

4

A Voice for Working Families in Our Communities

Building and Nurturing Alliances

Lifelong Unionism

Worker-Focused Economic Development

Unions and Union Members Respond to Need

The Fight for Immigrant Workers' Rights

A Voice in the Community

The tragic events of Sept. 11 taught America many things. One enduring image from those days and weeks and now months gone by is the portrait of union members giving their lives, their talents, their energy and their commitment to community. In cities across the United States, unions rose to the challenge of helping families cope with loss and dislocation. We rose to the challenge of making sure public officials heard the voice of working people and understood their needs. And we did this in concert with hundreds of other organizations—some of them longtime allies and others new to partnerships with our movement.

Unions play a crucial role in building strong, healthy communities, day after day, in less traumatic times. But we must expand our efforts to help working families build the power needed to make our communities work for us and to reflect our values. The union movement must be at the forefront of standing up for and winning excellence in public education; affordable housing; respect and fair treatment for people regardless of age, gender, national origin or sexual orientation; and legal status for undocumented workers. We must affirm that all workers deserve a living wage, and we must play a central role—alongside high-road employers and public agencies—in creating and maintaining family-supporting jobs with opportunities for continued training and advancement. One of our most important jobs in every community is to break down the artificial wall of separation between unions and community, to shed the false label of “special interest” and to speak for all working families.

We must, in short, articulate a vision of what we want America to be, and we must build the power to make that vision a reality.

We will do so by employing a range of strategies: building stronger state and local union movements through the Union Cities and New Alliance

programs (discussed in greater detail in Resolution 11), creating and nurturing alliances in our communities, fostering lifelong unionism, engaging in local economic development, putting unions' helping hands to work where they are most needed, leading the fight for immigrant workers' rights and providing an effective voice for workers where they live and work.

Building and Nurturing Alliances

The most effective state and local union movements know the success of harnessing the power of an entire community to further the common interests of working families and the community—be they good schools, health care or the freedom of workers to choose a union. Across the country, workers' struggles are being aided by religious allies, student groups and the AFL-CIO constituency groups, as well as other community-based organizations.

As lasting alliances in our communities begin to replace transitory cooperation, community-based organizations increasingly are looking to the labor movement as an essential ally on a wide range of issues. We are all learning the immense strength and value of our collective efforts. We must continue to build a diverse set of relationships, respecting each other's differences while strengthening our common commitment to improving the lives of America's working families and to building our communities.

The AFL-CIO's work with the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice has made Labor in the Pulpits, now in its fifth year, a key component of Labor Day celebrations nationwide. Through Labor in the Pulpits, during the Labor Day weekend each year union activists and leaders speak in churches, synagogues and mosques, building support for the struggles of local workers. More than 800 congregations in 160 cities participated in the program this year, and more than 150,000 people heard labor's message. We must continue to expand this initiative, and such others as Seminary Summer, to strengthen the alliances they inspire. AFL-CIO state federations and central labor councils working through their affiliated unions must identify union members and leaders who are members of local religious congregations to help bring union and religious leaders together to discuss common goals and to develop ongoing relationships.

Across the country, student activists have stood in solidarity with workers, exposing sweatshop conditions abroad and denouncing below-subsistence wages at elite universities. They have played a leading role in involving campuses, high schools and even grade schools in the global campaign for justice. They have participated in Union Summer and trained at the Organizing Institute; and as a result they have joined our affiliates as organizers in record

numbers. Now as never before, the labor movement is seen as a career path toward social justice. We must continue to deepen these relationships and find new ways to reach out to young people, including greater involvement in issues such as globalization, sweatshops and living wage campaigns. At the same time, we should increase the level of student support for the organizing struggles of university-based workers—from maintenance and clerical workers to graduate student teaching assistants.

Some of the most important allies in any community should be the local chapters of AFL-CIO constituency groups—the A. Philip Randolph Institute, the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, the Coalition of Labor Union Women, the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement and Pride At Work. These organizations play a key role in reaching out to specific communities and amplifying their voices within the labor movement as a whole. Constituency groups have helped recruit organizers who speak the language and share the culture of workers demanding the right to form a union; they have established training and apprenticeship programs for workers of color, organized voter registration and citizenship campaigns and offered technical assistance to form chapters across the country. A number of central labor councils and 18 state federations have amended their constitutions to permit the affiliation of constituency groups, and all state and local councils must be strongly encouraged to adopt such amendments. The New Alliance initiative to unify and strengthen state and local labor councils has increased diversity on executive boards, but state and local labor councils should not wait for New Alliance implementation to take these steps—they should do so now.

Lifelong Unionism

America's population is aging and people are spending more years in retirement. Walking away from a job at retirement should not mean losing the solidarity and united voice that is the heart of union membership. The Alliance for Retired Americans, building on the solid record of accomplishment of the National Council of Senior Citizens, is reinvigorating the concept of lifelong unionism. Building partnerships between active and retired union members at the national, state and local levels, the Alliance mobilizes support for political, legislative, organizing and contract campaigns. The union movement at every level must recognize and invest in the enormous human resource our retirees represent. And at the same time, we must respond to the needs of our nation's aging population by leading the fight for affordable health care, affordable prescription drugs and other critical lifelines.

Worker-Focused Economic Development

Unions, with deep connections to workers, employers and government, are uniquely suited to help communities embark on economic development that leads to family-sustaining jobs and healthy economies. The AFL-CIO's Working for America Institute strengthens American communities by assisting union-led activities that help both individual workers and high-road employers succeed. WAI was at the forefront of the union movement's responses to the jobs crisis that has followed the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, building upon its long-held expertise serving workers and unions facing layoffs by sharing research and providing technical assistance on labor-led job training and placement programs. WAI also has played a crucial role in assisting state and local affiliates in their efforts to get public unemployment and job training programs to respond more effectively and quickly to the hardships faced by working families in this economic downturn, and has helped unions work with their employers to improve members' long-term job security through high-road partnerships. Backed up by a research operation, fiscal administration expertise and a revamped communications network, the institute has become the labor clearinghouse on economic trends and best-practice models for turning dead-end, low-paying jobs into family-supportive jobs that provide benefits and career ladders. Over the next two years, WAI will build on this capacity and develop similar expertise for targeted industrial sectors. WAI also will continue to initiate new high-road partnerships in which unions, businesses, government agencies and community organizations work together to revitalize sectors decimated by recent layoffs.

Unions and Union Members Respond to Need

As the world saw on and after Sept. 11, union members know how to put their talents and commitment to work helping others. AFL-CIO community services staff and the Union Community Fund do this every day.

The community services network long has been a source of pride for our movement. But the events of Sept. 11 have shone a spotlight on this network's ability to respond quickly and effectively to the needs of tens of thousands of workers. Community services liaisons, operating through local labor councils across the country, helped fill the gaps between underfunded government programs to help laid-off workers and local nonprofit groups swamped by surging need. They staffed the New York City Central Labor Council's Labor Support Center; identified Sept. 11 survivors eligible for Red Cross emergency relief assistance; helped set up or operate one-stop centers to assist workers in Las Vegas, Orlando, Fla., and Syracuse, N.Y.; distributed financial aid in the

Washington, D.C., area; provided assistance to laid-off workers in Los Angeles and Toledo, Ohio—and more.

In the coming year, the AFL-CIO will continue our efforts to fully integrate these 265 full-time community services staff members in 170 cities with the programs of central labor councils to which they report. Staff members will receive Union Community Activists Network (UCAN) training in the federation's Voice@Work initiative, which engages entire communities, including elected leaders, in supporting workers seeking to exercise their freedom to form unions. With their deep connections within communities, community services staff members are able to open doors to civic participation—by assisting in voter registration drives among the homeless, the elderly and victims of domestic violence, for example.

The Union Community Fund, now in its second year, continues to redefine charity as solidarity, building reliable and substantial partnerships with local organizations committed to meeting the needs of working families. Six new local funds were started this year, and another six will be launched in 2002 along with new statewide funds. In the coming year, UCF also will create new alternative models for financially supporting labor's community partners.

A special UCF September 11 Relief Fund was set up to receive some \$2 million in donations from caring union members and national unions. Timely allocations were made to community-based organizations involved in relief, recovery and advocacy in New York City and the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, helping affected working families—including immigrant families eligible for few public assistance programs—with food, housing, legal and other needs.

The Fight for Immigrant Workers' Rights

The AFL-CIO is committed to the campaign for justice for immigrant workers, including enactment of immigration reform legislation and building community coalitions. In Houston, the central labor council and building trades council joined immigrant rights activists to fight exploitation of immigrant workers by establishing a labor center for day laborers that intervenes with employers and provides education, such as classes in English as a Second Language and workers' rights on the job. The struggle for justice for immigrant workers (described in more detail in Resolution 5) must be expanded and intensified in every affected community by protecting workplace rights for immigrant workers, including the right to join a union. Local union movements must lead opposition to discriminatory practices by monitoring Immigration and Naturalization Services enforcement practices in the workplace; building and strengthening

statewide coalitions to respond to state and local policies; expanding health, education and human services for immigrant workers and their families; strengthening hate crime legislation and enforcement; and opposing anti-immigrant sentiment stirred by the attacks of Sept. 11.

A Voice in the Community

As important as unions' role is in the community, the unfortunate truth is that the public doesn't know much about us. Surveys show that people strongly believe workers should have the freedom to form unions without employer interference—but they aren't aware of the war employers routinely wage against workers trying to organize. Surveys also indicate the public does not understand that unions work to improve the lives of all working families, whether they are union families or not. They don't understand that unions are workers, rather than disembodied institutions, and don't associate us with a broad vision of hope and possibility. Finally, they do not understand that unions are effective, or know about the many ways in which workers improve their lives through their unions.

At every level, our movement must hone the skills needed to tell workers' stories as well as the story of our unions effectively in our communities. We will give working families forums, through the media, town hall meetings and other communications methods, to speak directly to their communities about issues of common concern—from unjust treatment by employers to national, state and local matters that affect us all deeply. And we will provide communication tools that use technology to amplify workers' voices across America and support events such as the annual Labor Tech conferences. Our unions and the AFL-CIO are developing Internet-based communications tools to connect a Working Families Network and enable union members to use e-mail to make their voices heard with elected officials and corporate leaders.

This is all critical work if we are to break down those artificial walls between unions and communities and forge the partnerships we need to build vibrant communities that respect work and strengthen families.