

# How We Kept Compulsory Unionism Out of Our Community

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AND

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ED. NOTE: In the Spring of 1981, officials of the Michigan Education Association-union (MEA/NEA) figured that the township of Decatur, Michigan, was "easy picking" for its "agency shop" schemes. Because Decatur is a small community of 2,000 people located some 40 miles east of Lake Michigan in the southern tier of the state, NEA officials thought the town would succumb with hardly a whimper. But the militant union didn't count on Richard Jacobsen, the Superintendent of Schools and Dick MacKellar, President of the Board of Education. Backed by the citizens of Decatur, they fought NEA's forced unionism schemes every inch of the way, and finally put the issue before the people in a public referendum. On December 7, 1981, the union's officials overwhelmingly lost their attempt to gain the power to fire educators for no other reason than the nonpayment of "agency shop" dues. Below, Richard Jacobsen and Dick MacKellar tell how the community of Decatur did it.

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A precedent-setting labor dispute settlement occurred this fall in the Decatur Public School District, Decatur, Michigan. Contract talks commenced in May, 1981, and continued throughout the hot summer and into September. Only two major issues remained to be settled: salaries and a union demand for "agency shop."

This rather bitter contract dispute between the Decatur Public Schools Board of Education and the teachers' union, the DEA/SMEA/MEA/NEA (Decatur Education Association/Southwestern Michigan Education Association/Michigan Education Association/National Education Association) ended with the teachers' union engaging in an illegal concerted activity, a strike. A state mediator was called in to attempt to gain a contract settlement, and it was soon clear that the real issue was "agency shop."

Historically, the Decatur School Board has never allowed "agency shop" or related language to be a part of the contract agreement. A contract without "agency shop" has never been popular with the teachers' union, but more so this year. The declining economy in Michigan has forced many schools to lay off teachers. When teachers are laid off, the union loses money in the form of union dues. Hence, the local, county, and state union officials determined that this was the year to force an "agency shop" clause into the agreement.

At several Board meetings the teachers' union attempted to gain public support for their cause, and they aired the unresolved agreement issues. The teachers' union boldly indicated that they had public support for "agency shop" and used this ploy in attempting to force the Board to accept "agency shop" and terminate those teachers who refused to join or contribute money

to the union. In a unanimous decision, the Board then publicly challenged the union and offered to submit the question to the district's voters in a special referendum vote. The teachers' union, forced to "put up or shut up," reluctantly agreed.

The Board selected the rather infamous date of 7 December 1981 for the referendum.

The teachers' union waged a telephone campaign and media blitz, but they were not to go unopposed. A group of citizens, including some nonunion teachers, from all quadrants of the district formed the Freedom of Choice—Opposed to "Agency Shop" Committee and organized to stand and defend the Right to Work philosophy.

On 7 December 1981, a near-record turnout of voters defeated the "agency shop" issue by nearly two to one. As one happy and relieved Freedom of Choice—Opposed to "Agency Shop" Committee member commented, "Now I know how David must have felt when confronted with Goliath! And I know how he felt when the monster was defeated!"

Needless to say, the teachers' union has been very unresponsive to widely publish the results of the election, and are denying it has any precedent-setting value. However, the rugged individualists who refused to be coerced into joining the union, and the School Board and Superintendent of Schools are most pleased with the results. They further offer encouragement to others to challenge the union when they, with all their power, attempt to limit the God-given right of freedom of choice. The Right to Work philosophy can be successfully defended!

*This brochure is an educational service of:*

**CONCERNED EDUCATORS AGAINST  
FORCED UNIONISM**

a division of  
**THE NATIONAL RIGHT TO WORK  
COMMITTEE**

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