Shock and Law: Politicians Push Anti-Worker Bills

**Labor’s 2011 political battles don’t end at the Beltway.**

Anti-union forces are pushing bills and ballot measures to limit workers’ rights and curb union power from Maine to Hawaii. They’re gunning not just for public employees but for workers across the board. Legislators are debating proposals to ban collective bargaining for public employees, prohibit workers from choosing union representation through card check, and much more. In Missouri a senator even proposed repealing the state’s child labor law.

**Spreading the ‘Right to Work.’**

Twenty-two states, mostly in the South and West, already have so-called “right to work” laws on the books, but since the November election they’ve been introduced in 12 more.

These laws prohibit unions from negotiating “closed shops” that require everyone in the bargaining unit to join the union. They also ban “fair share” or “agency” fees—particularly common in the public sector—where non-members are required to pay a portion of full dues to the union. Since a recognized union must by law negotiate for and represent everyone in the shop, members or not, such fees are seen as a “fair share” for non-members to pay.

Conservatives say right to work attracts business to the state, but workers in states enjoying this “right” earn almost 15 percent less, are more likely to be uninsured, and are 1.5 times as likely to die in a workplace accident. Right-to-work states also have higher rates of poverty and infant mortality and spend about $2,500 per pupil less on education than other states.

Some are not satisfied with simply having the law on the books. In Iowa, conservatives are introducing measures that would place the phrase “Iowa is a Right to Work State” on all state vehicles, Department of Transportation signs, and official tourism literature.

**Public Sector Workers Scapegoated.**

With state budgets in the red, instead of crafting legislative hand-cuffs for the bankers and CEOs who caused the economic collapse, 18 states have bills pending to shackle public sector workers. They include eliminating defined-benefit pensions, setting constitutional limits on the size of the government workforce, and abolishing collective bargaining rights. Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker even threatened to call out the National Guard if public sector workers resist his plan to take away collective bargaining.

**Building Trades under the Gun.**

Seven states have introduced measures to ban or repeal Project Labor Agreements. A PLA requires that a contractor on a publicly funded project agree to meet wage and benefit schedules negotiated with unions.

Four states—including traditional union strongholds Michigan and New Jersey— have proposals to repeal prevailing wage laws, which require contractors working on publicly funded projects to pay the “prevailing wage” in the industry, usually defined as union scale.

Legend:

- **Right to Work Proposals or Extensions**
- **Attacks on the Building Trades**
- **Restrictions on Public Sector Collective Bargaining**