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"Worker Right to Know"

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A worker's right to know

Each year, literally billions of dollars in mandatory union dues are taken from American workers and used to pay for non-collective-bargaining activities — much of it political — that many of those same workers disapprove. Soon Congress will vote on legislation aimed at rectifying this situation.

For example, the AFL-CIO has launched a \$35 million campaign to unseat congressional Republicans this November, financed largely by compulsory union dues. Since union members typically split their vote roughly 60-to-40 between Democrats and Republicans, this means as many as 40 percent of AFL-CIO members may be forced to contribute to a campaign with which they disagree.

In a 1988 decision, *Communications Workers of America vs. Beck*, the Supreme Court declared that union members are entitled to a refund of the portion of their dues used for purposes other than collective bargaining, contract administration and grievance adjustment. Yet, eight years later, labor leaders and the Clinton administration are working in tandem to assure that the Beck decision goes unenforced, the AFL-CIO's partisan campaign being

the most egregious recent example.

The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the body charged with enforcing Beck rights, has failed to break this conspiracy of silence. Earlier this year, the NLRB — in its first effort to implement Beck — decided a brief statement of Beck rights in a union's annual publication was sufficient to satisfy court requirements.

However, an April 1996 Luntz Associates survey of 1,000 union members showed that 78 percent had no idea they had a right to obtain a refund for any dues spent on political activities. The survey also revealed that once union members discovered what their Beck rights were, 56 percent would be likely to request refunds.

As for union members who know their rights, trying to exercise them can be perilous. Workers actually can be required to resign from their unions in order to exercise their Beck rights. Workers who want to stop contributing to union political efforts must often give up their vot-

ing rights in key workplace issues, such as whether or not to strike.

To remedy this situation, Rep. Harris Fawell, Illinois Republican, has introduced the "Worker Right to Know Act." It would require labor unions to obtain a signed agreement from workers before using mandatory dues for activities unrelated to collective bargaining. Additionally, the bill would make it clear that if individual workers chose not to give a portion of their dues to support the political agenda of labor leaders, they would still have the right to participate fully in their unions.

In addition to securing these rights, the Worker Right to Know Act would help union members obtain the full refunds they are due from their unions. Currently, the unions themselves determine the amount of dues that should be refunded under Beck by manipulating the definition of what constitutes "non-collective-bargaining activities."

Union attorneys typically claim

that only 20 percent of dues go to non-collective-bargaining related expenses. But in the 1986 Lehnert case, the National Education Association and state and local affiliates were only able to prove that 10 percent of their general treasury funds had been used for collective bargaining activities. Marshall J. Breger, former solicitor of the Labor Department, has calculated that as much as 80 percent of union dues go to non-collective-bargaining activities.

Under the Worker Right to Know Act, an independent auditor would be called in to resolve this issue. Such audits are necessary for another reason: The information on union membership and finances provided in annual union disclosure forms for the U.S. Labor Department is often vague and incomplete.

Professor James Bennett of George Mason University notes that the Labor Department neither sets guidelines for the information

it requests nor performs comprehensive audits of unions. Unions know that incomplete or inaccurate data will not be scrutinized. On its disclosure forms, for instance, the United Auto Workers claims that rates for union dues and initiation fees for the years 1990-95 are "not available."

Depending on the calculations one uses, unions annually could be spending anywhere from less than \$3 billion to more than \$17 billion on non-collective-bargaining activities. The enormity of the financial stakes alone argues for a better system both to account for and to inform union members about the use of mandatory dues payments.

It's time to end the multibillion-dollar free ride for labor leaders at the expense of workers. The Worker Right to Know Act would give union members the power to choose for themselves whether to give their money to political causes or keep it for their families.

That doesn't seem like a lot to ask.

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GEORGIE ANNE GEYER

Terrorism's changing methods and intent

Following quickly upon the heels of the first question — Was it terrorism? — comes the second question: If it was, does this represent a new terrorism syndrome in the Middle East?

We must first qualify both questions concerning the tragic explosion of TWA Flight 800 off Long Island. As of this writing, we do not know what really happened, and perhaps we never will (although that is unlikely). President Clinton was right to warn against the kind of too-hasty blame that many of us focused on radical Islamic movements after the Oklahoma City bombing.

And yet . . . and yet . . . The testimony of horrified observers from the beaches — a terrible explosion, the plane falling in an eerie arc of fire, still more explosions on the water, a preternatural white cloud hovering above it all — sounds like either a bomb explosion or the work of a missile fired from below.

Backing up that physical evidence is a recent chronology of change in the methods and intentions of terrorism, particularly in the Middle East, that makes the theory of sabotage both plausible and more alarming than ever.

Think with me for a moment. There are "seasons" of terrorism, just as there are seasons of the year, of nations, of one's life. Terrorism is the power — the revenge, if you will — of the weak against what they perceive to be the strong. It has been employed for centuries, often with devastating effects, not because of its real power but because it so destabilizes and demoralizes both groups and countries.

When I first went to the Middle East in the late '60s and early '70s,



the preferred mode of terrorism was the hijacking. Remember all the pictures of half-crazed Palestinians brutally holding terrified passengers hostage? The important fact was that they were never anonymous; they wanted their faces to be seen, to be feared, to be recognized across the world as synonymous with their cause. But not today.

Now we see three basic types of terrorism, all rather different but evolved from those early days: (1) the Hamas and Islamic Jihad suicide bombers in Israel, who have caused such chaos by blowing themselves up to kill countless others; (2) the highly organized and visible Hezbollah, based in South-

ern and Eastern Lebanon and directly supported and sponsored by Iran, and (3) new cross-border Islamic fundamentalist movements that have yet to be identified. It is the last development that we have to worry about most in America.

The only "tips" we have so far are a vague telephone call from someone identifying himself as coming from an Islamic group and making threats against America, and a facsimile statement sent to an Arabic-language newspaper in London warning of terrorist attacks in America on essentially the same day that the TWA plane exploded. But there is now a sequence of events to study.

We know of the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York three years ago. More recently, we have the example of how the Iranian-backed suicide bombers in Israel essentially changed the government there this spring, from a peace-seeking government to a hard-line one (that kind of example is never lost on terrorists). And, most important, we have the horrific example of 19 Americans killed in Saudi Arabia by a terrorist bombing early in July — surely a sample of more to come.

In fact — and it is odd that this has not been cited more in possible conjunction with the TWA disaster — Defense Secretary William

Perry returned from Saudi Arabia only a few days before the crash. His words had a new urgency. Warning of possible attacks from chemical and biological weapons and from huge bombs that were previously deemed "unthinkable," Mr. Perry outlined plans to move thousands of American troops to remote, protected desert garrisons.

From such a posture, of course, American troops become ever more defensive instead of offensive. They lose effectiveness because essentially they exist only to protect themselves — which, of course, is just what the terrorists want.

We know who Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah are. We don't yet know who these new Saudi terrorists are, or how deeply they are infiltrating the kingdom. But we do know we are in a new stage of terrorism, in which the old terrorists — the Palestine Liberation Organization, for instance, with its world-recognizable hijackers — have been replaced by a far more ominous and as yet uncharted organizations of terror for whom America is the "Great Satan" that they must pit themselves against.

This American government has constantly given out exactly the signals of weakness and passivity (not protecting our troops in Saudi Arabia; the self-destructive pretense of neutralism in Bosnia; the uncritical embrace of Israel's war against Lebanon and Russia's war against the Chechens) that terrorists always instinctively understand and exploit. All of which clearly spells out: Danger Ahead.

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WEDNESDAY, JULY 24, 1996
The Washington Times