

# A Plan to Help Workers Win: Uniting Our Power to Build a Stronger, Growing Labor Movement

Submitted by the AFL-CIO Executive Council

Uniting Our Power to Organize and Grow  
Uniting Our Power to Win Legislative and Political Change  
Uniting Our Power to Build Stronger State and Local Labor Movements

**A** **MERICA'S WORKERS** are squeezed and hurting. Corporate and right-wing political forces are determined as never before to consolidate their power and silence our voices. And after 30 years of corporate assault and government complicity, the American labor movement is also in a deep and serious crisis.

Around the world, anti-worker policies are destroying good jobs. Here at home, anti-worker employers are using their political power to hammer workers and unions—through the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the Department of Labor, state governments and more.

As our economy has changed, the foundation of the modern American labor movement, our manufacturing unions, has been dramatically eroded. Bad NLRB decisions, weak labor laws and a corporate culture that celebrates unsanctioned lawbreaking have rendered moot any legal right to organize and bargain collectively.

Pressured by global economic changes, impotent laws and the corporate assault, labor union membership has declined as a percentage of the American workforce. Although union workers still earn considerably more than nonunion workers and are much more likely to have health care coverage

and pensions, the decline in union density has cost us the consistent ability to win improvements at the bargaining table, electoral contests and pro-working family policies. And the decline in density means a growing number of workers knows little about unions.

Nevertheless, tens of millions of workers still know that by joining and forming unions they can recognize their hopes for a better life for themselves and a better future for their children. Today, a higher percentage of U.S. workers than ever say they would vote to join a union if they had a chance. And unions are working every day to act on those hopes—to win good contracts and give workers a voice on the job and in our nation.

With so many forces determined to weaken and divide us, it is more important than ever that unions unite our power and respond decisively and boldly to help working people meet these urgent challenges.

We must change, refocus and recommit to strategies that can build a stronger labor movement and improve the lives of workers. No one union or group of unions alone can deliver on the hopes and dreams of working families. Every union in every sector must change and work to build a stronger

movement in the spirit of solidarity, mutual support and mutual accountability that defines us.

The source of our power is our members—educated, mobilized and united. We must maximize that power to win policies that meet the needs of working families and guarantee their freedom to organize and bargain collectively; at the same time we must harness our power to reach out to the tens of millions of working people who want to be in unions to gain a voice at work. On these goals and principles we believe there is broadly shared agreement.

We are committed to enacting serious changes now. Two inter-connected areas, in particular, are paramount to serious growth:

First, we must greatly increase the resources of the labor movement devoted to helping workers organize.

Second, we must greatly expand our collective efforts to transform the policies and politics of America.

Without growth, we cannot sustain wins in the policy debates and political contests that determine the future for working people. And without a more hospitable, pro-worker political environment, we cannot grow as fast as we must.

We cannot choose one over the other or pit one against the other. We cannot strengthen the labor movement unless we do both. And both require strengthening our grassroots capacity in states and cities nationwide.

## **I. Uniting Our Power to Organize and Grow**

In January 2003, the AFL-CIO held a two-day organizing summit bringing together 245 organizers from 45 states to face the facts and fashion a collective, movement-wide response. The summit concluded that the moral obligation of this generation of organizers, activists and leaders is to rebuild and reinvigorate the union movement in two ways:

(1) through an immediate, ramped up effort to change the nation's public policies to restore the freedom in America to organize and bargain collectively, and (2) through an accelerated initiative to help many more unions increase their capacity to organize, especially outside the NLRB election process.

Since the summit, the AFL-CIO organizing effort has focused on working to implement those two initiatives, building on the best of the work that preceded it.

### **Restoring Workers' Freedom to Organize for a Voice@Work**

Following the summit, the AFL-CIO launched a multifaceted, movement-wide campaign to restore the freedom of workers in our nation to organize. More than 30,000 union members and allies have participated in member education and mobilization workshops. On Dec. 10, 2003—International Human Rights Day—more than 37,000 workers gathered at more than 97 events in 37 states to express outrage over the loss of the freedom to form unions and bargain collectively; an even bigger effort is being planned for Dec. 10, 2005. We have conducted an aggressive media strategy to expose the political assault on workers' rights and protect voluntary recognition agreements. We have reached out to national and community allies as well as to public officials and candidates for office at every level. In states from New Mexico to Illinois to Connecticut, we have worked to pass state and local laws to establish bargaining rights, ban coercive employer behavior and provide for union recognition based on majority sign-up (card-check).

In November 2003, lawmakers introduced the federal Employee Free Choice Act. Under this legislation, when a majority of employees in a workplace signs cards declaring the desire to form a union, the employer is required to recognize their union. The act would toughen the penalties for violations of employee rights during organizing drives and contract disputes. In an effort led by workers, their unions and allies, 210 members of the U.S. House of Representatives signed on to the act, as did 38 members of the Senate. On May 19, 2005,

the Employee Free Choice Act was reintroduced as bipartisan legislation, and the fight to win majority support is on.

Allies such as Jobs with Justice and American Rights at Work, an independent organization formed with support from the AFL-CIO and major unions, are providing valuable research, public outreach and mobilization.

This is not only an all-out fight to change the legal framework to support workers' rights; we are also building stronger relationships and educating allies, policymakers, elected officials and even union members about why unions are essential to a democratic society and about the widespread violations of workers' rights. We are pushing back against the destructive actions of the most ruthless White House in many years. And in the short term, we are helping workers win their organizing campaigns by shining a light on employer intimidation and bringing the support of elected officials and allies—indeed, entire communities—to their side.

### **Increasing Unions' Capacity to Organize with Strategic Focus, Campaigns**

For several years, the vast majority of workers organizing into our movement have done so outside the NLRB election process—a clear sign that the legal system for workers to choose unionization has completely broken down.

Since the 2003 summit, more unions have committed to shift resources into organizing, more have prioritized strengthening their capacity to organize outside the NLRB and more have implemented structural changes to facilitate a growth agenda and focus on their core industries to regain industry density and power. The AFL-CIO Organizing Department has worked with a number of affiliates on their internal change-to-organize processes. The federation has recruited and trained strategic researchers and campaigners for the union movement—a vital component in building the capacity to take on the larger-scale, more-strategic campaigns necessary for long-term growth. In addition, the AFL-CIO Organizing Institute has recruited new organizers and trained staff and volunteer organizers in organ-

izing fundamentals, developing specialized training at the request of affiliates.

Today, some 20 unions are engaged in a change process, and more unions are pursuing strategic, larger scale organizing campaigns that aim to increase workers' power in their core industries and occupations, instead of reactive hot-shop organizing drives.

These strategic campaigns have added key components to worksite organizing—member mobilization, bargaining-to-organize strategies (which have resulted in thousands of workers organized in diverse industries, including auto assembly and auto parts, rubber and tire and telecommunications), the building of global alliances, outreach to community and political allies and legislative and political initiatives.

Some of the most important recent organizing opportunities have been opened by political and legislative mobilization. A ballot initiative for gaming rights in Broward County, Fla., gave thousands of new members the opportunity to join a union. The first union hotel in Houston grew out of city council action on hotel development. Davis-Bacon and prevailing wage laws have generated union jobs. Home care workers, child care workers and public university graduate teaching assistants have been able to organize because of actions by pro-worker state governments. Active support from elected officials has led to the success of many more organizing campaigns.

Nearly 4 million new members have joined AFL-CIO unions over the past nine years. Still, union membership has continued to decline as a percentage of the workforce. To grow, we must dramatically accelerate the pace of change.

As we plan together to make it happen, the lessons of the past nine years are clear.

Investing substantially in organizing is essential and effective even in the tough current environment. When unions develop real, strategic capacity for organizing—recruiting and training organizers, conducting strategic research, helping workers organize in their core industries and mobilizing

current members in support of new organizing—it has succeeded and made a difference in workers' lives.

Long-term growth will require a dramatically greater investment that can exponentially increase organizing across our movement. If all AFL-CIO affiliated unions invest 30 percent of their resources to organizing, it will result in an annual investment in organizing of \$500 million per year from the national union level alone.

But it takes more than money to succeed. We also must invest in developing sound, smart, strategic capacity for organizing.

And to sustain and accelerate growth as fast as necessary, we must further invest in winning public policies that will open opportunities for organizing, protect the jobs of current members and secure the freedom of workers to organize.

We therefore resolve to:

**1. Unite our energies and resources to help workers organize** by mobilizing a larger, more active constituency in support of their fundamental freedom to form unions and bargain collectively to gain a voice at work. Every affiliate of the AFL-CIO will work to help win public and community support for restoring the right to organize. We will build an army of frontline volunteers by extending education and mobilization training to 100,000 worksite stewards by 2008. We will take the real experiences of workers struggling to organize in the face of pervasive intimidation and coercion to elected officials and other opinion leaders. We will make the freedom to organize and bargain collectively an essential part of our political mobilization, and a core part of any progressive program for creating a just economy with decent wages, health care and retirement security for all. Acting in coalition with our allies and partners such as American Rights at Work and Jobs with Justice, we will use mobilization and education to build majorities for passage of the Employee Free Choice Act in the U.S. Congress, and to help workers win organizing campaigns now—confident of political, faith-based and community support that is broad and deep.

**2. Expand AFL-CIO organizing resources to leverage a substantially greater investment in organizing by affiliated unions.** The AFL-CIO will create a \$22.5 million Strategic Organizing Fund. Up to two-thirds, or \$15 million, of the fund will be returned as rebates to affiliates that have met high standards in changing their organizations to organize. Only if the rebate program is structured with high standards is it likely to move the labor movement to the \$500 million annual investment level. One-third of the fund, or \$7.5 million, will be allocated to assist strategic organizing campaigns by affiliates of importance to the entire labor movement. The Organizing Committee and the Executive Council will establish criteria for the rebates and allocations. Applications for rebates will be reviewed by a panel of retired union presidents.

**3. Assist national union affiliates in building capacity to take on larger scale, more strategic growth campaigns**—providing expert technical support, campaign research and organizer training—and to build a culture of solidarity and support for organizing. The affiliated unions of the AFL-CIO will support each other and our entire movement in developing the power and capacity to organize. We will build on the global reach of the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center to connect the struggles of workers in other countries and the work of affiliate organizing and bargaining campaigns with multinational employers here.

**4. Establish Industry Coordinating Committees in employment sectors where our affiliates have significant membership**, with participation required. The committees will develop and implement global industry strategies to support organizing and bargaining. They will create joint strategic growth plans, establish joint bargaining programs and set up joint political and legislative programs designed to increase bargaining power and membership growth.

**5. Revise Articles XX and XXI procedures to reinforce the work of the Industry Coordinating Committees** and to encourage strategic organizing in areas, occupations, employers or industries where a union has a significant or

dominant presence. We will also expand and modify the Strategic Campaign Registration Program to further encourage unions to register more of their organizing campaigns and decrease inter-union organizing competition.

**6. Encourage and actively promote mergers of unions with members employed in the same or related industries** to build union power, consolidate resources and facilitate economies of scale. Many such mergers have taken place in recent years. Union mergers must be voluntary and subject to the democratic processes of the unions involved.

**7. Stop the Wal-Marting of good jobs by major corporations**—including mounting a major global campaign to expose the greed of the world's largest employer and hold it to account, educate union members and communities about the hidden costs of Wal-Mart's practices and mobilize federation-wide support for the United Food and Commercial Workers union in its drive to protect good jobs from Wal-Martization.

## **II. Uniting Our Power to Win Legislative and Political Change**

America's workers and their families have suffered repeated legislative and political setbacks. The current Bush administration and congressional leaders are making history—bad history—with a crusade to eviscerate worker protections, dismantle the New Deal social compact and enrich its corporate and affluent base. With union-busters occupying the White House, the freedom of workers to join unions and bargain is under steady fire. And state leaders such as California's Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger are following suit. It is evident that workers will not gain substantial power and unions will not be able to grow unless we change the politics of America.

Now is the moment to demonstrate unprecedented resolve and ingenuity to devise and implement a long-term, multi-faceted strategy to fashion a roadmap for a pro-working family transformation in government.

Our goal is to lay the groundwork and build steadily over the next several election cycles to ensure that by 2012—when the next period of redistricting takes place—a pro-working family majority takes power. Our focus is not on party. We will work with all candidates and public officials who support working people and the issues central to our lives—the core issues of good jobs, health care, pensions and Social Security and the freedom to form unions, as well as opportunity, security, faith and values. Our plan must recognize varied regional political and demographic realities, including the needs and concerns of key constituencies. And we must emphasize not only federal races, but also strategic races for governors and state legislatures.

To build a stronger movement that can reverse workers' fortunes, we must strengthen the roots of our movement by deepening and increasing the involvement and activism of our members.

We must turn the unity and massive participation that characterized labor's effort in 2004 into a permanent culture of mobilization in local unions, at our workplaces and in our communities—and we must do so aggressively.

We must focus more than ever on winning gains—and defending against attacks—at the state level.

We must educate, communicate and activate union members to take on the assault on pensions and Social Security privatization, to fight for good jobs and health care for all and to defend workers' rights. And we must turn those fights into grassroots momentum and capacity to win power in state houses and local government as well as the White House and the U.S. Congress.

We must begin now to shore up states with a strong union presence, help more working people mobilize through Working America and build political alliances in communities of color. We must protect the strength of organized workers against right-to-work-for-less and other anti-union, anti-worker initiatives, encourage ballot initiatives that improve the lives of working people—such as minimum wage,

living wage and health care advances—and make substantial investments to recruit, train and elect union members to state, local and federal office.

To be as effective as we can be, we must re-examine everything we do—evaluating what works, refining our approaches where they work well and reforming them where they work less well. Our goal is to build an informed, empowered movement.

WE THEREFORE RESOLVE TO:

**1. Move from a focus on biannual GOTV work to building year-round, year-in-and-year-out capacity for informing and mobilizing union members, including members of Working America, around legislative and public policy issues and for political action at all levels of government by:**

- Integrating our local, state and national legislative fights with our political mobilization and expanding our work with community allies to join the fights of union members with those of other working people at all levels;
- Focusing on educating the public about the work-related issues that are at our core, while also embracing individual freedom, security, faith and values as issues critical to our movement;
- Working together with every national union as well as our state and local labor movements to identify tens of thousands of local union coordinators to lead worksite education and mobilization; and
- Placing full-time campaign directors in key states and creating mobilization capacity in every state through joint planning and training, working with and through our state federations and central labor councils.

**2. Develop and implement a long-term plan to create pro-worker governing majorities by:**

- Leading an intensive campaign to consolidate and expand our strength to uproot anti-worker

politicians from state legislatures, governorships, Congress and the White House; to turn back efforts to enact right-to-work-for-less and paycheck deception laws; to fight off attacks on defined-benefit pension and health care programs; and to create models for pro-worker governance;

- Setting our political and legislative agenda and priorities based on the interests of working families, not the interest of any political party or specific candidate. We will work on a bipartisan basis to elect candidates to public office who support a pro-working families agenda, recognizing that neither political party is entitled to our automatic support. Democrats should not expect to be endorsed by labor without earning that support, and Republicans who want to work on behalf of working people should be given an opportunity to meet with representatives of state and central labor bodies as part of an open and transparent endorsement process. The AFL-CIO will take steps to ensure local union leaders are informed about the issues and the records of candidates who have worked with unions in Washington, D.C., to advance a pro-working families agenda;
- Building coalitions to roll back right-to-work-for-less laws in states such as Iowa and Nevada;
- Working together with our constituency groups and other allies, assisting and strengthening efforts to mobilize communities of color, while also reaching out to young workers, retirees, working women, people of faith and union members who are hunters and sports enthusiasts;
- Encouraging more ballot initiatives that improve the lives of working people (such as minimum wage, living wage, collective bargaining for public employees and health care initiatives) and bring more working people into the electoral process; and
- Increasing our efforts to recruit, train and elect union members to local, state and federal public offices.

### **3. Build on the initial success of Working America, our new community affiliate, by:**

- Extending recruitment into five new states by the end of 2005, running full-scale recruitment drives in a dozen states and increasing the membership from 900,000 to 2 million by the end of 2006;
- Enlisting the support of Working America members for local legislative and election struggles, as well as national battles over Social Security, fair trade agreements, Medicare and Medicaid, the minimum wage and education funding; and
- Engaging Working America members in fights for corporate accountability, including holding Wal-Mart accountable for its corporate behavior, and mobilizing their support for organizing and contract campaigns.
- To resource this work, increasing our Member Mobilization Fund budget for legislative and political action by approximately \$7.5 million per year, with no increase in current per capita taxes. We must complete the job of stabilizing our funding for membership mobilization by making permanent the current assessment implemented since the last Convention. The Member Mobilization Fund includes absolutely no contributions to political candidates.

### **III. Uniting Our Power to Build Stronger State and Local Labor Movements**

To build the mobilization capacity we must have at the state and local levels, we need strong local labor movements. State and local labor movements are the backbone of our grassroots political efforts and legislative campaigns. They build support for working families' issues by establishing strong and lasting alliances with community allies, and they are key spokespersons in the community and with local media for working families' issues and concerns. They provide crucial support to affiliated unions in

organizing campaigns and contract fights. State and local labor organizations have a primary responsibility for carrying out the programs of the AFL-CIO.

One of the most important steps we can take to build a stronger movement is to dramatically improve the performance of our state and local labor organizations.

We must make sure they have the resources and capability to carry out an aggressive and effective political and legislative program, including a permanent political and issues mobilization operation. State and local labor movements must focus their work on the labor movement's top priorities, and they must function in the most effective, coordinated and accountable way possible. This will require significant reforms because while many state federations and central labor councils are high performers, others need major improvement.

We must build on the recommendations of the special committee of state federation and central labor council leaders and the vote by the Executive Council in March to implement the recommendations from the council's Committee on State and Local Strategies. The national AFL-CIO must lead integrated strategic planning and budgeting processes in the states to build better resourced, coordinated and effective organizations that can move the union movement's program. There must be clear expectations and accountability for these organizations, and the fullest possible affiliation and participation by local unions.

The experiences of states such as Oregon, Colorado, North Carolina and New York under the New Alliance program has shown how effective and successful state and local labor movements can be when all parts of the labor movement come together behind a unified vision and program. We must accelerate this process to bring about positive reforms in other states. Already, this work is well under way in three states of crucial importance to the labor movement—Pennsylvania, Ohio and Florida—and we will expand this work to other key states in the coming months.

WE THEREFORE RESOLVE TO:

- Strengthen state and local labor movements by leading and requiring strategic planning and budgeting processes to build better resourced, coordinated, effective organizations that can move the union movement's program. This will include reconfiguration of local labor movements where necessary to create large metropolitan, area and regional bodies with sufficient capacity and resources to carry out an ambitious and aggressive

mobilization program. We will set performance benchmarks and standards for state and local labor movements, and step in to enforce these standards as needed to ensure effective performance. We will promote full affiliation and funding for state and local labor movements by affiliated unions. To improve the effectiveness of these organizations, we will expand leadership development work with state and local labor movements and work to ensure diversity of representation at every level.