

Armed forces rank and file demand union

Amidst equipment shortages and failures, the rash of court martials in Iraq, misgivings over new deployments of 4000 troops to Afghanistan in the spring, bullying, and the fall in recruitment and retention of soldiers, rank-and-file members of the Armed Forces have started calling for a union.

As well as the discontent within regular soldiers, part-timers in the Territorial Army, due to differences in contract, have often stayed in Iraq longer than their full-time counterparts due to shortages of personnel. Many have been on active duty for more than 6 months, and in some cases been sacked by their employers upon their return, with only £1000 fine the maximum penalty for employers. This points to widespread discontent across both forces, which has recently been expressed in terms of calls for unionisation.

However, both industrial action and any form of political activity are illegal in the regular armed forces and the TA. It appears the call has quickly been taken on by campaigners keen to downplay any moves towards actual unionisation - calling the proposed organisation the "British Armed Forces Federation (BAFF)", and saying it would be similar to the Police Federation.

libcom.org finds it unlikely that the pressure for a union is limited to simply a professional association - which would cause no problems for the MOD or top brass at all. In fact the campaign for the BAFF may well be used to further marginalise any rank-and-file who intend to organise themselves independently.

Unfortunately whether such moves exist is mainly supposition at this point. If you or someone you know is involved in organising within the British armed forces, we'd like to hear from you.

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