CLEAR Mourns Another Alabama Labor Leader

Barney Weeks, former president of the Alabama Labor Council AFL-CIO and one of the moving forces behind the establishment of CLEAR, died December 12, 2003. He was 90 years old.

President Weeks lived his life doing things he thought were right, regardless of the consequences. After World War II he became a labor organizer, during a time when the world was hostile to those committed to helping workers better their lot in life. Weeks routinely received hate mail and threats, and was often followed by the police as he tried to organize workers in rural company towns.

Weeks was elected president of the Alabama AFL-CIO in 1957, a time of extreme racial tension in Alabama. He served as the president of the Alabama Labor Council for 26 years. At the time of his resignation he reflected on his accomplishments and challenges during his tenure as president. He said he felt his greatest accomplishment had been insuring that Alabama unions complied with the national AFL-CIO policy of racial integration. Segregated union meetings were abandoned during a time when Alabama had declared it illegal to hold meetings where both blacks and whites were present. Times were tense, and Alabama industrialists tried to use this tension as a way to destroy Alabama's labor movement.

During the time Weeks served as president of the AFL-CIO, the Alabama Labor Council reached its peak in political power. It was during this time that he approached Governor George Wallace to ask for his support for a labor education program based at UAB. The Alabama Legislature funded UAB’s Center for Labor Education and Research for the Budget year 1971-72; 30 years later, CLEAR continues to carry out the mission Barney envisioned.
Unions and Health Care

Observers of the American health care system have called for reform for decades. Many condemned the system for the difficulties poor people had in getting coverage, while many others remained untouched by the system’s problems. Unions negotiated employer-provided medical insurance in collective bargaining agreements that provided decent coverage for its members and their families. But today, with ever-rising deductibles and co-pays, with medical costs running at three and four times the rate of inflation the system is in major trouble. Today, no less than 43 million Americans are without any coverage.

The statistics on health care coverage are alarming. Three-fourths of those without health coverage are workers and their families. Many hold contingency or service jobs with few or no benefits. Those fields of employment exploded over the last two decades as manufacturing jobs declined. Others work for small businesses that cannot afford to pay their employees premiums. Even those that have coverage under their collective bargaining contracts have coverage that looks much different than it did just a few short years ago. Generally, the employee contribution has doubled in the last two years, which is itself double increase that employer’s contribute over the same time. Major employers like GM and Ford complain of the competitive disadvantage with foreign manufacturers as they increasingly absorb the higher costs of health care.

The solutions to these problems are difficult. Many unions today argue for a single payer system similar to the one in Canada, others for more incremental changes like cost controls on medical fees, the elimination of duplicate technology in communities, or requiring all employers to provide coverage for their employees. Most unions, and an increasing number of employers agree, however, that the status quo will no longer work.

CLEAR will offer a two-day workshop on the health care emergency on April 29-30 to discuss new developments and bargaining strategies to deal with this issue.

— Ed Brown

Understanding the Basics of Company Finance

Financial statements reveal important information about a company’s financial conditions for a variety of people. Management teams use them to make successful operational and business decisions; investors analyze them to maximize their investment returns; bankers read them to decide whether or not to loan money; and labor unions examine them to prepare for contract negotiations. This article is intended to introduce labor to the basic concepts of financial statements.

Financial statements usually consist of three major basic statements: the balance sheet, the income statement, and the cash flows statement. The balance sheet represents a snapshot of a company’s financial picture: what it owns, what it owes, and what it is worth on one particular day. The income statement indicates a company’s profitability. And finally, the statement of cash flows shows where the company gets cash and where that cash goes.

To fully understand a company’s financial health, one also needs to understand the relationships between different components in a financial statement. Understanding through ratio analysis provides one tool to analyze these relationships. For example, the “solvency ratios” or “liquidity ratios” measure a company’s ability to pay its bill when due. The “efficiency ratios” or “assets management ratios” tell whether a company is efficiently using what it owns to generate profits and whether it has “bad debts” by its customers. The “profitability ratios” demonstrate a company’s ability to turn a profit given a certain level of resources.

If you are interested in learning more about the analysis of financial statement, come join us for the Show Me the Money! - Researching and Analyzing the Basics of Company Finance Workshop on February 20, 2004

— Tracy Chang

Federal Law And Local Union Political Activity

As unions prepare for the 2004 campaign season, it is important that they keep federal election laws in mind. Federal election laws regulate what unions can and cannot do during the campaigns for President and Congress. These laws can be bewildering. On June 25, CLEAR will spend a day discussing these and other topics with local union leaders. In the meantime, here are a few guidelines for safe political activity.

1. Your local may spend money from the general treasury to get your members and their families registered to vote and to the polls. You may not join with a partisan group in a registration drive aimed at the general public.

2. Your local may spend treasury money to urge members and their families to vote for particular federal candidates. There is no limit to the amount you can spend; however, if these communications total over $2000 in one election, you must file a report with the Federal Election Commission. Do not mail candidates’ campaign material to your members!

3. You may solicit voluntary contributions for COPE or your international union’s political action committee (PAC). Transmit this money through a separate checking account or by money order. Keep these funds strictly separate from your general treasury!

4. Do not use treasury money to communicate with the general public about a federal candidate. Confine your persuasive attempts to your own members and their families.

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4. Do not use your union website to endorse candidates. Because your website is accessible to anyone, this is considered communication with the public — a violation of federal law.

5. Do not make any contributions to a federal candidate from your local political committee. You may not buy tickets to a fund-raising dinner or allow a federal campaign to use your equipment or hall without charge.

6. Finally, organize your members to work for a particular campaign. What individuals do on their own time without union funds is not regulated by law.

Announcements

Steward Training. Topics include: roles of the steward; legal rights of stewards; recognizing and investigating grievances; arguing the case with management. 6 Mondays, January 26 – March 1, 6:30 – 9 pm. Registration fee: $40

Show Me the Money! – Researching and Analyzing the Basics of Company Finance Workshop. Covers two major topics: (1) how to research a company's financial information and (2) how to analyze financial statements — Is the company making money? Where does the money go? Friday, February 20, 9 am to 4 pm. Registration fee: $75

Family and Medical Leave Act. Introduction to the FMLA. Monday, March 8, 6:30 – 9 pm. Registration fee: $15; for those who attend the steward training class: $10

Introduction to Arbitration. Topics will include procedures at the hearing, developing a theory of case, development of a brief, preparing witnesses, and the elements of “just cause” and contract interpretation. Wednesday, March 10 and Thursday, March 11, 9 am—4 pm. Friday, March 12, 9 am—noon. Registration fee: $150

Bargaining for Health Insurance. Health care provisions continue to be hotly contested in contract negotiations. Meet with CLEAR staff and local experts to discuss new developments in health care plans and new strategies for bargaining. If your contract doesn’t expire for another two years, come anyway! The more time you have to research this issue, the more successful you will be at the table. Thursday and Friday, April 29-30, 9 am to 4 pm. Registration fee: $125

Managing Membership Information Using Microsoft Access. The workshop will demonstrate how to build a membership database, what essential membership information should be included in the database, and how to use the database for signing up new members and recruiting volunteers. Friday, May 21, Friday, 9 am to 4 pm. Registration fee: $75

Getting Ready for the Elections: Unions and Political Action. This program will discuss the ins and outs of political participation, including what unions can and cannot do under federal and state election laws. Friday, June 25, 9 am – 4 pm. Registration fee: $75 includes a political action handbook.

For more information, or to register clip and return to:
UAB Center for Labor Education and Research
CLEAR Building
1530 3rd Ave S
Birmingham, AL 35294-4500

Fax: (205) 975-5087 Phone: (205) 934-2101
E-Mail: csturgis@uab.edu
Or register on-line at www.uab.edu/clear

[ ] Steward Training Jan 26-Mar 1 $40
[ ] Show Me the Money! Feb 20 $75
[ ] Family and Medical Leave Act Mar 8 $15 or $10 if w/Steward Training
[ ] Intro to Arbitration Mar 10-12 $150
[ ] Bargaining for Health Insurance Apr 29-30 $125
[ ] Managing Membership Information Using Microsoft Access May 21 $75
[ ] Getting Ready for the Elections June 25 $75

Need more information? Get the latest on-line at www.fec.gov
—Judi King
UAB Scholarships for Union Members

Union members and their families are eligible for two special scholarships in UAB’s School of Business:

- **The Southern Pulp and Paper Industry Labor-Management Council (SPPILMC) Scholarship** grew out of a joint program of paper industry unions and companies. At the conclusion of the program, remaining funds were dedicated to an endowed scholarship at UAB. **Scholarship Requirements:** Currently enrolled or admitted with a 3.0 grade point average. Preference for human resource majors or students in UAB’s School of Business who have worked in the paper industry.

- **The Victoria A. and Ralph A. Johnson Endowed Scholarship.** Founded by Ralph Johnson, former director CLEAR, this scholarship is intended for older students and those with union ties. **Scholarship Requirements:** Currently enrolled or admitted student in Business or Communication Studies. Preference to first generation college students over 22 years of age who are current or previous union members, or who are the spouse or child of a union member.

To apply for either scholarship, or for others in UAB’s School of Business, obtain a scholarship brochure or application form from CLEAR (205) 934-2101 or Jennifer More, Scholarship Coordinator (205) 934-1639. Application deadline is February 1, 2004.

Parting Shots

The U.S. economy has been bleeding jobs, more than 3 million, over the last three years. Especially hard hit has been manufacturing. Those workers who lose their jobs are reemployed at wages on average 20% less than they made in their former jobs and with fewer benefits. Not since the Hoover administration and the depression beginning in 1929 has an American administration lost jobs.

Poster from the 1944 Fair Employment Practices Committee established by President Franklin Roosevelt through the tireless efforts of A. Phillip Randolph.