

Jewish Labor Committee

Activities Highlights 2009

The Jewish Labor Committee, an independent secular organization, is the voice of the Jewish community in the labor movement and the voice of the labor movement in the Jewish community. Whether through its national office in New York or local offices and lay-led groups across the United States, the JLC enables the Jewish community and the trade union movement to work together on important issues of shared interest and concern, in pursuit of our shared commitment to economic and social justice.

For 75 years, the Jewish Labor Committee has served as the bridge linking the Jewish community and organized labor.

Our national headquarters are in New York City and we have regional offices staffed in Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago and Los Angeles, as well as volunteer-led affiliated groups in Cleveland, Detroit, Seattle and Arizona.

NATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Supporting Israel, opposing anti-Israel divestment and boycott campaigns

Due to its extensive relationships and credibility within the labor movement, the Jewish Labor Committee continues to play a unique role in combating anti-Israel efforts. In response to continuing support for Israel divestment and boycott calls, JLC organized a delegation of Irish-American members of the United States trade union movement to visit Ireland in late 2008. There they met with members of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) in a series of consultations aimed at encouraging engagement with Israel rather than calls for boycotting Israeli products. When this effort proved fruitless and the ICTU continued their campaign, the same Irish-American labor leaders publicly urged the ICTU to reconsider their position by publishing an editorial piece on March 1, 2009 in Ireland's largest selling daily paper, *The Independent*.

JLC is a founding member of "Trade Unions Linking Israel and Palestine" or TULIP, an online project "to challenge the apologists for Hamas and Hizbollah in the labor movement and to fight for a two-state solution to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians."

JLC President Stuart Appelbaum helped launch the trade union-based project as a founding signer of TULIP's statement of principles on behalf of the

Retail, Wholesale Department Store Union, UFCW. The other signing founders are Paul Howes, the National Secretary of the Australian Workers Union, who represents one of Australia's largest and oldest unions, and Michael J. Leahy, General Secretary of the UK's Community union.

On May 21st, Appelbaum and Howes met with the press and the New York City Central Labor Council to launch the movement and garner attention for TULIP in the U.S. Interest continues to increase. On September 21st, the Jewish Labor Committee issued a statement about the adoption by the British Trades Union Congress of policy on the Middle East. JLC stated, "We welcome the TUC's affirmation of support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and emphasis on security for all parties. Yet, the resolution simultaneously seeks to impose military and economic sanctions against only one party to the conflict - the state of Israel and its democratic trade union center, the Histadrut. The resolution thus undermines the very end that the TUC and trade unionists around the world fervently desire: a democratic, two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine question." JLC's statement was quoted online in an article in the "Comment is Free" section of the UK's newspaper, *The Guardian*; "TUC should focus on Iran, not Israel."

Iran

The Jewish Labor Committee is an important member of the National Inter-Agency Task Force on Iran, which includes diverse representation from local and

national Jewish communal institutions across the country. All major religious sectors within the American Jewish community have endorsed the Task

Force. Quoted in the September 20th edition of *The Jerusalem Post*, JLC President Stuart Appelbaum stated, "Our concern is the suppression of workers' rights in Iran and the suppression of democracy I think we've had long-standing concerns and the coalition that came together on Iran gave us the opportunity to express those concerns."

In Washington, DC, then-JLC Executive Director Sybil Sanchez, delivered the following message from the AFL-CIO to the National Jewish Leadership Advocacy Day on Iran, which focused on urging Congress to strengthen sanctions against Iran:

The AFL-CIO, on behalf of its nearly ten million members, repeats the call for full democratic rights for all Iranians, including freedom of association and freedom of assembly. The government of Iran must cease all violent repression, must release all imprisoned trade unionists, and must recognize all independent workers' organizations in Iran. We urge the

government of Iran to respect workers' rights and stop repression against peaceful demonstrations.

On September 24, 2009, Appelbaum spoke on behalf of the Retail, Wholesale Department Store Union, UFCW and the JLC at New York's 'Stand for Freedom in Iran' rally as did J. David Cox, National Secretary-Treasurer of the American Federation of Government Employees. The New York City Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO was a participating organization as were the national American Federation of Teachers and New York's United Federation of Teachers. The same day, Chicago JLC helped organize an event where Hank Scheff of AFSCME Council 31, Illinois State Representatives Will Davis and Illinois State Representative Lou Lang, Illinois State Senator Jeffrey Schoenberg, Illinois State Board of Investments Executive Director Bill Atwood and Jewish United Fund Executive Vice President Michael Kotzin announced the divestment of \$133 million of state pension funds from companies doing business with Iran.

Employee Free Choice Act

The Jewish Labor Committee has mobilized the Jewish community around the country in support of the Employee Free Choice Act. This much-needed legislation has three important principles: Workers would more easily be able to join or form a union; employers who break the law in efforts to stop union organizing would face penalties that are more stringent, and workers who have chosen to form a union would have a clear path to an initial collective bargaining agreement with their employer.

Working with the AFL-CIO, JLC initiated a website of rabbinic support for the act and through other means has been building a coalition of pro-EFCA Jewish organizations and individuals, focusing on Pennsylvania and California. In September, with the support of American Rights at Work, JLC brought a delegation from those states as well as our national office in New York to a Washington, D.C., lobby day.

JLC joined hundreds of labor, environmental, religious and community advocates on Capitol Hill to urge that Congress pass the Employee Free Choice Act.

JLC's annual Labor Day message was "Celebrate Labor Day by supporting the Employee Free Choice Act." The *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* published it as did the *Baltimore Jewish Times*, the *Ohio Jewish Journal*, the *New Jersey Jewish News*, Philadelphia's *Jewish Exponent*, the *Jewish Times of Southern New Jersey*, the *New Jersey Jewish Standard*, the *Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle*, the Broome County [NY] Jewish federation's Reporter and elsewhere. The article included a statement by Ofer Eini, chair of the *Histadrut*, Israel's federation of labor, conveying his support for the act and explaining how Israeli legislation is complementary to what is being proposed.

Holocaust and Jewish Resistance Teachers Program

Our Holocaust and Jewish Resistance Teachers Program for U.S. public secondary schools, initiated by Vladka Meed in 1985, had another successful three-week seminar in Poland and Israel this summer. Thirty-two teachers came from 17 states and Washington, DC, and had an intense immersion in the pedagogy of this tragic part of our – and the world's – history. They received content, proficiency, and processes to skillfully teach the Holocaust and Jewish Resistance to their students, fellow teachers and

community members. To date, nearly 900 educators have participated in this program. We estimate our "alumni" reach nearly 15,000 students a year. This internationally acclaimed program is sponsored by the Jewish Labor Committee's Educators Chapter, the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and the American Federation of Teachers. Many of our teachers are associated with the National Education Association as well, and our alumni can be found in nearly every state, as well as Washington, DC,

and St. Croix Virgin Islands. We are working on our 14th National Alumni Conference, to be held in

Washington, DC, in February 2010.

Labor Seder Program

The Jewish Labor Committee's Labor Seder project commenced about ten years ago. Modeled after a full

Passover seder – the labor seders have been designed to bring together people from the labor and Jewish communities, and to familiarize each community of the other's values and issues. We have prepared and use a special *Jewish Labor Committee Passover Haggadah*, which brings out labor themes and messages inherently in the traditional *haggadah*. Labor Seders often also tie these into current issues (national and local), and we try to generate

conversations between people from the Labor and Jewish communities.

Since its inception, this labor seder program has gradually added new communities around the country and reached additional people. In 2009, Labor Seders were held in twelve communities and involved over 800 participants - three of those being new endeavors - and strong seeds were planted in a number of other locations.

Jews and Labor Community Building

Our objective is to build and strengthen mutual support between Jewish and labor leaders for issues that are important to both of our communities, ranging from domestic economic and social issues to support for Israel and combating anti-Semitism.

Days before then-President Elect Obama was sworn in, the Jewish Labor Committee convened a national consultation of key national Jewish communal and labor movement leaders to discuss the Jewish-labor connection and our shared agenda. The meeting was organized with the help of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. JLC then followed up in late February with one of the few officially sanctioned events at this year's Executive Council meeting of the AFL-CIO in Florida. The JLC breakfast was co-sponsored by then-AFL-CIO

President John Sweeney, Communications Workers of America President Larry Cohen, American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, and Israel's Consul-General to Miami Ofer Bavly. JLC also held a cocktail reception in May at the AFL-CIO's annual Legislators Coordinating Committee – coincidentally, also in Florida - in honor of Florida employment lawyer Robert Sugarman. Lastly, JLC participated in this year's Diversity Summit and quadrennial Constitutional Convention of the AFL-CIO.

JLC is participating in a series of national and local campaigns targeted at engaging the Jewish community and the labor movement on issues of mutual concern, such as health care reform, comprehensive immigration reform, "green jobs – good jobs," and human trafficking.

REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Philadelphia Region

As part of an effort to recognize the recent national labor leadership elections in Pittsburgh, celebrate the Jewish New Year, and stand in support of the state and people of Israel, thirty Philadelphia-area labor, government, and community leaders gathered at the Israeli Consulate in Philadelphia on September 24th to honor the relationship between the U.S. and Israeli labor movements. Sharing hosting duties were Patrick Eiding, President of the Philadelphia Council AFL-CIO, along with Consul General Daniel Kutner. The event was MC'ed by Deputy Consul General Raslan Abu Rukun.

For many years, PJLC has reached out to local synagogues and temples, to arrange for speakers on

the issue of basic workers' rights, or otherwise have the issue of Judaism's respect for labor incorporated in some way during the Labor Day – *Rosh HaShana* period. This year, PJLC focused on health care reform legislation, highlighting it as part of their annual Labor on the *Bimah* program. Rabbinic intern Zach Silver prepared and distributed health care – related material, including a sermon, text study and facilitator's guide, to area rabbis for use either for Labor Day or into the High Holidays.

Other local activities have included monthly outreach to the media by PJLC leadership and members of PJLC's Rabbinic Cabinet, discussions with other Jewish agencies and area businesses to

garner support, and other forms of outreach to our members and the community-at-large.

PJLC held private meetings with nine national and state legislators and ten community leaders to address the social service needs of the Jewish and general population by advocating poverty-reduction policies (such as accessible health care, and the passage of the Employee Free Choice Act, two priorities of 2009). In addition, PJLC conducted individual meetings with 19 different labor leaders to discuss the shared policy agenda with the Jewish community, issues ranging from poverty reduction to anti-Semitism and labor support for Israel.

Philadelphia JLC's Rabbinic Cabinet, a network of pro-labor rabbis, continued to support working family issues, working on two local workplace campaigns as well as the larger issue of health care reform. This year's local Labor Seder a mix of 33 Jewish communal and local labor leaders.

Philadelphia JLC Director Rosalind Spigel coordinated another "Teaching the Lessons of the Holocaust" workshop at an annual conference of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, utilizing skills of

local alumni of our Holocaust and Jewish Resistance Teachers Program.

In support of working families and a path to economic security, Philadelphia JLC secured the support of 28 rabbis, who signed onto a letter in support of the Employee Free Choice Act that we brought to Senator Arlen Specter. The letter was later published in Philadelphia's *Jewish Exponent* - with an additional number of area rabbis and rabbinical students signing on as well. PJLC also cosponsored an interfaith prayer breakfast with Black Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity, with the Senator's staff in attendance. Following the example of the rabbinic sign-on letter, PJLC then wrote and gathered signatures from 17 Jewish business and professional owners in support of the Employee Free Choice, which we delivered by hand to legislators when PJLC visited Capitol Hill as part of a national advocacy initiative in support of EFCA.

Philadelphia JLC's Labor Human Rights Award Reception honored Greg Rosenbaum, CEO of Empire Kosher Poultry, and Senator Robert P. Casey.

Boston/New England Region

For quite some time, New England JLC has supported the workers of Commercial Cleaners who have reported incidences of sexual harassment, pay discrepancies, and health and safety violations. In addition to organizing a public hearing where workers told their stories, NEJLC has been working with synagogues that contract with Commercial Cleaning to take a stand for the workers.

Early in 2009, NEJLC co-hosted an "Interfaith Clergy in Support of Labor Breakfast" to get the message out about the Employee Free Choice Act, along with Jobs for Justice and Mass Interfaith Worker Justice. Rabbi Barbara Penzner, Chair of NEJLC's Rabbinical Council was one of the speakers and Rabbi Victor Reinstein, also of the NEJLC's Rabbinical Council, gave the opening benediction.

New England JLC held its 9th Labor Seder on April 2nd at the headquarters of SEIU Local 615. Over 160 people of all ages attended the festive program, cosponsored with Moishe House Boston: the Kavod Jewish Social Justice House.

In October, the Massachusetts Board of Rabbis, following the leadership of NEJLC Rabbinical Cabinet members Rabbi Victor Reinstein, Rabbi Barbara Penzner and others of the MBR Public Policy Committee, passed an important 'Statement on Labor', which may be the basis for similar board of rabbi statements in other communities.

Also in October, New England Jewish Labor Committee and Boston Workmen's Circle presented the documentary *At Home In Utopia*, a movie on the left-wing - predominantly Jewish - housing

cooperative apartment projects in the Bronx formed in the 1920s and 1930s. The showing was followed by a discussion on the current economic crises. Other sponsors included the Jewish Organizing Initiative, Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action, Moishe/Kavod House, and Filmmakers Collaborative.

NEJLC has engaged Massachusetts-based rabbis, cantors and synagogues to speak up about the firing of 100 Hyatt housekeepers from three Boston locations. The housekeepers, many of whom worked for Hyatt for 20 or more years and received between \$15 and \$16 an hour plus benefits, were replaced with contracted workers who are receiving a minimum wage without benefits. A petition initiated by Rabbi Barbara Penzner, calling on all Jewish institutions and individuals who might otherwise stay at these three Boston-area Hyatt hotels to find other accommodations while they are in Boston until the Hyatt rehires the housekeepers, was signed by over 220 rabbis and cantors; Rabbi Penzner brought the petition to Hyatt's corporate headquarters in Chicago in mid-December.

100 people attended the showing on November 15th, cosponsored by the New England Jewish Labor Committee and the Boston Jewish Film Festival, of *The Tale of Nikolai and the Law of Return* at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts. The documentary explored the situation of guest workers in the State of Israel, focusing on an out-of-work Romanian who left his family to earn money in Israel, and after three years as a "guest worker," tired of giving most of his pay to his employer, became an "illegal," and was caught and

sent to prison.

New England JLC cosponsored a hearing on immigrant workers' rights on International Human Rights Day, December 10th, 2009, at Boston's St. Paul's Cathedral, where testimony by immigrant workers, and workers' rights experts, explored workplace issues and challenges. Rabbi Barbara Penzner of Temple Hillel B'nai Torah, was joined by representatives of the Unitarian Universalist

Association, Amnesty International USA, Union Minority Neighborhoods, and the New England Conference of United Methodist Church. Sponsoring organizations included Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries, Irish Immigration Center, MIRA Coalition, Mass Interfaith Worker Justice, Massachusetts Jobs with Justice, MassNOW, SEIU 509, SEIU Local 615, UE District 2, UNITE HERE New England Joint Board.

Los Angeles/Western Region

The Jewish Labor Committee Western Region has been involved in the Los Angeles County Unity Coalition working to educate trade unionists of the scourge of human trafficking. JLCWR Executive Director Leslie Gersicoff and Program Director Jerilyn Stapleton have been making presentations on how to identify possible situations where workers may be trafficked and how to safely and anonymously report suspicions.

The Jewish Labor Committee Western Region has also been involved with the Labor Task Force for Universal Healthcare, supporting H.R. 676 at the national level and demanding that single-payer be included in the health care discussions currently engaging Congress. It is also active in educating the public about the State Bill 810 (Leno) for single-payer healthcare in California, which could take precedence over a national plan if the Kucinich Amendment is effective.

The Jewish Labor Committee Western Region President Floyd Glen-Lambert and Executive Director Leslie Gersicoff participated in the American Rights at Work - AFL-CIO lobby day in Washington, DC, for the Employee Free Choice Act, visiting representatives and senators.

A large delegation of the Jewish Labor Committee Western Region lay leaders and staff participated in this year's Jewish Public Affairs Committee of California's lobby day in Sacramento, CA. One key issue on JPAC's agenda included senior home health care to keep elders from being forced into nursing homes due to cutbacks in the amount of days home health care workers could be provided. (While deep cuts were made via the most recent state budget, the cuts were finally overturned by the state court, so for this time, affected seniors will be able to stay in their homes.)

The Jewish Labor Committee Western Region President Glen-Lambert is working on two Jewish Political Affairs Committee issues: divestment from companies doing business with Iran; and anti-Semitic activities on Southern California campuses. JLCWR

Executive Director Leslie Gersicoff is on a JPAC committee to bring civic works projects to California.

In June, the Jewish Labor Committee Western Region celebrated JLC's 75th Anniversary with its annual brunch. Honorees included Mike Quevedo, Jr., of the Laborers International Union of North America, who has had a 50-year career; James Brubaker, a film producer whose films include *Gia* and *Liar, Liar* and whose work with Universal film crews has earned him the respect of the entertainment labor unions; Carmela Lacayo, a community activist responsible for developing housing and health care for the Hispanic elderly and others; and CA State Controller John Chiang, who became a champion of the people when he refused to follow the Governor's demand that state employees' wages be reduced to the Federal minimum wage - which is less than the California state minimum wage - during the most recent budget dispute.

Earlier, the Jewish Labor Committee Western Region held its annual Labor Seder, celebrating Passover with guests from unions, community social justice groups, and long-time friends from diverse sectors of the community. The Seder incorporated labor issues and campaigns, including the issue of deaths in the fields from heatstroke, which is a priority of the United Farm Workers, the organizing campaign of the Car Wash Workers, health care, and human trafficking.

The Jewish Labor Committee Western Region has worked behind the scenes in several labor disputes this past year to bring about meetings that might lead to resolutions, as well as events seen by the community-at-large. For instance, the JLCWR sponsored a picket line at the Vermont Hand Wash for the Clean Car Wash Campaign and has participated in others in Hollywood and Northridge, CA. (In one of five car washes owned by a single family, the owners and a manager had been charged with over 200 criminal counts of labor, safety and criminal threats against employees. A settlement has brought workers monetary settlements but as yet no contract.)

Chicago/Midwestern Region

On January 9, 2009, three thousand Chicago-area residents gathered in Federal Plaza to support Israel in

defending its citizens against rocket attacks from Hamas in Gaza. A number of community and political

leaders addressed the crowd. Chicago JLC arranged for the following statement that had been prepared by Henry Bayer, the executive director of AFSCME Council 31 to be read: "No nation would tolerate wanton rocket attacks on its civilian population. The world must act to stop these attacks and prevent the rearming of Hamas terrorists as a precondition to the peace in the Middle East that we all want."

The Labor in the Pulpits programming done in association with ARISE Chicago, which was formerly Chicago Interfaith for Worker Justice, was a priority for August. The program involves contacting rabbis throughout the Chicago area and encouraging them to raise labor issues on the Sabbath preceding Labor Day. Chicago JLC supplies rabbis with materials they can use to prepare their own message, as well as provides speakers for Friday night or Sabbath morning services. Chicago JLC Regional Director Eli Fishman coordinated outreach to rabbis by an ARISE intern, a volunteer, and himself. They arranged for speakers in a half-dozen congregations and sent out material to an equal number of rabbis speaking to their own congregations on labor issues.

Chicago JLC Director Fishman spoke at a Jewish Federation-sponsored event along with a number of Illinois state legislators regarding a new state law requiring divestment from companies doing business with Iran. (\$133,000,000 in state pension funds were withdrawn from those companies.)

Fishman also reached out to a well-known pro-labor Orthodox rabbi in Chicago, as well as to the main headquarters of the Orthodox Union's kosher supervising service, in an attempt to resolve a problem with a truck wash operator who was mistreating employees and interfering with a union organizing drive. (The truck

wash has been certified as kosher by the OU.)

The Chicago JLC recently organized and co-sponsored an eight-week class on the Holocaust called "Teaching of the Holocaust," with the Chicago Teachers Union, which recruited its members to participate. The JLC has provided the CTU with a qualified instructor, Joyce Witt, one of the over 900 alumni of the JLC's Holocaust and Jewish Resistance Teachers Program. The class takes place at Wells High School on the Near West Side. Classes run three hours once a week for fifteen weeks. Subject matter covered in the class includes, defining the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, resistance activities and genocide today. Public school teachers from neighborhood schools throughout the City of Chicago attend the class.

The Chicago JLC is working with the CTU to arrange for study tours to the new Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center, in Skokie, for leaders of the CTU's QuEST Center, which was established to provide CTU's members with ongoing instruction. (Although teaching the Holocaust in public schools is mandated by the State of Illinois, many teachers do not have adequate training in the subject. The recently-opened center offers the community a tremendous opportunity to teach about the Shoah.)

The Chicago JLC, in cooperation with the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs and UNITE-HERE continues to support the striking workers of the downtown Congress Hotel. The strike, at its six year mark, is one of the longest strikes in U.S. history. The hotel owners refuse to participate in a contract offering housekeepers pay and benefits comparable to those in all other major downtown hotels. They participated in a Labor Day rally at the Congress Hotel, and a subsequent sit-down strike at the Park Hyatt.

New York / United Hebrew Trades

The United Hebrew Trades – New York JLC held this year's Labor Seder at the headquarters of Local 802 of the American Federation of Musicians in Manhattan's Theatre District, with over 50 people in attendance from the local labor movement and the organized Jewish community.

UHT Coordinator Carolyn De Paolo has participated in a number of hearings of the New York State Senate and Assembly dealing with keeping mechanical lever voting machines as opposed to electronic voting machines; she spoke on October 28th at a hearing of the New York City Council in support of a resolution in support of keeping lever-recorded voting in the city.

UHT reached out to the New York City Council regarding a key vote on a multi-million dollar

proposal to redevelop Kingsbridge Armory in the Bronx, the largest armory in the U.S., into a mega mall. We urged council members to vote against the proposal unless it included provisions for future mall workers to receive a living wage of \$10. (According to the Drum Major Institute, the armory project -- without a guarantee that future retail tenants would pay their workers a living wage -- would have been a serious financial drain on New York. In addition to the cost of providing tens of millions of dollars in tax breaks, the city and state would have had to subsidize the project again by providing food stamps, Medicaid, and other assistance to retail workers at the Armory who would not otherwise be able to make ends meet on poverty-level wages.)