

The NEA Pays to Play: Buying Influence With ACORN and Other Leftwing Groups

By RiShawn Biddle

***Summary:** Desperate to maintain its political influence, the National Education Association (NEA) is using philanthropy to build political alliances with left-leaning nonprofits such as ACORN and the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation. The NEA hopes grassroots activists and liberal special interests will back its efforts to protect the public sector's best-compensated employment—public school teaching—and beat back reform challenges that are attracting support from Democrats not beholden to organized labor. But the NEA's gift-giving strategy can backfire when its allies are caught up in controversy and scandal or oppose the very policies the NEA holds dear, reports education expert RiShawn Biddle.*



America has plenty of public employee unions that can throw their weight around, but the biggest is the National Education Association, which can rally its rank-and-file members to lobby mayors and school boards, legislatures and Congress. Since the 1960s, the NEA has used its campaign clout and its monopoly powers over collective bargaining to make public school teaching the best-compensated public sector job in the country. And the NEA's 3.2 million members are its best-known and most feared lobbyists. They can get a bill passed or defeated by mobilizing their forces outside a statehouse (and before the TV cameras) or inside a classroom, where they bond with parents who can be their advocates.

The \$377 million in dues that the NEA forcibly collects each year from teachers as payment for its services – a sum even

greater than the \$344 million that flows into the Service Employees International Union – gives the union the kind of financial heft other unions envy. Much of this money does not go into collective bargaining but fattens NEA campaign war chests, which the union and its affiliates deploy during election campaigns. The NEA took in an estimated \$569 million that it spent on local, state and national political campaigns during the 2007-2008 election cycle, according to the National Institute on Money in State Politics. This made the NEA the nation's single-biggest campaign contributor for the 2009-2010 election period, the NEA has raised another \$15 million to date – double the amount raised at the same time two years ago. This fundraising prowess is why Harvard University education scholar Paul Peterson declares that the NEA is “in a position to

tell state legislatures what to do.”

But these days, the NEA, along with the American Federation of Teachers, no longer has a stranglehold over education policymaking. Thanks to the efforts of the school reform movement and backers such

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as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, many politicians have become backers of more-rigorous curriculum standards, stronger accountability measures, school choice alternatives, and improvements to the quality of the nation's teacher corps. The NEA has especially lost support within the Democratic Party – which has long benefited from the union's largess – as centrist school reformers have won over President Barack Obama.

The NEA's changing fortunes were most apparent in March when Obama and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan lent their support to a school district in Central Falls, Rhode Island. It fired its entire high school teaching staff when they refused to support a plan intended to overhaul the school's abysmal academic performance. (Though some of the teachers may get their jobs back.)

The Obama Administration has especially angered the NEA with "Race to the Top," its school reform initiative that invites states to compete for \$4.3 billion in federal stimulus dollars if they implement education reforms, including lifting restrictions on the use of student test score data in evaluating teacher performance. This particular provision has angered the NEA, which until recently has insulated its members from all but the weakest forms of evaluation. NEA policy czar Kay Brilliant complained in a letter to Secretary Duncan that it was "inappropriate to require that states be able to link data on



Bill and Melinda Gates provided generous funding to prod schools to adopt better teacher assessments. That angered teachers unions and forced them to play defense.

student achievement to individual teachers for the purpose of teacher and principal evaluation.”

These developments are forcing the NEA and the AFT to bolster its coffers and rally members against adopting such requirements. But the unions are losing ground. In November 2008, in spite of threats from the NEA's California affiliate, the Golden State struck down a state law that banned the use of test scores in teacher evaluation. Since then, other states, including Tennessee, Massachusetts, and Nevada, have followed suit.

As its direct influence over Democratic office-holders has begun to sputter, the NEA has hit upon a new strategy. It is beginning to use its resources to cement alliances with nonprofit special interest groups that are major players within Democratic Party politics. Making financial contributions to left-leaning interest groups helped the NEA build a coalition against the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. As an increasing

number of education reform initiatives face voters and legislators in 2010 and beyond, the union is once again looking for help from its old allies.

Blackboards and Greenbacks

In the four years between fiscal years 2005-2006 and 2008-2009, the NEA has increased its donations to nonprofits by nearly a six-fold, from \$4 million to \$26 million. In 2008-2009 alone, the NEA ladled out \$360,000 to the "labor rights" group American Rights at Work – best-known for its lobbying for the curiously-named Employee Free Choice Act. It also contributed \$450,000 to Health Care for America Now (HCAN), which rallies grassroots support for President Obama's health care proposal. HCAN partners include the Communications Workers of America and the United Auto Workers. Until recently, the NEA was also a prime sponsor of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), the community activist group whose alleged voter fraud, advice on tax-dodging and

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D.C. public schools chancellor Michelle Rhee is intent on measuring teacher performance. She wants to give more money to good teachers and fire ineffective ones.

other misdeeds have haunted the Obama Administration and Democratic Party activists. The NEA reports on its tax forms that it gave ACORN \$396,452 in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 for “nonpartisan voter registration” and “community education” activities.

NEA financing for “nonpartisan” research dovetails nicely with its opposition to school reform. Between 2004-2005 and 2008-2009, the union gave more than \$1.3 million to the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), a Washington-based think tank. During that time, EPI and its white-bearded president, Lawrence Mishel, produced a steady stream of studies taking aim at school reformers. Their reports cast doubt on education reform-minded researchers such as Manhattan Institute scholar Jay P. Greene and Urban Institute researcher Christopher Swanson (now with the research division of the publisher of Education Week) that revealed that states and school districts inflated high school

graduation rates – and hid the nation’s dropout crisis.

What does the NEA receive in exchange for its donations? It gains access to research that it can use in its own advocacy and that will further the efforts of its state affiliates to rally grassroots support. As Joe Williams, the founder of the school reform-minded Democrats for Education Reform, pointed out in a 2006 report, the NEA can conduct stealth campaigns on behalf of its position. It can attempt to spin the public while “leaving the public unaware of the organizations’ financial ties to the union.”

More importantly, NEA donations buy critical support from organizations that might otherwise support elements of the school reform movement. This includes the charter school movement—which has earned the ire of both the NEA and the AFT for improving academic achievement among poor black and Latino children without the need for burdensome teacher contracts –

and the teacher quality movement, whose acolytes include Wendy Kopp, founder of the successful alternative teacher training group Teach for America, and Washington, D.C. schools chancellor Michelle Rhee. (The effort by the NEA and the AFT to organize charter school teaching staffs was covered last month in *Labor Watch*. Michelle Rhee was profiled in *Labor Watch*’s January 2009 edition).

Even as charter school advocates and teacher quality activists have won support from civil rights leaders such as Al Sharpton and the National Council of La Raza, the NEA has kept most of its beneficiaries, including the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, in the fold. Says Mike Antonucci of the NEA watchdog outfit Education Intelligence Agency: “You don’t bite the hand that feeds you.”

By backing left-leaning nonprofits, the NEA has no assurance that it will get a bang for its buck. Some of the groups have their own alliances with the NEA’s arch-enemies, the school reformers. Others have been hit by the kind of bad publicity and allegations of wrongdoing that damages credibility and ruins reputations. For instance, in September 2009, the NEA was forced to issue talking points to its affiliates explaining its relationship with ACORN. Conservative activists had exposed the group’s shady dealings. The union went so far as to trot out its president, Dennis Van Roekel, who pointedly insisted that his organization was “stunned and appalled” by the “inexcusable actions.”

The fact that the NEA distributes so much money to a leftist group belies its assertion that it is the leading voice for classroom teachers. More often than not, the NEA’s rank-and-file members aren’t fully informed about the donations made in their name. This is why few teachers object to their union’s contributions. No doubt teachers were indifferent to their union’s influence-buying as long as the NEA improved their benefits and salaries. But as states and school districts struggle through a fourth year of an

economic recession, confront astronomical budget deficits and more than \$1 trillion in unfunded pension deficits, they can't count on taxpayer relief. And the NEA may no longer be able to count on their members' complacency or a steady flow of their paid-in-full union dues.

NEA's Philanthropy Strategy

Teachers unions have long been generous in distributing their funds to groups they regard as coalition partners. During the Cold War, the AFT's legendary president, Albert Shanker, overtly funded anti-Communist projects in Nicaragua and Poland. He helped the AFL-CIO form a fund to help Lech Walesa and the Solidarity labor union stare down Poland's Communist leadership. A founding member of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Shanker understood the need for the AFT – whose membership largely worked in the nation's big cities – to diligently build alliances with groups outside public education. In Washington, D.C., for example, the AFT affiliate cultivated ties to a rising star, the now-disgraced Marion Barry. Their partnership managed to nearly destroy the prospects for high-quality academic instruction and student achievement in D.C. schools.

(The former president of the AFT affiliate, Barbara Bullock, along with its office manager, Gwendolyn Hemphill, and former treasurer James O. Baxter, were convicted of diverting \$5 million in union dues for an array of luxury items and other gewgaws, including a plasma-screen television and Rosendorf-Evans furs.)

By contrast, the NEA focused less on building ties to groups outside the confines of public education. Founded in 1857 as a professional association, and largely based in the Midwest and suburbia, the union chose to influence education policy and teacher compensation through its relationship with the nation's university schools of education – the training ground for most teachers and administrators – and other elements of traditional public education. This influence grew exponentially starting in the 1960s, when states began requiring school districts to collectively bargain with NEA and AFT locals. Although lacking the AFT's fiery



Former American Federation of Teachers president Albert Shanker helped fund anti-Communist efforts.

rhetoric, the NEA successfully won lavish perks for its teachers – including nearly-free health coverage and pension benefits that could pay as much as \$2 million over a lifetime. The union forced school districts into often-servile relationships in which it was the union locals that shaped classroom instruction.

The NEA became especially skilled at using its vast financial resources to sway state legislative and federal decision-making. Between 1980 and 1994, its national donations to congressional candidates increased from \$400,000 to \$3.7 million, an eight-fold increase. With most of these funds going to Democratic candidates and incumbents, the union became a key player in the party's activist core. State and local affiliates also masterfully used their campaign war chests and rank-and-file members to sway legislators and school board members their way. Until it went insolvent last year, the NEA's Indiana affiliate skillfully built ties to the state's politicians and bureaucrats. It poured more than \$1.5 million into Hoosier State political campaigns during the 2007-2008 election cycle, making it the single-biggest

donor at the time. (The collapse of the Indiana affiliate was chronicled in February by *Labor Watch*).

The NEA's largesse extends to other members of the public education establishment. It is a longtime donor to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, the trade group for the nation's education schools. The union donated \$252,262 to the group in 2008-2009. Another player in teacher training, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, received \$1.5 million from the NEA between 2005-2006 and 2008-2009. These donations cemented the union's influence with education trade associations.

However, during the past decade new organizations have emerged with a mission to reform education policies at the federal, state and local levels. These emerging forces have begun to dilute NEA and AFT influence.

Taxpayer organizations are one such force. Starting in California in 1978, taxpayer activists like the late Howard Jarvis and others have introduced ballot initiatives to reduce local property taxes, the major source of education funding for most of the past century. The impact of reduced levies on education finance occurred just as state governments were being pressed by civil rights activists and others to equalize school funding levels between poor urban and wealthier suburban districts. The states responded by paying for ever-larger shares of school budgets. That in turn aroused the interest of groups representing business. They were paying taxes while wondering why their young employees were so poorly equipped for work.

The concern over deepening academic failure in the public schools led governors like Tennessee's Lamar Alexander to focus their attention on new education issues. Curriculum standards, textbook requirements, and testing regimes became subjects of general political discussion. By 1986, some 250 state and local panels were at work on school reform. Big-city mayors and young Democrats worried over

the low quality of instruction inside urban school districts. Starting with Milwaukee with its school voucher program in 1990, mayors began taking over existing school districts and launching charter schools. They admired the energy and dedication of Teach for America and other alternative teacher training programs. During the 1990s, advocates for school reform became increasingly vocal, and they attracted the attention of more centrist Democrats such as Arkansas governor and then-President Bill Clinton, who worked to revamp education policy at the federal level.

Where were the teacher unions? By 1997, the NEA's public relations counselors, the Kamber Group, implored the union to go into "crisis mode." The unions were urged to answer the reformers and beat back their ideas. It didn't work. Four years later, school reformers, bolstered by the election of George W. Bush, transformed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act into the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The law, with its emphasis on using test scores and graduation rates to measure school, student and teacher performance, passed with bipartisan support. This included the support of then-Sen. Edward Kennedy, a longtime beneficiary of teachers union campaign contributions.

Nonprofits Play Ball

Reeling from this public policy defeat and unable to stop the passage of charter school laws across the country, the NEA has re-focused its energies and changed its strategy. It now aims to reshape public opinion about the standard and accountability provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act, which reformers touted as a way to force states to measure and improve student achievement. The NEA wants Congress to weaken or erase the law (Congress is now holding hearings on reauthorization this year). It backs the National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest) – whose criticisms of standardized testing regimes are widely quoted in the press; the NEA handed over \$150,000 to FairTest in 2008-2009. It also sponsored a new group called Communities for Quality Education



One National Educational Association grant recipient tried to shut down the Yankee nuclear power plant.

(CQE), whose "educational advocacy" was shaped by a board that included the heads of NEA affiliates. CQE collected \$8.7 million between the 2003-2004 and 2008-2009 fiscal years.

More importantly, the NEA has begun reaching outside the cozy circle of the education establishment to build ties to other elements within the Democratic Party's activist wing. Declared then-NEA President Reginald Weaver during a 2006 event: "We have all kinds of organizations that want this law changed. It's just a matter of the political climate."

For instance, through CQE, the NEA partnered with the Civil Society Institute, a Newton, Massachusetts environmental policy think tank better-known for trying to shut down the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant. The two created a coalition that includes elements of Massachusetts' education establishment. CQE and Civil Society cobbled together Facing Reality, a 2005 report that criticized No Child's provision that all schools make "Adequate Yearly Progress" toward enabling all students to be "proficient" in English and

mathematics. Critics of the provision say that the provision unfairly penalizes schools who are otherwise doing well because they fail to improve academic achievement for poor white, black and Latino students. (The reality that many schools ignore such students – and let them drop out – is the very reason why many conservatives and centrist Democrats have rallied around No Child in the first place.)

The NEA also showers funds onto education research outfits that produced reports favorable to the union's opposition to charter schools and to provisions of No Child Left Behind. One outfit, the Civil Rights Project, has proven to be reliable enemy of charter schools, accusing them of fostering racial and economic segregation. The NEA's most-reliable partnership is with the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), which is the union's go-to source for research supporting its talking points. Cofounded by an all-star group of left-leaning economists that include Robert Kuttner (cofounder of The American Prospect magazine and the brains behind the Community Reinvestment Act) and former Clinton Labor Secretary Robert Reich, EPI primarily focuses on wage and employment issues. But as the NEA bolsters funding for EPI, it has placed more focus on education.

Between 2004-2005 and 2008-2009, the NEA poured more than \$1.3 million into EPI. In turn, the think tank has generated reports and essays (including some published in the American Prospect) declaring that test performance shouldn't be used in evaluating teachers and schools – a cornerstone of No Child's accountability measures – and it even dared to proclaim that teachers unions weren't "an important impediment" in removing laggard instructors from the classroom. EPI even attempted to use faulty statistical data such as the National Education Longitudinal Study – a U.S. Department of Education survey with an extremely limited survey population – and the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (which doesn't track graduation rates over time) to disprove that high schools had far more students dropping out than annually reported.

By 2007, the NEA began to expand its donations to include groups with even more-tenuous ties to public education. This includes ACORN, which touts its role in voter registration drives ahead of the 2008 elections. Between 2006-07 and 2007-08, the NEA donated \$396,452 to ACORN in hopes of putting the group's "extensive grassroots network and track record for mobilizing community involvement" to its use. The goal? For ACORN to rally the kind of low-income parents and traditional defenders of public education who can oppose the voter initiatives and school reform-minded candidates that would adversely impact the NEA's agenda.

Another group receiving support from the NEA was the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), which received \$30,000 from the NEA in 2008-2009. It signed on to the NEA's "12-point joint action plan" on stemming dropouts – a hodgepodge of suggestions that includes funding universal pre-kindergarten programs and expanding alternative high schools (which research has shown actually encourages dropouts).

The philanthropy strategy hasn't worked as the NEA intended. One beneficiary, the Schott Foundation for Public Education (which received \$30,000 in NEA dollars in 2008-2009) advocates improving the data available on rates of graduation and it wants to learn in what ways academic failure contributes to high dropout rates among black males. The NEA opposes these sorts of proposals, arguing that this kind of data is misleading and should not be used to evaluate schools and teachers. Even MALDEF strongly opposes NEA efforts to gut No Child Left Behind. It joined together with La Raza, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), NAACP, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, and Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights to support and strengthen No Child. (Reauthorization proceedings for the law are now in its third, protracted year.)

An even bigger recipient of NEA funding is the Center for American Progress (CAP), the progressive think tank cofounded by



National Education Association president Dennis Van Roekel made a reported \$295,658 in the last fiscal year.

Clinton acolyte John Podesta. It collected \$110,000 in NEA funds in 2008-2009. Yet CAP works with two of the most active players in the school reform movement – the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the American Enterprise Institute – on a series of report cards that applaud states for embracing charters and alternative teacher training programs and flunk those that stubbornly cling to the status quo.

The NEA has beaten back ballot initiatives that would crimp its coffers either by cutting school funding (forcing districts to lay off

dues-paying teachers) or by passing Right to Work laws (allowing teachers to decline union membership). The NEA learned from the experiences of its California affiliate, which in 1988 secured passage of a ballot initiative (Proposition 98) requiring legislators to dedicate 39 percent of the state budget to school funding. The national NEA has poured money into helping other state affiliates set up front groups to act as sock puppets for similar goals.

In 2008-2009, the union gave \$1.6 million to something called Coloradans for Middle

Class Relief. It helped defeat a ballot proposal to restrict the collection of union dues from non-union workers. Last year in Maine, the NEA supplied nearly the entire budget of \$680,426.73 for Citizens Who Support Maine's Public Schools, a political action committee that defeated a proposed taxpayer bill of rights and a proposal to reduce Maine's state excise tax.

Aiding Fellow-Travelers

The NEA spends its member dues as lavishly as it tries to spend taxpayer dollars. Besides its contributions to nonprofits and its campaign contributions, NEA leaders collect handsome salaries averaging \$110,000 a year. The 2008-2009 salary of Dennis Van Roekel, the NEA's current president, was \$295,658. With almost no funding dedicated to recruiting new members, the NEA has little reason to exercise fiscal restraint. Notes union-watcher Michael Antonucci: "There isn't any incentive for NEA to hang on to this money once it is collected. The ballot initiative money gets rolled over from year to year, but if the fund gets too big people might want to reduce [their dues]."

The NEA must contend with the reality that large parts of the school reform movement are embraced by left-leaning nonprofits as strongly as they are by centrist Democrats, conservatives and urban parents. This includes Rock the Vote cofounder Steve Barr – who founded the Green Dot chain of Latino-targeted charter schools – and progressive pundit Matthew Yglesias. Groups such as Schott, MALDEF and La Raza work in the very neighborhoods whose public schools are little more than dropout factories. They cannot help but be more concerned about improving the quality of education than supporting highly-paid teachers unions.

The philanthropy strategy further exposes the NEA to charges that it aids and abets the worst excesses of left-leaning groups. Besides the blow back for its ties to ACORN, the NEA must now worry about its relationship with the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) Foundation. The NEA gave it \$65,800 in 2008-2009. Last month, the foundation and its PAC were

subjects of a New York Times report exposing its lavish spending – \$700,000 to produce the caucus' annual gala. The Times also disclosed that the CBC Foundation, a nonprofit arm of African-American Democrats in Congress, gave almost nothing in scholarships or other aid to the communities its members are supposed to represent and serve. Although the NEA hasn't yet had to publicly clarify its relationship with the caucus, it's unlikely that the teachers union is resting easy.

NEA donations reveal that the union is not particularly concerned about the opinions of its rank-and-file members. It says it is the voice of average classroom teachers, but does little to inform them about its giving and provides inadequate public disclosure of its expenditures. (The author reviewed NEA spending by examining its LM-2 annual reports, which through the efforts of former U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao, are available online at <http://www.dol.gov/olms/regs/compliance/rro/lnrda.htm>.)

In 2008, for example, the NEA gave \$260,000 to Citizens for Progress, one of a string of advocacy groups run by Democrat strategists Craig Varoga and George Rakis out of their Washington, D.C. Beltway offices. However, those donations are labeled as "media" expenses in the NEA filing with the U.S. Department of Labor. The fact that the donations are so skewed toward left-leaning groups means that NEA leadership is ignoring the wide diversity of political thinking within its ranks. An analysis by pollster Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, for example, found that rank-and-file teachers were far more wary of President Obama's health care reform plan than the union's national and state leadership.

Few NEA members have voiced opposition to the union's political and pseudo-philanthropic giving largely because the union has successfully kept its promise of assuring teachers that it will defend the traditional system of degree- and seniority-based compensation, near-lifetime employment and lavish retirement benefits that have made teaching more lucrative

than any other public-sector profession. But no one now can honestly make these promises. As states wrestle with budget deficits and the cost of retiree benefits for all civil servants, there are more calls to end the generous deals. In New Jersey, Gov. Chris Christie and the Democrat-controlled legislature are unified in requiring teachers to contribute 1.5 percent of their salaries to healthcare benefits (school districts currently cover those contributions). The NEA state affiliate opposes this measly contribution. Thanks to the Bush Administration's No Child Left Behind Act and the Obama Race to the Top initiative, there will be more and more efforts to pass performance pay plans over the objections of teachers unions. Young teachers, who are less interested in tenure, may force the NEA and AFT to back away from defending the status quo.

By the time it's all said and done, the NEA may not have many alliances left.

RiShawn Biddle, editor of the education blog Dropout Nation, is co-author of A Byte at the Apple: Rethinking Education Data for the Post NCLB Era.



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LaborNotes

“Public employee unions in Whitman’s crosshairs,” reported the **San Francisco Chronicle** on March 15. The former eBay CEO and current Republican gubernatorial hopeful **Meg Whitman** “is sharpening her focus on one of the main foils of [her] campaign: unions, particularly those representing public employees.” Whitman is attacking both primary and likely general election opponents for being too close to the state’s public sector labor unions.

Whitman isn’t the only prominent California candidate attacking unions. The popular blogger **Mickey Kaus** announced that he would challenge Senator Barbara Boxer in the Democratic primary. Two reasons he cited for running against her were Boxer’s support for card check and teachers unions.

Service Employees International Union president **Andy Stern** was appointed to the newly created **National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform** in March by President **Barack Obama**. The purpose of the Commission is to issue recommendations about how to balance the budget and shore up America’s fiscal future. Several critics charged that appointing Stern to this body was an awful idea. **Ashton Ellis** of the **Center for Individual Freedom** wrote that the effect would be to “skew the panel’s work toward an outcome that produces higher taxes, more union members with rapacious compensation packages and closer bonds between Big Labor and Big Government.”

In February, the U.S. economy lost 36,000 jobs, leaving the unemployment essentially unchanged at 9.7 percent, according to the **Bureau of Labor Statistics**. There was job growth in some sectors but massive layoffs in construction. The **Heritage Foundation’s Rea Hederman** and **James Sherk** compared this recession and aftermath to previous ones and found that “As a result of Washington’s interference, the current recovery’s job creation numbers are lagging behind those of previous recessions.” Also, the census bureau is hiring up to one million people who will again be unemployed in the middle of the year once the census is complete.

The special Winter 2010 issue of the **Cato Journal** set out to answer the question, “Are unions good for America.” The short answer is no, because they reduce economic freedom. Editor James Dorn explains in the introduction that “Although unions as voluntary associations of workers would not violate workers’ freedom, much of U.S. labor law takes that freedom away.” The 12 scholarly essays look at the historical development of U.S. labor law; the economic consequences of unionization, including “specific examples of how unions have caused capital and jobs to flee cities and have fostered discrimination”; and make the case for more free market-oriented labor laws going forward. Recommended reading.

On March 15, **Bloomberg** reported that the **UK Conservative Party** is urging its rival **Labour Party** to sever ties with **Unite**, the union that is spearheading the strike against **British Airlines**. Prime Minister **Gordon Brown’s** government has condemned the strike but Conservatives point out that a quarter of the party’s funds since Brown became prime minister have come from the union.

In February and March, Greece’s unions organized three general strikes in as many weeks, effectively shutting the country down. **Reuters** reported that the third strike “comes after austerity measures to rescue Greece’s debt-stricken economy angered Greek trade unions.” The country was in danger of defaulting on its debt, and so had to reduce pay and benefits to the heavily unionized government workers.