

Coca-Cola Worker Wins Thousands in Settlement After Union Bosses Illegally Had Him Fired

Incident shows Pennsylvania's workers desperately need Right to Work protections

Houston, PA (November 4, 2011) – A Coca-Cola employee has won a settlement for over \$4,000 with free legal assistance from the National Right to Work Foundation.

Keith Smiesko of Saxonburg won \$3,356.46 from Teamster Local 585 union officials and \$819.54 from Coca-Cola after he was illegally fired from his job for exercising his rights under the Foundation-won Supreme Court precedent in *Communication Workers v. Beck*, which allows workers to refrain from full-dues-paying union membership.

Earlier this year, Teamster Local 585 union officials ordered Smiesko – who had refrained from full union membership and dues payments – to immediately pay full union dues for the previous three years along with additional union initiation fees without ever notifying him that he was being charged for their so-called "representation." Union officials illegally threatened Smiesko with job termination if he did not pay.

Smiesko refused to pay, and Teamster Local 585 union officials demanded that Coca-Cola fire him. Coca-Cola complied with the union bosses' demand. With Foundation assistance, Smiesko then filed federal unfair labor practice charges against the union and company with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) regional office in Pittsburgh.

In addition to the monetary settlement, Smiesko was reinstated to his job with Coca-Cola, and union and company officials agreed to post a notice in the workplace for workers who may want to exercise their Foundation-won rights to refrain from full-dues-paying union membership.

"No worker should ever be extorted by union bosses to join or pay dues to a union in order to get or keep a job," said Mark Mix, President of National Right to Work. "Pennsylvania desperately needs Right to Work protections for its workers to strip from union bosses the power to compel workers to give up some of their hard-earned money in order to provide for their families."

Despite the Court precedent in *Beck*, union bosses can still force workers who refrain from formal union membership to pay part of union dues because Pennsylvania does not have a Right to Work law. However, workers cannot be compelled to pay the portion of union dues used for the union's political, lobbying, and member-only activities.

If enacted, a Right to Work law would end compulsory union dues by making union membership and dues payment strictly voluntary. Polls consistently show that 8 in 10 Americans support the Right to Work principle. Twenty-two states have already passed Right to Work protections for their workers.