

CLUW: Building the Labor Movement

12th Biennial Convention – Seattle, Washington

Special Edition Newsletter October 12, 2003

Women Organizing Women

Saturday morning's key focus was the panel entitled "Women Organizing Women." Moderated by CLUW Vice President Kerry Newkirk of SEIU, the panel featured four speakers, each of whom focused on a different aspect of the topic.

Petee Talley, Secretary-Treasurer of the Ohio AFL-CIO, utilized the theme of teaching and empowering ourselves to build a network that can mobilize solidarity. She stressed the importance of reaching out to work with the affiliates, saying, "If we are going to maintain viability as a labor movement we will have to organize women to get it done."

The next speaker was Sharon Pinnock, Director of Membership and Organization for AFGE. Sister Pinnock outlined the findings of academic studies done by labor educators on key questions about labor density, structure and culture. She cited the decrease in union density from 23.6% in 1960 to 20.9% in 1980 and 13.5% in 2000. In terms of structure, she defined the AFL-CIO as a loose affiliation of 66 national and international autonomous unions. In terms of culture, she posed the question of who leads and will lead these unions.

Pinnock outlined several future scenarios: the possible future (what may happen), the formidable future (the worst case scenario what we need to prevent happening), the probable future (what will happen if we do nothing) and the preferred future (what can happen if we take leadership). She exhorted us to take the future into our hands and make what we want happen.

Mary Finger, UFCW International Vice President, discussed the importance of using a variety of methods to reach out and organize different groups of workers. She described the struggle at Smithfield, a pork products manufacturer in North Carolina where workers are in a battle for the right to unionize. These workers, mostly female and overwhelmingly immigrant and African American, have been engaged in a

protracted struggle against poverty level wages and terrible working conditions at Smithfield. She urged us to support their struggle, saying that "These workers have a vision and they want to exercise their right to vote."

The final panelist was Rachna Choudhry from the AFL-CIO Civil, Human and Women's Rights Department. She discussed the demographics of women's participation in unions and their attitudes toward unions. Women are 42% of union membership, but this is increasing; 55% of newly organized workers are women. The most successful organizing campaigns in the recent period have involved women and, most particularly, women of color. Another feature of the most successful campaigns is that they are led by women organizers: sister to sister.

What do women want from a union? They want an organization that fights for its members and their wages and benefits. But, they are not sure that these unions can deliver. Choudhry encouraged us to emphasize such issues as paid family leave, childcare, health insurance and job security and to send the message that unions are about people, not just politics.

Congrats new vice presidents!

Two new CLUW vice presidents were elected Saturday morning, bringing our leadership body back to its full strength.

Gloria Brimm, Assistant Director of the UAW Women's Rights Department, was elevated to the body, replacing Selene McCoy who retired recently. Gloria is relatively new to CLUW activity but she has many years of leadership working with UAW members in the regions in her previous position with the Education Department. Her goal in CLUW is to "continue to motivate and activate women."

Also elected during the interim elections Saturday was Connie Cordovilla, Associate Director of AFT's

Human Rights and Community Relations Department. She is assigned to the AFT Women's Rights Committee. Connie has been active in CLUW for many years, focusing particularly on issues of women's health and contraception. In AFT, she is affectionately known by many as "Condom Connie."

We wish the new vice presidents well and are confident that they will play an important role in moving CLUW forward to meet the challenges ahead.

Globalization and Women: Race to the Bottom

International guests from Indonesia, France, Brazil, and Canada spoke about the impact of globalization B including World Bank and International Monetary Fund policies.

Free trade zones are sprouting up around the world B placing very few limitations or responsibilities on employers. One of the women described her overwhelming embarrassment when she was ordered to take a pregnancy test. AI was only 16 and a virgin,@ she said. AI couldn't understand why I had to take the test.@

Regarding globalization, sisters talked about how transnational corporations move jobs from one hemisphere to another, and how it affects union women's jobs, reducing wages and benefits across countries.

Privatization of public services has also been a problem, particularly in the areas of water, health care, and social services. Agriculture has suffered: A half dozen major food producers are pushing out family farmers. Soon they will be providing most of the world's food B genetically engineered.

NAFTA's fifth anniversary is coming up, and the possibility of the FTAA is a serious concern. Governance is superseding governments as corporations invoke language in trade agreements to override national or local government regulations.

Changing Faces of Labor Immigration Issues:

Solange Bitol, senior legislative advocate (SEIU), moderated a panel of union workers discussing the challenge of immigration. Much of the session focused on the experience of the Freedom Riders. The trip that took workers from Los Angeles to New York to bring attention to the working conditions of immigrants within the U.S. Panelists stressed the need for union activists to organize immigrant workers by educating them about current legislative issues on immigration and by expanding the union base to include community resources, with particular emphasis on areas of literacy programs and citizenship.

Participants left with a training plan outlining ways to educate local members around the immigration issue.

Cinderella Story

United American Nurses, AFL-CIO, President Cheryl Johnson RN came to CLUW's convention to share the story of her journey from being a nurse who refused to join her union all the way to a seat on the AFL-CIO's executive council.

A Michigan ICU nurse for 31 years, Cheryl said she loves what she does. But the years have taken their toll on health care, and she found many obstacles to providing quality patient care. She approached her union with her concerns and soon found herself on the bargaining committee. Cheryl's union was part of the American Nurses Association. She and other activists formed the UAN as they struggled to strengthen the ANA's collective bargaining arm. Then we decided we needed to get into the house of labor -- to affiliate with the AFL-CIO." UAN was chartered in 2001, with Cheryl as its president.

All along the way people have nudged and encouraged her activism, said Cheryl. "You have to do this," they'd say. "You can do that." The support added to her confidence and willingness to take on new tasks.

After their affiliation, other nurses came to Cheryl wondering how to get her onto the AFL-CIO executive council. They learned that there would be vacancies, and she called AFL-CIO President John Sweeney from her hospital ICU. He returned her call that day and invited her to attend the Chicago council meeting scheduled for the

following Tuesday where she was sworn into office.

Taking her council seat was a very emotional moment. "I closed eyes. I could picture all the nurses that I represent. Because all those brothers and sisters were there with me, any intimidation that was in my mind went away."

Cheryl had a message for the labor movement's male leadership: "We're here. We're going to increase our numbers. And we're going to help you!"

Clara Day Award

Congratulations to CLUW Missouri State Vice President Debbie Shoaf (CWA) upon her receipt of the Clara Day Award. This award goes to CLUW's most outstanding State Vice President in honor of founding CLUW member Clara Day (IBT). Shoaf like Clara Day has inspired and educated women to increase participation within their unions, CLUW and the labor movement. She has even spread the union word through music. Her CD "Out of the Workplace-Back to the Streets" features such songs as "Mother Jones," "Choices," and "Sisterhood of CLUW." It is available by contacting her online at debbieshoaf@yahoo.com.

Mother Jones Award

Rev. Addie Wyatt (UFCW) received this year's Mother Jones award. Addie, like Mother Jones, has been there giving life to others, and she has been arrested so many times they lost count. She assisted in organizing CLUW in 1974. More than 3200 women came to the Chicago founding convention when only 1500 were expected. They were seen as a group ready to take over the AFL-CIO. Addie has been in the labor movement for over 60 years and has been married to her husband for 64.

Shelia Jones: Candidate and Machinist

Shelia Jones is an IAM member who has worked at Lockheed Martin in Georgia for over 23 years. She comes from a strong union family; her dad was a business rep at Lockheed for many years. Shelia became interested in running for office while serving on her local's legislative committee. She was then named legislative representative for the Georgia State Council of Machinists, becoming the voice in the capital for Georgia's 9,000 union machinists.

More recently, after working as campaign manager for several

candidates, she decided to run for office on her own. Her goals when elected? Expand the Family Medical Leave Act and work with unions around the state to move the issues that are important to them.

Joyce D. Miller Chapter Recruitment Award

Each year CLUW recognizes an outstanding Chapter President with the Joyce D. Miller Award, honoring CLUW's second president. This year the award goes to sister Millie Hall (OPEIU) who thanked all her sisters from the Metro Detroit CLUW chapter.

Congratulations Helen Ramirez-Odell

Helen Ramirez-Odell, an AFT school nurse from Chicago and CLUW NEB member, has been active in the women's movement for several decades, serving as chair of her local's women's rights committee during much of that period. Most recently Ramirez-Odell has served as co-chair of the CLUW Women's Health Task Force which put on the excellent Women's Health Fair this past Thursday. Today CLUW honors Helen for her activism and leadership.

Workplace Safety & Health

"Do you hurt anywhere at the end of your workday?" panelists asked participants. The answer was an almost unanimous YES! That is the body's way of telling you something is wrong, but many workers don't get the message.

Panelist Kathy Hall, a senior editor at the University of Washington, noted that women outnumber men in many work-loss injuries including infectious diseases; carpal tunnel syndrome; musculo-skeletal disorders, and tendinitis. In addition, women die from assaults and violence at a rate more than double that for men. She stressed the importance of a workplace safety culture that is based on the premise that safety is a priority and a way of life.

Sharon Ness, RN, from UFCW Local 141, focused on workplace violence. "Violence is any physical assault or verbal threat that might lead to physical assault," she said. "Violence-prevention training can help workers stop and defuse the escalation of tension that can turn into violence."

"Ergonomics injuries are not accidents," said Jerri Wood, former CWA State Council lobbyist. She and

other Washington State unionists are fighting to defeat Initiative 841, which would stop the implementation of ergonomic standards that will otherwise become effective on January 1, 2004.

Employers who oppose ergonomics standards because of the cost are making a mistake, she said. When people don't hurt, they're more productive, happier, and less violent. That's good for everyone.

Taking Charge of Your Life: Financial, Emotional and Spiritual Well-being

Sharon Lockhart, CFD, CDFA offered ideas on planning for retirement. This workshop covered fairy tales and money myths, setting your course and making your way. She addressed the three stages of life for women Maiden, Mother and Crone-- sharing interesting facts: 42% of women age 65+ are living under 125% of poverty. Women write 80% of the checks, pay 61% of household bills, and are brought up not to take financial control. So we have to learn to take control! Tips to do so are:

- ❖ Check your credit and close your inactive accounts.
- ❖ Only purchase things that will outlast the bill.
- ❖ Use your credit card wisely. It can give you protection for car repairs, hotel, mail order purchases, etc.
- ❖ Prioritize spending.
- ❖ Don't marry without knowing your partner's debt.
- ❖ Pay yourself first, invest in your 401K, 457, 403.
- ❖ You should have enough money set aside to cover three to six months of living expenses.
- ❖ Invest in the market long term seven to ten years.

Know your Social Security benefits. The fund is solvent right now up to 2041. Social Security provides retirement, survivor and disability insurance. You will not outlive your social security. Social Security's toll free number is 800-772-1213.

HIV/AIDS: Beyond Condoms

This workshop featured two presentations. The first was by Gwen Johnson, Vice President of AFSCME Local 1199C. Gwen's straight-talk presentation was about how individuals can engage in unplanned sex, swept away in a moment of passion, without considering the deadly consequences of their acts. She gave graphic

demonstrations of how to correctly use both male and female condoms for safe sex.

The second part of the workshop featured Mary McCall, a consultant to the CLUW HIV/AIDS Program. Ms. McCall's presentation was entitled: "Take the test: Take control." She urged women to get tested regardless of their marital status. She said that testing is more available than ever with mobile testing centers widely used and new test techniques yielding quicker results in as little as 30 minutes.

Hormone Therapy: What's a woman to do?

As we age, we face many health challenges. They include a broad (no pun intended!) spectrum ranging from heart disease, cancer, stroke, fractures, diabetes and high blood pressure to Alzheimer's disease.

The Women's Health Initiative Study, begun in 1993 by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), studied hormone therapy, dietary modification and calcium/vitamin D. They conducted trials on 27,000 women to determine the effects of these three strategies on menopausal women.

What did they find? Estrogen/Progestin combinations actually **increased** the risk of heart attack, stroke, breast cancer and blood clots in the lung and leg. An adjunct study on memory revealed that women on these combination pills doubled their risk of dementia. On the positive side, the combination hormones did decrease colon cancer and hip and other fractures.

What to make of all this? Women need to manage their menopausal symptoms through self-care strategies and a combination of complementary and alternative medicine. It was suggested that only in cases of very severe menopausal symptoms should women consider the use of hormone-replacement therapy.

Websites for more info are:
<http://www.menopause.org> and
<http://www.womenshealthnetwork.org>.

Voice @ Work: Freedom to Form a Union

AFL-CIO national polling clearly shows that a majority of workers are interested in joining a union. So why is only 13% of the workforce organized? When it comes to women workers, their attitudes about unions are eroding. Women don't know which unions

represent them or how unions support issues women care about. Women are also concerned that unions speak for them instead of helping them speak for themselves.

Led by Jeff Grabelsky of Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations, this hands-on workshop explored why workers want and need unions, the obstacles to organizing and what activists can do to attract new union members through the AFL-CIO's "Voice @ Work" program. It taught participants how to convince workers why they should join unions and how they can improve public perception of the value of organized labor.

Help Bring Young Women Workers into CLUW

The three speakers Rachna Choudhry, program specialist at the AFL-CIO Civil, Human and Women's Rights Department; Valancy Blackwell, OPEIU; and Erica Hill, UAW. Each emphasized the need for better dialogue with young workers. Many of today's young workers have limited knowledge about the world of work and unions. Parents want their children to have a better life. They want them to prepare for college and do not share their union knowledge.

The young will bring the young in. We were all young and need to remember when we were young-- to speak their language. For instance Instead of family issues, change the topic to, "Let's talk SEX." We need to help young workers feel that they belong to the Union/CLUW.

Diversity in State Feds/CLC's

The labor movement remains largely "male and pale." The AFL-CIO's New Alliance program, set up to strengthen state labor federations and central labor councils can help change that.

Constituency groups, including CLUW, have used this program to get seats on the decision-making boards and bring our issues to the forefront.

Women and minority activists have been able to pool their resources to carry our issues, not only to our unions, but also to our constituencies in the community at large. In turn, we help with their issues.

"It's time for chicks to fly," but first we have to strengthen our wings - and mobilize to make sure we prevail on our issues.

Dem Bones, Dem Bones

Osteoporosis is a major health issue for older women who lose bone density as they age. This workshop presented a holistic approach to preserving one's skeletal system. Dr. Herb Joiner-Bey discussed his views that most problems are caused by improper diet and poor food chemistry. One participant at the crowded workshop remarked, "He was both scientific and understandable and that's not too common." He urged women to eat more dark green vegetables, both leaf and stem, and to make sure to get an adequate amount of omega-3 fatty acids. He said that many women don't realize that Premarin and other pill-form estrogens come from pregnant horse urine. He maintained that women can make their own estrogens by ingesting the right combination of foods. His message: Eat healthy foods and improve your health.

Deal with the "ism" in our work places and unions

Gloria Caoile, from APALA, opened the panel by reflecting on hatred. As children, we often respond in anger that we "hate" siblings or friends. Left unchecked, this behavior feeds indifference in adults. Tolerance of hate crimes is a result of this indifference. To counter this, we must build inclusion in our communities and trust across cultural boundaries.

Jan Darger Dinali, from PAW, shared her experience entering the carpenter's trade in the early '70's. Classic lines of "not a woman's place" and "taking a man's job" evolved into references of her not being a "regular woman." Her activism to preserve respect for women in the skilled trades resulted in protective, progressive policies on sexual orientation in Seattle. In speaking today, she said in all her struggles, it has been easier to deal with hatred than to deal with indifference.

Wil Duncan, from CBTU, opened by asking participants what "isms" are out there. After eliciting the traditional list - racism, sexism, homophobia, favoritism and xenophobia - he challenged that terrorism, the newest threat, was allowing the others to resurface. He noted that capitalism is actually the root of these "isms" with globalism its latest face.

Thank you to all who contributed to the success of these publications.

Starting or Invigorating

Your CLUW Chapter

About sixty participants engaged in lively discussions on how to resolve problems confronting CLUW Chapters, including inactive membership, lack of support from unions and lack of acknowledgement from the Central Labor Council.

Participants were encouraged to identify common issues with constituency groups, community organizations, churches and schools. The question and answer period provided sisters with ideas and suggestions like identifying local events to link labor with the community at large and focusing on diversity to strengthen chapter membership. Fund raising activities were also explored and encouraged.

Eleanor Roosevelt: Lessons for Today

Eleanor Roosevelt, a long time member of The Newspaper Guild, worked tirelessly for human, women's and workers' rights. Her work, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, provides inspiration and practical skills and strategies for today.

For instance, she built coalitions across traditional boundaries. She had close working relationships with A. Phillip Randolph and other labor leaders.

Roosevelt thought strategically. As First Lady, she agreed to press interviews, but only with women reporters - forcing newspapers to hire women.

Using media, working behind the scenes, she brought people of all backgrounds into her fights, prepared thoroughly and never gave up.

We need to apply her strategies, work like she did and remember to never lose our vision.

Political Action: How to Run for Office

Running for office in today's political environment is both a challenge and an adventure. CLUW sisters had the opportunity to learn the basics of developing an election campaign from three insiders. Each of the panelists provided insight from her personal experiences running for or managing a campaign for local and state office.

Millie Hall (OPEIU) addressed the issues women must confront when making the decision to run for office. Joanne Sanders, IATSE, outlined the basics of establishing a message and

communicating it to constituents. Veronica Turner, Maryland State Vice President (SEIU), helped participants with the structure of a campaign and provided job descriptions for campaign staff. The panelists worked to breakdown the barriers that often keep women from choosing to run for office.

The overarching message of the workshop was: get involved, get active, get elected!

Thursday's Health Luncheon

Hosted by a coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions, the lunch program opened with a presentation by Katherine S. Nash, Seattle Postmaster and Claudia Wayne of the National Breast Cancer Coalition. Ms. Nash celebrated the postage-plus stamp designed to fight breast cancer, and Ms Wayne talked about the struggle to conquer breast cancer.

The keynote speakers, Maggie Anderson and Priscilla Kania of SEIU and Natalie Richards of AFSCME described the highly productive partnership between Kaiser and their respective unions to improve both working conditions and health care delivery.

In Memoriam:

Dale Anderson; Moe Biller; Joe Bobo Robert Brenner; Sidney L. Brooks; Brenda Cronin; Stella Dobrowolski; Charles Dunlap; Carol Dupuis; George Fedo; Sally Jo Flint; Nadra Floyd; Walter Fulks; H. Gable Dorothy Garner; Joseph George; Sr. Albert Givens; Vernon Hasness; Ken Harvey; George Hooper; Erle Hubbard; Wilson Hubbell; Floyd Jenks; Robert Johnson; Paul Kelly; Donald Kendall; William Lee; Mary Lewis; Sylvia MacKinnon; Collyn Maple; John Martin, Jr.; Tony Mazzocchi; Omar McNally; Hugo McVey; Merrit Merrill; Jerry Meszaros; O. K. Patton; Evelyne Payne; Nep Peralta; John Pollard; Kevin Pope; Bernice Price; Mack Queen; Robert Raines; Kjeston Rodgers; Jerry Rollings; Carolyn Rowland; Anna Samick; Vergil Sarti; Jo Marie Schultz; Brenda Scott; Harold Shean; Bertha Van Sittert; George Spear; Norma J. Steill; Loree Sumling; Jane Ulmer; Frederick Vesser; Ted Watkins; Glen Watts; Senator Paul Wellstone; Sheila Wellstone; George Wood; Russell Woodrick; W. Wright; Stephen P. Yokich