

Labor Refutes Attack on Project Labor Agreements

At a recent U.S. Senate subcommittee field hearing in Irvine, California, the use of widely praised Project Labor Agreements (PLAs) came under attack by an antiunion construction group, the Associated Builders and Contractors, Inc. (ABC).

The Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO, notes that the ABC, a group of nonunion contractors, has announced a \$2 million campaign to oppose the use of Project Labor Agreements. The ABC falsely claims that PLAs are “union-only contracts” that discourage nonunion contractors from bidding and drive up costs on public construction projects. Republican Senator Tim Hutchinson of Arizona chaired the subcommittee hearings.

Scott Wetch, legislative representative for the California building and construction trades, presented evidence demonstrating that ABC’s allegations were “simply false.”

Wetch showed, for example, that ABC claims of a big cost overrun on the East-side Reservoir Project in Southern Cali-

fornia were untrue. According to the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, that project actually came in within 5 percent of total budget, considered within normal allowable limits. And, in fact, labor costs came in under budget. Wetch also submitted exhibits that “made it clear beyond doubt that substantial numbers of nonunion contractors are bidding for, being awarded work and performing work on major public projects covered by PLAs.”

“These [PLA] agreements not only provide cost savings and improve the quality of the finished product for taxpayers and public agencies, but they also improve conditions for craft workers by setting down in writing contract terms that can be enforced,” stated Los Angeles/Orange Counties Building and Con-

struction Trades Council Executive Secretary Richard Slawson in a news release on the hearings.

PLAs are locally negotiated “pre-hire agreements” between unions and contractors that establish uniform wage rates, work rules and working conditions for all contractors and crafts. The agreements, which usually include no-strike, no-lock-out clauses for the duration of the project, assure workers of steady employment and contractors of an adequate supply of highly skilled workers.

“Project Labor Agreements—which were used on big public works projects like the Grand Coulee Dam in the state of Washington (1937-38) and the Shasta Dam in California (1939)—have become increasingly popular with public owners and project directors in recent years,” said AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades Department President Edward C. Sullivan.

“Thousands of smart contractors and dozens of contractor associations—like the Southern California Contractors Association, the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA), the Mechanical Contractors Association, the Sheet Metal Contractors Association and others—also support Project Labor Agreements and welcome them as a means to level the playing field fairly when bidding public works,” noted Slawson. “The only opposition has come from a couple of contractor associations, like the ABC, who, in our view, oppose all collective bargaining...and seem to be established only to break workers’ unions.”



Building Trades Legislative Representative Scott Wetch, second from left, is surrounded by nonunion opponents of Project Labor Agreements at Senate subcommittee field hearings in Irvine, California. The subcommittee majority prepared nametags only for PLA opponents, not for Wetch and the one other supporter allowed to testify.

ERGONOMICS STANDARD

Turning its back on workers and workplace safety, the U.S. House of Representatives voted on June 8, by a margin of 220-203, to prohibit the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) from issuing its urgently needed and long-awaited new ergonomics standard. The bill was part of a larger fiscal year 2001 appropriations bill covering the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services and Education. The full bill, containing the ban on the standard subsequently passed on a largely party-line vote of 217-214.

The House vote was primarily along party lines, with the vast majority of Republicans lined up with Big Business and against workers. Fourteen GOP members voted right and 16 Democrats voted wrong, retaining a provision in the overall Labor/HHS/Education appropriations bill that bans OSHA from going forward with proposed ergonomic rules. The proposed new standards are designed to help prevent the nearly 2 million injuries workers suffer each year from poorly designed workplaces and repetitive, stressful motions.

The Senate version of the Labor/HHS/Education spending bill does not contain an anti-ergonomics amendment. At press time, the Senate was expected to take up the House version (H.R. 4577) of the bill.

President Clinton has said he would veto the bill if it retains the ergonomics ban. The AFL-CIO has voiced organized labor's opposition to the appropriations bill, which "cuts funds for OSHA, the National Labor Relations Board and skills-training programs, and does not contain money to reduce school class size or repair and modernize the nation's schools."

(Currents continued on next page)

From left to right, Local 164 Recording Secretary John M. DeBouter, President John D. Milazzo, Executive Board member and Volunteer Committee Chairman John Nordyk and Vice President Barry Hammond attended a White House ceremony honoring the local's volunteer efforts in the New Jersey area.

White House Honors Local Union 164

President Clinton honored IBEW Local Union 164, Jersey City, New Jersey, with the nation's highest award for volunteer service, the President's Service Award, during a June 13 ceremony at the White House. The members were recognized for volunteering their efforts to several projects ranging from raising money for breast cancer research to restoring power to a homeless shelter.

As he presented the sterling silver medallion to Local 164, President Clinton praised them for "striving to fulfill a deep belief in the promise of America" through a variety of initiatives that have bettered the nation by strengthening local communities in New Jersey.

Local 164 President John D. Milazzo, Vice President Barry Hammond, Recording Secretary John M. DeBouter and Executive Board member and Volunteer Committee Chairman John Nordyk attended the ceremony on behalf of the members. Local 164 represents approximately 2,800 members in the Bergen, Essex, and Hudson County areas of New Jersey.

Business Manager Richard Dressel says that the award honored Local 164 for raising more than \$10,000 for breast cancer research during a charity event titled "Project Grandma," in conjunction with the American Cancer Society and Holy Name Hospital in Teaneck, New Jersey. Spearheaded by Brother Nordyk, the Breast Cancer Committee consists of 22 Local 164 members and their spouses who work on the program. They donated the initial \$2,000 to "Project Grandma."

Local 164 was further cited for participating in a home-weathering project titled "Christmas in New Jersey" in Jersey City; rewiring a Boy Scout Camp in Nobibosco, New Jersey and providing lighting for the athletic fields at high schools in Oakland and Franklin Lakes. Members also worked on electrical projects at homeless shelters, senior citizen centers, and were praised by Rep. Steven Rothman (D-NJ) for assisting flood victims in the wake of devastation wreaked by Hurricane Floyd last year.

"This award speaks volumes for the dedication of our members," says Business Manager Dressel. "It recognizes the fact that we care a great deal about our residents and the community."

The President's Service Award is sponsored by the Points of Light Foundation and the Corporation for National Service. Created in 1982 as the President's Volunteer Action Award, the program honors outstanding individuals and organizations engaged in volunteer service directed at solving critical social problems and calls public attention to the contributions made by the nation's volunteers.

The Points of Light Foundation is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to mobilizing people more effectively in volunteer service. The Corporation for National Service engages more than a million Americans in service to their communities through AmericaCorps, Learn and Serve America and the National Senior Service Corps.

Business Manager Dressel says that Local 164's efforts demonstrate how a few individuals can make a big impact in communities. "If we can make a few individuals smile because we have offered them a hand up, then I would say that our efforts were worth it."



IBM Employees Score Big To Protect Pensions, Benefits


With a big boost from the IBEW, employees at IBM made significant progress in their fight to protect their pension fund and retiree health benefits. A resolution sponsored by the workers scored a surprising 28 percent of the vote at the annual IBM shareholders' meeting in Cleveland on April 25. The IBEW was instrumental in lining up pension funds holding IBM stock to vote with the employees, who needed a minimum of 3 percent of the stockholder

vote to keep the issue alive for future consideration.

"Money in a pension trust fund is exclusively for the benefit of plan participants," IBEW International President J.J. Barry said in a message to the workers rallying in Cleveland. "It is unconscionable that any company, let alone one with the status and prestige of IBM, would seek to implement benefit changes that would discriminate in different ways against older and younger workers alike."

Age discrimination was the basis of the stockholder resolution introduced by IBM employee James Leas, an engineer at IBM's facility in Burlington, Vermont, and other workers who formed IBM

Employee Benefits Action Coalition. IBM announced in May 1999 it was forcing 111,000 employees from its existing defined benefits plan into a cash balance pension plan and was revoking long-promised lifetime medical coverage. Employees have forced IBM to back down on the number affected by the raid on their benefits, but the core issue remains. The IBEW is currently engaged in an organizing drive at the Burlington facility.

In March, President Barry and Leas were joined by Bill Crist, president of the California Public Employees Retirement System (CALPERS), to announce support for the resolution. 

T R A N S I T I O N S

RETIRED

International Representative Mary Nell O'Brien, who helped IBEW organize the Jackson, Mississippi, plant where she worked in the 1960s, announced her retirement from the IBEW effective August 1, 2000.



Mary N. O'Brien

Sister O'Brien was among the first black women employed by Presto Manufacturing when she was hired as a line assembler in August 1965—soon after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its Title VII, which banned discrimination in the workplace.

When the plant was organized, she became Financial Secretary and a member of the Negotiating Committee of Local 2262 in Jackson in 1970. That launched a career of activism in the Mississippi Electrical Workers' Association, the county and Mississippi State AFL-CIO bodies, the A. Philip Randolph Institute and the Coalition of Labor

Union Women. Who's Who Among Black Americans has listed her since 1985.


She was a delegate to the IBEW International Convention in 1974 and was appointed International Representative in August 1978. Assigned to the Manufacturing Department, she continued her activism on the national scene. At the time of her retirement, she served on the National Steering Committee of the A. Philip Randolph Institute and the National Executive Board of CLUW.

At the International Office, she coordinates collective bargaining agreements with national employers who have contracts with multiple unions and serves on the Documentation/Assessment Committee of the Manufacturing Skill Standards Council.

She has also served on the County Democratic Executive Committee in Jackson and on

the Board of Directors of the Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC), which sought to improve the skills and job opportunities, particularly for young African-Americans and other minority group members. She also conducts a regular training workshop at the national conferences of the Randolph Institute.

Born in Bolton, Missis-

issippi, Sister O'Brien graduated from high school in Clinton and attended junior colleges in Utica and in Jackson after going to work for Presto. She has one son, Edgar, and says she looks forward to a retirement with her husband, Hank O'Brien, and devoting more time to her lifelong hobbies of cooking and sewing. 

DECEASED

With great sadness, the IBEW announces the death of retired Assistant to the International President Robert B. Reeser on April 3, 2000, at age 86.



Robert B. Reeser

Initiated into former Local 686, Hazelton, Pennsylvania, in 1943, Brother Reeser served the local as recording secretary, business manager and as a member of the Executive Board. On February 1, 1963, Brother Reeser was appointed an International Representative. Later he was appointed assistant to then-International President Gordon

M. Freeman. He served the Brotherhood in the Council on Industrial Relations Department (CIR) from November 1971 until his retirement in 1979.

Brother Reeser was born in Danville, Pennsylvania, on March 21, 1914. He served in the Marine Corps in World War II and as a Pennsylvania state trooper in the Criminal Investigations Division. He was a member of the American Legion and the Elks.

The IBEW extends condolences to his family and many friends. 