

Right-to-Work

Questions and Answers

1) What is Right-to-Work? In 1947 Congress amended the National Labor Relations Act to allow states to make a union shop (where all workers must equally belong to the worksite union) illegal in their state. Michigan has never seen the need for this and continues to adhere to the original intent of the Labor Relations Act.

2) How does a union shop agreement get in a union contract? How does it happen that all workers at a worksite must be members of the Union? The employer and the negotiating committee for the union always have to agree to put the language or a clause into the contract that says if a worker receives the higher pay and better benefits of a union contract, then they should equally pay dues and/or become a union member. Usually this happens in the first contract.

3) Must the employer also agree that all workers are in the union? Yes, and even more, all of the workers vote to accept or reject the contract with the union worker stipulation in it. Workers and employers democratically agree to an all union clause, through the negotiations and ratification process.

4) Shouldn't individual workers be able to choose to be in or out of the union if they want? No, that's not the way majority rule works in America. Even if you didn't vote for George W. Bush, he won and he is the President of all Americans. You may live in a Democratic state senator's district and be a Republican, but that member of the Democratic party is your senator because he won a majority election. It's the same with a union at the worksite. A majority of workers vote for the union to represent them and the minority (if it exists) has the same representation. Just as one politician represents Democrats and Republicans after the election, so the union does too, with an all union contract clause.

And, by the way, individual workers can, for certain reasons, like religion, drop out of union membership. However, they do continue to pay fair and equal fees.

5) If workers have a choice every time they vote for their contract, and if the union representing everyone is the same arrangement as in the rest of America's elections, why do some people think Right-to-Work is a good idea? Well, look and see who says Right-to-Work is a good idea for Michigan. Very conservative right wing newspaper editors (at a newspaper that caused a five-year strike); business owners that know union workers get paid one-third more; and Republican party politicians who know that over 80% of union members voted Democratic last year. That's who is talking Right-to-Work in Michigan. It's an extreme agenda pushed by extreme interests.

6) Aren't there any union members who want Right-to-Work in Michigan? There would only be a few. Some members might be mad that they lost a grievance or are otherwise unhappy with their union. The large majority of union members know that a unified organization is stronger and will produce a better deal for workers.

7) Shouldn't I have a choice to join an organization? When it comes to receiving economic benefits, the way it works in our country is that we all pay in together. You don't get to not pay taxes just because you don't like them. We all pay for our driver's license, it allows us the benefit of driving. Union dues are like that, you receive greater pay and benefits through a collective bargaining system that must be supported financially and equally by everyone who benefits. All workers receive the benefits, therefore, it's fair that all pay equally to get those benefits. Also, the union by law must represent all workers equally. It's an arrangement where everyone pays their fair share.

Imagine a worker who pays union dues working next to a worker who is a free rider and pays no dues. Both workers receive good pay and benefits but one guy gets them for free. That's like cheating the system.

8) Don't Right-to-Work states have better economics? No, the only state to go Right-to-Work in 46 years, Oklahoma, has now lost over 22,000 manufacturing jobs after Right-to-Work took effect. North Carolina is a Right-to-Work state. They lost an even greater percentage of manufacturing jobs in the past few years than Michigan has. Right-to-Work does not mean more jobs in these states.

9) What about the quality of life in union fairness states and Right-to-Work states?

- The average worker in a Right-to-Work state makes \$5,403 a year less than workers in free-bargaining states.
- Right-to-Work states have a larger share of uninsured residents compared to free-bargaining states.
- Right-to-Work states have higher poverty and infant mortality rates than in free bargaining states. The infant mortality rate is 14 percent higher in Right-to-Work states.
- According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the rate of workplace deaths is 44% higher in states with Right-to-Work, where unions can't speak up as effectively on behalf of workers.

10) Why would a ballot issue about Right-to-Work be bad for Michigan? First, it would be divisive. At a time when Michigan businesses and unions should be working together to help our state adjust to a changing economy, a Right-to-Work ballot issue would pit us against each other. Most voters think politics is too polarized as it is. It would be far better for Michigan's image to the rest of the country to be that of Labor/Management cooperation than workers and employers at odds with each other.

11) What about Right-to-Work legislation? Michigan's legislature has never thought Right-to-Work was a good idea and such a bill would not pass either chamber this year, nor would the Governor sign such a bill. The extremist proponents of Right-to-Work would only have a 2008 ballot issue option, and there is currently little support for that in the state.