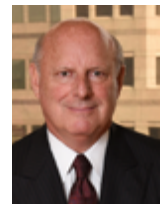


# THE TREND TO CONSOLIDATE UNION LOCALS

## *THE DEMISE OF CITY TRADE ASSOCIATIONS?*

**M**any International Unions are consolidating their locals and attempting to **create multi-state regional bargaining agreements** to reduce their administrative costs, increase their bargaining power and set standard collective bargaining agreement terms and conditions favorable to them.



By: Bob Dunleavy



at the bargaining table all that you fought for in 50 years of negotiations goes “out the window”

As a result of this movement, city and local area **trade associations** which have bargained and administered local contracts for over one-half of a century **are being replaced** by regional associations handpicked and developed by the International Union leaders so that the union can establish a realigned multi-employer bargaining relationship more favorable to it. The very existence of local multi-employer bargaining associations as we have known them is in jeopardy. Unless city associations **plan now** for this eventual scenario they will suffer even less bargaining power than ever before – they may even become extinct.

City associations must consider possible consolidation or “joint venturing” with other associations to enhance bargaining power, to create a higher level of sophistication in dealing with the unions, and to lower the costs of the association conducting its business – among other things. Obviously, it takes much advance planning, collaborative effort, vision and resolve for members of these local associations to meet these new challenges – even the most successful ones.

Already on the East Coast and in the Midwest unions such as the **Carpenters, Millwrights and Ironworkers** are making their moves. Is your company and your association prepared to meet these challenges?

**Picture this** – the Executive Director of your local association who has held the position for 20 years gets a call from the long-time local union business manager saying that an International Vice President will be coming from Washington to negotiate a new multi-state contract to replace yours. You have never heard of this International Union official and you are satisfied with the relationship your multi-employer group has established with the business manager and his business agent over the years – after all, it took some time to build trust. Shortly thereafter, the International Vice President calls your Executive Secretary and says he wants to meet to negotiate, and he will be sending a “model” bargaining agreement because the union wants standardization – kind of like Sheet Metals’ Standard Form of Union Agreement but actually handpicked clauses most favorable to

the union gathered from his various locals – ouch! He claims regional portability of workers will be good for you but you never work in the other covered locals. He tells your Executive Secretary that a trade association on the East Coast which you have never heard of is going to be an actual “party” to the collective bargaining agreement along with your local association. He explains that the union has a “special relationship” with that organization, that association has a good perspective of the industry and it will somehow be good for the local contractors – loosely translated this means the East Coast association is “in bed” with the International and will facilitate the adoption of the union’s bargaining proposals now and in the future. Then, at the bargaining table all that you fought for in 50 years of negotiations goes “out the window” in favor of the union’s burdensome bargaining agreement with East Coast wages, benefits and working conditions. How will your customers react to these price increases? There go more jobs taken away by non-union contractors!

If that were not enough, most of your employer contributions to your industry fund will be diverted to the East Coast association whose name is on the front page of your contract. The association officers then recognize that they don’t have enough money to operate the association’s offices and the Executive Director becomes part-time working from home. Lord – how did all of this happen to all of us contractors in just 90 days? My how we long for a good old fashioned fight with our local business manager who was forced to retire because of this. Not liking any of this, your association members say they will take a strike before they will agree to all of this. In turn, the International Vice President says he will negotiate your agreement with the East Coast association and “oust” your local association all together.

Does this scenario sound make believe? I assure you it is not! I have been involved in these **new union tactics throughout the Midwest** in the last year or so with several unions. If you don’t want this, or if you believe that your association isn’t postured properly to avoid a “hostile take-over”, you need to **start strategizing** and planning now. None of this can be accomplished within a few weeks of when

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your contract expires. Here are some of the **things you need to do now**:

- Assess whether your International Union is considering the tactics mentioned in this article. Is the International consolidating locals? Is the International trying to effectuate regional or national benefit plans and apprentice programs? Is there a trend to standardization? What are your local union officials saying about all of this?
- Assess whether your association is strong enough to reject this type of union maneuver and how effective your local association has been in dealing with your union. If you are concerned or if you think the union had the advantage at the bargaining table, consider abandoning your current style of negotiations in favor of an alternative bargaining format utilizing more experienced bargaining negotiators and bringing other contractor groups into your multi-employer unit.
- Consider standardizing collective bargaining agreement terms and conditions with your neighboring associations in your region before the union does it for you – united you stand – divided you fall! Also, consider worker portability provisions.
- Strive to strengthen your allegiances with your fellow contractors and neighboring associations.
- Evaluate the costs of local collective bargaining negotiations and contract administration and determine if it would be beneficial to share these costs with other employers and associations in order to upgrade your bargaining approach.
- **Start the “conversation” today** among your fellow contractors and associations before it is too late - consider your labor relations goals and strategies as part of your long term business plan.

For further information and assistance in planning your labor relations strategies, contact Bob Dunlevey at Taft/Law (937) 641-1743 or email [rdunlevey@taftlaw.com](mailto:rdunlevey@taftlaw.com).



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