

Building Labor Opposition to the Occupation. The Role of USLAW in the Labor Movement.

"The AFL-CIO supports the brave men and women deployed in Iraq, which include our members in all branches of the armed services. Our soldiers – the men and women risking their lives in Iraq – come from America's working families. They are our sons and daughters, our sisters and brothers, our husbands and wives.... they deserve a commitment from our country's leaders to bring them home rapidly. An unending presence will waste lives and resources, undermine our nation's security and weaken our military....The American people were misinformed before the war began and have not been informed about the reality on the ground and the very difficult challenges that lie ahead...."

**Resolution 53
AFL-CIO Convention, July 2005**

Delegates to the 50th Convention of the AFL-CIO took a historic step forward when they adopted Resolution 53, "The War in Iraq". This marked the first time that the AFL-CIO adopted a position on a U.S. war effort that is markedly different than that of the administration. That historic occurrence was made possible only because of the coordinated and persistent efforts of USLAW. While the passage of Resolution 53 is of great significance in moving opposition to the war forward in the labor movement and recognizing the work of USLAW, much work remains to be done to realize the USLAW goal of immediate withdrawal.

Public opinion polls now indicate that a majority of the people in the country believe that the war was wrong to begin with and want to bring the troops home. The recent voicing of this sentiment by Congressman Murtha of Pennsylvania – generally viewed as a hawk – raised the bar for discussions and debate around the question of withdrawal. While partisanship reigns in the U.S. Congress and Senate, Republican legislators generally march in lockstep with the administration's line of forging ahead to some shifting victory and the Democrats, with few exceptions, flee from anything that may define them as either antiwar ~~definitive~~ or liberal. So while Congressman Murtha's call for immediate withdrawal has provided some cover, the verdict is still out on who will have the courage to stand with him.

The U.S. union movement is in a unique position at this point in history to significantly influence the outcome of future debate and actions leading to the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. Static numbers and organizational fractures notwithstanding, unions still represent a potent force to be reckoned with in U.S. politics. The processes around the mid-term elections provide an opportunity to build on the AFL-CIO's Resolution 53 and demonstrate the union movement's resolve to educate and mobilize union members to make the U.S. Congress and Senate enact legislation to end the occupation of Iraq. To end the occupation and bring our troops safely home requires that organized labor translate its antiwar resolutions into concrete actions – mobilization of union members and labor's institutional and political resources and influence – to force the Congress to act. USLAW must serve as the spearhead and coordinating center of that effort.

USLAW will continue its leadership role of linking union members, and their organizations with other anti-war activist to strengthen labor's voice in efforts to end the war.

1. USLAW must continue its work to get unions at all levels, state federations and labor councils to take a public stand demanding an immediate end to the occupation, return of the troops, dismantling of bases in Iraq and redirection of resources to meeting human needs.
2. USLAW should press Change to Win to take a stand, just as we did the AFL-CIO, and urge both federations to put ending the occupation at the center of their political, educational and mobilizing work in 2006.
3. Ensure that the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq and the redirecting of U.S. resources from inflated military spending is on the questionnaires presented to all candidates seeking endorsements from unions, federations, and central bodies.
 - a) Develop letter requesting inclusion of the questions and a one pager on why ending the war and redirecting resources is important to labor.
 - b) Send second letter requesting support for USLAW
 - c) Strategically initiate dialogue with the leaders of unions, federations, central bodies and constituency groups
 - d) USLAW activists should volunteer to be on the candidate interview committees of unions and central bodies
 - e) We must be prepared to challenge all candidates to spell out their position at forums, candidates' nights and other campaign events and seek firm commitment to a principled antiwar stance if elected
2. Organize and support forums for executive officers of unions, federations, central bodies and constituency groups to voice support for immediate withdrawal and the redirecting of U.S. resources.
3. Secure a presence and voice at union, federation, central body and constituency group gatherings.
4. USLAW activists will submit communications about anti-war activity to international, local union and central body publications
5. The USLAW Steering Committee will engage in discussion and planning to popularize the concept of "Labor take the Lead - End the War Now" as we intensify our anti-war efforts in 2006
6. We must seek to translate labor antiwar resolutions into institutional and financial support for and affiliation with USLAW at all levels of the labor movement.
7. With the immediate goal of ending the occupation as the focus, we should also utilize this effort to seek a broader reappraisal within the labor movement of the need for labor independence on all U.S. foreign policy issues, the meaning and requirements of international solidarity, and the relationship between U.S. foreign policy objectives and the domestic and international interests and needs of working people.