

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Union membership is up. Perhaps you read about it in the papers, although you probably had to dig deep to find it, given the way labor issues are covered in the mainstream media. That's a pity, because the news is really very good.

Total union membership in the United States rose by more than 265,000 in 1999, according to the U.S. Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). This is the largest one-year jump in membership in more than 20 years. I am proud to say that our union played a part in generating these numbers. With some 50,000 new members added mainly through organizing and recruitment—the IBEW alone accounted for nearly 10 percent of the growth in U.S. union membership last year.

The BLS figures show that union membership in the U.S. rose from 16.21 million to 16.48 million. The percentage of American workers represented by unions remained steady at 13.9 percent, reversing a trend of decline. The percentage figure is especially important because it shows that unions are gaining a share of the strong job creation of recent years.

The best news was in the private sector where union membership increased by 112,493. This was only the second time in 20 years that the private sector showed a net gain in union membership, and the 1999 figure nearly doubles the last increase. In addition, the 1999 private sector increase by itself outpaced the 1998 growth in both the public *and* private sectors. The percentage of union members in the private sector also held steady, snapping a 22-year string of reduced numbers.

The increased numbers are encouraging, but even more heartening are the reasons behind the statistics. Without a doubt, the strong organizing efforts of the IBEW and other unions have played a major role. The growth in the national economy has created new jobs, many of which are in unionized industries. Workers in traditionally nonunion sectors, such as medical and high tech, have been more receptive to orga-

nizing (see page 5 of this issue). Other voices in the community, such as those of religious leaders and elected officials, have increasingly called for strengthening workers' right to organize.

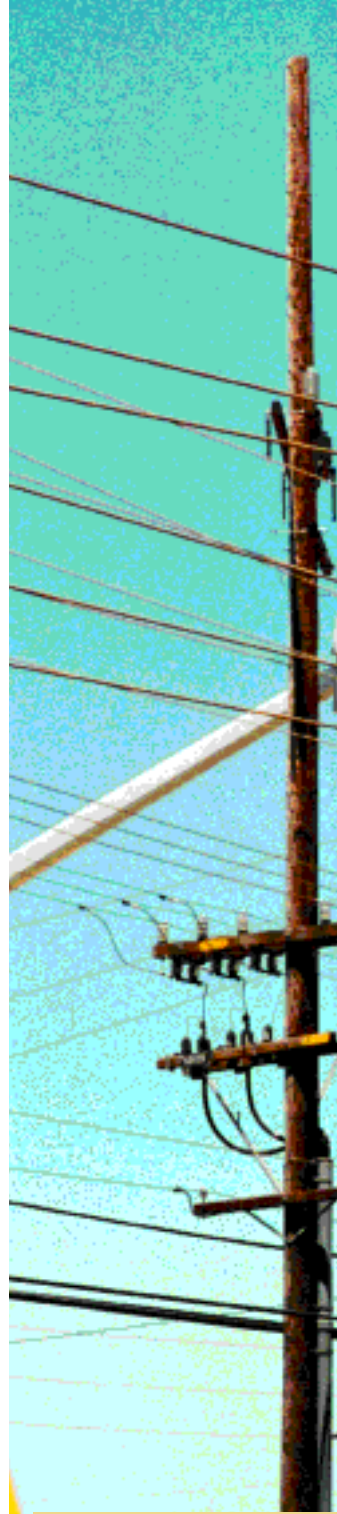
Most important, however, have been the efforts of countless IBEW local leaders, organizers and rank and file members who have worked so hard and so tirelessly to bring our union and others back into the plus column. When I took office in 1986, organizing had become dormant at every level of the Brotherhood. It took education and constant reinforcement of the importance of organizing to change a culture of the status quo that had become ingrained in our union. But change it we did, as a team. Since 1994, we have seen a net gain of some 40,000 new members in Canada and the United States, primarily in construction. Our numbers in construction are greater than they have ever been. That is quite an accomplishment—proof positive that the years of decline are over, and we must never let them return.

We still, however, have miles to go. Our industrial membership continues to drop from its all-time high in the mid-1970s. The economic restructuring of North America brought about by technology and the global marketplace has taken a mighty toll. We may never see our historic high numbers again, but there is certainly no shortage of targets to pursue in electronic manufacturing, telecommunications, utilities, railroads and broadcasting, as well as construction.

We are gratified to see the numbers turning our way, but will never rest in the struggle to organize. ☐

On the Rise

J. J. BARRY



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SECRETARY-TREASURER'S MESSAGE

Recently, during the International Officers annual meeting, we had occasion to meet with a member of long standing who is also a deacon in the Catholic Church. He told me how his involvement in both the IBEW and his church often intertwine. The church supports the union in its struggle for social justice, and the union supports the church's efforts to help those in need in the community.

The last word is the key—community. The old proverb that no person is an island comes to life in so many ways within the labor movement. Our very existence is based on the belief that all can accomplish together what none can do alone. We are founded on the ideals of brotherhood and unity that underlie virtually all systems of religious and moral belief in the world. Sometimes, however, I worry that in the rush of our daily activities or in the inevitable disagreements that our working lives bring, we forget just how much good IBEW members accomplish every day. Meeting that brother in San Diego was a valuable reminder for me.

The pages of this magazine have contained numerous stories over the years showing how our members wire homes for the needy, hook up computers for school kids, bring holiday happiness to those who would otherwise have none, collect food and clothing for the hungry and homeless, assist a union brother or sister in an emergency or a tragedy... the list goes on. Our brothers and sisters seek no recognition for this, but they do deserve it.

I would like to use this little bit of space in our *Journal* to jog our memories to thank those who are not in the everyday operation of our trade union movement, but who are responsible for the many good and unseen things that affect us. We should honor them for giving of their time and of themselves to make life better for union members and the greater society. There is no substitute for the caring and commitment that transforms your towns and neighborhoods from a residence into a community. To all of you who have done so much, I say simply "thank you." Thank you from all of us in the IBEW for providing a light to follow.

We need more of the spirit of community throughout our entire organization. New members—and many who have been members for years—need to know that they are part of something that goes beyond material needs. Our stated goal in the IBEW Constitution says it all in asserting that we seek "to elevate the moral, intellectual and social conditions of our members, their families and dependents, in the interest of a higher standard of citizenship."

Membership in the IBEW is and should be more than paying dues and living under a collective bargaining agreement. Every member should see the union as a vehicle to build community, whether we unite to achieve our organizing and political goals, stand shoulder-to-shoulder at contract time, or participate in charitable activities. Community is built when members attend their meetings or volunteer to help carry the load of making a busy local union work. Community can involve something as simple as going to the union picnic or keeping in touch with fellow members through modern communications technology like our web site and new Internet portal page (see the inside back cover of this issue).

There are a thousand ways to make the spirit of community come alive. Each of us should find a way to do our part today.



Building Community

EDWIN D. HILL

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