

Employee Free Choice Act

By Art Pulaski

Massive layoffs, record home foreclosures and skyrocketing healthcare costs are making it increasingly difficult for California's working families to make ends meet. State unemployment jumped from 5.7 percent to 8.4 percent in the last year and with a \$40 billion budget shortfall, the California job crisis is bound to get worse.

During these tough economic times, it's more important than ever that workers have the freedom to bargain collectively with their employers for better wages, healthcare and retirement security. Workers who belong to unions earn, on average, 30 percent more than nonunion workers. They are 59 percent more likely to have employer-provided health coverage and four times more likely to have pensions. In fact, more than half of U.S. workers—nearly 60 million—say they would join a union right now if they could.

Unfortunately too few get that chance under the broken National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) process. The company-dominated election process gives employers ample time to run aggressive, sometimes illegal, anti-union campaigns. Companies routinely harass, threaten and even fire workers who are trying to form or join unions. A third of companies fire union supporters in union organizing campaigns, often in the days leading up to the election. Ninety-one percent of companies force workers into one-on-one meetings against the union with their direct supervisors, and employees often aren't allowed to speak. Meanwhile, union representatives aren't even allowed on the premises to talk to employees.

Does this seem like a free and fair election?

In 2007 alone, over 29,000 cases filed under the National Labor Relations Act found evidence of employers harassing, intimidating and firing workers for supporting a union.

Why? The dirty little secret is the reason companies will go to all lengths to stop workers from organizing is the same reason Big Business interests have put down big money to stop passage of the Employee Free Choice Act: They don't want to give workers the power to bargain for the fair wages and benefits that corporations just don't feel like paying.

The Employee Free Choice Act would eliminate the problem of rigged, company-dominated elections by letting workers decide how they want to form a union. There are currently two potential ways for workers to express their decision of whether to form a union – they can petition for an election, or they can be

recognized when a majority signs cards saying they want a union. The problem is that companies get to decide which way the workers decide. The Employee Free Choice Act would reverse that; it would put the choice of how to form a union into workers' hands, not their companies'.

All employees should have the freedom to make their own decision about whether to form a union to bargain for better wages and working conditions. Our labor laws do not respect workers' choice. Our laws promote wage inequality and depress our middle class. In today's economy it is more important than ever that we fix them. Let's level the playing field and give working people a chance.

With the free choice to form unions, working people can counterbalance corporate power and rebuild our middle class.

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