
Defense Report

AUSA



Military Unions—Let's Settle the Question, NOW!

For the past several weeks there have been reports that various locals of the American Federation of Government Employees have begun efforts to sign up military members. This action is apparently in response to a vote by the AFGE membership in its annual convention to remove bars against including the military in its ranks.

Strangely, these reports from McGuire Air Force Base and Fort Dix in New Jersey, and from Fort Devens, Massachusetts, have been met by exclamations of surprise by the AFGE national leadership. The new union president, Kenneth Blaylock, now says that although the AFGE headquarters has been "inundated" with inquiries from military personnel since the convention gave the green light to expanded membership, the union hierarchy must still address many unanswered questions before beginning any military membership drive.

It is interesting, too, to note that at Fort Dix AFGE has been joined in its organizing efforts by the Enlisted People's Organizing Committee and the Friends Military Counseling Service, groups that were born in the anti-Vietnam, anti-military, anti-establishment, anti-everything days. In a meeting with the press these groups expressed their concern over the real "gut issues"—the length of a military man's hair and whether he can be required to exchange salutes with his fellow soldiers.

AFGE president Blaylock expressed many reservations about moving ahead with military organizing efforts, including the fundamental ability of the union to represent a new category of members with unique problems. He also wondered if there had been sufficient "dialogue" between the union and its potential military members to provide an understanding of their problems.

We may be able to help Mr. Blaylock answer that last question. Our information indicates that AFGE has been "inundated" with a trickle of no more than 2000 letters from a total military population of over two million. If this is considered a form of dialogue, the military participants amount to less than one tenth of one percent of the total population—a miniscule representation.

AFGE is welcome to its second thoughts about military unionization. In the meantime, however, it is still incumbent of the Congress to address the propriety of such a move by AFGE or any other organizers. No one in Congress has offered any pro-union encouragement but none of the concerned committees has seen fit to act on the various anti-union bills that have been submitted. The 95th Congress must quickly search for and find a constitutionally acceptable answer to the problem.