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EMPLOYEE WINS LAWSUIT AGAINST COCA-COLA AND UNION

An employee for the Coca-Cola Company who was fired for not paying full dues for a union membership has recently won a lawsuit against both Coca-Cola and the union. The worker was employed at a Coca-Cola facility in Houston, PA. Officials from the Teamster Local 585 union demanded that the man pay full union dues from the last three years, in addition to supplementary fees associated with the union, though the employee was unaware of any representation from the Teamster Local 585. The worker was told that, if he did not comply, his position at the company would be terminated. The union insisted that Coca-Cola fire the employee for his refusal to pay his dues, and the company met the Teamster Local 585's demand. The man responded by filing federal charges for unfair labor practices with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) office in Pittsburgh. He received support from the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, a nonprofit organization founded in 1968 that offers "free legal aid to employees whose human or civil rights have been violated by abuses of compulsory unionism." The Foundation cited the 1988 case, *Communications Workers v. Beck*, in which the Supreme Court ruled that workers can abstain from paying full union dues. As Pennsylvania does not have a right-to-work law, which would prevent required union membership for employees at a particular company, employees can be forced to pay partial union dues but not the percentage used for political, lobbying or members-only endeavors. The NLRB approved a settlement awarding the man a little more than 3,300 dollars from the Teamster Local 585 and more than 800 dollars from Coca-Cola for a total exceeding 4,000 dollars. He was also given back his job at the company. As part of the settlement, the facility in Houston posted a notice for workers, stressing their right to refuse to pay full dues for membership in a union. Mark Mix, President of the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, released a statement, which said, "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. 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." Right-to-work laws are the result of the Labor-Management Relations Act, or the Taft-Hartley Act, passed in 1947 to oversee union enterprises and prohibit closed shops, which are workplaces that make union membership a stipulation of employment. There are currently 22 states in the U.S. that enforce right-to-work laws, including Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, North and South Carolina, North and South Dakota, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia and Wyoming.