

And a Caterpillar Shall Lead Us

by Burt Prelutsky

I have never understood why the rest of us have sat idly by while unions have gobbled up so much power and money. Even as their numbers in the private sector have steadily declined over the years, they have surged in the public sector. My question is, just exactly when did we lose our senses and allow civil servants to unionize and strike?

It had always been understood that the trade-off was that the members of the Civil Service had forfeited possible riches in the world of entrepreneurs and risk-takers for the security that went with a steady paycheck from the city, the state or the federal government.

But now, they are paid more than the typical wage earner. What's more, even as the unemployment rate hovers around 10% for the rest of us, employment for this privileged class continues to increase. And it's all because they tithe their benefactors in the Democratic party. One hand washes another, and both hands remain as dirty as sin.

Consider that over 300 New York City sanitation workers made over \$100,000-a-year. Their boss, John Doherty, is paid \$205,000 for basically shaking down the city council. What's more, during the December storms, the workers intentionally delayed snow removal in protest of six percent of their colleagues being laid off over the past two years because of the financial meltdown.

The top stagehand at New York's Metropolitan Opera made \$334,000 in 2010. I bet the executives at the Met don't talk about that when they go begging for operating funds.

At Carnegie Hall, one lucky stagehand pulled down an astonishing \$422, 599. The average, when you include benefits, is \$290,000-a-year. No wonder the tickets are so expensive. It reminds me of the old joke about the tourist asking how to get to Carnegie Hall and being told, "Practice, practice, practice." We had always assumed that it referred to aspiring violinists, cellists and pianists. But thanks to Local One of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, it apparently includes furniture movers.

Some years ago, the unions closed down New York's newspapers. By the time the strike ended, most of the papers were out of business, and with them went thousands of jobs. On another occasion, they managed to close down most Broadway theaters for 19 days. Out of fear of a reoccurrence, the owners caved in and the contracts now call for the hiring of musicians for every show on Broadway, even two-character dramas in which nobody even whistles, hums or pretends to play a piccolo.

The greed and corruption doesn't end with salaries and pensions. More than a thousand Postal Service employees are collecting workers compensation benefits, even though they are in their 80s; 132 of them are in their 90s. Not only aren't any of these people ever going back on the job, but 75% of the money is tax-free.

It's only an unconfirmed rumor that some of these folks started out with the Pony Express.

Recently, a stagehand, a member of IATSE Local 33 here in L.A., was sent packing by his union when he reached the job site at USC. He came fully prepared to help set up an Obama event. The problem was that he was wearing a sweatshirt depicting the USS George H.W. Bush, a Navy ship on which his son is currently serving.

The fact that politicians, particularly those of the liberal persuasion, are allowing unions to destroy our financial

futures reminds me of something I recently read about the processionary caterpillar. It seems that a French naturalist enticed a group of these insects on to the rim of a flowerpot. Because they derive their name from their habit of following a lead caterpillar, each with its eyes half-closed and their heads lodged firmly against the backside of the caterpillar in front of them, Jean-Henri Fabre managed to connect the caterpillar at the head of the line with the one bringing up the rear, thus forming a furry circle. He surmised that after a few times around the rim, the critters would discover their predicament and move off in a different direction. As an added inducement, Monsieur Fabre even stashed some of their favorite food just six inches away.

But instead of changing their ways, the caterpillars continued circling for a week, finally stopping only because of exhaustion and starvation.

With insects, such behavior is regarded as instinctual. With people, it would be diagnosed as insanity. Which tells us all we really need to know about unions and the politicians who pander to them.

It is probably untrue that, instead of morphing into butterflies when these caterpillars emerge from their cocoons, they become welfare recipients and lifelong Democrats.

©2011 Burt Prelutsky

Write to: BurtPrelutsky@aol.com.

To send this article, click the envelope icon↓