

# 'Right to Work' for Less

## What is 'Right to Work' for Less?

"Right to work" for less laws don't guarantee any rights or work. In fact, state legislators who support these laws are voting to lower workers' wages and weaken workers' protections and unions.

"Right to work" for less laws allow workers who pay nothing to get all the benefits of union contracts. This forces unions to use their time and members' dues money to provide union benefits to free riders who are not willing to pay their fair share.

■ **"Right to work" laws lower wages for everyone.** The average worker in states with "right to work" for less laws makes \$5,538 a year less than workers in other states (\$39,169, compared with \$44,707). Because of the higher wages, working families in states without these laws also benefit from healthier tax bases that improve their quality of life.

■ **Federal law already protects workers who don't want to join a union.** Supporters claim "right to work" for less laws protect employees from being forced to join unions. Yet federal law already does this, and protects nonmembers from paying for union activities that violate their religious or political beliefs. This "freedom" argument is a sham.

■ **"Right to work" for less laws endanger safety and health standards that protect workers on the job.** Unions have a long history of fighting for tougher workplace safety and health rules. By weakening unions, "right to work" for less laws weaken unions' ability to maintain and strengthen workplace safety and health standards. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the rate of workplace deaths is 52.9 percent higher in states with these "right to work" for less laws.

■ **"Right to work" for less laws are unfair to dues-paying union members.** For example, they require a union to spend its time and money representing a nonmember who pays no dues—even if the battle is long and costly. Since the union represents everyone, everyone benefits—so everyone should share in the costs. Amazingly, nonmembers who don't pay dues can sue the union if they think it has not represented them well enough.

SOURCES: AFL-CIO, *Death on the Job*, 2010; Fred Feinstein, Testimony before the Subcommittee on Workforce, Empowerment and Government Programs in the U.S. House of Representatives, Hearing on Freedom in the Workplace—an Examination of a National "right to work" Law, Sept. 8, 2005; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages*; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Highlights of Women's Earnings in 2009*, June 2010.

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## 'Right to Work' for Less Hurts Everyone

By many measures, the quality of life is worse in states with "right to work" for less laws. Wages are lower, poverty and lack of insurance are higher, education is weaker—even infant mortality and the likelihood of being killed on the job are higher.

States with "right to work" for less laws have:

### **Lower Wages and Incomes**

- The average worker in states with "right to work" for less laws makes \$5,538 a year less than workers in other states (\$39,169, compared with \$44,707), or \$106 less each week.
- Median household income in states with these laws is \$6,185 less than in other states (\$46,328 vs. \$52,513).
- In states with "right to work" for less laws, 28.3 percent of jobs are in low-wage occupations, compared with 19.5 percent of jobs in other states.

### **Less Job-Based Health Insurance Coverage**

- People in states with "right to work" for less laws are more likely to be uninsured (16.7 percent, compared with 13.5 percent overall; among children, it's 10.4 percent vs. 7.5 percent).
- They're less likely to have job-based health insurance than people in other states (60.1 percent, compared with 64.0 percent).\*

- Only 50.3 percent of employers in states with these laws offer insurance coverage to their employees, compared with 56.7 percent in other states. That difference is even more significant among small employers (with fewer than 50 workers)—only 34.6 percent of them offer workers health insurance, compared with 43.8 percent of small employers in other states.

### **Higher Poverty and Infant Mortality Rates**

- Poverty rates are higher in states with "right to work" for less laws (14.5 percent overall and 20.3 percent for children), compared with poverty rates of 12.7 percent overall and 18.5 percent for children in states without these laws.
- The infant mortality rate is 16 percent higher in states with these laws.

### **Less Investment in Education**

- States with "right to work" for less laws spend \$2,671 less per pupil on elementary and secondary education than other states, and students are less likely to be at grade level in math and reading.

### **Higher Rates of Death on the Job**

- The rate of workplace deaths is 52.9 percent higher in states with these laws, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

SOURCES: AFL-CIO, Death on the Job, 2010; Corporation for Enterprise Development, 2009–2010 Assets and Opportunities Scorecard; Elise Gould, Employer-Sponsored Health Insurance Erosion Accelerates in the Recession—Public Safety Net Catches Kids but Fails to Adequately Insure Adults, Economic Policy Institute, Nov. 16, 2010; Kaiser Family Foundation, State Health Facts.org; National Education Association, Rankings and Estimates—Rankings of the States 2009 and Estimates of School Statistics 2010, December 2009; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Highlights of Women's Earnings in 2009, June 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2006–2008 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates; U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey 2010.

\* Insurance coverage is for the years 2008–2009 and for people younger than 65.

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## **What's at Stake for Unionized Employers?**

Unionized employers have a lot to gain by supporting workers' rights and opposing "right to work" for less laws. In states with these laws:

- It's harder for unionized employers to compete for business. While many unionized employers stay unionized, nonunion firms can gain an even greater competitive advantage based on low-wage, no-benefit jobs.

- That's especially true in construction. Unionized construction companies may have the most to gain from opposing "right to work" for less laws and other attacks on union membership. Unionized construction companies compete largely on the basis of better-quality work because they provide more training, have fewer injuries on the job and are more productive. These competitive advantages are threatened when low-road companies can drive down wages because of anti-union laws.

- Consumer spending is lower. Because union membership means higher wages, higher unionization within a community means consumers have more to spend. That's good for local companies, especially those in retail sales and services.

- Politicians are interfering in private enterprise. A "right to work" for less law takes union security off the bargaining table. In effect, politicians limit the right of employers to set the terms and conditions of employment by telling companies and their workers what they can and can't bargain over. Labor and management should have the freedom to agree upon the conditions of work—without politicians dictating to them.



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## **'Right to Work' for Less Laws Hurt Women and People of Color Most**

By holding down union membership, "right to work" for less laws hurt all workers, but especially women and people of color, who benefit most from belonging to unions.

- Women workers in unions earn \$212 more each week (34 percent more) than nonunion women. Union membership narrows the pay gap between men and women from 19.8 percent nationwide to 12.2 percent.
- Hispanic workers in unions earn 50 percent more each week (\$258) than nonunion Hispanics.
- African American workers in unions earn 29 percent more each week (\$168) than nonunion African American workers.

SOURCES: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Union Members—2009, Jan. 22, 2010.