

A Few minutes with the Boss

By: Joseph Andalina

Did Quinn step in it this time?

Labor disputes in the news again. No rest for the weary in this business. These issues are affecting both private and public sectors, and not in a good way. Among all the other problems involving the collective bargaining rights in Wisconsin, Ohio, Michigan and others, right here in Illinois we have our own travails.

Politicians, both blue and red, trying their damn best to dismantle your pensions. The press on a never-ending witch hunt to reduce your pensions, pay, perks, and even sick time benefits.

Chicago public schoolteachers are fighting cancellation of their raises, nurses at a suburban hospital seeking union affiliation, the new mayor of Chicago vowing to layoff over 600 workers if concessions are not made. (Hmm, where have we heard *that* before?)

Now our governor, he with various union endorsements and support, brazenly decides to cancel pay raises for nearly 30,000 state workers because lawmakers (he related) left him no choice by not setting the money aside (to pay the raises). He says he can't spend the money the General Assembly doesn't appropriate.

Problem here is two-fold. First, the governor can fix this problem by money by vetoing the current legislation and telling our fine legislators to provide more money for their employees. Or the politicians can just appropriate the money in another bill. Of course, the governor could also have just paid the salaries and gone to the General Assembly in the fall veto session and request more money. That's too simple, I guess.

The House Speakers says it's not up to them to decide how to spend the money; that's up to Quinn. Senate president John Cullerton was equally standoffish when he replies "Quinn's decision to end the raises will be added to next year's list of items that need to be addressed" (paraphrased).

Do their remarks sort of seem like punting the "political football?" So are they all okay with trashing workers' raises but will just allow Quinn to bite the bullet? I'll let you guess on that one.

The second issue here, though, is the bigger one. Can a politician unilaterally, with or without the General Assembly, violate a legally binding collective bargaining contract? Personally, I don't think so. What is the value of a public employee contract if it can be broken over this nonsense? I guarantee if this is allowed, then nearly every collective bargained contract out there is in jeopardy. Don't for a second believe that these lying politicians out there in some venues will do the same thing in their jurisdiction if they could. It is just sickening.

If in the public sector this happens, can it happen in the private sector, too? And how about if I contract for a new roof, the roofer replaces the old with the new and then I renege on the contract explaining that my budget director (wife) failed to provide the appropriate funds for the job?

Then as Quinn states when confronted on his bonehead move: “If they decide to sue, that’s their right and we’ll be happy to meet them in court” — meaning the union. But in this instance, “we’ll” means taxpayers’ money used to fight unions again. So he is “happy” to spend more taxpayers’ money to back off on negotiated raises? Happy? Fighting his employees makes the governor happy?

But the roofer has no such pot of gold like our state has. So in order to resolve this issue and fight for our workers, there will be a three-pronged attack. Unions (like MAP) will file grievances with the ILRB to get Quinn to honor the contract. I do pray when we win this one that penalties are assessed the state to illustrate to these disingenuous politicians that the **must** honor a legal collectively bargained contract.

Second, “there will be lawsuits.” The flavor and type are forthcoming. Third is your part. Again, write, e-mail, fax, or call multiple times to your reps, senators, and governor, as well as the House speaker and the Senate president. Get your relatives and friends to do so also.

Voice your displeasure. They need to be held accountable. Conservatives are moving forward with agendas geared to disable unions and make you a worker without a voice. Sad to say, the Democrats’ ability to take charge and ride openly with the worker has been insufficient at best. It is hard nowadays in some arenas, especially in labor, to tell the difference between “red” and “blue.”

Make them accountable to you—these politicians need to know that they are indebted to the workers who protect the streets, watch over the prisoners, handles the 911 calls, enforces our conservation laws, as well as other numerous functions.

The United Auto Workers will soon be entering into negotiations with the three big automakers. It will be interesting how this pans out with all this unrest in a similar arena that is public service.

But as hard as politicians are trying to meld the private with the public and foist a “socialistic umbrella over **all** employees in both sectors” we must stand up and hold them accountable and prevent this from happening, forcing them to honor collective bargaining.

This can turn out to be the labor fight of the decade. Fire up those electronics, people. There are messages to be sent.

Vita é Bella

Editor: As this piece was being posted, the press has reported that the unions have won the arbitration hearing over the pay raise issues with Illinois. In brief, Governor Quinn violated the union contract with state workers by refusing to give them a pay raise on July 1, 2011. Quinn was ordered to start paying the increases and back pay within 30 days. The arbitrator wrote “As a matter of contract, the State cannot simply refuse to pay the increase.” Quinn, obviously unhappy and possibly being vindictive, has said he will now appeal to the State court. What they didn’t say is where they will appeal it, and I don’t believe they will be successful here, either. We’ll keep you posted.