

## RESOLUTION 33

# Public-Sector Collective Bargaining

Submitted by International Association of Fire Fighters

*No issue is more important for the future than the procedures through which the legal framework of collective bargaining evolves.”*

JOHN DUNLOP, SECRETARY OF LABOR 1974–1976

**A** KEY SUCCESS OF THE NEW DEAL was the passage of the Wagner Act in 1935. Sponsored by New York’s Sen. Robert Wagner and championed by President Franklin Roosevelt, the Act was labor’s Magna Carta.

The Act enabled workers to organize and form unions and assured every private-sector worker the right to collective bargaining. It also set the stage for a generation of union victories. The Act may have been weakened over the past seven decades, but it still benefits workers throughout the nation.

Collective bargaining is largely responsible for the reforms that have transformed how Americans work and how they are paid. But collective bargaining is not just about legal protections and working conditions: It is about dignity and justice. Ultimately, collective bargaining is about empowering workers.

And yet millions of public employees are denied this basic right. The Wagner Act and other legislation that followed have failed to extend bargaining rights to state and local government workers. Over the years, collective bargaining has been granted to federal employees.

A number of states and jurisdictions have adopted legislation to provide limited collective bargaining rights to their employees. But the sad truth is that there are still 24 states that do not have statutes guaranteeing public employees the right to bargain. As a result, an estimated 2.5 million public employees lack workplace equity and justice.

Beyond not having bargaining rights, many of these same employees are denied fundamental citizenship rights. They are prohibited by a series of state and local “mini-Hatch Acts” from being involved in politics. As a result, they are unable to influence the policymakers who can grant bargaining and other workplace rights. It is a cruel paradox that keeps millions of union brothers and sisters from gaining dignity in the workplace.

Thirty years ago, John Dunlop recognized that improvements were needed to govern bargaining in both the public and private sectors. But in the succeeding three decades, no real progress has been made on the national level to grant state and local government employees these rights. The issue of why these rights have not been extended isn’t partisan politics. It is a problem of resolve.

Regardless of which party held a majority in Congress, the expansion of collective bargaining rights for public employees has been dead in the water.

The federation and all of its affiliates must champion the cause of collective bargaining for state and local government employees. We must dedicate the same effort and energy to these rights to our public-sector members as we do in expanding and reforming these rights for private-sector brothers and sisters.

Based on the foregoing, the International Association of Fire Fighters submits this resolution:

WHEREAS, gaining collective bargaining rights for all workers is a critical mission of the AFL-CIO; and

WHEREAS, many public employees continue to this day to be denied the right to national collective bargaining; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO will pursue legislation to enact a national collective bargaining law for state and local government employees; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO will encourage state federations and central labor councils to initiate and support legislation that grants state and local government public employees collective bargaining and organizing rights in states that do not have such laws; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO will encourage state federations and central labor councils to initiate and support legislation to eliminate “mini-Hatch Acts” that deprive public employees the right to participate fully in the political process.