

Leveling the Playing Field

Our predecessors in the American labor movement fought hard for one thing above all others: the right to organize. After many years of bitter struggle, many jobs lost, much blood shed, and many families put to the tests of poverty, they succeeded in getting a simple rule written into law: If employees want a union to represent them, they can have one.

Or so we thought. Because of bad laws and employer abuse, the promise of the right to organize gets broken far too often these days. The National Labor Relations Board's election process, as it exists today, enables employers to block employees' desire for a union much too easily. Employers faced with organizing drives routinely fire employees in retaliation and get away with it. Even when an employer is found guilty of unlawfully firing a union supporter, the penalty is minimal. As a result, employers have little reason to follow the law and play fair when employees are trying to vote in a union.

With a new Democratic majority in Congress, however, there's finally a chance to breathe some life back into right to organize. The Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), which the union movement has promoted for years, has been put before the new Congress with bipartisan sponsorship. The House has already approved it, and it's now under consideration in the Senate.

If it became law, the Employee Free Choice Act would do three critically important things.

First, it would require employers to recognize a union if a majority of the workers signed cards authorizing union representation. This method provides a quick and reliable way to make the employees' desire for a union effective—and it avoids the complicated processes of a full NLRB election, which employers have learned to exploit so well. Representation through a card majority is particularly important in our fast-paced industry, where a job could be over before an NLRB election could ever be run.

Second, the Act would increase the penalties for unlawful conduct in organizing. Employers who willfully break the law during organizing or negotiations for a first contract would face civil fines of up to \$20,000 per violation, and employees who are unlawfully fired in such circumstances would be entitled to triple back pay. In addition, employers would be subject to injunctions for unlawful conduct during organizing and first-contract drives.

Third, the Act would provide for mediation and binding arbitration when negotiations for a first contract fail. This provision is important because even when the union wins recognition, employers frequently refuse to agree to a first contract.

The Employee Free Choice Act presents the first opportunity in years for a change in federal law that could actually improve employees' ability to negotiate for better lives. We must do everything we can to make sure this bill gets approved by the full Congress. Write your Congressperson or Senator to tell them to vote for the bill, and make the right to organize a reality once again.

OFFICIAL NOTICE

This is to advise that the regular Mid-Summer Meeting of the General Executive Board is scheduled to be held at the Sheraton St. Louis City Center, 400 South 14th Street, St. Louis, Missouri 63103 at 10:00 a.m. on Monday, July 23, 2007, and will remain in session through and including Friday, July 27, 2007. All business to come before the Board must be submitted to the General Office no later than fifteen (15) days prior to the meeting.

Local Union representatives planning to attend the meeting must make hotel reservations with the Sheraton St. Louis City Center by calling the hotel directly at 314-231-5007 or 888-627-8096. Guest room rates for the IATSE are \$149.00, single or double occupancy, plus applicable taxes. In order to ensure that you receive the preferred room rate established for our meeting, you must identify your affiliations with the IATSE.

Cut Off Date: July 1, 2007

In addition, A Stage Caucus will be held at the Sheraton St. Louis City Center on Monday, July 23, 2007 at 5:00 p.m. in the Colonnade Ballroom, Salon D. Representatives of the Stagecraft locals are welcome.