

## **Employee Free Choice Act**

By *Greg Coleridge*

*[Talk at Akron-Summit Co AFL-CIO sponsored forum, 2/26/07]*

The American Friends Service Committee is a Quaker related justice, peace and humanitarian organization. Quakers believe in the dignity and worth of every person regardless of religion, race, class, gender, nationality, physical ability, or sexual orientation.

The AFSC works to see that no person is discriminated – none. This includes those in a workplace who are in an unequal power relationship with their employer. That is, a worker who feels he or she is not being paid fairly, not receiving adequate benefits and/or not working in a safe environment. To be treated with respect and dignity, a worker needs to join in union with others who face common grievances to collectively approach their employer. To advocate for justice. To demand fairness. To work for their common health, safety and welfare.

The Employee Free Choice Act restores some balance to what is a grossly unbalanced relationship between employee and employer. It's about the right to decide. The right to choose. The right to be heard. The right to possess the ability and power to have a role in shaping a part of their lives – where they work. It's a right we should all have. When we do, we feel authentic, empowered, and human. We are more open to being creative, dedicated, compassionate, serving to others.

Consider two groups of people in our community, state and nation in February 2007.

One group is workers who want to form a union within a corporation. The barriers and hurdles are enormous. Corporate intimidation, harassment, and coercion are common. Corporations fire workers who try to form unions and bargain for economic well-being. They deny workers the ability to exercise their First Amendment rights of free speech, assembly and association since the Bill of Rights doesn't apply on corporate private property. Yet they exercise their own Constitutionally guaranteed free speech rights to prevent workers from signing cards and holding an election. And those are just some of the corporate hurdles. Never mind government hurdles at recognition and certification. No wonder only 12% of workers in this nation are members of unions.

The second group is a few people who want to form a business corporation. What do they have to do? Four things. Obtain a form from the Ohio Secretary of State's office. Fill it out. Send it in. Send a check with it. That's it. Voila. Just like that, this group of people have now become a business corporation with Constitutionally protected "personhood" rights and with liability protections that human persons couldn't dream of. For those who place the game of chess, it's the equivalent of a pawn making it all the way to the end of the board and being transformed into a Queen with powers and rights that we human pawns simply don't have. Oh, and by the way, powers and rights that were never intended... but that's another story.

The Employee Free Choice Act is a necessary step in the direction of justice and dignity. The bill's sponsors and endorsers should be thanked and encouraged to support this bill with no watered down amendments.

But it is only a step. We have a very, very long way to go, my friends, to create democracy and self-governance in our society. A very long way.

As we look to evaluate this bill and others that come thereafter, I would like to respectfully offer one simple measuring stick.