

Forced-Unionism Abuses Exposed

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

National Right to Work Committee • 8001 Braddock Road • Springfield, Va. 22160
www.nrtwc.org • (703) 321-9820 • (703) 321-7143 (fax)

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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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How Teacher Union Bosses Smeared a Michigan Philanthropist and Sabotaged His Plan to Donate \$200 Million to Detroit Public Schools

If union bosses really were, as their propaganda claims, dedicated to bettering the lives of workers and the disadvantaged, they would love Bob Thompson.

After Mr. Thompson sold his construction company for \$442 million four years ago, he quickly distributed \$128 million to his employees, making many of them millionaires.

Next, this former road builder wanted to give away most of what remained of his fortune to public schools attended primarily by poor and minority students -- but only to schools he was confident would make good use of the money.

While investigating potentially worthy schools, Mr. Thompson made the acquaintance in 2002 of educator Doug Ross, founder of Detroit's University Preparatory Academy, a middle school.

Here's how Mr. Ross, as quoted by *Time* magazine reporter Joe Klein, recalls what happened after Mr. Thompson sat in on some classes at the academy:

"He liked what he saw and asked how he could help. I asked him to build me a high school. He said he'd build one to my specifications and lease it to me for \$1 per year -- but there had to be accountability. How would he know if I was succeeding or not? I told him my goals -- a 90% graduation rate and 90% of graduates going on to college. If I didn't meet those bench marks after three graduating classes, he could take the school away and let someone else give it a try."

Mr. Thompson then offered essentially the same deal to Detroit. He would build to order 15 small, independent charter schools in the city for any person or organization that presented a feasible construction plan and accepted the 90-90 criterion for success.

The total cost to Mr. Thompson would be \$200 million. All that was necessary to implement the plan was the enactment of enabling legislation by state lawmakers. No one expected that Michigan politicians would look a \$200 million gift horse in the mouth.

That was before top bosses of the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT), a local of the AFL-CIO-affiliated American Federation of Teachers (AFT) union, came out foursquare against Mr. Thompson's plan.

To intimidate Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm into backpedaling away from her previous public support for the Thompson-financed charter-school expansion, DFT union President Janna Garrison "asked" its 12,500 members, all of whom are forced to pay dues to the DFT to keep their jobs, to skip school and instead attend a union rally at the state Capitol in Lansing on September 25.

Ms. Garrison and AFT union czarina Sandra Feldman furiously opposed Mr. Thompson's offer because, under Michigan law, public school teachers who are forced to accept a union as their "exclusive" bargaining agent in contract negotiations and pay union dues, or be fired, may escape from both requirements by accepting a position at a charter school.

Ms. Garrison and her lieutenants understandably didn't want to admit their real motivation. Instead, they claimed they opposed the charter-school plan because it would take money away from other schools. This was obviously a pretext, because the clear effect of the enabling bill would actually have been to *increase* per-pupil spending in traditional schools.

Besides making false statements about Mr. Thompson's generous offer, Ms. Garrison also falsely and brazenly insinuated that the philanthropist is "insensitive" to the concerns of black Detroit residents. Even Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, a longtime DFT union ally, berated teacher union partisans' divisive racial politics as "a lot of poison in the air."

Evidently terrified of losing Big Labor forced-dues support for her future political ambitions, the governor quickly caved in to the DFT bosses' self-serving and malicious campaign. The very day of the anti-charter school rally in Lansing, Ms. Granholm announced she opposed legislation to implement the Thompson plan and wasn't interested in negotiating changes to produce a bill she would sign.

On October 3, Mr. Thompson, who had even personally met with DFT bosses to see if he could in some way quell their opposition, finally gave up. In a statement released to the media, he said:

"I am disappointed and saddened by the anger and hostility that has greeted our proposal. . . . The response has been very distressing to all of us involved in the project with the Thompson Foundation. It has taken a personal toll on my wife and me. Because of

these contentious conditions, we are not going to move forward with our planned charter high schools."

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