better wages. These so called right to work laws don't have to do with economics; they have to do with politics." While President Obama seems to draw the lines very clearly, there are plenty of others who continue to deny that politics are to blame for the decline in unions and claim that becoming a Right to Work state is to attract more businesses.

Missouri will be the twenty-eighth state to pass a Right to Work law. With over half the states now having Right to Work legislation in place, it has a direct correlation with the domination of the Republican Party having control of Congress and the White house. Earlier this year, the Republican Party introduced the National Right to Work Bill, which would make the Right to Work laws a National standard. The same legislation was attempted in 2015 but did not go anywhere. However, now with a Republican President who also agrees with Right to Work laws, the Republicans in Congress's chances of successfully passing this law have dramatically increased. Although the Republicans have majorities in Congress and control of the White House, they will also need the Supreme Court to pass the law. However, the odds of this happening have been greatly improving for the Republicans. With the Courts session coming to a close at the end of this week, there is speculation that Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy might retire. If this happens, President Trump will be able to appoint a conservative judge, which will assist in passing Right to Work legislation that might not have otherwise passed. This would be a devastating blow to the unions as a whole, and it could be closer to reality than ever thought.

In 2016, there were 14.6 million union members in the United States, which is a drastic decrease from the 17.7 million members in 1983. This is certainly a sign of what

the future might hold for unions and their members. Most studies show that union workers tend to earn approximately \$200 more per week than non-union workers and also receive better benefits and pensions. Knowing this, businesses tend to give their support to the Republican Party to help continue the trend of states passing Right to Work laws. If these trends are allowed to continue, they could be the demise of unions as they are today.

Politics do seem to play a very large role in unions. However, in most recent memory, that role seems to be to weaken the unions to the point that they have no power to help workers earn equal and fair wages, work in safe conditions, receive health insurance and be able to retire with a pension. By the time non-union workers realize the Unions also helped them receive better pay at their jobs, it will be too late.