

SECRETARY-TREASURER'S MESSAGE

Unions in the United States are participating in more representation elections, vying for larger numbers of workers, and winning more elections, according to the latest figures. Our Brotherhood is right in the thick of it, gaining 5,000 members last year.

The totals on National Labor Relations Board elections in calendar year 1998 show that unions filed for 3,229 elections, up from 3,160 the year before. And unions won more of them, 1,653 victories vs. 1,591 the year before. That winning rate, 51.2 percent, is an increase of a percentage point and, most distinctively, unions also won more than half in units of 500 or more.

As long as we're improving from one year to the next, we know we're on the right track. But the hard truth is that .500 teams don't win many titles.

Organizing today is an uphill climb. A major reason is employers' determined—sometimes vicious—intimidation of workers who seek a voice by forming a union, a fact that was recently documented again in *Business Week* magazine.


"Some 40 million workers say they want a union today, compared with only 19 million in 1984," *Business Week* says. "If even half of the employees who say they favor union representation had been allowed to vote, organized labor would represent as much as 35 percent of the American workforce" instead of the current 14 percent. "The reality is, there is a disturbing trend of management coercion that inhibits workers."

And employers are increasing their use of blatant methods of illegal intimidation. "A third of the companies in the NLRB study illegally fired supporters during elections...up from a mere 8 percent in the 1960s. Half threatened to close the facilities if the union won and 91 percent required workers to meet one-on-one with supervisors," *Business Week* reported, citing a Cornell University study.

The magazine also reported the case history of a Southern plant at which a new CEO instructed his supervisors not to break the law. He sent a video to workers in which he stated his case against votes for the union but, he said, "I made sure managers didn't make any threats, even implied ones." In that atmosphere, the 5,000 workers got their union—after seven unsuccessful attempts over the previous 25 years.

We have been unsuccessful several times in Congress trying to restore the original intent of that law when it said 64 years ago that workers and only workers would make the decision on having a union. But fairness in the workplace has held no interest for the majority in Congress, especially since the current bunch took over leadership in 1995. So our Brotherhood has concentrated instead on what can be done by us, on our own, and right now.

The answer, it turns out, is quite a lot when we pull together in unity. In recent months, the IBEW has scored impressive organizing gains by reaching out to non-union employees in places where we represent other units. Across the continent, we have recently achieved a number of victories at utilities, telephone companies, television stations, and electrical contractors. Victories like that can get started if we are concentrating on "talking union" to people we see every day.

The more we pull together, the more our record will improve. Organizing is not something "they" do over there, it's the job of every one of us. It takes only a moment's reflection to see that no one segment of our Brotherhood can do it alone. It takes longer to build that winning spirit of cooperation. But we're doing it, and we'll continue as long as we make organizing job one. 



On The Upswing

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