



Bob Kerr

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Bob Kerr: The real reason why nothing seems to work

01:00 AM EST on Wednesday, March 10, 2010



Once, it seemed it might be state workers who were plotting the downfall. They seemed so unyielding.

Then illegal immigrants seemed the greater threat to undermine everything we hold dear with their eagerness to walk the same streets and breathe the same air that we do.

It is now as clear as a babbling brook in springtime, however, just what lies at the heart of the destruction of everything that matters.

It's unions. Yup, those organizin', negotiatin', picket line walkin' unions.

I keep hearing it again and again. In the push and shove of hard times, it's the unions that are clogging the municipal machine and keeping the good times from rolling.

I've even heard it on the radio from experts. Union is becoming another word for something not so nice.

I'm getting e-mails from people who know everything, including the way that unions keep the sun from rising on time.

Does the water turn brown coming out of the tap?

Unions.

Does your TV reception get fuzzy after 9 p.m.?

Unions.

Does your chewing gum lose its flavor on the bedpost overnight?

Unions.

And your son or daughter could be at risk.

“Unions? Not my kids. I raised them better than that.”

Sure, you might believe that. And there might be nothing you’ve seen, nothing you’ve heard at home that says otherwise.

But the sad thing is your children could already have taken that first fateful step into the seductive clutches of organized labor.

In their still-forming young minds, the kids might have felt the first rush of the linked arm, the passionate voice, the unbroken line. The romance of the struggle can take hold, and it can be difficult to bring them back.

And parents are often the last to know.

Fortunately, those who have known the heartbreak of discovering, too late, the union flier in the sock drawer, the picket signs in the garage, are using the experience to help others. Groups such as Angry Parents Appalled By Unions (APABU) are putting out the word that steps can be taken.

There are warning signs which, if spotted in time, can help avoid the neighborhood embarrassment of a union sticker on the family car or, even worse, an organizer dropping by the house.

First, look through your children’s schoolbooks. If you find a copy of the Pete Seeger songbook, call the deprogrammers.

Check your son’s or daughter’s iPod. If Joan Baez’s “Joe Hill” has been downloaded, call the deprogrammers.

Random before-school inspections can sometimes reveal a Cesar Chavez T-shirt beneath a hoodie. If found, call the deprogrammers.

And always be on alert for the casual Woody Guthrie reference or the Studs Terkel quote about how every American drawing a paycheck owes a debt to the unions.

There is almost no problem that can’t be blamed on unions, and a whole bunch of people are doing all they can to make it happen.

But it takes vigilance. It takes a steely resolve not to let that old solidarity shtick take hold.

Otherwise, a whole generation is going to start thinking it can make a difference just by sticking together.

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