

Delivering our message to AFL-CIO's leadership



William H. Young

When I sat down last month at the first Executive Council meeting of the AFL-CIO since the historic Chicago convention, I had an agenda. I was determined to make it clear to the federation leadership that the NALC is unique, that we have earned respect, and that letter carriers will always be leaders in defending the working men and women of America.

That may not sound very radical, but the way things have been going in the labor movement—well, believe me, it seems a lot of “leaders” have had their heads in the sand, or worse.

The meeting did have its positive side. President John Sweeney nominated me for a position on the new Executive Committee. He told the Executive Council that he believes any union with 200,000 members or more should have a permanent seat on that committee and he would support making that change. (The Chicago convention adopted a constitutional amendment creating a committee with 10 permanent seats for the 10 largest unions—the NALC is number 11—and nine other rotating seats.)

With President Sweeney's action and the acceptance of the full Council, the National Association of Letter Carriers should now have a permanent place at the table where the most important decisions are made.

Much of the Council meeting was devoted to the problems created by the disaffiliation of several large unions and their creation of the “Change to Win Federation.” The financial crunch is already hitting state AFL-CIO federations and Central Labor Councils. Many unions favor making up the revenue loss by encouraging “full affiliation”—requiring all union locals to become dues-paying members of state feds or local councils.

While those bodies do play an important role, full affiliation for the NALC is not necessarily appropriate, given the nature of our jobs and employer. The issues that concern letter carriers the most are handled at the federal level. Normally, the NALC

does not involve itself in local or state matters, although some of our best branches are affiliated with their local labor councils—by choice.

I explained this to the Council and I admit I felt very uncomfortable doing so. I know that some unions agree with me, but they seem reluctant to make their position clear. The bottom line is that like anything else, you must set priorities and, when it comes to NALC's resources, our priorities are not at the local or state level.

At the same time, we are not turning our back on the federation. I am more convinced than ever the best course for the nation's letter carriers at this time is to remain affiliated and keep our options open.

I intend to continue to be a voice urging cooperation between the two federations wherever and whenever possible. Our true obligation is to the whole “House of Labor” and not to any individual or intellectual agenda.

On another matter, I regret to inform the members that I have been unable to reach any agreements with management on a memorandum concerning displaced employees in the Gulf Coast region.

Our craft—the very nature of our work—is different from others and we have many concerns that do not affect other crafts. We will not be drawn into any agreement to permit the USPS to contract out the work of displaced letter carriers by unilaterally changing the method and means of delivery.

I have been informed that over 17,600 deliveries are being converted to a different type of delivery, such as setting up neighborhood mail boxes. That is acceptable for an interim period, but we need assurances city delivery will be re-established as the recovery continues.

We continue our discussions to find a solution that works for both parties and, if good faith prevails, we will get there. I would rather be last, and get it right, than be first and make mistakes that would haunt us for years to come. ☒