
Democracy in America
American politics

Unions

Teaching quality and bargaining

Feb 23rd 2011, 17:15 by M.S.

SCOTT LEMIEUX [passes along](http://www.lawyersgunsmoneyblog.com/2011/02/but-i-thought-union-busting-solved-all-educational-problems) (http://www.lawyersgunsmoneyblog.com/2011/02/but-i-thought-union-busting-solved-all-educational-problems) a pretty useful point to keep in mind, courtesy of his friend Ken Sherrill.

Only 5 states do not have collective bargaining for educators and have deemed it illegal. Those states and their ranking on ACT/SAT scores are as follows:

South Carolina – 50th

North Carolina – 49th

Georgia – 48th

Texas – 47th

Virginia – 44th

If you are wondering, Wisconsin, with its collective bargaining for teachers, is ranked 2nd in the country.

As Mr Lemieux says, this doesn't show that collective bargaining makes school systems better. But it makes it pretty hard to argue the converse.

On a broader note, I think this is illustrative of the need for people who are interested in better outcomes for national social challenges to stop arguing that their opponents are illegitimate and should be annihilated. In the particular case of unions, it's pretty clear from all the research that the existence of unions in a workplace can either increase or decrease productivity, depending on how unions and management interact. Conservatives who want to argue that unions destroy productivity almost inevitably use the example of the American auto industry and the UAW, which is an interesting example because American car manufacturers were defeated on

quality and price by car manufacturers from two countries with extremely high rates of unionisation, Germany and Japan. When GM staged a last-ditch effort in the 1980s to learn how to make cars the Japanese way, they sent management and union teams to [work with Toyota](http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/403/nummi) (<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/403/nummi>) to see how to arrange collaborative union-management relationships.

There are clearly some serious problems facing American governance, and public-sector unions are going to have to make adjustments to solve those problems, whether it means pension restructuring or allowing the firing of incompetent teachers. But those kinds of reforms will be unachievable if unions correctly understand that their opponents, including Scott Walker and the modern Republican Party, are not in fact interested in collaborating with them on solutions, and are instead trying to destroy their existence as institutions.