

Trouble In Federal Union Paradise

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While private sector union membership has been declining for decades, down to 6.4 percent in 2016, public sector unions have remained relatively strong. But perhaps not everything is as good as it seems for public sector unions. Following news last week of the [U.S. Supreme Court's upcoming decision on mandatory public union fees](#), we're now treated to a salacious story of federal employee union in-fighting. American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Local 12, which represents thousands of Department of Labor (DOL) employees, was recently placed into trusteeship by its national union. AFGE's national president, J. David Cox, accused Local 12's leaders of misusing union money and ignoring a member vote that called for a new audit of the union's finances. The claimed misuse of funds, coupled with what has been described as poor auditing practices, could be a violation of the Federal Service Labor-Management Relations Act, which requires federal employee unions to maintain democratic procedures and practices, along with accounting and financial controls. The trusteeship will be voted on in the coming months and the national union hopes to install new local leadership. The ousted leaders remain unrepentant, claiming the expenses were for valid purposes. Further, the ousted leaders have filed unfair labor practice charges against the DOL for allegedly assisting the national union in its *coup d'état* by removing union officials from the workplace. The infighting stems from political differences within the union that were exacerbated when the national union endorsed Hillary Clinton for president, despite strong objections from members. The intra-union quarrel comes at an ominous time for unions representing federal workers. Unions like the AFGE have actually reported strong growth since President Trump took office, perhaps because the administration has promised cuts to the federal government – including a proposed 12 percent cut to the Department of Labor. But if the proposed budget cuts are approved and the Supreme Court decides *Janus* as expected, public sector unions like AFGE may find themselves in a very tough situation.

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