

James P. Hoffa

Protests mount over pension cut

Opposition is growing across the Midwest against a devastating pension cut proposal put forward by the Central States Pension Fund that would slash benefits by as much as 65 percent. Thousands of Teamsters are letting the federal government know they must reject the plan if they want retirees to be able to subsist on their own.

In December alone, rank-and-file Teamsters and retirees attended meetings in Columbus, Ohio, Milwaukee and Washington to inform decision makers at the U.S. Department of Treasury that the application put forth by Central States last fall is unacceptable and will financially ruin many retirees who contributed to the plan throughout their careers. Additionally, more joined in on phone-in conference calls.

Teamster leadership is also resolute in

our opposition, writing Treasury officials last month to tell them the pension proposal will not succeed in saving the fund, only destroy the futures of tens of thousands of retirees in their golden years if it is adopted.

After extensive review and analysis, this union does not believe Central States, an independent entity, can save itself through more intensive cuts or higher employer contributions. The reality is that Central States will become a "zombie" plan -- its funding ratio will sink to 40 percent and its active worker population will decline by two-thirds. If the federal government is truly concerned with the economic future of Central States' participants, it will find a way to provide direct financial support to the plan and its participants.

The Teamsters are far from alone in their opposition. Nineteen House members have signed onto two separate letters sent to Special Master Kenneth Feinberg, who is overseeing the process, urging him to reject efforts to slash monthly pension payments. One of those letters signed by Rep. Dan Kildee (D-Mich.) and 17 others

says doing so is a matter of fairness.

"Simply put, America's workers are entitled to the pensions they've earned over a lifetime of hard work -- and the big corporations that fall into financial trouble or even declare bankruptcy should not be permitted to take those problems and failures out on employee pensions, especially while executives secure golden parachutes," they wrote.

The heart of the problem is Congress' approval of the Multiemployer Pension Reform Act (MPRA) in late 2014. That's what allowed Central States to put forward such a ridiculous pension proposal in the first place that now is being mulled by the Treasury Department. But there is a way to fix it.

Capitol Hill lawmakers should take a close look at the Keep Our Pensions Act sponsored by Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-Ohio) or the Pension Accountability Act offered by Sen. Rob Portman (R-Ohio) and Reps. David Joyce (R-Ohio) and Tim Ryan (D-Ohio) as a way to solve the crisis facing

Central States and other pension plans.

In the end, Congress must start over and do whatever it can through the broad powers and resources of the federal government to protect the pensions of millions of retirees who had nothing to do with the crisis, but whose burden they are now being asked to bear.

Meanwhile, Teamsters need to continue to contact Feinberg and the Treasury Department so the federal government listens to their needs and opposes the Central States' proposal. Workers deserve better!

By Teamsters General President James P. Hoffa in the Detroit News, January 6, 2016



JAMES P. HOFFA
GENERAL PRESIDENT
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VAIRMA: War . . . , cont.

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declined from more than 20 percent of the U.S. workforce to about seven percent. Because organized labor establishes wage standards for all workers—union and nonunion—weaker unions mean lower wages. That's quantifiable

In the census year of 2010, anti-union lawmakers assumed control of the majority of state legislatures in the country, and immediately began gerrymandering legislative districts to ensure that they would remain in charge for the next 10 years

And what have the politicians been doing?

A lot of things to make matters worse, it seems, such as introducing right-to-work legislation in every state where union busters believe it can be passed. The three free bargaining states in Joint Council 3 were targets in 2015, and the bill has already been introduced this year in Colorado.

In addition, Congress continues to pass global trade agreements that are negotiated in secret and kill thousands of American jobs, mostly by shipping them to countries with slave wage workforces. Congress will soon vote on the Trans Pacific Partnership, another job killing trade agreement. The affinity for global trade began in 1992 with passage of the

North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), proposed by the Clinton administration

Then there is the U.S. Supreme Court. Rather than helping the working stiff the high court seems to have an anti-union bias. It is now considering a case that would allow nonunion public school teachers to receive the benefits of a union contract without paying for union representation, thereby weakening the unions in collective bargaining.

There is no question this year will be one of biggest challenges to face organized labor since the Great Depression. The stars seem to have been aligned against working men and women for many years. That must change very soon if the labor movement is to survive.

It is imperative that memberships of every union in the country must become more active in politics this year than they have ever been before. We need a unified voice when we go to the polling place. We must understand that good wages, hours and working conditions, the most important assets possessed by our families are in peril, and, thus, we must campaign accordingly for the candidates who will safeguard them.

We must go to war in 2016, and apathy will be our greatest enemy.

RTW introduced again in CO

DENVER — For the 25th time in the last 27 years, a right-to-work (for less) bill has been introduced in the Colorado Legislature, and it didn't take long. The bill was introduced six days after the 120-day session convened.

The bill, sponsored by 12 Republican senators, including the senate leader, was sent to the Senate Business, Labor and Technology Committee, where it will like-

ly pass. Then it will probably pass in the full senate where Republicans control 18 to 17, but will run into problems in the House, where Democrats hold 134 to 31 edge. It is expected to be defeated in a house committee.

In addition to being defeated regularly in the Colorado legislature, right-to-work was overwhelmingly defeated at the polls in a state referendum in 2008.

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