
ELM Emergency Labor Meeting

Cleveland March 4-5, 2011

Jobs • Social Security & Medicare
Labor's Rights • Peace & Justice

REPORT on Emergency Labor Meeting (Cleveland, Ohio – March 4-5, 2011)

BUILDING UNITY TO DEFEAT UNION-BUSTING AND CONCESSIONS

Ninety-six union leaders and activists from 26 states and from a broad cross-section of the labor movement gathered at the Laborers Local 310 Hall in Cleveland on March 4-5, 2011, in response to an invitation sent out in January urging them to “explore together what we can do to mount a more militant and robust fight-back campaign to defend the interests of working people.” [See excerpts from Letter of Invitation and list of endorsers of the meeting in this report-back packet.]

Three weeks prior to the Emergency Labor Meeting (ELM), unionists and community and student activists in Wisconsin unleashed a resistance movement against Governor Scott Walker’s union-busting and concessionary attacks that in a short time has breathed new life into the labor movement. The sustained occupation of the State Capitol and the sustained mobilizations in the streets -- including 7,000 people who marched on March 3 “Against All Concessions for Workers” at the initiative of National Nurses United and 50,000 people who rallied on March 5 -- have galvanized working people across the country.

Participants in the ELM took full note of the new situation and of the grave dangers to the U.S. labor movement and to workers’ and democratic rights posed by Governor Walker’s attacks. They pledged to make the fight against union-busting and the budget cuts/concessions in Wisconsin the centerpiece of an emergency action plan centered on two national days of action called by the labor movement:

* **March 12:** Participants pledged to go back to their unions and workers’ organizations to promote the March 12 Day of Action called by the Wisconsin AFL-CIO. Brother David Newby, President-Emeritus of the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO, attended the ELM and relayed the proposal from his state federation that all unionists and labor activists in Wisconsin and neighboring states mobilize in Madison on March 12, with labor-led solidarity actions the same day in cities across the country.

* **April 4:** Participants welcomed the call issued by Larry Cohen, International President of the Communication Workers of America (CWA) to organize on April 4, the anniversary of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a “not-business-as-usual” Nationwide Day of Action at workplaces and communities across the country in support of labor rights. This call has since been supported by the AFL-CIO Executive Board, which is urging “movement-wide dramatic actions” on this day.

Participants agreed to go back to their unions and communities to promote broad support for this April 4 Day of Action in all ways deemed appropriate by unions and community organizations on the ground, including, where possible, industrial actions. They also urged support for these actions around demands that link the struggle in defense of labor rights to the struggle against budget cuts and concessions, and that point to solutions to the federal and state budget deficits, including taxing the rich and the corpora-

tions, cutting the war budget, and creating 27 million full-time jobs through a massive public works program (which could be launched immediately and without raising the U.S. budget by a penny with a \$1 trillion "Bridge Loan" from the Federal Reserve).

To promote these actions, participants pledged to go back to their cities to build "We Are All Wisconsin!" committees of labor and community activists.

Also, in the event the Walker bill is approved by the Wisconsin legislature, the state's labor movement has announced that it is prepared to launch a recall campaign designed to remove from office seven members of the Wisconsin Senate. The Wisconsin State AFL-CIO, in fact, has already initiated a fundraising campaign for this purpose. [To send a donation, or for updates on this campaign, go to <http://www.wisafcio.org> or call 414-771-0700.]

In Ohio, a bill to deny collective-bargaining rights to public employees is likely to pass in the General Assembly. Ohio labor and its allies are already gearing up to get the bill rescinded through a referendum. To qualify for a referendum for the ballot in Ohio, supporters must gather about 230,000 valid signatures within 90 days after the bill passes and is signed by the governor. The Ohio labor movement is organizing to gather the necessary number. The bill will not be implemented for 90 days regardless, but if the requisite number of signatures is submitted and validated, the bill will be held in abeyance pending the November 2011 election. A bill passed by the Ohio General Assembly in 1997 to gut workers' compensation was never implemented because of a successful labor-led campaign to rescind it through a referendum vote.

Participants in the Emergency Labor Meeting discussed a "Perspectives" document submitted by the ELM Organizing Committee. Changes and additions were made to the text, which will serve as the framework for future efforts undertaken by a Continuations Committee that will emanate from the meeting. [See Perspectives document in this report-back packet.]

Participants also took a stand urging the ELM Continuations Committee, in collaboration with the fighting unions and community organizations, to consider the possibility of organizing in the not-too-distant future a broader and open Labor-Community Conference structured around the points included in the ELM Perspectives document.

Throughout the four panel discussions of the meeting, participants submitted a whole host of proposals and ideas aimed at bolstering the capacity of the labor movement to assert its independence and fight back against the employers' and government's offensive. These will be incorporated into a "Tool Box" on the new website that will be set up by the ELM Continuations Committee.

For example, proposals on how best to organize labor-community coalitions, with reports on activities of the "We Are All Wisconsin!" committees in different cities, will be included in the Tool Box. Also included will be articles and proposals geared to helping to educate union members about the roots of the current economic and financial crisis from a working-class perspective. These are just two of the many sections that will be included in the Tool Box. Participants entrusted the new Continuations Committee with the task of publishing as many of these texts as possible in Spanish and other languages, to strengthen the ties with immigrant workers.

Participants left the meeting encouraged by the new fight-back movement in the country and by the necessary contribution to this movement that this ELM effort can provide. All unionists and activists interested in working with the ELM Continuations Committee to advance the goals contained in the ELM Perspectives document should write to <emergencylabor@aol.com>.

PERSPECTIVES APPROVED BY EMERGENCY LABOR MEETING (Cleveland, Ohio – March 4-5, 2011)

1 - As they are doing throughout most countries, the corporate class is using the financial crisis orchestrated by them to launch unprecedented attacks on the job security, living standards, working conditions and useful public services once enjoyed by the working class in the United States. This cold-blooded offensive threatens the very existence of our unions.

2 - Labor movement unity in action -- public and private sector, the two federations and the independent unions -- is indispensable to success in stopping and reversing this assault.

3 - As recent events in Wisconsin have reaffirmed, the key to an effective fight-back is mobilization of the union ranks. We envision a strategy that includes both actions in the workplace and in the streets.

4 - We must go to the streets to defend trade union and democratic rights, as public sector workers are now doing. The right to collective bargaining is a right enshrined in universally recognized Conventions 87 and 98 of the UN-based International Labor Organization (ILO); it is also a human right codified in the UN Charter. In fact, the United States is on trial before world public opinion for violating basic labor rights at home. The ILO ruled recently that the state of North Carolina was out of compliance with international labor standards for denying collective-bargaining rights for public sector workers, and the ILO called on North Carolina and the U.S. government to repeal this ban on collective-bargaining rights.

5 - We must also go to the streets to oppose the concessions demanded by the bosses and the government. There is plenty of money available without demanding givebacks from public employees, but this requires changing our nation's priorities to raise taxes on the rich, redirect war dollars to meet human needs, and more -- all demands that we must place on the federal government. We can no longer effectively deal with such crucial issues as health care and retirement through collective bargaining alone.

6 - We not only defend the social insurance model -- Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, public education, food stamps, unemployment insurance, etc. -- but demand that these programs be strengthened and improved. And it is high time we follow the example won by our Canadian sisters and brothers decades ago by extending Medicare to all.

7 - Nor can contract negotiations create the 27 million full-time jobs urgently needed today. Since the private sector has failed to do this (in fact, the corporations continue to off-shore good full-time jobs in their continued drive to lower labor costs), we need a public sector that can put America back to work rebuilding our neglected and crumbling infrastructure, revitalizing mass transit, and promoting a sustainable economy. The public sector and public services provide the basic core safety net for human rights.

8 - In fighting for such independent solutions to our country's crises we would return to what once was the bedrock of trade unionism -- our unions champion the needs of the entire working class,

including the unemployed, not just our dues-paying members. That approach was what enabled the historic labor victories during the depths of the Great Depression. This is not only the right thing to do; with union density at near record lows we cannot win the big struggles just on our own.

9 - To cement working class unity we reject every attempt to divide us by race, skin color, gender, immigration status, religion, or sexual orientation. This means not only politically correct resolutions but active support to all targets of such pernicious discrimination.

10 - A unified, energized working class could reach out for even wider alliances. There are millions of students, mom-and-pop businesses, family farmers, and others who are being squeezed by the corporate class. Seeking to partner with the Chamber of Commerce and corporate America, however, can only lead to failure for labor and its allies.

11 - Our goals cannot be met while American blood and vast amounts of our tax dollars are being consumed by unjust wars to advance the global corporate agenda. We say end the wars, bring all of our troops home now -- and put the war budget to work for human needs.

12 - Instead of supporting wars of intervention, the labor movement should embrace international worker solidarity. The mutual declarations of support between protesters in Madison and insurgent independent unions in Egypt are a proud example that deserve wide emulation.

13 - Since many of the attacks we face today have bipartisan support, labor must act independently of these two parties. To the extent that the labor movement subordinates its demands to agreements with these parties in the name of "shared sacrifice," it will not be able to defend effectively the interests of its members and of the working-class majority.

14 - The call to protect the right to collective bargaining must include the demand to repeal all laws that prevent workers, such as those in the U.S. South, from having the right to bargain collectively and arrive at enforceable contracts. All laws, such as the Taft-Hartley Act, that prevent the consolidation of strong unions in the Southeast and other regions of the country must be repealed.

15 - We must view organizing the South as fundamental to rebuilding a strong national labor movement in this country.

EXCERPT FROM LETTER OF INVITATION TO THE EMERGENCY LABOR MEETING

“We want this meeting to address how we can spur more effective action by the labor movement to win the creation of millions of new jobs at the expense of Wall Street and the rich; a moratorium on home foreclosures; defense of Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid; protection of pensions; closing the widening gap in economic and social inequality; enactment of the Employee Free Choice Act; redirection of war dollars to meet human needs; and generating federal support for state and city governments that are poised to lay off even more teachers and other public employees, support that includes allocating sufficient resources to ensure that ALL of our children have access to quality public schools and affordable higher education.”

ENDORERS OF CLEVELAND EMERGENCY LABOR MEETING

Donna Dewitt, President, South Carolina AFL-CIO • David Newby, President Emeritus, Wisconsin State AFL-CIO* • Jos Williams, President, Washington Metro Council, AFL-CIO • Ken Riley, President, International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA) Local 1422 • Karen Lewis, President, Chicago Teachers Union (AFT) Local 1* • Henry Nicholas, President, National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees, AFSCME • Jim Savage, President, USW Local 10-1 • Lew Moye, President, St Louis Chapter, Coalition of Black Trade Unionists • Eduardo Quintana, President, International Association of Machinists (IAM) Local Lodge 933* • David Poklinkoski, President and Business Manager, IBEW Local 2304 • Monadel Herzallah, President, Arab American Union Members Council – USLAW-affiliate • Dominick Patrignani, President IUE-CWA Local 81359 • Jeff Crosby, President, North Shore Labor Council • Traven Leyshon, President Green Mountain Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO • Ron Dicks, International Vice President, International Federation of Professional and Technical Employees (IFPTE)* • Erin McKee, President, Charleston Central Labor Council* • Tim Paulson, Executive Director, San Francisco Labor Council • San Francisco Labor Council, AFL-CIO • Laborers Local 310 • Laborers Local 483 • GEO 6300 (IFT-AFT). • Portland Jobs with Justice • Sonia Ivany, National Vice-President, Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, President, New York City, LCLAA • Andrea L. Delgado, Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA) • Dennis Serrette, Education Director, Communications Workers of America* • Tom Leedham, Secretary-Treasurer, Teamsters Local 206 • Ashaki Binta, Field Organizer, UE* • Sal Rosselli, Interim President, National Union of Healthcare Workers* • Gladys McKenzie, Field Representative, AFSCME Council 5 (Minnesota)* • Phil Qualy, Minnesota State Legislative Director, United Transportation Union* • Mark Dudzic, National Coordinator, Labor Campaign for Single-Payer Health Care* • Saladin Muhammad, member of Black Workers For Justice and Coordinator of UE Local 150’s International Worker Justice Campaign • Jesse Sharkey, Vice President, Chicago Teachers Union (AFT) Local 1* • Virginia Robinson, former Treasurer and Reporting Secretary, Cleveland AFL-CIO; retired member, Steelworkers Union • Bill Henning, Vice President, CWA Local 1180 • Gabriel Prawl, ILWU Local 52, Executive Co-chair African American Longshore Coalition • Eduardo Rosario, Grievance Representative, AFSCME Local 375, New York City* • John Wagner, Executive Secretary-Treasurer, Tri-County Regional Labor Council, AFL-CIO* • Jan D. Pierce, retired Vice President, CWA District One • Ed Sadlowski, Staff Representative, Wisconsin Council 40, AFSCME, AFL-CIO*; Member, Local 938; membership in Council 40 Field and Support Staff Union • Mary Prophet, Co-Chair, Ca Teachers’ Association Peace & Justice Caucus; KPFA Community Advisory Board; Steering

Committee, USLAW* • Jerry Tucker, former Intl UAW Exec Board Member; Center for Labor Renewal Co-Founder • David Riehle, United Transportation Union Local 650 Vice-Chairman; past local Chairman 1989-2007 • Chris Silvera, Secretary-Treasurer, Teamsters Local 808 • Sandy Eaton, RN; Chair, National Nurses United Legislative Council* • Dr. Peter Rachleff, professor of history, Macalaster College; author and researcher on U.S. labor, immigration and African American history • Mary Nichols-Rhodes, LPN, Ohio coordinator, Progressive Democrats of America • Dean Gunderson, Minnesota Association of Professional Employees Region 5 Director and past local president • Gregory Cendana, Executive Director, Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO • Bill Fletcher, Jr., Center for Labor Renewal; BlackCommentator.com • Jim Lafferty, UAW Legal Service Workers; Director, National Lawyers Guild Los Angeles • Dr. Jack Rasmus, Member, American Federation of Teachers University Council, University of California Berkley; Former National First Vice President, National Writers Union, UAW Local 1981; former local union Vice President and Business Representative, CWA Local 9415 and SEIU Local 715

- Alan Benjamin, Executive Committee, San Francisco Labor Council; Co-Convenor, Workers Emergency Recovery Campaign • Jim Hamilton, State Executive Committee, Missouri AFT* • Carolyn Park, Steward, AFSCME Local 232* • Mike Carano, Member Teamsters Union Local 348, member, State Council, Single-Payer Action Network Ohio (SPAN Ohio)* • Bill Leumer, Former President, International Association of Machinists Local 565*; Co-Convenor, Workers Emergency Recovery Campaign • Russell Bannan, LCLAA Denver Metro Communication Coordinator; Colorado Jobs with Justice Executive Board; Colorado Young Workers Steering Committee • Bill Onasch, Retired former vice president, ATU Local 1287*
- Steve Early, labor journalist, lawyer, and former CWA International Representative; author of *Embedded with Organized Labor* and *The Civil Wars in U.S. Labor* • Dan La Botz, National Writers Union/UAW*
- Clarence Thomas. Executive Board, ILWU Local 10 • Lenny Potash, Co-Chair Labor United for Universal Healthcare* • Fred Hirsch, Executive Board Member, Plumbers & Fitters Local 393; Delegate to the South Bay AFL-CIO Labor Council and to the Santa Clara and San Benito Counties Building & Construction Trades Council* • Dan Kaplan, Executive Secretary, AFT Local 1493, the San Mateo (CA) Community College Federation of Teachers* • Ann Robertson, Executive Board Member, California Faculty Association – San Francisco State University - Delegate to San Francisco Labor Council*
- Allan Fisher, Executive Board Member, AFT Local 2121 - Delegate to San Francisco Labor Council*
- Marc Rich, United Teachers Los Angeles delegate to Los Angeles County Federation of Labor*
- Paul Bigman, Business Representative, IATSE Local 15; Treasurer, Washington State Jobs with Justice*
- Harry Kelber, *The World of Labor* • Genevieve Morse, member, Massachusetts Teachers Association, shop steward in the Classified Staff Union at the University of Massachusetts Boston and elected delegate to 2010 annual MTA conference • Steve Edwards, President, AFSCME Local 2858, Chicago, IL and Steering Committee member, Public Workers Unite! • Ira Grupper, labor journalist, Louisville KY
- Phyliss Walker, President, AFSCME Local 3800 (clerical workers) at the University of Minnesota
- Muata Greene, Labor Liaison for EMT's, Paramedics & Inspectors of FDNY • Lee Sustar, member, National Writers Union/UAW Local 1981; labor journalist • Ron Lare, UAW Local 600, former Local-wide Executive Board member • Bernie Hesse, Political Director and Director of Special Projects, UFCW 1189 (St Paul MN)* • Randy Raskin, Vice General Chairman, United Transportation Union General Committee of Adjustment (UP-former C&NW) St Paul/Minneapolis* • SEIU Local 49 (Portland, OR) • Jerry Gordon, Retired International Representative, United Food and Commercial Workers Union*; Secretary, Emergency Labor Meeting

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