

Democratic Socialists of America National Convention November 11-13, 2005

Resolution on Building Labor Solidarity

Despite an economic recovery American workers continue to face hard economic times, and U.S. unions are in crisis. The hard times and the crisis are an outcome of many factors: globalization and the push to compete with low-wage, exploited labor abroad; a hard-Right administration in the White House and a G.O.P controlled Congress; a flailing Democratic Party; and an unrelenting corporate offensive, to name just a few. While much of the problem is political, part is demographic as well. Too few Americans are in unions.

The percentage of US workers claiming union membership is approaching an all-time low. In 2004, just 12.5 percent of the U.S. labor force belonged to unions, and the figure in the private sector is now below 8 percent. Organizing new workers while fighting for existing members is key. Supporting the labor movement in this crisis remains a critical part of DSA's perspective.

If the outlook for organized labor in defending American workers is bad, labor unions are at least not accepting it passively. Autoworkers refused to accept a ruinous take-back contract from auto supplier Delphi Corp., which then filed bankruptcy in October in a last-ditch effort to enforce that pact on its workers while blaming labor and pension costs for its managerial failings. Its independent mechanics union struck Northwest Airlines, also in bankruptcy, in an attempt to resist the company cut backs. Boeing machinists won increased pension pay after a prolonged strike, and public employees in California are waging a sophisticated, coordinated attack on their union-busting governor.

Yet while unions continue struggling, friends of the US labor movement are confronted with the reality of two separate and potentially competing labor federations. Where there was once one unified body, six national unions representing some one third of the AFL-CIO's total membership broke away to form Change To Win.

DSA is committed to promoting as much operational unity and solidarity as is possible among all elements of the labor movement. We have members active in unions in both federations. We intend to work with both federations.

Our commitment to solidarity is more than a strategy to maintain alliances and relationships. Our vision of the society we seek includes a dynamic labor movement capable of mobilizing workers and their allies. We support workers and their struggles because a stronger, democratic labor movement is essential, especially if we are to win the fight against corporate globalization and declining living standards.

DSA has always sought to be an organization in which union activists holding a variety of perspectives and loyalties can work and talk collaboratively. In the current period of conflict and uncertainty we believe this aspect of our organization has never been more important.

As we meet there are serious and unresolved conflicts between the two federations, particularly as it impacts local and state labor organizations. We call on all sides to work towards resolution. We applaud the AFL-CIO's decision to extend Labor Solidarity Charters to any union that wishes to join or remain in Central Labor Councils, even as we understand that the exact details of these charters are still subject to some negotiation; and we commend the SEIU and AFSCME for concluding an important no-raiding pact. Measures to preserve as much unity and solidarity as is possible in state and local organizations, such as the recently announced agreement allowing members of any member organization to be officers of a local federation, are a solid step in the right direction.

The labor movement is more than just the present federations, elected officials or even the present members of unions. The labor movement is about the aspirations of all workers to organize to democratically control their working conditions as well as their own institutions, to be treated with dignity and respect, and to increase the standing of their organizations.

DSA continues to view the labor movement -- at both the national and local level -- as a key constituency of the broad progressive coalition we seek to build. In our work to increase labor solidarity and reverse the decline in the labor movement we will impose no litmus test save a commitment to a robust and dynamic labor movement. We look forward to continuing to work with all elements of the American labor movement.

We encourage chapters and members to participate in the December 10 International Human Rights Day activities in support of the right to organize.