
Defense Report

AUSA



Now It's Official—The Civilians Don't Want Soldiers in their Union

When the American Federation of Government Employees, representing civilian employees of the federal government, met in its convention last Fall it voted to accept military members, subject to the outcome of a poll of its entire membership. That poll has now been conducted and the union members have rejected the idea of taking in military personnel by a margin of four to one—80 percent against the proposition and 20 percent for it.

Union President Kenneth Blaylock says he intends to live by the decision of his rank and file members. This seems to end the immediate threat of military unionization but it does not mean that the conditions which AFGE cited as motivation for unionizing the military have been removed or even ameliorated.

"I believe," said Blaylock, "that eroding conditions for military personnel—cutbacks in pay, medical benefits, subsistence and many others—will force military personnel into a more militant posture. . . . The spinoff of this two and one half years of debate (over military unionization) is that Congress, The Pentagon and the American People have been forced to confront the ugly results of ill-advised austerity programs and neglect of the people—the men and women—who are expected to defend this nation at all costs."

There is no question that Mr. Blaylock has gauged the problem correctly. He simply chose the wrong solution. The damage that a military union might inflict on the normal command relationships of the armed forces is immeasurable. Let it be said only that the influence of a union, even one voluntarily restricting itself from strikes or other job action, would shatter the traditional channels of loyalty—upward to the Commander-in-Chief and the Congress and downward from them to the lowest ranking service member.

While it is hoped that the House will confirm the overwhelming Senate vote in favor of a statute forbidding military unionization, the only true solution to the problem cited by Mr. Blaylock is a reemphasis of downward loyalty to meet the trust of service people who are still convinced their leaders will take care of them.

The President and Congress must bring an end to the parade of random, negative actions that has been underway for several years, almost all with the exclusive goal of saving money. They must make sure that military compensation is fair to those who must live with it and adequate to sustain the volunteer environment. No matter what they do, however, they must make sure that their proposals are properly explained and justified. The most logical solution to a problem may be unsatisfactory if it is not understood.