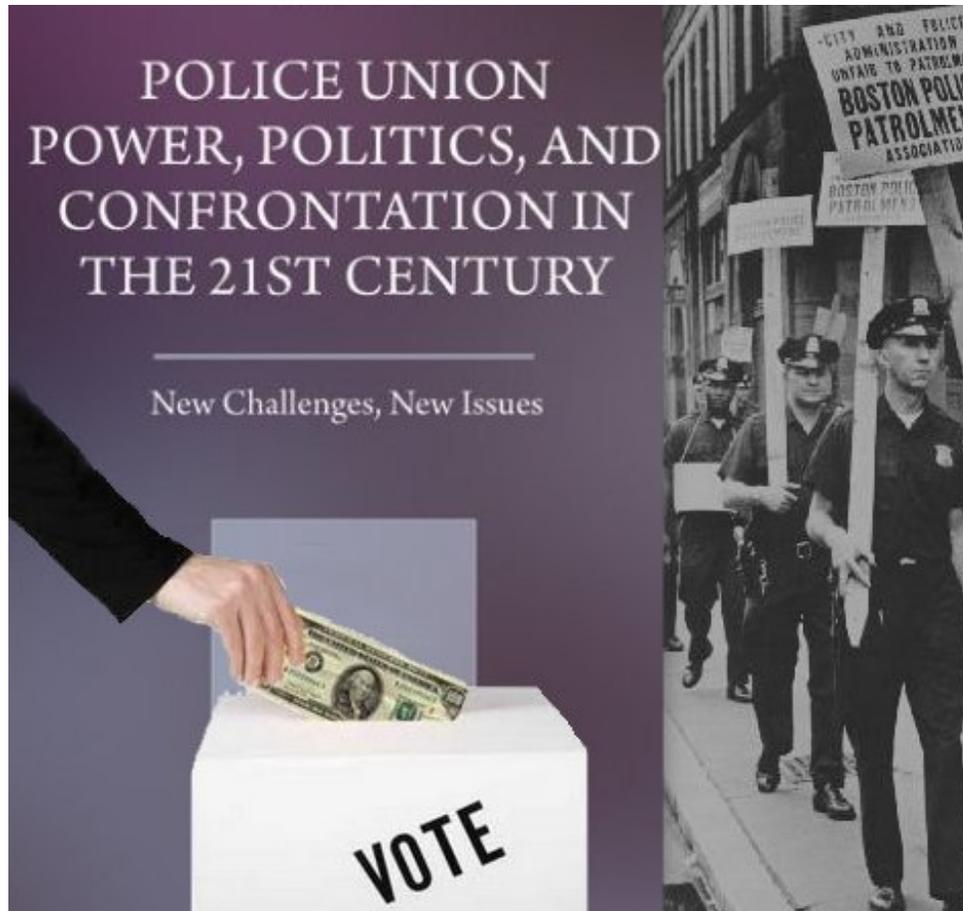


# The Conflicting Interests of Public Safety and Police Unions

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Labor unions exist, theoretically, to do little more than defend the interests of that union's members against the interests of those that employ those members. On the face of it, there isn't anything inherently wrong with this arrangement, in fact it should be viewed as necessary in some situations.

But, there can be problems with the inherent conflict of interests this kind of arrangement can bring into effect. After all, it's still in the union's interest to act in ways that help the employer succeed... otherwise the unions begin to act in ways that are ultimately more detrimental to their members than their worth by causing their member's employers to close shop.

Law enforcement unions, perhaps the most powerful type of labor union in the US at this point in time, are a bit unique in that the conflict of interests that they can create have reverberations that range far outside the confines of the union hall and employer's workplace. To understand why this is the case it's important to remember who ultimately employs law enforcement officers because the conflict of interests inherent in police unions pit the interests of public servants against the very public they serve... a conflict that should appear as irreconcilable as conflicts of interests come.

For example, law enforcement officers are meant to be in the business of arresting suspected criminals, not defending them. But when police unions come into the equation it can bring about a rather surprising switch in roles, to the point where law enforcement officers actively seek to prevent suspected criminals

from being brought to justice.

To see how this is so, we can take a look at some recent police union activities that have been in the news lately...

[In Rockford Illinois](#), for example, a police union organized a fundraiser event for two men accused of shooting an unarmed man to death inside of a church daycare center, all within view of several children and daycare workers... and one of the prizes the police were raffling off was a police-issue rifle.

[In Birmingham Alabama](#), police officers organized a “barbecue butts” benefit in order to bankroll the defense fees for five people who were caught on video kicking and beating an unconscious man who was just ejected from a car during an accident. Coincidentally, the president of that organization hosting the \$30 a butt benefit was disciplined for his role in association with that case.

[In Chicago Illinois](#), police officers recently hosted a \$50-a-ticket fundraiser amid community protests in order to help to pay the defense costs for an alleged drunk driver facing reckless homicide charges for when he hit a parked car while drunk and caused an explosion that killed two. The suspect had a record of DUI arrests and was apprehended while trying to flee the scene of the accident with a BAC 3x the legal limit.

Now, it’s only fair to mention that the suspects discussed above are police officers and the organizations which hosted or organized these benefits are police unions... but should it matter? In cases of criminal behavior, should there be a distinction between police officer and suspect when the individual in question is one and the same?

There is no ignoring that, when it’s a police officer who stands accused, that police unions facilitate a conflict of interests that causes law enforcement officers to strangely switch roles from law enforcer to criminal defender. They encourage officers to act in ways that support the accused when, in any other circumstance, the officer’s duty is to put forth every effort to bring a person suspected of a criminal act to justice.

Now, of course, it’s questionable whether officers would or would not be as inclined to defend fellow officers accused of wrongdoing if such unions didn’t exist. But police unions do force officers to take such a stance due to the very nature of such a union. A union who’s alleged function is to defend the interests of it’s members against the interests of the employer of those members... pitting the police against those they are meant to serve.

Nothing really brings this incompatible conflict of interest into sharper focus than when police unions actively protect police officers from the very laws they are meant to enforce and from the very system of justice that they are meant to serve.

Does this mean police unions should be prohibited? Perhaps not, after all they do serve a necessary purpose in protecting police officers from the whims of public servants who would prefer a system of nepotism or political favoritism over unbiased merit.

However, it is important to keep this conflict of interest and all it entails in mind when considering how powerful police unions are becoming and whether there should be limits on the political influence they are able to wield... especially considering that they are currently the fastest-growing type of labor union in America today.