

An Important Reality (Part 1)

A Flaw in Collective Bargaining With Governments

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In the news broadcast of the past several weeks, the most frequently repeated news was that regarding the attempts to overthrow dictatorial governments in Morocco, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen and Libya. But occasionally the question was asked, "Who's next?" It's almost as if these uprisings were a contagious disease that one could catch. This sort of news is somewhat disturbing to Americans, because even though the violence is pretty far off, they also know that this is the very area of the world from which the oil that powers many of our automobiles is imported from.

But another news-making event occurred in the past week or so that made me think of something much closer to home. It was the Republican governor of Wisconsin's bold new move to strip the government's labor force of their right to collective bargaining. He made this move in an effort to balance Wisconsin's budget, which is several hundred million dollars in debt. I do not understand every aspect of this issue, but I do know that the governors of Ohio and Tennessee are already on record as saying that they will pursue the same course.

This approach to budgetary deficits has made many people very angry. Demonstrations arose on the streets of Madison, but not with the Middle Eastern violence. What advantage is there to collective bargaining that would rile the possessors of it to get so angry? I do know this: It was not long ago—maybe about a generation or a bit longer—that even Democrats, despite their liberality regarding spending other people's money, were opposed to government workers being unionized and thus being able to collectively bargain their wage package with government officials. Even four-time Democratic President Franklin Roosevelt made it very clear that he was solidly opposed to government employees being unionized. So was George Meany, who, for 25 years, was president of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations. These were too powerful unions who joined forces to create one very large, powerful union that was very difficult for corporate management to deal with.

I joined the United Steel Workers of America in 1952 and remained a member for 16 years. But even then, I saw the union as sort of a protection racket. The concept was that as long as I was a member, if I ever got in trouble with the company over some issue, the union would fight for me. Otherwise, they were no bother. Strangely, the only time that I ever got into a fairly serious dilemma, the union was against me—me and a half dozen other men. The company was on our side. I think that God intervened because technically, the company had done something wrong in assigning us to that particular job. But the company won that battle. For some reason, the union backed off.

Now, why were President Roosevelt and George Meany against unionizing government employees? The answer is actually quite simple. It begins with understanding that collective bargaining done by a union is much more persuasive and threatening than each employee bargaining for his own wage package as is normally done in the business world. Roosevelt and Meany understood the business world. They also understood human nature—somewhat, anyway—and very important was they thoroughly understood the mind of a politician.

The answer lies in understanding the term "collective bargaining" when it is combined with a government issue. "Collect" is a verb meaning "to bring together." A "collective" is the group

brought together. To bargain is to negotiate the terms of a purchase, agreement, or contract. And when management and union sit down at a table to negotiate a contract, management sits on one side of the table and the union on the other, and they haggle back and forth. However, when union representatives negotiate with government representatives, in practical fact, there aren't two sides to haggle over the terms because of the way that political figures perceive the people on the opposite side of the table.

What do they see when they look across there? They see voters. Not just individual voters, but as representatives who have persuasive influence over many voters who are union members. And in addition, the government reps see them and those they represent as potential contributors to their campaigns. Thus, those people on the other side of the table are voters and contributors. The practical reality is there is no real bargaining. It is almost as if the politicians say, "How much can we give you?" They do not perceive themselves as the management responsible for guarding the public's interest in the economic state of the city, county, state or federal government.

It is a truth: Politicians are literally in a position to buy the votes of the people the union represents by granting the wage package the union bargainers propose. This is why former President Roosevelt said, "Collective bargaining cannot be translated into the public service." It is part of the reason why garbage collectors in New York City make over \$100,000 a year. It is why the head of New York City's largest public union said in the mid-'70s, "We have the ability to elect our own boss."

What really struck my interest in this subject is the way the union workers reacted. Do they care that their state and nation are in dire—and I mean *dire*—economic straits, largely due to the mishandling of public funds by politicians, and in this case, also involving union leadership, their own leadership that has been guilty of abusing? The indication in the way they are reacting is, "Let's let somebody else do the sacrificing."

My concern is that the time is coming that will fulfill Jesus' prophecy that "whoever kills you will think that he does God service." Jesus also said the time is coming when we may be delivered up to tribulation. Even killing and lawlessness will abound, and the love of many will grow cold.

Those government union employees are showing that they are unwilling to share in the cities', counties', states' or national problems. Unlike the soldiers who bear the pains of a war fought in the nation's behalf, these citizens are in the act of bailing out when the pain hits them because they believe that their pay out of the public till is an entitlement.

It's helpful to recognize this. Are we entitled to all the blessings that God is capable of giving us? Our time for this kind of sacrifice is coming. This gives us time to think ahead, to plan, to take action toward being mentally prepared because it is very likely that it is going to be asked of us. "You must sacrifice," our government is saying. I do not mean the U.S. government. I'm talking about God.