



Jewish Labor Committee

140 West 31st Street, 3rd Floor ♦ New York, NY 10001

Tel 212-477-0707 ♦ fax 212-477-1918

Email info@jewishlabor.org ♦ web www.jewishlabor.org

2012 Program Highlights

As the voice of the Jewish community in the labor movement and the voice of the labor movement in the Jewish community, the Jewish Labor Committee engages in programs of value to both communities. Below are highlights of our activities during the first ten months of 2012.

Labor Seders

The Jewish Labor Committee holds *Labor Seders* annually in a number of communities. This spring, the JLC sponsored or co-sponsored Labor Seders in Boston, New York City, West Orange NJ, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Houston, St. Louis, Madison WI, Washington DC and Chicago. Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick and U.S. Senate candidate Elizabeth Warren spoke at a pre-Seder reception in Boston.

These Labor Seders bring together local Jewish community leaders and local trade union leaders. Most use our unique *JLC Passover Haggadah*. Inspired by the event in Houston, that city now also sees special Interfaith Anti-Human Trafficking Seders, co-sponsored by the JLC and organized by the Houston Rescue and Restore Coalition and the Greater Houston Section of the National Council of Jewish Women, with the support of the Justice and Peace Council of the Christ Cathedral Church.

U.S. – Israel “Friendship Agreements”

The Jewish Labor Committee is working to broker Friendship Agreements between local trade union councils in U.S. communities with their counterpart trade union councils within Israel. So far, agreements have been signed between the Greater Boston Labor Council and Haifa Histadrut Council, the Philadelphia Council AFL-CIO and the Tel Aviv Histadrut Council, and we are working on similar agreements between CLCs in Chicago, St. Louis and Seattle.

Our goal is to develop meaningful council-to-council, person-to-person and face-to-face relations between U.S. and Israeli trade unionists that foster community relations and trade union solidarity across borders, and create interactions between Israeli and American trade unionists that naturally counter potential proposals of anti-Israel resolutions that call for boycotting of or divestment from Israeli goods, services and academic institutions.

In other related activity, we recently widely disseminated a report on a significant speech in defense of Israel by an Australian Labour government minister. We noted that he detailed the pressure that was exerted on Australia to vote in favor of the Palestinian request for

enhanced observer status at the United Nations, with the implication that Australia would otherwise not win a seat on the Security Council. Australia's Labour Party-led government, which supports a two-state solution and negotiations to achieve that end, does not support the proposed changes in the U.N. States of the Palestinian Authority. It resisted the pressure put on it, and, despite that, Australia was recently elected to the U.N. Security Council. This is the sort of story that would not otherwise be circulated in the U.S. but which the JLC received from a colleague in Australian Member of Parliament with whom we are in contact.

Labor Day Events

Labor On The Bimah: For many years, local Jewish Labor Committee field staff has reached out to congregational rabbis to ask them to in some way dedicate one of their services, ideally near Labor Day, to focus on the issue of workers, workers' rights and the intersection of Jewish faith, tradition, text, history and culture with these rights. This could include a special *Dvar Torah*, a speaker, or some such event. For example, the New England JLC arranged for a number of representatives, including union leaders and members, attorneys and a rabbi to discuss links between Jewish values and the fight for better treatment of working men and women at synagogues and a number of similar institutions in the Greater Boston area. Text of a *Dvar Torah* given by JLC Executive Committee member at his synagogue was reprinted in Greater Boston's *Jewish Advocate*. The Chicago JLC arranged for a dozen Labor On The Bimah activities in the Greater Chicago area. And the national JLC reached out to congregations across the United States, asking rabbis to use the Torah reading of the weekend before Labor Day as a springboard for a discussion of Jewish teachings about workers' rights.

Labor Day 2012 and Jewish Values, a Labor Day Op-Ed article by JLC President Stuart Appelbaum was published by the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* and disseminated by the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. It was highlighted on websites of many union local and central labor council websites and appeared in Jewish community publications in such places as New York, New Jersey, New Orleans, Northern California, St. Louis, Columbus, Minnesota, Pittsburgh, Arizona, Salem MA, Long Island and Orlando, FL

Supporting Israel: Opposing BDS (Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions)

Working with colleagues in Israel, the U.S. and elsewhere, JLC activists were instrumental in blocking an anti-Israel resolution that was submitted for adoption at a major international labor confederation convention that has as members national trade unions representing 12 million workers in 120 countries. This summer, JLC President Appelbaum participated in a consultation in Jerusalem of a small group of leaders in the Jewish Diaspora, Israeli think tanks and Israeli political figures to discuss productive ways to counter the BDS movement.

Appelbaum is one of the three international trade union leaders of TULIP (Trade Unions Linking Israel and Palestine), together with the heads of the Australian Workers' Union and the United Kingdom's Community Union.

The Chicago JLC worked with the largest statewide public employee union as it publicly supported divestment from Iran's energy sector by the City of Chicago and Cook County, Illinois.

To foster a better understanding of Israel within the labor movement, the Philadelphia JLC held a briefing on "Good Jobs, Green Jobs" that examined environmentally-conscious jobs within Israel and what lessons they can provide for the U.S. job scene.

The JLC joined a U.S.-based international taskforce focusing on women and gender segregation in Israel, and JLC Associate Director Arie Lebowitz shared information on related work within a key body of the World Zionist Organization, the WZO's Vaad Hapoel, of which he is a member. Lebowitz participated in the June 2012 session of this body, meeting in Jerusalem.

Workers' Rights/Economic Justice Campaigns

After months of preparatory work by JLC staff and colleagues in a number of national and local Jewish organizations, a resolution in support of collective bargaining in the public sector was passed by an overwhelming majority of delegates to the annual conference of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, a body that encompasses 14 national and 125 local independent Jewish community relations agencies. The JLC, a founding member of the JCPA, was one of the sponsors of the resolution.

At the national level, the JLC continues to be active in a campaign to mobilize the organized Jewish community in the U.S. in support of hotel staff at the Hyatt Hotel chain who are struggling for fair working conditions. We are active in the "Organizing in the Jewish Community" group, working in consultation with the AFL-CIO and the UNITE-HERE union. We were able to secure a letter of support for Hyatt hotel workers from the Chairman of Israel's union of hotel workers. The JLC participated in the Washington, DC launch of this global campaign. Our regional offices in Los Angeles, Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago have participated in support activities for the Hyatt workers.

At the request of the Minnesota AFL-CIO and the Bakery and Confectionary union (BCTGM), the JLC is preparing an appeal in support of the national campaign in support of the 1,300 locked-out workers at American Crystal Sugar in Minnesota, North Dakota and Iowa. We will then get signatories to a list of "Concerned Jews for the Workers at American Crystal Sugar" that calls on management to end the lock-out and negotiate a fair contract.

The Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) and the AFL-CIO reached out to the JLC to secure the support of ten rabbis for a campaign to assist tobacco farm workers in the South. Within a few days, the JLC secured the support of many more rabbis than the initial ten requested.

JLC is working with Local 226, the culinary workers in Las Vegas, in support of the employees at Station Casino who are trying to secure union representation. We have written the casino's management urging them to respect the wishes of their employees to be represented by the union. We sent copies to key national Jewish communal leadership as well as the casino's major investors and are preparing to share information about this struggle more broadly.

When the Chicago Teachers Union went out on strike, Michael Perry, the Chair of the Chicago JLC spoke out in favor of the teachers and support staff in their efforts to achieve a fair contract for themselves, their students and the City of Chicago. The Chicago JLC participated in a labor rally, "Jobs, Not Cuts, Day of Action," protesting the elimination of many public service jobs due to reduced tax revenues.

JLC continued its support for Verizon workers struggling to secure a fair contract, joining the Communications Workers of America and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers as they leafleted in front of Verizon Wireless stores. In New York City, the United Hebrew Trades, the N.Y. division of the JLC, was active in the successful campaign for the "Fair Wages for New Yorkers Act" before the City Council, participating in rallies and reaching out to NYC rabbis. The New England Jewish Labor Committee joined the SEIU 615 janitors, whose contract was about to expire, at their demonstration calling for a fair contract. The demonstration, in downtown Boston, featured prayer, song, a *shofar* blowing and testimonials and included members of the Jewish community of Greater Boston and members of Local 615.

The Philadelphia JLC was well represented at the August rally to promote a Workers' Second Bill of Rights and the national Jewish Labor Committee urged people to sign the document. The Philadelphia JLC is also continuing its *Jewish Labor Series* of public panel discussions, holding sessions on "Public School 'Choice': Vouchers and the Risk to Public

Education” as well as on immigration reform and on the attempts to suppress the vote in the recent elections.

The Jewish Labor Committee is a partner in the "Caring Across Generations" campaign - a national grassroots movement to improve how we care for elders and people with disabilities in the United States, and to improve conditions for the workers who provide that care. And we have recently joined the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable.

Holocaust and Jewish Resistance Teachers Program

This year marks the 27th year of this internationally-acclaimed program that provides educators with the content and skills to effectively teach students, fellow teachers and community members about the Holocaust and Jewish resistance. JLC regional directors have had programs that involve Holocaust and Jewish Resistance Teachers program alumni in their area. In addition, they implement other Holocaust education programs at the local level. For example, this summer the Chicago JLC arranged for members of the Chicago Teachers Union to take a special tour of the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center in Skokie.

Adding to the JLC's Online Presence

This past year, the JLC opened its own Facebook page – which can be viewed at <https://www.facebook.com/Jewish.Labor.Committee>. You are invited to join the many people and institutions who “like” the page. This includes people from many countries, many of whom were not previously connected to the JLC in any way. In addition, there are now local Facebook pages for the New England JLC, the Philadelphia JLC, the JLC Western Region and the UFT Jewish Heritage Committee/Educators’ Chapter of the JLC. And we have just established a Twitter account.

Through these social media avenues, we can disseminate not only activities and programs of the JLC and its regional offices, but also a range of articles and activities of interest.

Support the JLC

There are a number of ways you can support the JLC and its work. Your involvement and that of others like you help make our work possible. You’re invited to contact us for more information – just get in touch with our national office.