

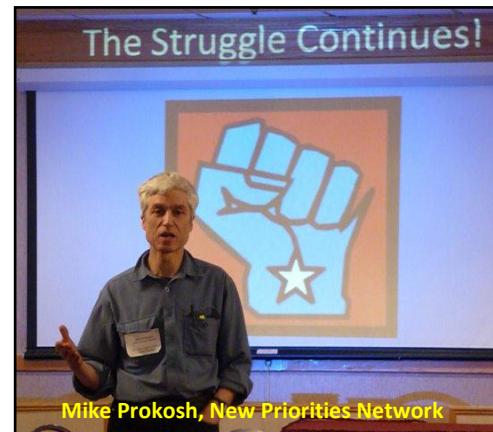
U.S. LABOR AGAINST THE WAR



NATIONAL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE CHARTS PATH AHEAD

Leadership of USLAW affiliates from around the country met April 8-10 in Chicago to review the work of the organization, develop priorities for the year ahead, and to fill vacancies in the Steering Committee and officers.

Friday, April 8th's afternoon session began with a review of USLAW's work since the last national meeting in December 2009. The evening session was divided between detailed reports from USLAW's Wisconsin affiliates on the ongoing struggle there, and a discussion facilitated by [New Priorities Network](#) National Coordinator Mike Prokosh on how to effectively integrate labor's response to the economic crisis with its antiwar and solidarity objectives.



Mike Prokosh, New Priorities Network



Gene Bruskin, Co-Convenor

Saturday's session was led off by remarks on behalf of the officers by Co-convenor Gene Bruskin, which opened a discussion facilitated by Brother Bruskin and 1199 SEIU Liaison Joanie Parker on the strategic direction USLAW should take in the coming year. That discussion continued throughout the morning and into the afternoon session when specific proposals for USLAW's 2011-12 organizational priorities were considered.

In his opening comments, Brother Bruskin took note of the singular role played by USLAW and its remarkable development over the course of seven years from an outsider to being accepted as an important and legitimate voice within the labor movement. He related how we were told outright that workers aren't interested and that no one would pay one nickel to support this work. USLAW helped inspire solidarity work on behalf of the labor movement in Iraq. It was the first foreign labor organization to show up in Iraq in September/October of 2003. That began a whole set of international solidarity activities. USLAW convened a call with labor leaders across around the world, sharing their opposition to the invasion. Its leadership and staff developed a personal relationship with the Iraqis. USLAW broke with 100 years of Gompersism – with the notion that the labor movement in this country should be in lock step with government foreign policy.

But he also noted that when USLAW formed, the conditions were dramatically different. There was a war unilaterally launched by an unpopular President. Today we're in a different situation. The economic crisis puts the people in a different mindset that is centered on economic insecurity and a lack of jobs and lack of any prospect of getting out of the crisis. Even though the media report the stock market is doing well, foreclosures continue,

unemployment continues. This is what is on everyone's mind. Now, it's at the feet of a president who we busted our chops to elect.

We are now in a period of huge economic insecurity and not surprisingly, Republicans took advantage. They created self-fulfilling prophecies – they manufactured crises. There's a reality to the resentment of taxes you pay and services you don't get. The Democrats are compromised. On the issue of neo-liberalism there is broad agreement in Congress to an austerity budget, free trade, deregulation, developing global economy, free market ideology (anti-teacher, anti-public school, pro-charter school). The Democrats have been unwilling to challenge the Republicans.



At the same time we have Wisconsin and Egypt, what's below the surface, there's a tremendous amount of anger and indignation. Where, when, how it's tapped - that we can shape. We can't control the events but we can prepare and lay the groundwork to respond. This is what the Republicans did for the last 30 years. What's USLAW's role during this period? Brother Bruskin said we need to rethink that role. Globalization of our industries, the bloated military-security-terrorism budget and the economic crisis are linked. If the military budget isn't dealt with, they will take funds from somewhere else in order to get the budget straight. They will take it from our table. The labor movement has been silent on the military budget.

USLAW is the only force that has the potential to take the issue of the military budget and all that implies and put it on the table for discussion inside the labor movement. In 2003, we brought opposition to foreign wars into the conversation in the labor movement.

In order to build a movement in this country, the big picture is really crucial, or people get lost in the numbers in the budget. Given our limited resources, as an organization we have to make a decision. The co-conveners recommend that we make a dramatic shift – to an attack on the military budget and all that it implies – including war. It's a really different focus. He then discussed the implications of this decision for allocation of staff time and resources. If we try to do everything, we will do nothing. It can only work if people can pick up other pieces and take the lead on them. We have a chance to make a significant dent in this area in the same way we did in 2003. The spirit is waiting to be freed up.



People are losing jobs, pensions, homes and we have an explanation. The only explanation offered by most labor leaders is that Republicans are the problem. He reminded the conference of what Michael Moore said, that we aren't broke. There are big pots of money out there and war and military spending are a big part of that.

A wide-ranging discussion followed these remarks. At two different points the conference broke up into small groups to engage everyone in the discussion and to generate ideas and proposals. In one of these small group sessions, the participants assessed the internal and external strengths and obstacles to moving this work forward.

Financial and Organizational Reports [detailed reports will be posted on the website]



The conference received and accepted without dissent a financial report by Administrative Coordinator Adrienne Nicosia. She reported that 2010 income was \$164,828 and expenses were \$166,818. First quarter 2011 income was \$39,171 and expenses were \$39,394. The General Fund carried over \$19,783 into 2011 compared to \$21,654 carried over into 2010. The General Fund as of 4/4/11 had \$20,500 (as of 4/15/11 the balance was \$26,500), with outstanding unpaid expenses for the conference and unreimbursed staff expenses that could amount to \$7,500. In 2010, affiliation fees brought in \$124,877 from 135 organizations with additional organizational contributions of \$2,461. Individual contributors donated \$29,850. In the first quarter of 2011, USLAW received \$27,575 in affiliation fees from 37 organizations, plus an additional \$425 in contributions from organizations and \$10,067 from individuals. USLAW's monthly expenses average about \$13,500.

The organization's lack of a financial reserves and limited resources – for staff travel, printing, educational materials, paying technical and project consultants – has had an impact on its ability to fully develop its programmatic objectives. As a result of tight cash flow, National Coordinator Eisenscher has not received the agreed upon contribution to his 401(k) retirement fund or reimbursement for health insurance premiums (\$5,575 in foregone benefits). All staff did receive a 2% salary increase at the start of 2010.

The Solidarity Fund received \$1,520 in 2010 and spent \$8,192. It carried over \$9,439 into 2011 and in the first quarter of the year received \$1,687 and spent \$80. Currently (3/31/11) the balance in the fund is \$11,125. In 2010, USLAW contributed \$2400 to the Iraq Federation of Oil Unions in support of its monthly newspaper. An additional \$1500 remains to be transferred and \$3300 has yet to be raised to fulfill USLAW's pledge to raise the equivalent of one year of operating expenses (\$7200). [Make a contribution on-line to the [USLAW Solidarity Fund](#).]

Sister Nicosia stressed the importance of individual contributions and in particular monthly sustainers. She reported that about \$600 per month in individual donations is attributable to sustainers, plus \$100 per month more to the Solidarity Fund. She added that another \$10,000 in income would enable USLAW to meet all its obligations; another \$20,000 would provide a cushion and resources for programming. Brother Eisenscher also emphasized the importance of getting Steering Committee members, officers and boards of affiliates and other leaders to set an example by [enrolling for a monthly sustainer](#) and challenging others to join them. He also urged all affiliates to be sure that the [USLAW logo](#) is prominently displayed on their website with a link back to the USLAW site.



In the discussion that followed, the question of in-kind contributions was raised. National Organizer Tom Gogan presently gets in-kind office space, computer and landline phone use from 1199 in NY. Some of his travel expenses have also been paid by affiliates. CWA Local 1180 and 1199 SEIU have donated printing in NYC. Michael Eisenscher gets photocopying donated by an SEIU local in Oakland. CWA contributed printing for a large postal appeal for which USLAW paid the postage. An in-kind donation of postal charges would be helpful. An affiliate could also cover the monthly cost of internet services.

Tom Gogan paid tribute to USW Locals 675 in CA and 10-1 in PA for their role in getting the national union to promote the drive to raise funds for the Iraqi oil union in its national paper.

Mike Zweig (UUP/AFT 2190) reminded the conference that the video "[Why Are We in Afghanistan?](#)" can be used as a fundraising vehicle when purchased in quantities of 25 or more at \$2 per copy. People often want to buy the DVD after seeing it, so sell extra copies for \$5 or more. Similarly, USLAW can provide [buttons in quantity](#).

Brother Zweig also said that the NYC chapter was going to attempt to organize a fundraising event with a well known "headliner".

Adrienne Nicosia cited the example of a house party organized by the co-convenors in DC which set a goal of raising \$5000 and came very close to achieving it. Carol Rosenblatt (CLUW) said that she would consider organizing a similar fundraising event.

National Organizer Tom Gogan delivered an [organizational report](#). Of 191 affiliates, 154 are in good standing with 14 somewhat overdue; 20 are significantly late (more than six months overdue) and 17 are more than two years behind and are no longer considered USLAW affiliates. **Eight new affiliates joined in 2010**, with combined affiliation fees of \$3750. They are: Maine AFL-CIO; Western Maine Labor Council; AFSMCE 2507 (NYC) – EMTs & Paramedics; AFT 1789 /Seattle Community Colleges; CWA Local 1037 (NJ); Inland Boatmen's Union /ILWU (Seattle); Long Island Jobs With Justice; OPIEU Local 2 (DC). AFT-Oregon re-affiliated and CWA Local 1036 declined to renew its affiliation.



Brother Gogan observed that stable affiliate funding sufficient to cover the overall budget continues to elude the organization. The annual shortfall has been made up through online and mail appeals and extra efforts in the last quarter of 2010, as had also been the case in 2009. He also noted that USLAW had held together quite well in a year when some allies in the peace

movement experienced a serious drop in support. Those extra efforts – with very active steering committee and co-convenor participation – helped us raise enough in individual donations and memberships to just barely meet USLAW’s year-end budget needs.

National Coordinator Eisenscher reported on highlights of USLAW activities since the last in-person meeting: USLAW --

- Was an active and often leading participant in the national antiwar protests organized to commemorate the anniversary of the Iraq (March) and Afghan Wars (October);
- Was an active participant in the leadership of the Peace Table component of the One Nation rally in DC in October, 2010;
- Helped initiate the meeting immediately following the One Nation Rally that founded the New Priorities Network and has begun to move this work out to the affiliates;
- Website has grown to more than 24,000 entries and added news sections on Yemen and Libya;
- Successfully promoted the sale and distribution of a second printing of "[Why Are We in Afghanistan?](#);"
- Chartered its second urban chapter in NYC and has begun work to lay the foundation for a chapter in Los Angeles;
- Circulated an [open letter to Prime Minister Maliki](#) signed by 21 members of Congress;
- Raised nearly \$4000 toward a goal of \$7200 to support publication of the [Iraq oil union newspaper](#) for one year and established a joint solidarity task force with IVAW to support Iraqi unions;
- Mobilized support for embattled Wisconsin public workers, including providing support to IVAW in its March 19, 2011 demonstration of 10,000 in Madison that had a distinct antiwar theme, connecting the ongoing wars and military spending to the economic crisis;
- Participated in the LabourStart Conference in Toronto, Canada, the Labor Notes Conference and U.S. Social Forum in Detroit;
- Established communication with underground labor organizations in Iran and Afghanistan.



An extended discussion followed in which more than a dozen representatives of affiliates reported on their own antiwar activities during the last year. Brother Bruskin also reported on his trip to an international conference in Algiers where he delivered funds and two lap top computers to Iraqi union leaders who were present there. A number of participants also commented on the website and a discussion ensued about how to provide more technical support to the site. Christine Geovanis (National Writers’ Union) and Karen Klipowicz (SEIU

Local 1) offered to work with Michael Eisenscher to evaluate the site and determine how it might be improved and how USLAW could make greater use of social networking tools.

An extended discussion centered on the relationship between the wars that have been our focus in the past and more generally the military budget that is the focus of the [New Priorities Network](#). Discussion also focused on how affiliates can incorporate the new priorities work to bring together two narratives – one of which focuses on the economic crisis and the need to tax the rich, corporations and banks, and the other which focuses on the cost of the wars and bloated wasteful military budget.

Public Program

Saturday evening there was a public program open to members of Chicago's labor, peace and social justice movements. The program was opened by music provided by Mescalanza, a local group that included Terry Davis, Steering Committee member from Chicago Labor for Peace Prosperity and Justice. Co-convenor Kathy Black acknowledged help in organizing the weekend event provided by Terry Davis, Elena Marcheschi (CLPPJ), Carl Rosen (UE) and Karen Klipowicz (SEIU Local 1).



Gene Bruskin then spoke briefly about USLAW and the nature of the weekend's deliberations. Sue Ruggles, SC member from AFT Local 212, then narrated a slide show of photos she had taken over the course of a number of trips from Milwaukee to Madison. She was followed by Bryan Kennedy, President of AFT-Wisconsin, who spoke about the remarkable movement that has developed there, the political context in

which that struggle is taking place, and the challenges the movement faces going forward. Brother Kennedy responded to questions and comments from the audience.



Then Mike Zweig (United Univ. Professions, AFT Local 2190) introduced the abbreviated 11 minute version of "[Why Are We in Afghanistan?](#)" and reported that 3000 copies had already been sold and a new order would be

placed so that USLAW can continue to offer them at \$5 each in quantities up to 24 and \$2 each for orders of 25 or more.





Co-convenor Kathy Black

Sister Black then introduced [IVAW](#) member Vince Emanuele, who [spoke powerfully and passionately](#) about his experience in the Marines in Iraq and his determined opposition to the wars and occupations in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

His remarks were followed by a presentation by [Joe Iosbaker](#), a steward in SEIU Local 73 in Chicago, whose home was one of those raided by the FBI as part of a series of such raids last September 24th in Chicago, Minneapolis and Grand Rapids, MI.



Vince Emanuele, IVAW

Over 70 FBI agents simultaneously carried out the raids and served subpoenas to prominent antiwar and international solidarity activists. FBI agents also questioned activists in Milwaukee,



Joe Iosbaker, SEIU Local 73

Durham, NC and San Jose, CA. They seized documents, computers, cell phones, passports, family photos and even children's artwork. Fourteen subpoenas were issued to appear before a federal grand jury in Chicago on October 5, 12 and 19, 2010 as part of an investigation of alleged "material support for terrorism." Those subpoenaed could face incarceration if they refuse to testify after being offered immunity. Brother Iosbaker described the outpouring of support that they had received from labor, peace and other social justice forces across the country that are incensed by the government's repressive inquisitorial tactics and violation of Constitutional rights and liberties.

Rounding out the evening's speakers was [Professor Kaveh Ehsani](#), an International Relations expert at DePaul University. He spoke about developments in his native Iran and the importance and implication of the massive wave of uprisings taking place across North Africa for U.S. foreign policy. Professor Ehsani is an editor of the [Middle East Report](#) and has written extensively on developments in the region.



Prof. Kaveh Ehsani
DePaul Univ.

The evening's program closed out with several more songs performed by Mescalanza, ending with "Solidarity Forever."

The Sunday morning session was devoted to adoption of resolutions and motions [available on the USLAW website].



Mescalanza



2011-12 USLAW New Priorities Focus

The Conference adopted the following resolution:

Consistent with USLAW's mission statement and ongoing programs, USLAW will develop and promote a national campaign to "Move the Money" in conjunction with the New Priorities Network based on the following principles:

1. End the wars.
2. Redirect the inflated war and military budgets to create jobs and meet other human needs.
3. Provide greater benefits for and care of returning veterans and their families; protect military sector workers and their communities.
4. Tax the rich and corporations.

and will engage in activities such as –

Local Union Internal Organizing/Activities

Member Education
Introducing new priorities platform
Moving union resolution
Doing creative activities

Coalition Building

Working with IVAW, Military Families Speak Out, Veterans for Peace and other veterans organizations
Working with peace, economic and racial justice, and other progressive organizations
Campaigns against War Profiteers
Folding our program into other groups' activities and other groups into ours
City Council Resolutions with public hearings or town hall meetings
Bring our position into Budget Hearings
Demonstrations

Campaign within Labor Movement

At other local unions, labor councils, state/district orgs
Moving international unions
Building USLAW Chapters

Effective Messaging, messaging techniques and technologies

Develop fact sheets, leaflets, posters, slide shows, talking points
Utilize social networking tools like Facebook and Twitter

Research

Legislative analysis



Identify defense industry waste & profiteers/tax cheats
Identify unions in the defense industry, location of plants and information about the workforce

Needed:

Took Kit: materials, model resolutions, etc.
Create legislative strategy, targets and candidates for office.

Other activities

Target military-industrial complex in addition to Wall St./Banks
Compare taxes paid by war profiteers vs. those by military families



In furtherance of this shift in focus, staff time and resources will be re-evaluated. Terry Davis (CLPPJ) and Rachel Torres (Unite HERE Local 11) agreed to take on responsibility for representing USLAW in [United for Peace & Justice](#) (UFPJ) with which USLAW is affiliated. The International Solidarity Task Force will be reorganized to involve additional people. Mike Zweig volunteered to serve on it and share leadership responsibilities with Denice Lombard, who has served as its coordinator with assistance of National Coordinator Michael Eisenscher. The Middle East Peace Task Force will also be

reconstituted in a manner that will not require such extensive staff support. Karen Klipowicz (SEIU Local 1) offered to provide support to USLAW's legislative and political action work.

Two resolutions introduced by Jerry Gordon (Ohio State Labor Party), Donna DeWitt (So. Carolina AFL-CIO) and Alan Benjamin (SF Labor Council) were both adopted with minor amendments.

October Antiwar Demonstrations

The first endorsed the idea of united antiwar actions organized by the antiwar movement on a local, regional or national basis in October to mark the 10th anniversary of the war in Afghanistan. The specific demands, dates and locations are to be decided by participating organizations. This resolution was adopted without dissent.



Resolutions to End the Afghan War

The second resolution reaffirmed USLAW's policy and encourages its affiliates to adopt resolutions calling for immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan, and to move those resolutions to their union's convention, as well as to state federations, central labor councils and other local unions. It was adopted without dissent, with one abstention.

Against U.S./NATO Military Attacks in Libya



The conference also supported unanimously the statement ("[Democracy Won't be Delivered by a No-fly Zone](#)") issued March 16, 2011 by the Co-convenors prior to U.S. and NATO bombing in Libya that warned against just such action, calling for alternatives to military action to be fully explored and for the U.S. to end its role as "global cop, global bully and arms merchant to every autocrat, despot, tyrant and authoritarian regime (that) is willing to do our government's bidding." The statement further called for "the resources the government now squanders playing super-power to the world (to) be invested in creating jobs, restoring the social safety net, and meeting the myriad needs of people here and around the world."

Proposed Name Change

A motion made by Peter Nowicki (AFSCME Local 145) to drop "the" from "U.S. Labor Against the War" as more accurately reflecting the multiple conflicts in which the U.S. is militarily engaged was defeated. Others argued that the USLAW name is now well known, that it constitutes a valuable "brand" and that the change might lead some to construe that USLAW is a pacifist organization, which it is not.

Mideast Peace Taskforce

The conference reviewed the work of the task force, in developing a set of [guidelines for moving a discussion in the labor movement](#) and then developing a [resource list](#) of materials unions can use if they want to pursue this course. One possible direction is to organize a labor delegation to visit Palestine and Israel and then report on its findings. Following discussion, it was agreed that we need to reconstitute this taskforce by finding representatives of affiliates prepared to take on the work. It is



Foreground (L to R): Mike Zweig, David Newby, Christine Geonvanis, Karen Klipowicz



Mike Zweig

essential that whoever serves on the taskforce does so in behalf of their organization, not just as an individual.

New Leadership

The Conference accepted the resignation of Eileen Connelly (SEIU PA Council President) as co-convenor in light of her decision to take a job outside the labor movement. It unanimously agreed to appoint Mike Zweig as a new co-convenor while recommitting to further diversify the leadership to better reflect the gender, race, ethnicity and age characteristics of the labor movement. There was unanimous consent to express to Eileen Connelly on behalf of the organization our deep

appreciation for her many contributions to the development of USLAW.

In reviewing vacancies on the [Steering Committee](#) – which is composed by category of organizations – there was agreement that AFT-Wisconsin should fill one vacancy for the category of regional organizations. That leaves one seat open.

There are two vacancies for small local unions. There was consensus to seek a Jobs With Justice chapter to fill the vacancy for Local Allied Labor Organizations. Coalition of Immokalee Workers will be approached about filling the vacancy for Other Labor Organizations.

Following an evaluation of the meeting, the conference adjourned.

Photo Credits: p. 5 *IVAW March* and p.10 *War in Madison* by Hal Sutton;
all others by Michael Eisenscher

[Thanks to Karen Klipowicz for taking comprehensive detailed notes of the proceedings.]

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