
Defense Report

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Military Unionization; AFGE Begins Its Move

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) fired the opening round in its expected drive to unionize the military on September 23d when the nearly 2,000 AFGE members attending the union's annual convention in Las Vegas voted to amend the AFGE's constitution to permit military membership in the union.

The move followed a request by its newly elected president, Kenneth Blaylock of North Carolina, to remove the union's constitutional restriction against organizing uniformed members of the Armed Forces. Union sources said that Blaylock would not necessarily move out immediately to seek military members for his union, but that he wanted to have "the pistol in the holster" in the event it was needed.

According to press reports, Blaylock also said that his union will call a strike against the government if such action is necessary to protest inadequate pay raises or other proposals from either the Congress or the Administration with which the union does not agree. Disregarding the fact that slowdowns or strikes against the Government are illegal and punishable by dismissal and fines or imprisonment, the convention backed Blaylock by voting approval for possible future slowdowns and picket lines around government offices or installations.

Reporters attending the convention said that Blaylock's stated intention was to keep DOD, the Congress and the White House guessing as to what the union would do if it disagreed with governmental actions involving its members. Unionizing the military would, theoretically at least, provide the AFGE with added ammunition for any showdown between the union and the Government.

In response to queries to AFGE headquarters, a spokesman said that there were no plans at this time for a military membership drive. Further, there appeared to be no guidelines available as to what dues a military member would have to pay or how he would join. However, union officials said privately that they expect some military members to join the AFL-CIO union and that their dues would be used to begin a military recruiting campaign in the future.

Some DOD officials believe that the convention's actions, particularly the approval of illegal activities which, if military men were involved might well be dangerous to national security, may give impetus to Congressional approval of legislation barring military membership in unions.