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ADVERTISING

Anti-Union Group Takes Message to the Airwaves

TV Spots Employ Sarcasm In a Campaign to Discredit Practices of Organized Labor

By **KRIS MAHER**
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An advocacy group with an unusually broad antiunion message is now bringing its marketing campaign to television.

Earlier this month, the Center for Union Facts, a Washington-based group partly backed by corporate interests, ran what may be the first TV commercial designed to disparage the labor movement as a whole. The commercial followed the group's purchase of similar antiunion newspaper ads earlier this year.

In a 30-second spot that has aired on Fox News nationally and in several local broadcast markets, four actors posing as workers describe sarcastically what they "love" about unions: paying dues, having their dues go to support politicians they don't like, union discrimination against minorities and the "fat-cat lifestyles" of union leaders.



An anti-union ad campaign includes this TV commercial in which actors posing as workers sarcastically describe what they "love" about unions.

"I really like how the union discriminates against minorities!" says an African-American actor portraying a construction worker in the spot, which is titled "Thanks Union Bosses."

awareness about what the group sees as the corrupt practices of organized labor.

The spot -- like the broader ad campaign -- is aimed at raising

Lane Windham, a spokeswoman for the AFL-CIO, called the ad "unfounded and outrageous."

Union Facts is headed by Richard Berman, a former lobbyist for the food, alcohol and tobacco industries who runs several other advocacy groups, including the Center for Consumer Freedom and the Employment Policies Institute. He also is general counsel of the American Beverage Institute. Through those groups, Mr. Berman has helped design several similar advocacy-ad campaigns, including efforts critical of animal-rights activists and Greenpeace.

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To fund the antiunion campaign, including the newspaper ads and one radio spot, Union Facts raised \$3 million from companies, foundations and individuals that Mr. Berman won't identify. The group says it paid \$150,000 to run the commercial for roughly a week on Fox News and various local stations earlier this month and will run it again through the summer. The group plans to start filming another TV ad by early June.

In the past, employers often have run ads against specific unions during labor disputes or to counter union claims during organizing drives. Some groups have run ads around an issue such as the requirement in many states that unionized employers' new hires join a union. But labor experts say they can't recall another ad campaign that so directly targeted the entire labor movement.

"To create an antiunion atmosphere more generally, that is a new wrinkle," says Harley Shaiken, a labor and economics professor at the University of California at Berkeley. He sees the campaign as partly a response to the growing number of negative campaigns that unions have directed at companies in the past few years in their effort to win public support for organizing efforts at those firms.

Union Facts produced the first TV spot on a one-day shoot in Louisiana using a nonunion crew and actors, according to James Bowers, creative director for the group. He said he wanted the ads to avoid the sober tone typically adopted by nonprofits. "It has a sardonic flavor to it," he said. "The humor is the spoonful of sugar to get the message across to a much wider audience."

The ad invites viewers to visit the group's Web site for more information. A number of Web pages, including the home page of the Pennsylvania Manufacturers' Association, have linked to online versions of the ad.

A spokeswoman says the Union Facts Web site, which contains information such as union spending data from the U.S. Department of Labor, had a spike of 100,000 hits during the commercial's weeklong run. It normally receives 250,000 hits a month. Union Facts said it has received about twice as many positive as negative emails about the ad.

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