

Forced-Unionism Abuses Exposed

The facts Big Labor bosses would rather you didn't hear about.

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Compulsory unionism breeds corruption. In each issue of "Exposed," the National Right to Work Committee will highlight yet another example of union-boss abuse spawned and perpetuated by Big Labor's government-granted privilege to force workers to pay union dues, or be fired.

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Local Union Bosses Allegedly Steal Teachers' Forced Dues; Lawyer For National Teacher Union Brass Claims: 'We're the Victims'

Since late last year, countless news stories have been written about the alleged looting of the Washington Teachers Union (WTU), a subsidiary of the 1.2 million-member American Federation of Teachers (AFT) union, by former WTU President Barbara Bullock, two other top-ranking union officials, and several coconspirators.

However, one element of this story, which now involves the alleged embezzlement of more than \$5 million from union treasuries, has not received nearly the attention it deserves.

The WTU scandal began to unravel last summer after then-President Bullock hiked the union dues that roughly 5000 union-"represented" teachers in Washington, D.C.'s public schools are forced to pay, or be fired, by a total of \$830,000. Dues were illegally jacked up to cover per capita payments that the WTU owed the AFT hierarchy.

Angry teachers who saw an average of \$160 deducted from their paychecks with no explanation began to complain not just to the AFT, but also to the D.C. school board. Evidently sensing that the police were about to get involved, the AFT decided to audit the WTU itself – and quickly found evidence that Ms. Bullock and her cohorts had been buying custom-made clothing, a Tiffany tea set, fur coats, jewelry, and much more with teachers' forced-dues money.

When news of the illegal dues hike hit the press, AFT spokesman Alex Wohl sanctimoniously told The Washington Post that AFT officials would "work to recoup the money and return it to members."

But last month, teachers who are "represented" by the WTU and the AFT found out just what AFT bosses mean when they say they're "working to recoup and return" money to teachers. On January 7, during a court hearing on a lawsuit filed against the WTU and AFT

brass by Anacostia Senior High School government teacher Nathan Saunders, union lawyer James Cole's explanation of how AFT bosses planned to "repay" teachers dumbfounded U.S. District Judge Emmet Sullivan.

As Judge Sullivan pointed out, AFT bosses were by their own admission planning only to "loan" 1700 teachers who had asked for their money back a total of \$250,000. However, the WTU will have to repay this loan, with interest, and funds to pay the principle and interest will come straight out of the forced dues of the teachers who were overcharged! "That's not a repayment, is it?" Judge Sullivan asked Mr. Cole.

Mr. Cole replied: "I know it sounds odd that the teachers have to pay, but the teachers union was the victim."

In a single sentence, Mr. Cole exposed as nonsense all the claims that AFT President Sandra Feldman and other AFT officials have made over the years to the effect that "the union belongs to its members."

Mr. Cole also conveniently ignored the fact that AFT officers are, at a minimum, morally culpable for any embezzlement committed by WTU officers since the mid-1990s. As AFT spokesman Wohl has admitted, the AFT constitution requires that the WTU, like all other AFT subsidiaries, conduct an internal audit every two years and submit it to the AFT convention. Although the WTU had conducted no audit since 1995, the AFT hierarchy took no action to inform WTU-"represented" teachers that anything was amiss.

Instead, as Mr. Saunders pointed out in his lawsuit, for years AFT officers continued to receive "portions of Plaintiff's union dues knowing that they were improperly deducted from Plaintiff and knowing AFT did not provide proper oversight or due diligence. Defendant AFT was not entitled to the 'per capita' payments which they received."

Acting in solidarity with Mr. Saunders and other D.C. teachers, the National Right to Work Committee recently asked that Sandra Feldman, whose annual forced dues-funded compensation in salary and "expenses" comes to well over \$500,000, and other AFT officials to accept a temporary pay cut so that the AFT can keep its word and truly "return to members" their illegally confiscated dues money.

So far, this request, which was directly addressed to Mr. Wohl, has been met with stony silence.

The arrogance and lack of accountability displayed by Sandra Feldman and other AFT bosses as the WTU/AFT scandal has unfolded is an excellent illustration of why no union official should be granted the legal power to force teachers to submit to union monopoly bargaining and pay union dues as a job condition. If teacher unionism were voluntary, AFT bosses would surely never dare to claim to be "the victims" of this scandal.

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