

“Labor Unions a Key to Happiness”



By Frederick Wright

Unions are an essential part of a strong democracy and play a crucial role in America's public and community life. Not only do they give workers a voice on the job and help negotiate fair benefits and wages for their members, but they also use their political and economic resources to raise the floor for everyone who works for a living. Unions, by fighting for higher standards for workers, businesses, families, the environment, and public health and safety, have helped to build the middle class and make sure the economy works for everyone.

Even though U.S. public opinion of unions remains low, a new report finds that labor groups nonetheless improve the general well-being for union and non-union citizens in several industrialized countries.

The findings appear in the September issue of *Social Indicators Research*, a journal which focuses on quality of life measurements. They highlight a link between union density and life satisfaction based on data from fourteen developed nations.

The researchers (three American academics) used individual and aggregate data to measure what effect unions have on the overall happiness of the country and their citizens using a measurement known as “subjective well-being,” a scientific concept that evaluates quality of life or general happiness. They found that organized labor is a boon to the well-being of those who live in industrialized regions in

places like Europe, Japan and Australia.

“Our findings strongly suggest that unions increases the life satisfaction of citizens, and that this effect holds for non-union members as well,” wrote Notre Dame University political science professor Benjamin Radcliff, Notre Dame PhD candidate in political science Patrick Flavin and Texas A&M University political science associate professor Alex Pacek. “Moreover, we also find that labor organizations have the strongest impact on the subjective well-being of citizens with lower incomes.”

These findings are a bright spot for labor groups at a time when union membership has declined and American public opinion for labor groups has remained low. The results were positive across all sectors from the society to the individual: countries and individuals who live in countries with high union densities had a higher level of life satisfaction; union members reported being generally happier than non-union members by one-tenth; and the less fortunate who were union members had the highest improvement in their quality of life.

The study outlines several variables that contribute to an improved well-being, including many that have been touted by labor advocates. For one, unions provide a measure of job security that provides safeguards for sudden layoffs. Secondly, the power of collective bargaining allows for a sense of empowerment through mechanisms like grievance procedures. Unions also reduce a sense of alienation through a support network. Nonunion members and society at-large also benefit through a “contagion effect” through interpersonal communication.

“As such, people are likely to be more satisfied themselves the more they interact with other satisfied people. Those in countries with a higher proportion of more satisfied that otherwise union members are likely to be more satisfied, on average, than those in countries with fewer proportional union members,” according to the report *Working in These Times*.

Although the total unionization rate in the United States is only 12.3 percent, the research underscores how labor groups are contributing to the quality of life in industrialized nations. The big takeaway, life satisfaction is directly related to unionization rates even as public and private sector unions have come under attack in recent years.

But America still has a way to go, according to the union coalition American Rights at Work. The group points out that America ranks on the bottom on the quality-of-life scale because of small union membership numbers. Employers have continued to prevent unions from forming in the workplace, leading to lower levels of general well-being.

Unions have indeed been criticized for everything from wages and benefits, political organizing, and economic productivity, but the researchers note that it's important to consider organized labor as an agent for improving happiness. If this study rings true, that's not good news for Americans. If membership continues to decline, then the populace faces unhappy days ahead.

Quotes excerpted from *Working in These Times* by Akito Yoshikane October 7, 2010.

AFSCME Local 1739

Community and Social Agency Employees
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Fred Wright
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Recording Secretary

1606 Walnut Street • Philadelphia, PA 19103
Tel: 215.893.3710 • Fax: 215.732.4876
Email: FGunion1@aol.com

Happy Holidays!

Tips for Gifting Your Children with Meaningful Experiences

By David and Andrea Reiser

Choose an event to attend together. Get a schedule of local holiday-themed concerts, plays, parades, shows, and other events, and choose a few to attend as a family. Your kids (and you!) will enjoy counting down to these outings, and you'll have an even better time attending them. Plus, everyone will remember the live performance of White Christmas or the holiday-themed magic show much longer than they will a bevy of action figures under the tree. Even better? In most communities there are plenty of events to choose from that are free to the public! It just goes to show that you don't have to spend a mint to make memories over the holidays.

Remember: There really is no place like home for the holidays. Making special holiday memories doesn't always have to mean going somewhere. In fact, some of your most treasured experiences can be created inside the four walls of your house, and they don't have to cost a lot of money or cause a lot of stress to be perfect! Take a regular weeknight dinner and turn it into a magical holiday meal by dimming the lights, lighting candles on the table, and playing soft holiday music in the background. Serve sparkling juice or cider in special glasses and pull out the fancy china for once. It's a special night you and your family won't soon forget!

Set your family up for success. On the best of days, kids will be kids...and their propensity for energy, misbehavior, and hijinks grows exponentially when they're excited. Whenever your family is preparing for any sort of event this season, don't assume that the "usual" rules are at the forefront of young minds. Go over your expectations—and potential consequences—beforehand so that you don't spend the whole time scolding and correcting. And as a parent, take the time to remind yourself that children are often overstimulated, overexcited, and saturated with sugar this time of year. If you don't think your brood can handle sitting still for an hour-long concert, then make the choice not to go. You'll save yourself a lot of stress, anger, and disappointment in the long run.

Make meaningful conversation. Conversation is the foundation upon which any memorable event is built. So to make the most of outings and experiences this holiday season, have a few meaningful topics up your sleeve to engage your family. Otherwise, you'll find yourself griping about chore lists, homework, and soccer schedules during your special outing—instead of the things you really wanted to share. For example, as you drive around your neighborhood looking at Christmas lights, you may want to ask your kids about their favorite Christmas memories. Or, before attending a church service or

local event, sit down and talk about what Christmas truly means to each member of your family. You may be surprised at the answers—and it will make each event and activity that much more meaningful.

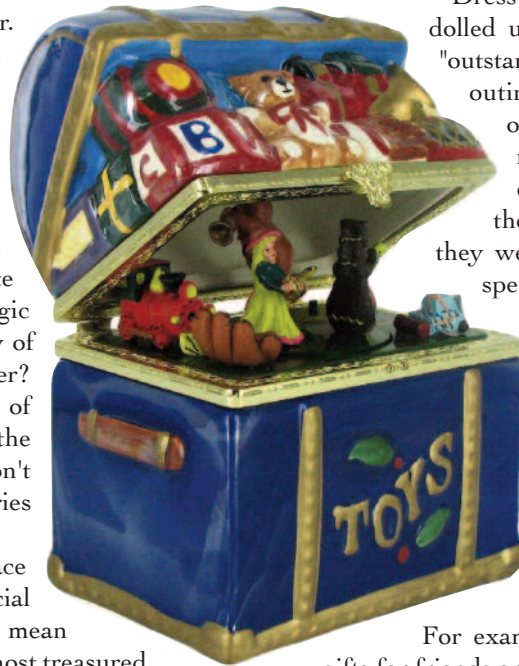
Dress up! It's amazing how getting all dolled up can take an event from "okay" to "outstanding." If you frame your holiday outings as opportunities instead of as obligations, your kids probably won't mind putting on their fancy duds...and they'll definitely remember the fact that Mom and Dad thought that they were mature enough to attend such a special event! (And you can take the opportunity to snap some photos everyone will enjoy looking at for years to come.)

Make something out of nothing. A meaningful experience doesn't have to cost a massive amount of money, and it doesn't have to be a once-in-a-lifetime event. In fact, your family can make "routine" holiday tasks into beloved traditions.

For example, get everyone together to wrap gifts for friends and family, and share hot chocolate and cookies while you're curling ribbon and cutting paper. Or let everyone climb into special holiday pajamas, then pile in the car and look at all of the beautiful holiday lights in your town.

Give thanks. As the saying goes, "Remember the reason for the season." Depending on your family's beliefs and background, that "reason" might differ from your neighbor's, but one thing's for sure: This is a time to be grateful and to count blessings. Whenever your family visits a friend or attends a special event, make sure to point out to your children how fortunate they are to have such individuals and opportunities in their lives...and point out that not every child around the world is so privileged.

Give back. If your family is counting its blessings, the natural next step is to reach out to those whose holiday seasons might not be filled with much cheer. Consider donating to a charity instead of giving as many gifts, volunteering at a soup kitchen, or caroling at a nursing home. This is the perfect time of year to teach children that it truly is better to give than to receive—and it can actually feel really good, too. These experiences will instill values in your children and broaden their perspective on holiday privileges. Live in the moment. It's easy to get caught up in the hoopla of the holidays, and not living in the moment is a downright joy robber. If you're constantly setting your sights on the next holiday party or dance recital on your calendar, you won't be fully enjoying the activity you're currently doing. Reveling in the now and accepting the (minor) flaws that might come along allows you to truly experience the benefits of living in the present. Those moments with family and friends will be that much sweeter.



Our Delegates to AFSCME International Convention



Local 1739 members attended the 39th AFSCME International Convention held in Boston, MA in June, 2010.

Our Union Picnic at Clementon Park



Chapter Reports

American Friends Service Committee

The new General-Secretary of AFSC is now in place, her name is Shand Cretin. Ms. Cretin was formerly the Regional Director of AFSC in the Pacific Southwest. As per the contract extension that was ratified in July 2009, Bruno

Fedele and I met with Lee O'Neil (CFO) to review AFSC current financial situation to determine if the AFSC achieved the financial thresholds to restore staff salaries. The threshold for AFSC to surpass is \$31 million for income and \$61 million in assets. Currently the AFSC has \$27 million in income and \$46 million in assets. The AFSC suffered major hits on its investments and pension fund contributions.

Jewish Community Centers

As all of you are aware, the contract between AFSCME Local 1739 and JCC Kaiserman and Klein Centers expires on September 15, 2011. We expect contract negotiations will be difficult due to our current economic conditions and the ongoing rising costs of healthcare insurance. We need to start now in preparation for our upcoming contract negotiations with management.

Immediately after the holidays, we will be holding union meetings at both the Kaiserman and Klein centers to hear your concerns and gather input for our upcoming negotiations. Everyone should take some time and familiarize

themselves with the current contract and take notes on our strengths and weaknesses that you feel that we need to address. I know that job security, maintaining medical benefits and wage increases are of the utmost importance, however we need your input to prioritize other contract demands that you may want the union to address in these contract negotiations.

Also, every department of the JCC community centers should have a representative to serve on the union negotiating team to represent the concerns and issues of that department. If you are interested and would like more information on the role of participating in contract negotiations, please feel free to contact me directly at (215) 893-3708 or at FGUnion1@aol.com.

Jewish Family & Children's Service

The Union and JFCS reached a tentative agreement on a new two year contract which was ratified by the membership on September 29th. Contained within the new collective bargaining agreement is; an inclement weather policy which mirrors the Philadelphia School system closing policy. New language on seniority, "bridging" of seniority and layoffs. We

established Labor/Management committees on career development, sizes of caseloads and pay-for-performance programs. Medical Insurance options which depending upon employees' options, monthly medical premiums are reduced. Most importantly, wage increases of 6% over the two year term of the agreement. The union negotiating team of Lenore Borowski, Barbara Lerner, Zakiyyah Snead and Angela Griffiths did a tremendous job in these very difficult economic times.

JEVS Human Services

The Union and JEVS successfully negotiated a new salary structure the SFI division, with some employees receiving salary adjustments and others receiving salary bonuses. The union is still having ongoing problems at ACT II, regarding employee morale issues over changes in management and support to line staff.

Unfortunately, JEVS EARN Center lost some funding which resulted in the retrenchment of five bargaining unit positions and two non-union positions. Hopefully, the five affected employees will be absorbed into open positions within JEVS. The student enrollment at OTI is down due to the economy,

which may have an adverse effect on the classes offered by the school.

Congratulations to the following individual union members who are at the maximum accumulation for sick leave and had perfect attendance for the year.

- Pauline Baker
- Cedric Gibson
- Caldwell Grant
- Michelle Simon
- Rita Starling-Taylor
- Amber Waters-Porter
- Delcine Emerson
- Michael Gifoli
- Robert Hermann
- Larry Talbert
- Dellanora Toumuene
- Rachel Ziring

This entitled them to a two week bonus check (without deductions) as per our contract.

Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Association Corp.

• SEAMAAC, our newest chapter into Local 1739, are still suffering from the economy. Some employees hours have been

reduced, however, we hope that now school is in session, their funding will stabilize and improve. Merlin Wahyudi (Shop Steward) attended the Union Summer School for Women and Yohanis Sulistiyono attended the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO Community Institute. Our goal is to train as many members to union activism as possible.

Special People in Northeast

• The union clarified the tuition reimbursement situation where SPIN had an issue reimbursing union members who take college courses on-line. SPIN will now reimburse all employees, as long as it has middle states accreditation. SPIN chose to relinquish the Early Head Start program at SPIN Frankford. This resulted in a potential retrenchment of five Infant/Child Development Specialist II positions and one

Service Coordinator. After meeting with SPIN, all employees were retained within SPIN's Children's Services department.

The union has finalized the addendum to SPIN's E-Time policy. Employees' will now be allowed to utilize leave time two hours in the beginning or at the end of their shift, provided that they secure coverage. SPIN will no longer impose infractions on staff who swipe-in more than eight minutes before their shift or who swipe-out more than eight minutes after their shift.

Chapter Reports

Tenant Union Representative Network

The Union and TURN reached a tentative agreement on their 2010 wage re-opener which was ratified by the membership in October. After lengthy negotiations and a review of

TURN's financial information, union members will maintain status quo on their medical insurance and receive a net bonus of five hundred (\$500.00) dollars. A special thanks is extended to Dolores Dorsey and Marcella Joe for their unwavering persistence in representing the membership at TURN.

Trevor's Campaign for the Homeless

The Union and Trevor's Campaign are still trying to negotiate a new contract for 2010-11. Good news is that

medical benefits are not on the table, but the Agency would like to maintain the current wage scale and have the ability to hire more part-time employees.

Brothers and Sisters:

Please read the following letter from AFSCME International Secretary-Treasurer, Lee Saunders, regarding the mandated minimum dues increase for 2011. Based upon information from 77.71% of AFSCME's membership. The average wage increase received by AFSCME members over the 12-month period ending July 31, 2010 was 1.471%. A calculation of furloughs experienced by the members was also taken into consideration. Approximately 38.622% of the total membership was surveyed. The average reduction in pay as a result of furlough days was 1.405%. We have reduced the average increase amount accordingly. The average increase for the year with this adjustment was 0.066%.

Applying this latest percentage (0.066%) to the current minimum dues of \$32.40 results in a required (unrounded) dues

increase of \$.021384 per month. This unrounded increase is then allocated and Rounded to the nearest five cents, resulting in no minimum dues increase.

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------------|
| AFSCME International | \$12.20 |
| District Council 47 | \$17.35 |
| Local 1739..... | \$ <u>2.85</u> |
| | \$32.40 minimum dues |

This means that unless the delegate assembly of District Council 47 raises its dues, there will be no mandated dues increase in 2011.

In solidarity,
James Baylor, Treasurer
AFSCME Local 1739

Budget-crunched states prepare for reduced aid under GOP House

By Peter Schroeder

State and local governments that relied on federal aid to stay afloat during the recession are not counting on as much help from Congress once the era of divided government begins next year. Nationwide, states are grappling with a total budget gap of \$110 billion for fiscal 2010 and \$82 billion for fiscal 2011, according to the National Council of State Legislatures. Compounding the budgetary problems, states are burning through the fiscal assistance that was passed under the stimulus law. "It's going to be a tough environment next year," said Charles Loveless, director of legislation for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. "We're going to have a major fight on our hands, no ifs, ands or buts about it."

Local Governments Rail Against Proposed Pension-Reporting Changes

By Ryan Holeywell

State and local governments are fuming over a new bill introduced by House Republicans that would require public pension plans to report their liabilities using a new accounting standard. H.R.6484, introduced earlier this month by Republican Reps. Devin Nunes, Paul Ryan and Darrell Issa, would require public pension funds to report two types of data to the Treasury Department, which would then post it online. The bill's opponents say it sets a precedent for federal intervention into financial areas historically handled at the state and local government. The bill is unlikely to pass, given the fact that the current congressional term expires in a matter of weeks. But it could be a dress rehearsal for similar legislation to be introduced in the soon-to-be Republican-controlled House.



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Brothers and Sisters

We hope you and your families all remain in good health during this holiday season and may you have a happy and prosperous new year.



Local 1739
1606 Walnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103