

WASHINGTON-BALTIMORE NEWSPAPER GUILD

Local 32035 • The Newspaper Guild-Communications Workers of America • AFL-CIO, CLC

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BY FAX AND REGULAR MAIL

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John Sweeney
President, AFL-CIO
815 16th St., NW
Washington, DC 20006

Dear President Sweeney,

The Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild is pleased to see the dialogue on how to strengthen the labor movement, and we appreciate your invitation for members, activists and leaders to add their ideas to the discussion.

Our local discussed various reform proposals at a general membership meeting, and our executive council prepared the enclosed reaction.

In solidarity,



Bill Salganik, President
WBNG, Local 32035, TNG-CWA, AFL-CIO

C: WBNG Executive Council

Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild, Local 32035: Labor Reform from a Local Union's Perspective

We at TNG-CWA Local 32035, the Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild, are encouraged by the national discussion on re-organizing organized labor. Clearly, what the labor movement has been doing has not produced the results we'd all want. Something has to change.

Most of the discussion has been at the international level. We'd like to respond as a local. Our primary concern is the future of the labor movement, but we do have another important concern - you might say "a special interest" - that we should identify. Our local represents the professional staff at the AFL-CIO and at several of its trade and industrial departments, allied organizations and sponsored programs, as well as the staff at three international unions.

It's not our goal to respond in detail to any one of the restructuring proposals, but, rather, to add our voices and our viewpoint to the dialogue. Here are our reactions:

- 1. We need to start the discussion by looking at functions, not by allocating per-caps.** We're not averse to shifting resources among the federation, internationals, state feds, CLCs and locals, but we think the first question has to be: What functions can best be performed at each level? Allocations of resources should follow from the answer to that question.
- 2. The movement needs to deliver its message better, and this is a primary function of the federation.** It's clear to us in the movement that unions are in workers' interest. The membership numbers prove it isn't clear enough to the unorganized. This isn't to minimize the importance of organizers on the ground or of labor law reform, but an effective message makes all other components of organizing (and representation and political action) work better. We need not only to communicate an overall message in a more powerful way, but we need to develop better methods of informing the public (consumers) which employers treat their workers honorably and which don't.
- 3. The message has to be broader than specific "labor issues."** The labor movement should return to its roots as a movement for social justice. Only putting the "movement" back in the labor movement will restore it, regardless of restructuring.
- 4. Re-organization at the international level is not enough, so the revitalization process shouldn't end with this summer's AFL-CIO convention.** Restructuring a school board doesn't, by itself, change classroom instruction; reorganizing a hospital board doesn't change patient care. As the discussion continues, we need to look not just at how we're structured at the top, but at how we work at the bottom. In particular, there hasn't been enough dialogue so far on locals (size, staffing models,

rank-and-file involvement) and about how we function in the workplace (steward and mobilizing structures). This is where the real power is gained or lost during organizing drives, contract campaigns, and grievance handling. And the discussion not only needs to consider the local and shop level, it needs to involve the local and shop level.

5. **Merging isn't an action, but a process.** We know. The Newspaper Guild and CWA were willing, even eager, partners, with compatible cultures and history but nearly a decade after merger activity began, we're still integrating. Mergers are good - at least, ours has been - but they shouldn't be viewed as a quick fix.
6. **The movement needs better strategic planning at all levels.** Ideally, as locals consider their tactics and their needs, this would help guide the affiliates and, ultimately, the federation. That's union democracy. And the process must be an ongoing one of adapting to changes in our environment, not occasional bursts of reform.
7. **The labor movement needs to harness its economic power.** We are intrigued by the proposal by the Laborers' International Union to create a consolidated union financial services organization, with potential to manage hundreds of billions of dollars in pension and other assets. Beyond that, there's more economic power we haven't fully tapped. We own stock - in our own employers and other companies - through 401 (k), employee stock purchase and other plans. And we haven't wielded the full consumer power of unions and of working families.
8. **Locals need better access - some sort of "one-stop shopping" - to the resources of different units of organized labor.** As a local, we deal with an international (CWA) a sort of subsidiary international called a sector (The Newspaper Guild). CWA has districts; TNG has district councils. We're members of three CLCs and three state feds. We interact from time to time with a variety of constituency groups and other organizations friendly to the labor movement. All of these units were created for good reasons, but accessing them isn't simple. We need to consider how the tangle of structures can best be coordinated.
9. **We need more focus on the global as well as the local.** In a globalized economy, we need to strengthen our ties to the international labor movement, and find ways to work together more effectively to organize and bargain with cross-national businesses.

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