

# Labor News Digest

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## AFL-CIO's New Alliance Program

When a PACE local needs the support of other unions to help workers it is organizing or to get a contract, it can count on its local AFL-CIO central labor councils to help.

To put the "movement" back into the labor movement, the national AFL-CIO is restructuring its central labor body organizations to be responsive and flexible to the changing needs of America's workers.

Under the "old way," many central labor councils did not have paid staff or the funds to support organizing drives and first-contract campaigns. Some federations represented few workers, while others in member-rich areas did not have a central labor body.

Now, the AFL-CIO is working state-by-state to reorganize central labor federations to represent more workers and cover major media markets. The idea is to create organizations that can help increase the membership of the labor movement, strengthen its political power, and diversify the movement's leadership.

New York is the first state to reorganize under the New Alliance program. National and state labor leaders gathered in a meeting at the beginning of June and voted to accept the New Alliance proposal and its restructuring of 25 upstate New York labor federations into five larger federations.

Speaking at the meeting was national AFL-CIO President John Sweeney. "You hold the future of the labor movement in your hands," said Sweeney, who chaired the state drafting committee. "Talk is cheap. Real change takes great time, effort, and expense."

### Creating Solidarity

Unions working together put working families on the WTO agenda in Seattle, mobilized members to halt fast-track authority, and built the strength in California several years ago to defeat Proposition 226, the paycheck "deception" act. These victories spurred the initiative to restructure local union movements and create stronger voices for working families in communities around the country.

"PACE will help lead this historic change," said President Young. "By working together with other unions and community groups, PACE will become even more effective in organizing workers and getting first contracts at worksites like Werthan Packaging in Nashville."

Along with other international unions, local unions, state labor federations, central labor councils, and the AFL-CIO, PACE helped lay the foundation for the New Alliance with a series of local forums that grappled with issues local union movements are confronting.

### Common themes arose despite the varied local issues:

- Many groups, including business interests, have restructured to reflect change over the years and the shift to the local level in political fights, and changes in the economy, society, and lifestyles. But the structure of many local and state AFL-CIOs has not changed in decades.
- The needs and priorities of local union movements have changed--and as central labor councils and state labor federations work to meet new challenges, they often don't have the necessary resources or staff.
- Local unions and international unions like PACE want to see full potential of state labor federations and central labor councils realized, and councils are eager for the full participation of affiliates.

Unions, central labor councils, and state labor federations in states besides New York are in the process of convening "drafting conferences" to map out their futures. Through the drafting conferences and follow-up committees, local union members and union leaders are crafting state and local plans. When a consensus is reached, a statewide convocation will finalize the plan and make the adoption and implementation of the New Alliance.

"Helping to build a new alliance of local unions and central labor councils is among the most important things our union can do for this new century," said Young.

*PACE International Union, P.O. Box 1475, Nashville, TN 37202.*

## Words of Wisdom

***"Democracy cannot succeed if only the rich and powerful have and use the votes."***

*--George Meany, 1978*

## Did You Know?

### **Dirty Laundry From Fruit of the Loom**

Plaudits to the International Textile Garment and Leather Workers International Trade Federation (ITGLWF) of the ILO for standing by eight Moroccan union activists who have been arrested and harassed by the militia after a thwarted attempt to form a union in a Fruit of the Loom plant in Rabat, Morocco. Fruit of the Loom and Moroccan officials continue to flash their dirty laundry to the world with statements related to this situation. The plants general manager hung a huge banner on the front wall of the factory which reads: "No to the Union."

When the workers sought a meeting with the governor of the prefecture of Sale where the factory is located, they were told "I don't want unions in my prefecture."

### **US Army Hats**

The U.S. Army enlisted personnel have been spared the humiliation of wearing new GI headgear made in China, at least for the time being. The Army might have slipped this

## Energy Deregulation Strikes Out at Working Families

Union families are demanding action from their elected officials as the nation's energy problems continue to fester. Deregulation in the energy industry lies at the heart of the growing crisis.

For the past 15 years, energy companies have lobbied behind the scenes to shed the restraints of government oversight that for more than 70 years had proven to be an effective check against profiteering.

The principles of oversight of public utilities were laid out in response to the Depression as the federal government sought to provide affordable and reliable electricity to every citizen at a time when many regions were without. Since the 1930s--when the federal government initiated huge electrical generation facilities such as the Tennessee Valley Authority and similar projects in the West--electricity has become as essential to the nation's economic well-being as water is to life.

However, by 2001, with few exceptions, most states had embarked on plans to deregulate the industry based on a bogus claim that state regulatory requirements were "stifling competition" and "artificially" controlling prices. As deregulation gathered momentum, a handful of giant energy corporations began to dominate the industry.

Over the five years since California deregulated power, companies have invaded the market to broker available electricity at inflated prices. While California has become the symbol of the perils of deregulation, it's not the only state where the effects have played havoc with the lives of workers and consumers.

Wild price fluctuations and price gouging have rippled through Western states. Construction workers and those engaged in basic manufacturing have been laid off as some companies, which held contracts guaranteeing cheap power, found it more profitable to resell that power for huge profits.

Kaiser Aluminum, for instance, made some \$400 million selling electricity instead of manufacturing aluminum while 600 workers at its Mead plant near Spokane, Washington, were idled by layoffs. The Northwest Labor Press reported recently that Kaiser paid \$22.50 per megawatt hour for 200 megawatts of electricity, which it sold back to BPA last December for \$550 per megawatt hour for a neat profit of \$52 million. In January, the company resold its electricity allocation for the month for \$37 million. California's deregulated electricity provided windfall opportunities for a number of other firms in the Pacific Northwest to buy electricity from the Bonneville Power Authority at deep discounts and turn around and sell it back at prices 12 to 24 times the original price. Instead of using their valuable electricity to manufacture aluminum, the companies are "mining electricity" for huge profits.

The AFL-CIO has urged the adoption of policies, which will guarantee adequate energy supplies and stability in generation facilities while reining the monopoly power of huge power companies. In a statement adopted early in 2001, the Executive Council called on Congress to formulate a national energy policy that will put people first--consumers and working families. The statement identifies the need for reliable and affordable power as the nation's top energy priority.

There are no simple solutions to the problem. Union families must counteract the political power of those who engineered helter-skelter deregulation schemes such as the one adopted in California five years ago. California's deregulation scheme that Governor Gray Davis describes a "colossal failure" has forced consumers to confront soaring energy prices and the nagging threats of periodic blackouts because of electricity shortages.

Nationwide, more than 121,000 employees of public energy utility companies have lost their jobs as a direct result of deregulation. As requirements for service standards and maintenance have eased, deregulated companies have pulled back from spending to replace new equipment and scheduled maintenance to fatten their bottom lines.

The nation's power companies are part of a network of major corporations seeking to lock up control over all the nation's power sources--from basic fuels to finished electricity. That network presents a menace to working people and consumers as it tightens its grip on the economy.

The AFL-CIO has called on lawmakers to help counteract the power lobby. The federation has called for a balanced energy policy that would include working families and consumers. Such a policy must:

- Increase capacity for generating electricity and refining fuel;
- Encourage the development of alternative energy sources; and
- Take steps to increase efficiency and conserve resources.

*AFL-CIO, 815 E. 12th St., Washington, DC 20006.*

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## Plan the Work, Work the Plan

An enormous sense of enthusiasm filled the IBEW 269 union hall in July as nearly 200 union leaders from across every sector of our diverse labor movement joined forces together behind the NJ State AFL-CIO Labor 2001 political plan. As "One State, One Voice, One Labor Movement," we pledged to do the work, which will leave no stone unturned on our quest to elect Jim McGreevey as the next Governor of New Jersey, and our endorsed candidates to the Senate, the General Assembly, and to local government offices.

Thanks to labor's dynamic education and membership mobilization initiatives in last year's presidential election, one out of three votes cast in New Jersey came from a union member or their family. Contacting our members frequently about our issues and endorsed candidates worked. As a result, our candidate Al Gore won big in our state. Recognizing this achievement means our labor movement is faced with an awesome responsibility, and an awesome opportunity, to deliver a winner for working families in New Jersey again this year.

In close coordination with our national AFL-CIO, international unions, and our affiliates, the NJ State AFL-CIO 8 Point Plan for Labor 2001 has been designed for victory. We've taken the time to plan the work together and the plan is great. Because now it works, again we'll contact union members often by local union mail and publications, worksite leaflets, phone banks, labor-to-labor house visits, and strong GOTV action.

We must take the time to work the plan. We're inspired because we know it's our time and our turn. Each one of us must do everything possible to carry out the plan. If we do it, we will win.

*Labor Fax, NJ State AFL-CIO*

## Building for Our Future

The 40th International Convention is just weeks away. Delegates from the U.S. and Canada will gather in Las Vegas.

These delegates will set the policies and resolve the issues that will affect the future of every member of our great Union. Every convention is important since it is the highest governing body of our Union.

It is where you, the member, send your elected delegate representative to help guide our Union for the next five years.

We will meet to discuss constitutional changes and amendments, hear from political and labor leaders, and nominate and elect International Officers.

The theme of our 40th Convention is "Building for Our Future." It is more than just a slogan. It is a description of a Union that honors the spirit of its founders by remaining true to the principle that workers must stand united to win justice for all workers.

And it speaks to the leadership and the changes we have made and will continue to make in the tradition of being the greatest labor organization in North America.

Yes, we have much to be proud of. We have stayed on the course of our forefathers who founded this great organization. Their dreams became our dreams; their hope became our hope, and their goals, our goals. We must never forget the sacrifices made by countless men and women who struggled before us in the face of what seemed to be insurmountable odds. Our forefathers suffered the blows of Pinkerton detectives and other hired thugs whose main objectives were to crush unions.

This is our first convention in the 21st Century. And after the deliberation and actions convention week, hopefully we will leave with a new sense of purpose and a renewed spirit of solidarity, knowing that our membership has an International Union that is totally dedicated to preserving the future of our Great Union.

If we all stand in solidarity, no force can thwart the dreams and desires of a union with members as great as ours. Allow me to finish with a paragraph from the preamble of the Constitution of the AFL-CIO:

"We pledge ourselves to the more effective organization of working men and women; to the securing to them a full recognition and enjoyment of the rights to which they are justly entitled; to the achievement of even higher standards of living and working conditions; to the attainment of security for all people sufficient to enable workers and their families to live in dignity; to the enjoyment of the leisure which their skills make possible; and to the strengthening and extension of our way of life and the fundamental freedoms which are the basis of our democratic society..." And that is my pledge to you.

Joseph Hunt, General President

*The Ironworker*, 1750 New York Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20006.

## AFL-CIO National Boycotts

### Food & Beverages

#### **Mt. Olive Pickle Company**

Pickles and relishes sold under the Mt. Olive and other labels, including the Food Lion and Harris Teeter supermarket "house" labels.  
- *Farm Labor Organizing Union*

#### **Diamond Walnut Company**

Diamond brand walnuts that are canned and bagged to include walnut pieces.  
- *Teamsters*

#### **Pictsweet Mushroom Farm**

Fresh mushrooms and frozen vegetables with the Pictsweet label.  
- *United Farm Workers*

### Transportation & Travel

#### **Best Western-Grosvenor Resort**

Hotel in Lake Buena Vista, Fla.; located at Disney World, but separately owned and operated.  
- *Hotel Employees & Restaurant Employees*

#### **Four Points By Sheraton**

Hotel in Waterbury, Conn.  
- *Hotel Employees & Restaurant Employees*

#### **Holiday Inn Sunspree**

Hotel in Kapaa, Hawaii.  
- *Longshore & Waterhouse Union*

#### **New Otani Hotel & Garden**

Hotel in downtown Los Angeles.  
- *Hotel Employees & Restaurant Employees*

## Suggestions for Improving Union Morale

Bob Reilly from Local 3-052 has a few tips that might be helpful in improving our union morale and image:

1. Teach the new workers about seniority in your local union meetings. Have older workers explain how it has been helpful for them.
2. Spread the union business and training tips around your local. Give everyone a chance to go.
3. Handwrite notes to members on their birthday. No form letters!
4. Leaflet all nonunion workers coming onto plant premises to do jobs.
5. Support all local charitable efforts in your area for good public relations.
6. When union members donate to charity, do it in the local's name. This gives the local good press and members still get the tax write off.
7. Send get-well notes to members who are ill or injured and off work for more than a few days.
8. Place signs around the plant on Election day, reminding people to vote. This is an example of a sign: "When you vote, keep your union in mind."
9. When donating money to charitable causes, ask them to write a letter to the paper thanking the local for their donation.

These are some good ideas that will help improve the morale for our locals, and will further the good cause and the public image of unionism in America.

## What Does Labor Want?

Samuel Gompers, past president of the American Federation of Labor, spoke to the International Labor Congress in September 1893 in Chicago, Ill.:

"What does labor want? We want more schoolhouses and less jails; more books and less arsenals; more learning and less vice; more constant work and less crime; more leisure and less greed; more justice and less revenge. In fact, more of the opportunities to cultivate our better natures; to make manhood more noble, womanhood more beautiful, and childhood more happy and bright."

What would Gompers say to the AFL-CIO if he were here today? What would he think of today's arsenal, including 5,400 warheads loaded on intercontinental ballistic missiles at land and sea; an additional 1,750 nuclear bombs, and, just in case we need them, an additional 10,000 or so nuclear warheads tucked into storage?

What would he think of NAFTA, with its loss of 300,000 jobs to foreign soil, or George W.'s idea to expand it further into South America? How would he feel about technology issues, layoffs, plant shutdowns, an eroding industrial base, and a global economy where it is hard to find anything made in the U.S.A.?

Brother Gompers would be faced with record corporate greed, with many of the least profitable companies paying their CEOs record increases while their employees suffer "painful restructuring" and downsizing. Some CEOs think that "American workers are too damn comfortable." They don't realize they already have the best and most productive workers in the world working for them.

It is true we have many gains for labor since Gompers spoke on that day in 1893, but history has a way of repeating itself. The American worker still wants and deserves all the ideals that Gompers mentioned--and for good reasons. Don't we still have to fight for good and better education for our children? With a good education, would we still need as many jails? Couldn't we offer more books to other countries, rather than aiming missiles at them?

Why must America's workers in the year 2001 be fired, humiliated, and harassed because they want to join a union? The war that corporate America wages on working people gets uglier by the day. Some things never change.

Somehow, new standards must be created for corporate behavior, based on respect for workers and the communities where the companies are located. Must corporate America suck every last resource and tax break from the community, and then move on to greener pastures of Third World nations? (i.e. International Paper closes its Moss Point mill and moves to Russia.) What a difference life would be without greed.

Labor's "want list" seems just as reasonable now as it did in 1893. It is attainable if all of us put forth our best efforts. Together, we can achieve justice in the workplace and a better quality of life.

We must talk about history: Spread the word neighbor to neighbor, friend to friend, about how unions made life better for working families over the years. Management and owners of businesses did not give workers a minimum wage, vacations, child labor laws, and workers' compensation out of kindness. Neither did job security, seniority, safety equipment, and health benefits just fall as a gift out of the sky. These were hard fought battles.

Finally, as elected officials, we must work to educate our members and restore the respect and hope of working people. If we do these things, Samuel Gompers would be proud of us, and history would not repeat itself.

Jim Dunn is Secretary-Treasurer of *PACE International Union*, P.O. Box 1475, Nashville, TN 37202.

## Construction Union Membership Increasing

According to the AFL-CIO figures reported in *Engineering News Record*, during the five-year period 1995-2000, only three construction unions showed double-digit percentage increases in membership.

<b>Painters</b>				<b>16.6%</b>
<b>Elevator Constructors</b>				<b>12.9%</b>
<b>Ironworkers</b>				<b>10.3%</b>
<b>Asbestos Workers</b>				<b>9.9%</b>

## Determination Pays Off

In May, UNITE members who work in the women's outerwear industry were meeting to ratify a new three-year contract covering 30,000 workers throughout the Northeast. Negotiations went down to the wire as a pattern agreement with multiple manufacturer/jobber and contractor associations was reached just hours before the June 1 deadline.

Members who work for manufacturers and jobs (such as sample-makers and cutters) and those who work for contractors (as sewing factory workers) both made gains. For all, wages will increase 3 percent each year for the next three years, and the union's minimum wage levels will increase 1.5 percent each year over the same period. Warehouse and shipping workers, who make up a growing part of the garment industry, received equivalent or better wage increases. Improvements were also made in immigrant workers' rights and bereavement pay.

At the same time, workers who are direct employees of garment manufacturers and jobbers gained two paid sick days starting in 2002, if they do not already have them. These workers will also receive an improved drug plan and a new 401(k) retirement account.

Protecting the union's health benefits was a key concern in these negotiations. The union and employer associations agreed to set up a Labor Management Task Force on benefits to study the problem of increasing health care costs and seek creative ways to sustain benefits in the future.

UNITE members covered by the agreement work at hundreds of firms throughout the Northeast and belong to Local 23-25, the New York Apparel and Allied Workers Joint Board, the Pennsylvania, Ohio, and South Jersey Joint Board, Local 99, and the New York-New Jersey Regional Joint Board.

"We were determined to work together with our members and the employer associations to make sure that a domestic garment industry survives, and we succeeded," said UNITE's newly elected Secretary-treasurer Edgar Romney, who is almost manager of Local 23-25.

"Given U.S. trade policies, which have encouraged a race to the bottom in garment and other manufacturing industries, the fact that we were able to win two paid sick days for those who work for manufacturers is a major achievement," added Vice President Rich Rumelt, manager of the New York Apparel and Allied Workers Joint Board.

UNITE, 1710 Broadway, New York, NY 10019.

## Did You Know?

(Continued from page 2)

### US Army Hats

one by--the only early complaints were registered by the labor movement--if not for the furor created by the shoot down of the Navy surveillance plane in April. As that crisis subsided, Army brass found themselves stammering in front of congressional committees to try to explain, as the kids might say: "What's up with this 'berets from China' thing?"

It seems the Pentagon hurried this transaction through the acquisition process because the brass wanted to hand out the new hats to GIs on the army's birthday, June 14. The tight deadline gave them the excuse they needed to take the contract overseas, awarding deals to hat makers in Romania, Sri Lanka, China, and other third world countries. By now, about a third of the 617,000 berets from China have been delivered, but they're sitting in a warehouse. The Army says it's looking at "other ways" to use the berets. No wonder the Bush White House needs to find extra funding for the Pentagon.

When 75 members of Congress raised a stink over the foreign-made hats (there is still a federal law that requires U.S. military uniforms be made in the U.S., but that requirement can be waved for "emergencies"). Army brass found a way to wiggle out of contracts with three of the seven foreign hat makers it had hired, charging contract defaults for quality and delivery problems.

Union Labor & Service Trades Department, 816 16th St., NW, Washington, DC 20006.

## Family and Medical Leave Act Helps Workers Handle Strict Attendance Policies

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is an important tool in protecting workers from discipline when their absences are covered under the law. FMLA absences cannot be used as points under an attendance policy or as a reason for denying a pay increase or promotions.

FMLA requires public and private employers--with 50 or more workers in a 75 mile radius--to offer up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave per year. Leave can be taken for the birth, adoption, or foster care placement of a child; to care for a seriously ill parent, spouse, or child; or to undergo medical treatment for a serious illness. To be eligible, an employee must have worked at least 12 months and a minimum of 1,250 hours in the last year for the employer.

A "serious health condition" must be the cause of FMLA-covered absences. Under DOL regulations, a serious health condition is an illness, injury, impairment, or physical or mental condition that involves one or more of the following:

1. Inpatient hospital care or other medical facility;
2. An injury, illness or other condition lasting more than three consecutive calendar days that involves continuing treatment by a health care provider;
3. Pregnancy;
4. A chronic serious health condition;
5. A long-term or permanently disabling health condition;
6. A condition requiring multiple treatments to prevent a period of incapacity of more than three consecutive calendar days.

Employees who suffer from serious health conditions will benefit greatly from the FMLA provision which permits intermittent leave. Intermittent leave means the 12 weeks available under FMLA do not have to be taken in one continuous block of time.

For example, if an employee must receive physical therapy or kidney dialysis, leave can be scheduled in blocks of hours or days, separated by work time or a reduced schedule.

The intermittent leave procedures also apply when caring for a qualifying relative. Under the FMLA, intermittent leave is not guaranteed for newborns, and must be taken in consecutive days, unless agreed to by the employer.

During a workers' FMLA leave, the employer must maintain group health plan benefits for the employee. If the employer fully paid the health care premiums, it must continue to pay this amount. If the worker pays a portion of the premium, he or she must arrange with the employer to continue submitting the contribution.

The FMLA requires the employer to return the employee to the job he or she held (or to an equivalent one) prior to the leave, with no loss of seniority or benefits. The Department of Labor has ruled that a position is not equivalent unless it has virtually identical pay, benefits, and working conditions.

Unionized workers can use the FMLA as a supplement to the collective bargaining agreement. When the FMLA is better than the contract, the FMLA applies. When the contract is better than the FMLA, the contract applies. A union can enforce the FMLA through the grievance procedure if the contract "incorporates" the FMLA or makes (in plain English) the FMLA part of the agreement. A contract incorporates the FMLA if it contains a clause that states: "The employer agrees to abide by its obligations under the FMLA."

To learn more about the FMLA, we recommend *The FMLA Handbook* by Robert Schwartz, available from Work Rights Press: 1-800-576-4552. The FMLA Handbook is available at the Department of Labor's website, [www.dol.gov](http://www.dol.gov). Click on the search button and type in "fmla."

*FMLA is commonly known for extending childbirth leave to 12 weeks, but it can also improve the quality of work and home life, including:*

*- The right to take up to 12 weeks of medical leave each year on a consecutive or intermittent basis, with demonstrated medical need.*

*- The right to take up to 12 weeks of family leave each year to care for a seriously ill child, parent, or spouse.*

*- The right to a part-time work schedule when necessitated by medical problems or to care for an ill family member.*

## Tell President Bush and Members of Congress: Stop Hurting Workers

As a payback to their corporate campaign contributors, President Bush and the Republican-controlled Congress repealed the worker safety rule that could have protected 1.8 million workers who suffer from repetitive strain injuries every year. Caused by heavy lifting, repetitive work, and poorly designed jobs, these injuries are the top job safety problem in America.

Working families struggled for 10 years to win the OSHA ergonomic standard that Bush and anti-worker members of Congress wiped out in a few days. Every day without these protections, 4,930 more workers are hurt.

**Write or Call President Bush at:**

**President George W. Bush  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20500  
(202) 456-1414**

**Call your Senators and Representatives at (800) 648-3516.**

**Tell them to:** Protect workers from crippling injuries and issue a job safety ergonomics standard now.