

THE LIBERTARIANS AGAINST COERCION APPLAUDING DICK DEVOS' COERCION

I had a pretty revelatory experience last night interacting with a bunch of self-identified libertarians about alleged violence in Lansing yesterday and so-called Right to Work. I asked several of them why they were supporting a bill that should be anathema to libertarian principles. Here's a more coherent version of the argument I made.

I also consider the restrictions right-to-work laws impose on bargaining between unions and businesses to violate freedom of contract and association. So I'm not cheerleading for the right-to-work law just passed in Michigan, which bans closed shops in which union membership is a condition of employment. I'm disappointed that the state has, once again, inserted itself into the marketplace to place its thumb on the scale in the never-ending game of playing business and labor off against one another.

[snip]

The ideal role for the government in business-labor relations is to stay the hell out of it and let the parties work things out themselves. I may *prefer* one outcome or another, but I don't have the right to enforce it by law, and that's what right-to-work legislation does.

While I don't embrace that view, it is the stance I would expect true libertarians to adopt. I'm gratified a couple of libertarians weighed in and pointed out the inconsistency of the arguments my interlocutors were making,

which at least caused them some confusion (and led one to admit he would freeload on taxes if it were not for fear of legal repercussions).

One thing these self-identified libertarians kept coming back to, however, was alleged union coercion. They don't want to be coerced into joining a union, paying dues or representation fees. These people at least pretended to be adamantly opposed to coercion.

Which is why this detail of Michigan's union-busting is an important part of the narrative.

Michigan Senate Minority Leader Gretchen Whitmer, a Democrat told MSNBC that some of her Republican colleagues complained to her privately that DeVos was twisting their arms over the anti-union legislation.

"I spoke with someone in Republican leadership who was angry because these heavy-handed tactics were being used with the members," she said. Republicans told her, she said, that DeVos had "threatened primaries, threatened to spend whatever it takes to beat them if they don't support these bills."

It's not just Gretchen Whitmer saying this. Detroit Free Press said it specifically about Randy Richardville, who flipped his position on RtW.

Certainly, there are a large number of Michigan legislators who are beholden to Americans for Prosperity, or the Koch brothers. Word is the groups threatened Senate Majority Leader Randy Richardville's leadership post, and promised him a primary challenge in 2014, if he refused to move right-to-work forward.

And Tim Skubick named DeVos too.

Having performed the 180, Mr. DeVos ramped it up. He told senators that if they don't vote for this thing, he would launch a petition drive to place this before the voters.

Recall that Mr. DeVos spent \$35 million of his own money to beat Gov. Jennifer Granholm, (money wasted). Legislators on the other end of his phone calls knew he has the deep pockets to not only gather the required signatures, but also to find a way to sell it to the voters.

Folks in MI are fairly clear about one thing: a billionaire who was soundly defeated by voters in 2006 has instead brought about a radical change in the state's law by coercing people, precisely the kind of thuggishness "Right to Work" supporters claim unions engage in.

"Right to Work" supporters insist that no one should feel like their job depends on capitulating to coercion about who or what to support.

Except that Dick DeVos and his thuggish special interest group friends used precisely that kind of coercion to cram this law through. Randy Richardville, among others, was told his job depended on supporting policies and groups he otherwise wouldn't support.

I guess libertarians like the kind of thuggishness billionaires engage in?