

# Why unions don't want you to vote . . .



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## Organizing director offers fighting words at state conference

By Steve Share, Minneapolis Labor Review editor — March 1, 2004

MINNEAPOLIS — “The American labor movement faces a crisis and decline in membership and density. We continue to struggle just to tread water.” This blunt message came from national AFL-CIO director of organizing Stuart Acuff, speaking to a one-day organizing conference hosted by the Minnesota AFL-CIO.

Dozens of union organizers gathered for the event Feb. 26 at the Sheraton Four Points Hotel in Minneapolis.

→ Acuff said the labor movement needs to transform itself and move from “servicing institutions to organizing institutions.” Local unions, he said, should be fielding one organizer for every 100 workers.

Unions, he said, need to return to an emphasis on the fundamentals of organizing, move to more strategic organizing, and challenge head-on the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and its institutional barriers to organizing.

→ “The National Labor Relations Board and its processes not only do not protect the right to organize, they inhibit it,” Acuff said. “It’s time we name that and act on it... it’s time we had a real fight in this country on the right to organize.”

Acuff cited a report by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, which ranked the United States among the four worst countries in the world when it comes to the right of workers to organize. “It’s a shame and a disgrace,” he said.

Every year in the United States, Acuff said, “according to the NLRB’s own statistics, 20,000 American workers are victimized for trying to form a union or for other union activity.”

“Every local organizing campaign has to be a referendum on human rights in that community,” Acuff said.

Acuff said Congressional support is building for the Employee Free Choice Act, which would do away with NLRB elections and instead certify unions when a majority of workers sign union authorization cards. He added that all of the Democratic candidates for president have endorsed the Employee Free Choice Act.

With the presidency and the U.S. House of Representatives at stake in this year’s national election, Acuff said, “we’ve got to campaign as if our way of life is at stake.”

Acuff said that the growing inequality of wealth and income in the United States and the erosion of workers’ health care and retirement benefits all are related to the current obstacles to the right of American workers to organize unions.

“We’ve got to tell the bastards, you might have stolen an election... but you won’t steal this labor movement,” Acuff said. “Too much blood, too much sweat has been shed for us to walk away from this fight.”

Workday Minnesota is a collaborative effort of the Labor Education Service and the Minnesota AFL-CIO on behalf of working people in Minnesota. Contact us at [editor@workdayminnesota.org](mailto:editor@workdayminnesota.org) or by calling 612-624-1104.

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