



**Report-back from:
Dr. King's Legacy:
*a town hall meeting on labor and community partnerships to protect
and create jobs in Philadelphia***

by Penny Jennewien,
program intern
from the University of Pennsylvania

SUMMARY

On January 22, 2013, Bread & Roses Community fund convened a town hall meeting that brought together both labor and community organizers to talk about the strong history of solidarity between the two groups and how they can continue to support each other going forward. The town hall also highlighted the inspiring partnership between labor and community groups in the Philadelphia Coalition Advocating for Public Schools (PCAPS). This coalition formed in response to the School Reform Commission's plan to close schools, increase charter school enrollment and lay off thousands of School District of Philadelphia employees.

Click [here](#) to see pictures from the town hall!

ORDER OF PROGRAM

Bread & Roses Community fund convened a town hall meeting on January 22, 2012 at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. The purpose of the event was to bring together labor and community representatives from the Delaware Valley to highlight an issue area where labor and community groups are successfully working together.

The night began with a keynote speech by Liz McElroy, Secretary-Treasurer of the Philadelphia AFL-CIO Council. She connected Dr. King's legacy of integrating race and class issues to the struggles we face today. The next part of the evening was a panel discussion moderated by Chris Rabb with Andi Perez of Youth United for Change, Evette Jones of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, and Tim Finucan of SEIU 32BJ.

After the presentations, attendees broke out into small groups to discuss their reactions and ideas for ways that labor and community groups can continue to work together in the future.

THE POSSIBILITY OF LABOR AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS:

Attendees overwhelmingly supported greater coalition and relationship building between unions and community groups. Participants emphasized the need for long term, not transactional relationships. They pointed to the Earned Sick Days Campaign, the IATSE Philadelphia Theatre Company strike, the school to prison pipeline, and Philadelphia Jobs with Justice as possible issue areas/organizations where this kind of collaboration can take place.

Participants also recognized that successful coalitions leverage overlapping self-interest while finding room to look at the bigger picture. Noting that many labor and community struggles involve the same targets, participants talked about opportunities for labor and community organizers to identify common enemies, share networks and resources and effectively communicate in order to develop a comprehensive and holistic social justice strategy

Participants also expressed the need for more internal and external education about unions and why they are necessary. Attendees emphasized that union members need to know more about their union and feel better connected to it. Participants also highlighted the value of telling stories about the role that both unions and grassroots organizations play in building a just city as a skill that should be developed.

Attendees discussed the changing economy and the need for the labor movement to adapt to fit the needs of the day. This means both organizing new kinds of workers as well as recognizing that the kinds of working conditions and issues that matter to workers may be different than they were during an industrial economy. Attendees also felt that unions should be more open to seeing themselves as part of the broader movement for social justice.

Some other ideas that came up for future labor-community partnerships included popular education programs and media campaigns that develop capacity of individuals to recognize "class" as a way to unite even among material differences. There was also some discussion about the formation of a progressive political party in a time when multi-party democracy is gaining more legitimacy.

Finally, there was much discussion about the need for both labor and community organizers to develop long-term, permanent and meaningful relationships (as opposed to only occasionally working together on an issue-by-issue basis).

One of the top ideas for future labor and community partnerships was to form a coalition to create more training programs for young workers and/or people of color that lead to union jobs (and not just in the building trades). Other ideas for future labor and community solidarity included:

- Using existing vehicles like Jobs with Justice and Bread & Roses to help establish relationships and show mutual support between labor and community organizers
- Organize around common targets, rather than issues alone
- Identify broad community issues (schools, voting rights, healthcare, etc.) that both labor and community organizers can devote time to
- Build a coalition to fight for better jobs for unorganized workers

FEEDBACK FOR UNIONS THAT WANT TO DO MORE TO PARTNER WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZER-LED ORGANIZATIONS AND THE SOCIAL JUSTICE SECTOR AS A WHOLE:

In small groups, attendees were asked to discuss ways that individual unions and the labor movement as a whole could better support the efforts of social justice community organizers. Some of the specific ideas they came up with are:

- Get union membership involved in larger community issues by asking constituents what they're interested in
- More outreach by labor unions, both in terms of recruiting more workers into unions and in communicating to the larger public the important role that unions play
- Remember that “union speak” can be overly technical and difficult to understand for those not directly involved
- Ask for and win community demands in workers’ contracts
- Spend time engaging the next generation—especially college students—in labor struggles
- Fight for dignity for all workers, not just members (especially in terms of access to pensions and healthcare)
- Support struggles of community organizers as a sign of solidarity
- Substantially address racism and classism both at the union leader and union member levels
- Unions should share their knowledge about training organizers, developing advocacy campaigns and lobbying decision makers with the larger social justice community as a way to build capacity

FEEDBACK FOR COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS THAT WANT TO DO MORE TO PARTNER WITH UNIONS AND THE LABOR MOVEMENT:

In small groups, attendees were asked to discuss ways that community organizers and social justice supporters could do to better support the efforts of unions and the labor movement. Here are some of the specific ideas they came up with:

- Show workers and the unions that represent them more support: remember that in most social justice campaigns, workers involved are often likely to be allies if properly engaged
- Remember that not all community organizations and non-profits encountered by unions are always progressive. Don't assume solidarity with unions before working to establish trust.
- Remember that many unions *are* progressive. Do your homework and don't generalize or make assumptions based on one poor experience.
- Learn about local union and workers' rights history
- Make building relationships with unions a priority always, not just in times of need

Learn more about the organizations who participated in the town hall:

Check out these websites for more information from those organizations represented at the January 22, 2013 labor town hall hosted by Bread & Roses Community Fund.

Philadelphia AFL-CIO Council: <http://www.pa.aflcio.org/philaficio/>
 PCAPS: <http://wearepcaps.org/>
 SEIU 32bj: <http://www.seiu32bj.org/districts/mid-atlantic/>
 Youth United for Change: <http://www.youthunitedforchange.org/>
 Philadelphia Federation of Teachers: <http://www.pft.org>

Bread & Roses Community Fund: <http://www.breadrosesfund.org>

