

U.S. LABOR AGAINST THE WAR



2009 AFL-CIO Convention Calls for "Speedy Withdrawal" from Iraq and Defends Iraqi Labor Rights

September 17th, 2009

These resolutions were adopted September 17, 2009, in the final session of the AFL-CIO Convention in Pittsburgh. Numerous USLAW affiliates contributed to this success. Special thanks go to David Newby, President of the Wisconsin AFL-CIO, and Jos William, President of the Metropolitan Washington DC Labor Council, both of whom served on the International Resolutions Committee; to Co-convenors Fred Mason and Nancy Wohlforth, who led the antiwar effort at the convention; to Tim Paulson, Executive Director of the San Francisco Labor Council, Traven Leyshon, President of the Washington-Orange-Lamoille Labor Council and Gerry Colby, President of the Champlain Valley Central Labor Council, all of whom spoke from the floor on the resolutions, and Sharon Cornu, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alameda Labor Council; and USLAW National Organizer Tom Gogan, who helped coordinate that effort. Many delegates were also involved in building support for the resolutions and circulating USLAW's [petition to Hillary Clinton](#) in support of labor rights in Iraq. Leaders of five of Iraq's labor federations attended the convention to witness this effort. They were also honored with a luncheon hosted by the United Steel Workers Union.

RESOLUTION 16

End the Silence on Labor Rights in Iraq

Submitted by Alameda Labor Council (Calif.), San Mateo County Central Labor Council (Calif.), Washington-Orange-Lamoille Labor Council (Vt.) and Wisconsin State AFL-CIO

WHEREAS, after more than six years of military occupation, more than 4,300 U.S. and as many as a million or more Iraqi lives have been lost and our government has spent nearly \$650 billion of taxpayer funds on the military occupation of Iraq, and yet real democracy in Iraq still remains more of an aspiration than reality; and

WHEREAS, one of the fundamental building blocks of a democratic society is the right of workers to join unions of their choice free of government interference, domination, harassment or repression; and

WHEREAS, after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the U.S. nullified most of the repressive Saddam era legal code, but kept on the books and continued to enforce a 1987 law that Saddam Hussein imposed making it illegal for public-sector and public enterprise employees to join unions or negotiate the terms of their employment; and

WHEREAS, the subsequent Iraqi Interim Governing Authority continued to enforce this undemocratic denial of worker rights, and the newly elected Iraqi government imposed additional restrictions on worker and union rights, including seizure and freezing of union bank accounts and assets; and

WHEREAS, U.S. and Iraqi forces raided and ransacked union offices and assaulted and detained union leaders, and management of public enterprises, including the oil industry, was directed not to recognize or bargain with unions; and

WHEREAS, a vibrant pluralistic independent labor movement continues to grow in Iraq despite harassment, beatings, kidnappings, detention, torture and even murder of trade union activists; and

WHEREAS, Article 22, Section 3 of the new Iraqi Constitution promises respect for worker rights, foremost freedom of association and calls upon the Iraqi government to enact a law that guarantees the right to form unions; and

WHEREAS, Iraq is also a 1962 signatory to ILO Convention 98 on the right to organize and collectively bargain (which, ironically, the United States has yet to ratify), thereby also imposing a treaty obligation under international law to respect worker rights; and

WHEREAS, the ILO assisted the Iraqi government to draft a basic labor law that conforms to the requirements of the Iraqi constitution and international norms for respect of labor rights and yet the Iraqi government has refused to present that law to the Parliament for adoption; and

WHEREAS, these transgressions of fundamental labor and human rights have taken place for more than six years without a word of criticism from the U.S. government to Iraqi authorities and it is long past time for the U.S. government to speak up for the rights of Iraqi workers and unions; and

WHEREAS, respect for and enforcement of labor rights anywhere encourages respect for and enforcement of labor rights everywhere, including in the United States;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO adopt this resolution and urge the U.S. government to strongly call upon the Iraqi government to live up to the terms of its own constitution and international treaty obligations by:

- Respecting the right of free association and other worker rights defined by ILO Conventions for all Iraqi workers;
- Ceasing all repression of Iraqi unions, union leaders and activists;
- Releasing union funds and assets that have been frozen or impounded and permitting unions to operate normally;

- Directing management of public enterprises and government jurisdictions to recognize and bargain with unions freely chosen by their employees; and
- Promptly adopting a basic labor law that enshrines these rights and obligations in the legal code of Iraq; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO shall send a copy of this resolution to the U.S. government through Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, with an additional copy to the Iraqi government through its embassy in Washington, D.C.; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO urge its state and area labor federations and central labor councils to concur with this resolution and communicate that concurrence to the U.S. government by notice to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the Iraqi government through its embassy in Washington, D.C.; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO shall participate in the campaign for labor rights in Iraq by circulating the petition in support of those rights initiated by U.S. Labor Against the War.

RESOLUTION 52

Bring All the Troops and Contractors Home!

Submitted by Alameda Labor Council (Calif.)
Amended by the International Labor Committee

WHEREAS, the 2005 AFL-CIO convention resolved that “Our soldiers...deserve a commitment from our country’s leaders to bring them home rapidly. An unending military presence will waste lives and resources, undermine our nation’s security and weaken our military;” and

WHEREAS, at the time of that convention, 1,700 U.S. troops had already lost their lives in Iraq, and today there are more than 4,300 U.S. dead and more than 30,000 seriously wounded; and

WHEREAS, the nation confronts the most serious economic crisis since the Great Depression and as a consequence millions of workers have lost their jobs or suffered cuts in working hours and wages, social programs and government services are being cut or eliminated across the country for lack of resources while

our country has spent \$650 billion in Iraq already and nearly \$900 billion since 2001, including Afghanistan; and

WHEREAS, under terms of the Status of Forces Agreement signed by the Bush administration, U.S. forces will remain in Iraq until the end of 2011, and will continue to engage in combat and suffer casualties as long as they remain in that country; and

WHEREAS, in March 2008, Barack Obama said, “It is past time to end this war that should never have been waged by bringing our troops home, and finally pushing Iraq’s leaders to take responsibility for their future. As we do, we must serve the memory of all who have died as well as they who served our country, by providing support for their families, caring for our troops and veterans and upholding the American values which our fallen heroes exemplified through their service”; and

WHEREAS, at its 2005 convention, the AFL-CIO called for “rapid” withdrawal from Iraq—and four years later, 130,000 troops and 190,000 contractors are still in Iraq;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Alameda County Labor Council reaffirms its opposition to the continuing military occupation of Iraq and calls for the speedy* withdrawal of all military forces and armed contractors from Iraq; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Alameda County Labor Council calls upon the Congress and president to redirect the resources now squandered in Iraq to meeting the urgent needs of the American people, restoring and fully funding vital social programs and public services, developing sustainable technologies to address global warming, creating quality long-term jobs that provide a decent living, rebuilding the Gulf Coast and our nation’s infrastructure and a host of other needs that will provide our country with real security; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Alameda County Labor Council will submit this resolution with a request for concurrence by the California Labor Federation and by the AFL-CIO at its 2009 convention.

* *"Speedy" was substituted for "complete and immediate" by the International Resolutions Committee by agreement of Sharon Cornu of the Alameda Labor Council to secure support of the committee needed to bring it to the floor for a vote.*