

Bush Watch

Workers' Freedom to Join a Union

Among the guarantees under both the U.S. Bill of Rights and international law is the freedom of association—a protection that encompasses the freedom to join a union. Yet since taking office, President Bush has waged a war against workers' freedom to form unions and have a voice on the job, often using the justification that collective bargaining is incompatible with national security in the wake of the terrorist attacks. Bush seeks to privatize hundreds of thousands of federal government jobs—a move that would take away those workers' voice on the job. Aiding his Big Business allies, Bush also changed several federal rules to make it easier for private-sector companies to thwart workers' efforts to join unions.

Took Away Collective Bargaining Rights from Homeland Security Workers

President Bush strong-armed members of Congress in late 2002 into undermining the civil service and collective bargaining rights of some 170,000 federal workers while creating a Homeland Security Department. The new department combines 150 existing agencies, departments and offices into one megadepartment. Though many members of the Senate fought to preserve fully workers' voice on the job, Bush repeatedly threatened to veto the bill creating the department unless it scaled back bargaining rights for the workers. Since taking office, Bush also has threatened the rights of the nation's air traffic controllers.

Denied Airport Screeners Freedom to Choose a Union

The Bush administration denied collective bargaining rights to federalized airport security screeners. On Jan. 9, 2003, James Loy, then undersecretary of transportation for security, signed an order prohibiting workers' right to bargain, saying such rights were not compatible with the nation's war against terrorism and "collective bargaining conflicts with

national security needs." AFGE activists had been helping screeners at LaGuardia Airport in New York City and at Baltimore/Washington Airport form a union. AFGE has filed lawsuits challenging the Bush administration's silencing of the workers' voices and continues to help screeners come together at their workplaces, where many say they are subjected to long hours and haphazard management practices that could endanger the flying public.

Terminated Collective Bargaining Rights for 1,300 NIMA Federal Workers

On Jan. 30, 2003, a Bush administration official terminated the collective bargaining rights of more than 1,300 workers at the National Imagery and Mapping Agency (NIMA), which since has changed its name to the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. Following the lead of others in the Bush administration, James Clapper Jr., the agency's director, invoked the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, as the

motive for curtailing workers' rights. However, union leaders said the move came as NIMA workers—members of





AFGE Local 1827 in St. Louis and Local 3407 in Bethesda, Md.—were pursuing concerns about safety, promotions and gender and racial bias in the agency.

Backed Employer Efforts to Use Taxpayer Money for Anti-Union Campaigns

The Bush administration's National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) is helping Big Business fight a California law that mandates accountability for the way state dollars are spent and requires state neutrality in worker organizing campaigns by banning the expenditure of state monies—pro-union or anti-union—in such campaigns. In 2000, the California legislature passed and then Gov. Gray Davis (D) signed A.B. 1889, which prohibits employers from using taxpayer dollars to pay for employer-run campaigns to influence workers in their efforts to form or join a union. The law ensures the billions of dollars that flow to private employers each year through California grants and subsidies are used only for the purposes intended: public services and programs. In a 3–2 vote, the five-member NLRB voted on May 29, 2003, to intervene in a federal court case brought by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, taking a position that protects employers who want to use taxpayer money to subsidize their anti-union campaigns and that denies states

the right to control their own spending authority. The NLRB's purported justification for its action is that federal labor law pre-empts the California statute. This position by the NLRB is directly contrary to that taken by the U.S. Department of Justice in two recent cases, which argued that federal labor law does not pre-empt Bush administration restrictions involving the use of federal funds.

Revoked Union Representation for Hundreds of Department of Justice Workers

President Bush issued an executive order on Jan. 7, 2002, revoking union representation for workers in the Justice Department's U.S. attorney's offices, the Criminal Division, the U.S. National Central Bureau of INTERPOL, the National Drug Intelligence Center and the Office of Intelligence Policy and Review. News reports said Bush acted to prevent strikes by workers in offices engaged in intelligence, investigative and law enforcement work. However, current federal law prevents workers in those offices and other federal agencies from striking.



“Joining a union is the best move I ever made.

People take care of one another.

When you're with the union, you are not out

there by yourself.”

**—Ronnie Pruitt
Kansas City, Mo.**

Read more about the Bush record on workers' freedom to join a union at

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