



A Vote for Our Future

Two years ago, working people and their unions in state after state across the United States united to fight for their political voice. The now infamous “paycheck protection” movement—which we immediately dubbed “paycheck deception”—would have imposed strict, unworkable restrictions on how unions account for and spend money. Working people saw through the charade clearly, realizing that the true enemies of the labor movement were behind the effort to gag working people’s only organized voice while leaving the wealthy and corporate contributors free to do as they please.

We beat back paycheck deception everywhere. We saved our voice. Now is the time to use it.

Cutting through all the hype surrounding the coming of the year 2000, one fact is inescapable. This is a critical election year in the United States. Working people have clawed their way back from the brink of recession, unemployment and a steady stream of initiatives designed to gut the social progress of the last fifty years. We stand ready to face a new century by building on the progress we made in the 1990s. But it is by no means a done deal that we will continue to move forward.



President Bill Clinton brings down the house when he mentions his future role as Senate spouse.

International President J. J. Barry introduces First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton. Background are: left to right, Denis Hughes, President, New York State AFL-CIO; President Bill Clinton; Rick Diegel, Director, IBEW Political/Legislative Affairs Department; First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton; and International Secretary-Treasurer Edwin D. Hill.



Politics is not the only factor that determines our future. First and foremost, we must shore up our solidarity, our mutual determination and our collective strength. Hard bargaining, cooperation when possible, confrontation when necessary... these are the day-to-day tools of the trade union movement. Innovation and constantly seeking new and improved ways to advance have been and will remain a major part of the IBEW’s policy.

All of this, however, can be made easier or far more difficult through politics. It has long been an axiom of labor that the gains won on the streets or at the bargaining table can be wiped out with the stroke of a politician’s pen (or laptop). No modern union can claim to represent its members fully and responsibly without legislative and political involvement.

There is much to say about this elec-

tion year. Our members in the United States will elect a new President, the entire House of Representatives, 33 U.S. Senators, and the governors in 11 states. Our Canadian members will be watching this election closely to see how it might influence their nation’s relations with its neighbor to the South.

Sitting on the sidelines only lets our opponents have the field to themselves. The field for what? For issues that affect all of us, including health care, retirement security, the state of the economy, responsible foreign policy, trade, taxation, education and the environment. How our elected leaders come down on pressing issues means a great deal to the working lives of every American. Do we want leaders who are sympathetic to our cause making these decisions? Or do we want those who are hostile to unions and who think that the interests of corporations



Hillary Rodham Clinton graciously thanks the crowd for their support.

...tice for working people—is constant. On these pages, you see photographs of the event for First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton that the IBEW hosted on April 1, immediately after our Construction and Maintenance Conference in Washington, D.C. This was a voluntary fund-raiser where participants paid their own money to attend. More than 300 IBEW members and their families did so in order to support a Senate candidate who would be a great friend to workers if elected. The President of the United States, the leader of the free world, was there, as he has been for other IBEW events. While we have disagreed with Bill Clinton on some issues, he remains the best President for working people since Lyndon B. Johnson. We want the President—any President—to know who we are, what we stand for, and to listen to the organized voice of working people. That is responsible representation in the real world.

Innumerable state and local offices will be on the ballot. These are especially important, since this is a census year. State legislatures will be charged with the task of redrawing legislative districts based on census data. Every union member should shudder at the prospect of this task falling into the hands of those who oppose the rights and aspirations of working people.

That is why we urge every member and all working families to listen care-

fully this year to candidates for every office. Judge them by their words, their past records and the company they keep. Above all, register to vote and then exercise that precious democratic right in the remaining primaries and in the general election on November 7.

We want to state once again the IBEW's policy on political action so that there is no mistake among our members. The International does not take money from its general fund to contribute to the campaign of any candidate for political office. By law, direct contributions to the campaigns of candidates for federal office must come from voluntary contributions from a federally registered political action committee. Ours is the IBEW Committee on Political Education (IBEW-COPE). The International also does not use general treasury money as so-called "soft money" for the purposes of campaign contributions to any candidate or political party. We use funds voluntarily contributed by our members or local unions for this as well.

The International does not endorse candidates for any office. We seek the input of our locals in determining who receives our support. We did not concur in the AFL-CIO's endorsement of Vice President Albert Gore until we had given our members the opportunity to express their preference through a preference poll in last November's *Journal*. Respect for the individual member as a worker and a citizen is a critical part of the Brotherhood's basic philosophy, and nothing will be allowed to dishonor that belief.

There is much more to say about the issues that will shape the political dialogue this year. We will devote space in future *Journals* to these matters and to information on the candidates' positions. As Sherlock Holmes might say, "The game's afoot." Don't be left in the bleachers. ■

should come first? Do we want a President or governors who will appoint department heads, judges and a host of other officials who will work constructively with labor or those who will fight us at every turn? The choices are that stark.

Daniel H. Kruger, Professor of Industrial Relations at Michigan State University, says, "The work of a democratic society is achieved through a system of negotiated transactions with groups who possess political power. Political action by unions gives workers a seat at the social negotiating table. Political action is part and parcel of a free and democratic society." Who among us would walk away from a bargaining table when the rights and the best interests of our members are at stake?

We take our case to any elected official who will listen. We seek allies and identify opponents. Alliances may come and go, but our cause—dignity and jus-