Labor formed a plan to skirt Prop. 226 rules

The defeat last month of Proposition 226, California's "paycheck protection" initiative, was a blow to conservatives and Republicans, especially those Republicans who pay dues to labor unions and resent seeing their mandatory fees used to promote Democratic candidates. Prop. 226 would have required unions to get a member's permission in writing before spending any part of his dues on political activities.

But organized labor fought hard to defeat Prop. 226, pouring at least $20 million into a campaign of astonishing deceit. The unions claimed, for example, that the measure would stifle the voice of California workers. They warned that it would threaten "Medicare, Social Security, public education, health and safety regulations and environmental protections." They even howled, ludicrously, that paycheck protection "could mean the difference between life and death" for sheriffs and police officers.

It is always painful to lose to mendacious opponents, but the supporters of Prop. 226 can take comfort in this: Even if they had won, nothing would have changed.

Last May, I wrote that Prop. 226 would ultimately prove futile. Now there's proof.

I have from Mike Antonucci, the relentless teachers union watchdog who runs the Education Intelligence Agency, the 1998-99 budget of the California Teachers Association. Or rather, the two budgets — the union prepared one spending plan marked "226 wins," and a second marked "226 loses." (Antonuc-

JEFF JACOBY

ci's communiques, must reading for anyone interested in the skinny on teachers unions nationwide, are dispatched from EducIntel@aol.com).

Few unions blasted Prop. 226 as harshly as the powerful CTA, which described paycheck protection as "the biggest threat to teachers and public education by far." Lois Tinson, the union's president, prophesied that Prop. 226 would stifle the voice of teachers in the public arena. Making unions get members' permission before spending their dues on politics would prove a bureaucratic nightmare, she said, and would "open the door to government intrusion into teachers' lives."

But the union believed not a word of its own rhetoric.

The amount the CTA budgeted for the new fiscal year if Prop 226 failed — that is, if its political operations would continue as usual — was $97,394,400. The amount it planned to spend if Prop. 226 passed was ... $97,394,400. A difference of nothing. Zero dollars and zero cents. One of the most partisan unions in California intended to spend exactly the same amount of its members' compul-

sory dues whether the paycheck protection measure won or lost.

The two budgets differed in only one respect. The "226 fails" version allotted $7.1 million to its so-called Initiative Fund and its political action committee. The "226 passes" budget shifted that $7.1 million into a mysterious new line item, the Public Policy Center. The center's purpose would be to "engage in the development of public policies" — read: politics. Instead of giving money directly to Democratic candidates and left-wing campaigns, the CTA planned to funnel its members' money to other liberal groups and let *them* make the political contributions.

In short, a paycheck protection law "would have resulted in no net reduction in CTA income," says Antonucci, "no increased say for CTA members, and probably no effect on CTA political influence." Had Prop. 226 passed, evading it would have been as simple as announcing that the money the union had formerly spent on politics it was now spending on mere "outreach." And for mere outreach, it wouldn't have had to ask anyone's permission.

In short, the new law wouldn't have changed a thing.

Real paycheck protection is about ending compulsory unionism in the first place. Employees who wish to join unions should always be free to do so, but no one should have to tithe to a union — or any other organization — as a condition of keeping his job. Extortion is a crime.