

# CLUW: Building the Labor Movement

12<sup>th</sup> Biennial Convention – Seattle, Washington

Special Edition Newsletter October 11, 2003

## **JOHNSON URGES CLUW MEMBERS TO STAY ACTIVE AND TO ORGANIZE**

In her President's address, Gloria T. Johnson urged CLUW members to step up to the huge challenge of mobilizing voters in Election 2004 and to rebuild the labor movement. Johnson, who paid tribute to the great union leaders in Seattle and Washington state, alluded to the fact that explorers Lewis and Clark, led by a woman, Sacajawea, first entered what is now Washington state 200 years ago this week.

"Imagine how they felt when they saw the huge mountain passes to climb and the raging rivers to cross," Johnson said. "Not unlike those explorers, we too are entering a new frontier and must overcome our own set of obstacles," she explained as she mentioned the attacks on overtime pay, courts, personal privacy, public education and other problems raised by today's conservative Congress and Administration that have led the nation from record surpluses to record state and federal budget deficits.

Johnson said, "The best way to protect our families'

futures is also the easiest. Talk to other women about what unions are doing and about the economic issues we know they care about. Our roadmap to success is drawn on rebuilding the labor movement."

Johnson explained that CLUW's prime focus for the next year will be on Election 2004, mobilizing women voters and changing the eroding image of unions women now hold because they don't understand the value of unions and how they represent women workers.

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### **A Place at the Table**

"We want to be at the table. We want 50 percent of the table – 50 percent of the issues," AFL-CIO Executive Vice President Linda Chavez-Thompson told those at the opening plenary session. Chavez-Thompson is the highest ranking woman – and person of color – in the U.S. labor movement. She saluted CLUW's leadership in a number of areas, particularly noting advances in contraceptive equity – birth control coverage in negotiated health care plans.

Chavez-Thompson urged CLUW members to join in November 19-20 activities in

Miami against extending NAFTA throughout the western hemisphere. She also called on union sisters to celebrate Human Rights Day, Dec. 10, by drawing attention to the fact that the U.S. has not signed the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights and that our country does not protect workers' rights of free association – the right to join unions.

Throughout her remarks, she expressed growing frustration with Pres. George W. Bush – "the first president in my lifetime who has destroyed more jobs than he has created." Chavez-Thompson also pointed out that, despite labor's successful efforts to save overtime for millions of workers, "Bush is fighting tooth-and-nail to cut overtime rights. "We have to talk to the women of this country and make believers out of them," she said, and send Bush back to Crawford, Texas.

"Time and time again, we have been pushed back, and time and time again, it is our job to make sure our voices are heard," she said. "I want the sacrifices we have made to count. If they don't count, how can we face our children or our grandchildren?"

## Constituency Allies

Representatives from all six AFL-CIO constituency groups described their plans for coalition efforts to convention delegates. Each group serves as a bridge between organized labor and the workers it reflects.

*Gloria Caoile, executive director of the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance,* discussed the importance of mobilizing its base. "Why should we get involved in the political process?" they ask. APALA is trying to answer that question by pointing out priorities that are being ignored – like Head Start, child health, schools, housing, and higher education. "We have to respect our differences," said Caoile. "Instead of generating conflict, we can generate collaboration. Let's learn not to compete for the crumbs – to squeeze one group to help another."

*Wil Duncan, executive director of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists,* stated the organization's goals as: trying to improve the economic development and employment opportunities for Black workers across the country; and to organize unorganized workers. He noted that all the constituency groups "are stronger and more together than ever before." CBTU has initiated a project to survey the Black community on issues facing the country and to collect and publish that data. Goals leading up to the 2004 election are to "organize, educate, mobilize, and get voters to the polls."

*Carol Rosenblatt, executive director of the Coalition of Labor Union Women,* said that CLUW's

chapters carry out the national programs and listed a number of examples. "We have converted the AFL-CIO's 10-point plan to CLUW priorities," she said. "We have to organize women into unions. It makes a difference to their lives." Looking to 2004, she anticipates the "coalition approach to handling problems affecting all of us."

*Norman Hill, president of the A. Phillip Randolph Institute,* stated a commitment to "work together to make race and sex equality." APRI is dedicated to becoming a positive presence in the community. Approaching 2004, its goals include: increasing the ranks of pro-labor community activists; telling our own story through the media or person-to-person; and becoming the voice of militant responsibility.

*Jan Denali, treasurer of Pride at Work --* representing the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community – stressed the point that "human rights for all is a labor issue. We must resist the climate of fear," she said. "We must come out as allies for each other."

*Debra Renteria-Styers, vice president of the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement,* told delegates about September's Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride, which culminated in a New York City rally of well over 100,000. "Latinos have become the nation's largest minority group," she said. "We want them to become a unionized workforce."

The six organizations plan to communicate with each other and team up to build and strengthen the labor movement as they speak for their own communities.

## Patty Murray: Senator and Sister

U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-Wash.) addressed her union sisters and brothers at the CLUW Convention on Friday morning. Her message was simple and direct; you *can* make a difference. She recounted her own history of activism which started when she took on the struggle to continue her children's state-subsidized childcare program. She has not given up activism... her current focus is on the struggle to maintain ergonomic standards for workers in Washington State. Murray thanked the many CLUW activists who are playing a key role in this campaign.

Murray concluded her remarks by quoting from the famous anthropologist Margaret Mead who said, "Never doubt that a small group of concerned citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has."

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## Marie Clarke Walker: On Globalization

Marie Clarke Walker is the first Black woman elected as an executive vice-president of the Canadian Labor Congress (Canada's version of the AFL-CIO). She brought greetings from union sisters in Canada.

Walker stated that women have strong voices and, all over the world, they are getting even stronger. But, because of the context of corporate economic globalization, we feel the backlash. Inequality and poverty have grown and deepened worldwide over the last two decades. Women, who are more

economically vulnerable, bear the brunt of this growing inequality.

Women of color, aboriginal women and women with disabilities experience the highest levels of poverty and exploitation. The large majority of the 27 million women working in the exploitative 'export manufacturing zones' are younger women. Such conditions are on the rise in Canada and U.S. The building blocks of this economic model include **universal privatization** which is causing a downward pressure on wages and working conditions, weakening labor laws and eroding human rights.

She said, "We have to move *sisters* to think differently; we have to raise the issues of racism and human rights. We recognize that union women can't win the equality fight alone. We need a strong independent women's movement to raise new challenges. We have to build bridges with community activist who are wary of big labor wanting to control and dominate the decision making process. It is time to raise our voice... take to the streets... to stand up and be counted against the juggernaut of International Globalization."

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## Happy Hour and a Half

The Young Women Workers Committee sponsored a reception for young women workers ranging from 18-30 in age to introduce them to CLUW's program in a relaxed atmosphere. The committee will offer mentors to the young workers. The mentors will share and guide them through their experiences by reaching back and pulling them forward. The reception highlighted the poor working

conditions some women are forced to work in because of their need to support their families. Rubye Jones, UNITE, talked about the terrible working conditions that undocumented workers face in New York sweat shops. Susan Phillips discussed the substandard health insurance benefits and low pay received by Walmart employees nationwide.

One of the young workers who attended the reception spoke of Walmart's refusal to allow its employees who are unionized to talk to other non-unionized employees about organizing efforts. Another worker inquired about labor's role in challenging their workplace practices. CLUW emphasized the importance of lobbying by unions to address workplace issue before the state legislators. A Day of Action is planned for January 14<sup>th</sup>.

The committee is seeking information from young women around their issues and finding ways to help them. The young workers received surveys soliciting feedback on their interest in labor unions. This information will be used to develop future programs for the Young Women Workers Committee. The committee thanks all of the young workers and mentors who attended and participated in the reception.

We briefly interviewed one of the young women in attendance. Sharon Crowley is a doctoral student and graduate assistant in the English department at University of Washington. She's been actively engaged in UAW's organizing work on campus. She came here from the University of Vermont where she received her M.A., looking forward to participating in a union, since there is no

graduate employees union there. Sharon sees unions as absolutely essential because they give workers a voice. When asked if she sees an important role for CLUW as an organization targeted to the needs of women workers, Sharon said "Yes, we need to break that old boy labor stranglehold and challenge the men."

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## CONVENTION BUSINESS

### Constitutional Amendments

Delegates to CLUW's 12<sup>th</sup> Biennial Convention amended CLUW's Constitution as follows:

- Added accounting and bonding requirements to Article VIII—State Vice-Presidents
- Added four new Standing Committees
  1. Women in the Global Community
  2. Sergeant-at-Arms
  3. Women's Health Committee
  4. Young Women Workers Committee

### Resolutions

On Friday, convention delegates adopted the following eight resolutions:

1. Maintaining Overtime Pay Protection for American Workers
2. December 10—A Day for Bargaining Freedom
3. Pass HR676—U.S. National Health Insurance Act
4. Protecting our Postal Workers
5. Support Candidates Who Support Health Care
6. Stop FTAA
7. Save Women's Lives: March for Freedom of Choice
8. Angeline's Union Deserves a Contract

## They Came to the Fair

The CLUW Health Fair attracted a wide array of exhibitors that will help women take charge of their own health.

- *Working Women ROCC! (Reach Out Against Cervical Cancer)* -- a new five-year partnership between CLUW and the Academy for Educational Development. Its aim: to educate women about cervical cancer and the fact that it can be prevented – and cured if it is caught early. This year, ROCC will conduct focus groups, seeking the most productive ways to encourage women to have regular cervical cancer screenings.
- *Master Home Environmentalist* – an effort, supported by the American Lung Association, to help families prevent dust, mold, and other problems in the home through the use of a home environmental assessment.
- *National Women's Health Information Center*-- coordinates women's health efforts throughout the Department of Health and Human Services – empowering women by providing free, reliable health information. Contact them at: 800-994-WOMAN or at [www.4woman.gov](http://www.4woman.gov). The TDD number is 888-220-5446.
- *American Red Cross* – continuing on its history of providing education and assistance in natural and man-made disasters, they offered materials and information on emergency preparedness. A new product: Under the Table Safety Tube is a small safety kit with an emergency whistle, 6-hour light stick, dust mask, and water packet. Call 206-726-3530 for more information.
- *Lupus Foundation of America* – provides information on this little-known health problem, which is a chronic, autoimmune disease creating inflammation of various parts of the body. Innovative therapies are outlined in the foundation's publication.
- *National Breast Cancer Coalition Fund* – offers information on the causes and treatment of breast cancer. The coalition helps those facing breast cancer find the best sources of care.
- *American Heart Association* – is working to get out the word that heart disease is the primary killer of women. Its "Go Red for Women" campaign lists the warning signs for heart attack and stroke – and ways that they may affect women differently from men.
- *American Diabetes Association* – distributes risk assessments and information on delaying or preventing Type 2 diabetes.
- *Vital* – produces a breast examination aid. It is an aid designed to increase sensitivity while performing monthly breast examinations.
- *Arcadia Women's Health Center* – gives information on emergency contraception to back up birth control. For more information on emergency contraception, contact them at: 888-NOT2LATE or [www.backupyourbirthcontrol.org](http://www.backupyourbirthcontrol.org).

- *Washington State Coalition of Mental Health Professionals and Consumers* – advocates for ethical mental health care. Its publication helps readers understand how their health insurance covers mental health problems. Phone number: 206-444-4304.
- *Contraceptive Coverage* – a project of Planned Parenthood, it is collecting signatures on a petition to Congress, requesting contraceptive coverage in health insurance plans. It is part of the contraceptive equity program in which CLUW has been involved for a number of years. Reach them at [www.covermypills.org](http://www.covermypills.org).
- *U.S. Department of Labor, Pension and Welfare Benefits Administration* – provides information and support in protecting health and pension benefits for private sector workers. They can be contacted at: [www.dol.gov/dol/pwba](http://www.dol.gov/dol/pwba).

CLUW thanks all the organizations listed, plus those groups that provided instructors for the many workshops and panel discussions which gave members the opportunity to gather new information and materials to take back to their homes, their workplaces, and their unions.

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### Keep Workers Healthy: It's Common Sense

Get your button from the Puget Sound CLUW Chapter Booth. Help fight to save Washington State's Ergonomic Rules. Vote NO on I-841, November 4.