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EDITORIAL: Labor cannibalism

Who is Bruce Raynor?

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One of many good reasons to oppose the misnamed "Employee Free Choice Act," otherwise known as the "card check" bill, is because it would further empower union bosses not just against employers but at the expense of union members themselves. Anybody who doubts that labor chieftains often work against the interests of the rank and file need only consider recently ousted "general president" of the UNITE-HERE union, Bruce Raynor.

In his nearly 30 years in various union leadership positions, Mr. Raynor helped forge mergers of a number of smaller unions into the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE), and in 2004 UNITE merged with the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE). While Mr. Raynor led UNITE, its leadership was sued at various times by its own members, by its employees, by its retirees and by workers who balk at forced unionization.

A Bureau of National Affairs database shows that UNITE members on nearly 1,300 occasions filed charges of "unfair labor practices" against their own union -- including charges of coercion and harassment. In recent years, more than 200 groups of the union's members filed petitions with the government asking to withdraw from UNITE. In 1987, UNITE alone had a membership of about 740,000, but now UNITE-HERE's combined membership stands at just about 400,000. This is hardly a credit to Mr. Raynor's leadership.

In 2003, a federal judge ordered the union to pay \$5 million to employees at the Cintas Corp. in Philadelphia for violation of federal privacy laws. In 2006, a California jury ordered UNITE-HERE to pay \$17.3 million for defaming some nonprofit hospitals called Sutter Health. Eventually, UNITE-HERE's membership tired of Mr. Raynor. On March 25, UNITE-

HERE co-president John W. Wilhelm suggested in a letter that Mr. Raynor or his associates might face "criminal liability" for reportedly missing "property and records" from union offices. On April 21, the union suspended Mr. Raynor and effectively forced his May 29 resignation.

Mr. Raynor joined a group called Workers United, which is part of the 2-million-member Service Employees International Union, and immediately started raiding UNITE-HERE's membership. The Service Employees International Union itself already was riven by several nasty internal disputes; now, it is in a pitched battle with UNITE-HERE.

The battles have metastasized. Some 15 major national unions, led by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, have signed a pledge of "solidarity" with UNITE-HERE. The Service Employees International Union is digging in on the other side. The July 9 New York Times described it all as "the biggest, nastiest surge of labor fratricide in decades."

With so many union bosses seemingly more interested in turf fights and power plays than in member services, it is no wonder that so many workers want to keep secret ballots for union-organizing elections. Thirteen major union leaders met with President Obama at the White House on Monday, trying desperately to find a way to revive their "card check" bill. If they wonder why they can't win this fight, even with a president wholly subservient to their cause, maybe they should ask if it's because the general public rightly recoils at the likes of Mr. Raynor.