

## 'Card Check' Caveat

By Lawrence B. Lindsey  
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As our democratic process grinds toward selecting the next leader of the free world, it is also shedding light on the values a democracy should hold dear. Last weekend in Nevada, former president Bill Clinton said he witnessed voter intimidation firsthand. According to Clinton, a union representative was telling workers to agree to caucus for Sen. Barack Obama or expect to get a work schedule making it impossible for them to attend at all.

We all know that things like this happen and that our electoral process isn't perfect, though it is the best available. One benefit of the secret ballot is that it minimizes incidences of such pressure because those doing the intimidating can never be sure if their threats worked. But in a caucus there is no secret ballot, so these union leaders would be able to tell how their members voted if they participated.

I wonder if, having seen such voter intimidation, the Clinton campaign will change its position on doing away with government-supervised secret-ballot elections for union representation. Under the Orwellian-named Employee Free Choice Act, secret-ballot elections to decide whether a plant is unionized would be replaced with a public "card check" system, under which both employers and union organizers would know how each worker voted. Sen. Hillary Clinton, Obama and former senator John Edwards all support this bill.

But a card-check system would offer even more room for intimidation of workers. A union card can be signed by workers at any time during an organizing campaign, which can take many months. Union organizers can pursue workers in their homes, at churches and civic clubs, and at watering holes after hours. Workers' family members can also be intimidated during this process. So much for a "free choice" for employees.

The bill assaults workers' rights in other ways, too. For example, it would make it a crime for management to raise pay or improve working conditions while a plant is being organized. So the only way to get a raise would be to get the campaign over with and bring the union in. Such an arrangement might strike some as government-mandated intimidation.

Now that Bill Clinton has seen for himself that union leaders can and do intimidate employees over whom to vote for in a party caucus, he might want to think about whether union leaders might do the same things when something even more relevant to them is at stake -- such as whether their union can win an organizing battle and begin forcing workers to pay dues. Hillary Clinton may have lost a few votes in Nevada because of union intimidation, but the Clintons should keep in mind that workers have a lot more to lose from a bill she is supporting.

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