

Training & Support For The Labor and Civil Rights Movements

Internal and External Organizing to Develop Leaders, Build Power and Fight Back

Advancing a Unifying Narrative for Racial Justice and Economic Opportunity

SUMMARY

The labor movement may very well have dodged a lethal bullet with the unforeseen death of Justice Scalia last year as the Friedrichs case was hurtling toward the Court. Today, after a year of non-stop political convulsions, unions have very little time to prepare for the next salvo. The likelihood of a new round of existential attacks on labor rights *and* civil rights through the courts, state legislatures, and White House remains high. Some have already started.

After a year of populist anger on the left and right, frustration and pain over racial injustice and economic inequality, and now a surge of protest and political participation, there are some signs of hope. But hope and anger, even with renewed activism and political engagement, will not bring about the political force needed to arrest the rise of economic inequality and the assaults on labor and civil rights without sustained organized and institutional power.

As diminished as the labor movement is today it remains one of, if not the most important and viable people's organizations in America. It's survival and revival is critical to America's chances of averting economic, social, and environmental disaster and for moving us back on a track toward shared prosperity, equal opportunity and social and racial justice.

PURPOSE AND DESCRIPTION OF THIS PROGRAM

If organized labor is to survive and ever begin to reverse the downward spiral of power, influence, and membership of the last 40 years, then it must stop doing what it has been doing and start doing things differently. No doubt, this is easier said than done, especially since many unions are convinced they already are, or have tried, doing things differently, including innovations in communication and data technology as well as coalition building among allies and supporters. But advancements in technology only impact the scale and speed of organizing people and money. And mobilizing like-minded progressives or pro-union activists adds nothing to labor's power and too often alienates the middle and working-class men and women that the labor movement so desperately needs to win back.

The basic building blocks of organizing working people and the principles for fighting and winning campaigns have not changed and cannot be sidestepped. But they do need to be retrofitted to changing workplaces, economic structures and new and emerging technologies - as well as changing demographics and geography.

Those principles and building blocks are:

1. Leadership identification, recruitment, and development;
2. An understanding of power and the ability to analyze power at all levels (from the workplace to Wall Street and from the Statehouse to Congress);
3. The development of strategies and of strategic thinking among members, allies and staff;

and

4. The creative application of tactics during the course of strategic campaigns (at all levels).

Building One America provides professional leadership training and strategic consultation for members, allies and staff that include these basic elements of external and internal organizing. The main purpose of such training is to support the critical need for unions today to build and strengthen the organizational and relational infrastructure among their members and allies - especially in “open-shop” situations and in regions and industries that are under sustained threat and assaults from hostile politics and anti-union policies.

But while unions need to defend and bolster themselves, they must also continue to organize and expand in traditional industries and within changing workplaces and economic structures. BOA’s training and organizing support is applicable to both existing members and bargaining units, as well as to new and potential members in organizing drives regardless of the industry, workplace or profession.

Today more than ever, unions need to be reintroduced to and immersed in the nuts-and-bolts of one-to-one organizing to build and rebuild their membership. But as essential as this is, people still need more than nuts-and-bolts to be inspired, sustained and motivated to join, fight for, and rebuild the labor movement. Working people need better explanations of the economic pressures and political dynamics working against their solidarity and power than just slogans, moralizing or divisive identity politics. Nor does it help to avoid the anxieties and fears around issues of race, immigration, automation, and globalization so cleverly exploited by right-wing demagogues.

We believe working people need and deserve an intelligent analysis and a coherent and unifying message that is based on power and their own self-interest and one that provides both an historical and a political perspective not just on work, but on race, class and place.

Building One America provides such an analysis and an understanding of the key principles of organizing to be prepared, armed and motivated to build and sustain a strong defense against labor’s enemies and to begin to put forward a more compelling vision for America’s future.

BUILDING ONE AMERICA

Building One America is a civil rights organizing and training institute that advances its agenda through education, organizing and mobilization of diverse constituencies from congregations, labor unions, municipalities, school districts and civic and civil rights organizations in metropolitan regions – with an emphasis on economically stressed, increasingly diverse and politically competitive older suburbs and small towns. Building One America has promoted the goals of social inclusion, racial justice, sustainability and economic opportunity by addressing regional housing policy, land use, municipal and educational fiscal structures, major infrastructure investments and jobs.

What does BOA offer?

BOA has a faculty of leadership trainers/organizers and experts from its staff, board, and advisors including organizers formally affiliated with the Chicago-based Gamaliel Foundation and its board of strategic advisors. It has a training culture, pedagogy and curriculum rooted in the Alinsky model of building leadership and working-class power. But its approach and training has been updated and modified for labor leaders, elected officials, congregational and civil rights leaders attempting to navigate in today’s world. This means Building One America puts a

greater emphasis on issues of race, place, and class than other organizing institutes. It has a deeper commitment to building racially diverse, middle and working-class coalitions. And it has a view of metropolitan regions and states (including middle-class suburbs and segregated ghettos) as key to understanding regional and national politics; understanding the anti-union and anti-public sector agenda; advancing meaningful policies; and building multi-racial working-class power.

The Building One America training curriculum includes:

1. An orientation and reflection on power.
2. Understanding self-interest as a way to build membership, engage adversaries, and become a more focused and self-motivated leader.
3. The role, value, and techniques of one-on-one organizing and developing and implementing relationship-building campaigns for membership and expansion.
4. Conducting and understanding a power analysis based on relationships, power and self-interest.
5. Distinguishing the “public” from the “private” in order to build an effective public life and avoid the pitfalls of blurring these lines.
6. The key principles of strategy and tactics, and the elements of issues and action in the context of campaigns and in day-to-day navigating power relationships.
7. Identifying and developing leaders.
8. The importance of organized money and how to ask for and raise money.
9. The principles, techniques, and strategies for effective meetings.
10. Personal reflection, strategic planning and developing a personal path to power.

Weaved through the narrative and presentations will be expert engagement around the labor and civil rights movement’s history and thoughtful analysis of where we are today including the social, political and economic forces working against solidarity and social and economic justice - and how we can combat them.

Time frame and structure of the training

Trainings can be tailored and modified to fit the size, budget, and needs of an organization. The standard training is from one to five days. Those include:

- A one-day orientation on power, self-interest, and one-on-ones.
- A two-day training that will support or launch a program or a membership campaign.
- A 5 to 6 day training that includes personal transformation and will support or launch a campaign. These can be done consecutively or over several weeks and months on weekends.

Cost

The cost depends on the number of leaders being trained and the length of time of the training. Typically the cost is \$2,000 per day, per trainer. This includes preparation and research and pre-training meetings, calls or correspondence to ensure that the trainers and the training curriculum is relevant and consistent with the interests and priorities of the trainees and their organizations.

A single trainer can handle a room of 30 to 60 leaders. Larger groups would generally require

more trainers (an additional trainer for every 50 to 60 leaders) depending on the length of the training. Longer trainings such as 5 day training require not only more trainers but additional time for trainer rotation and preparation.

Consulting contracts for organizing and campaign support start at \$5,000 and are negotiated on a case by case basis. They will typically include training services as a part of a package.

Conclusion

The recent attention to both economic inequality and racial injustice should not be another excuse for divisive identity politics among middle and working-class Americans. Instead, it is an opportunity to be seized upon to build more, not less, solidarity among working people of all colors by addressing both racial justice and economic opportunity as labor and civil rights leaders did so powerfully a half century ago.

No two groups have been more damaged by the rightward backlash in American politics than the institutions of labor and civil rights. Their once powerful alliance has fractured under sustained assault from reactionary forces, resulting in diminished power and harmful reversals of some of the most important social, political and economic advances of the past 75 years.

Despite significant challenges and setbacks, it is labor and civil rights, and much of the faith community, that have the history, organizational infrastructure, self-interest and values that make them as relevant and as essential today as ever.

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BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Building One America

For much of the past decade, Building One America has worked to build a multi-racial powerbase strong enough and sustainable enough to challenge some of the most intractable and chronic problems plaguing America: rising inequality, economic disparities and diminishing opportunities for poor, middle and working class Americans.

At the center of this crisis has been the shifting but enduring legacy of ghetto poverty in our urban centers, racial segregation in housing and schools and the deep and growing gap in economic mobility and life outcomes impacting education, income, incarceration, and even mortality rates - all too often predetermined by place, race and class and exacerbated by urban abandonment, suburban sprawl and regional fragmentation.

While African American families trapped in our most distressed communities are the hardest hit, working people of all races and backgrounds (including working class whites and many recent immigrant groups) in both cities and middle-class suburbs are all weakened by the growing spatial and social divisions of our society.

BOA has effectively and successfully expanded this conversation and broadened support for this struggle by engaging a larger swath of Americans, including middle and working-class whites and other ethnic groups who have been deeply harmed by these same forces of inequality along with African Americans who are still disproportionately and adversely impacted by segregation, discrimination and poverty.

Much of BOA's work has focused on increasingly diverse middle and working class suburbs where regional disparities and increased economic stress can motivate middle-class people of all colors to find common ground around place-based issues impacting their families and communities like the quality of schools, local tax rates, public safety, basic services, infrastructure improvements and jobs.

While BOA's constituency has historically been from congregations, towns, and school districts led by clergy, local elected and civic leaders, BOA's work has included powerful relationships with labor unions at the regional and state level. Our relationships with organized labor have been practical, political and based on our shared values. We have drawn on them for funding and as allies for their influence and political muscle. But we have not fully explored or fully developed this relationship and the potential for far greater power, support and strategic coordination that could come from a more formal and ongoing relationship based on shared goals, intersecting interest, power and history.

Learning from the past to create a future

Fortunately, many of the things we need to do differently are not new. They are ideas, approaches and tactics that are all part of the American labor movement's own story. They are

lessons that can be drawn from its own history of growth, resistance, and advancement of economic and racial justice for *all* working people during the times of its greatest expansion and maximum power.

We believe some of those lessons of history that have not been drawn on enough (but can and should) include:

- A deep and fundamental commitment to organizing workers internally and externally.

This means learning how to identify, recruit and train leaders among key constituency groups in workplaces, communities, and institutions.

This includes intentional, structured, and scalable one-on-one organizing and membership drives in new and existing workplaces, bargaining units, and communities.

- A class-based approach to both organizing and advancing the interests of working and middle-class Americans and their communities, first and foremost.

An approach that embraces the power of diversity and racial justice but rejects divisive identity politics and anything other than temporary alliances with corporate elites no matter how liberal they are on social, cultural or even environmental issues.

With populism ascendant on both the left and right there is no better time for the labor movement to reclaim this narrative.

- A renewed commitment to civil rights and an approach to racial justice that is powerful, relevant, but aimed at galvanizing and unifying (and not splitting) a deliberately multi-racial working-class coalition.

This means a meaningful appreciation of the unique importance of black workers and black leaders in building the power of the American labor movement.

It also means understanding (and a corresponding investment in) the invaluable role to be played by black workers and black leaders in restoring its power and reversing its decline.

And it means joining the fight against racial segregation and racial discrimination in jobs, housing, criminal justice, and schools because (just as during the civil rights era) it's wrong, exploitative, and harmful to all working people - and, because it's a potent weapon against labor's enemies.

- An approach to the dynamics of immigration that is honest, unsentimental, and relevant.

One that is about power and the economic interests of all working people and communities.

One that fully recognizes the role of employers and even whole industries in the exploitation and abuse of undocumented workers to depress wages and weaken labor's power while creating a new permanent and powerless servant class in America.

And an approach that is about both fighting exploitation through organizing the undocumented, while at the same time, protecting and defending organized labor's diminishing market share in industries being undermined by low-wage exploitation and abuse.

- A compelling and powerful vision of the role and purpose of the labor movement in the face of

rampant technological change and accelerated automation.

This means an analysis, a narrative, and vision that is not about work but rather about the freedom from work and drudgery.

One that is about dignity and human development, and the happiness of the individual, family, and community.

- An understanding of place as a unit of organizing and the spatial structures that create the conditions to oppress and exploit working people and drive economic inequality, racial injustice and anti-union politics.

Regional labor federations were formed to address inequities within larger multi-sector regional markets. Metropolitan inequalities between schools, towns and counties today drive large and growing gaps in wealth, health, educational attainment, and crucial life opportunities (including life expectancy) for workers, families and children in both poor and middle-class communities.

This includes an understanding of the role of the American ghetto and enduring racial segregation both in driving political polarization and the privatization and plundering of poverty institutions and the public sector in general.

And it includes understanding the role of the suburbs as places of growing diversity, economic insecurity, and political volatility and power.

Make America Great Again (Labor and civil rights once did)

Many on the left scoff at the slogan of the new president and his supporters, but whatever the true meaning of *Make America Great Again* is for Trump backers, there was a time not so long ago in which America was a better place for many working people. This period of shared prosperity, in which wages rose, opportunity expanded and economic inequality and racial discrimination were in decline, was due in large part to the power of a multi-racial labor movement, an ascendant civil rights movement and the reinforcing relationship of the two.

While liberals suggest that any nostalgia for the post World War II period is simply a longing for the days of white privilege and racial subjugation, the reality is that the period following World War II, until the mid 1970s was a time for great progress for both civil rights and labor. It was a time where incomes rose for all American workers even as the enormous gap between black and white was beginning to narrow.

It's true many Americans remained stuck in poverty, and black Americans, especially in the South, not only experienced profound poverty but also Jim Crow oppression and segregation. But the modern civil rights movement, which started before the War under the leadership of unionists like A. Philip Randolph, was ascendant during this time and ultimately victorious in breaking the back of legal segregation and racial discrimination.

This "heyday" of American labor and civil rights, which lasted a little over 30 years, was a result not so much of policies but of power. The labor movement was at its peak because, despite internal resistance and divisions, it was at its most unified and most multiracial both in membership and in emerging leadership. And despite continued opposition in many quarters, it had embraced the civil rights movement to the point where their destinies had become intertwined. It was the untangling of their once powerful partnership that left both the organizations and the gains of labor and civil rights exposed and ripe for attack.

The backlash (the exploitation of the breach yet to be closed)

The seeds of the onslaught were already in place. Many were planted deep in the labor movement itself. But it wasn't until the election of Richard Nixon and the appointment of the Judge Rehnquist did the balance of power begin to shift and the full and unabashed assault on both labor and civil rights began in earnest. There were a number of significant reasons why the labor movement began to lose its influence and become vulnerable to attacks first from Republicans like Ronald Reagan and then Democrats like Bill Clinton but not all of them were inevitable. Labor's retreat from the civil rights movement and its abandonment of racial justice was a self-inflicted wound that left the labor movement less powerful, more isolated and defenseless. And it was devastating to civil rights.

New forms of Jim Crow were taking root in American cities, white flight to suburbs encouraged by federal financing, job flight to the South, along with automation and deindustrialization in many basic industries - especially steel and auto related manufacturing - were turning urban industrial cities into ghettos. The growing pool of unemployed black workers, generational poverty, rising crime, and deepening urban blight was used to foment fear, resentment, and hatred among white workers. The American working-class was once again being thoroughly fractured, split and divided along racial lines.

Race or class (a false choice)

Today, more and more it seems like the American people are being offered two conflicting and even contradictory choices for what is ailing our democracy. Economic inequality has reached obscene and unprecedented levels. Racial injustice has reemerged in the mainstream public consciousness as a result of high profile and often lethal encounters with police and a criminal justice system that has made the United States look like a racial gulag.

But this false choice is a ruse (and a very old one) designed to prevent what would otherwise be a natural alliance of working people along class interest. The advancement of civil rights, human rights and workers' rights for African Americans and immigrants have always led to greater prosperity for all working people, including working-class whites. This is not an abstract concept about morality and justice but about power. Both the power of a less divisible and exploitable labor market and the power of organized labor, especially when that labor movement represented a multiracial power base and political constituency. Until there is once again a serious commitment to building multiracial solidarity and power among middle and working-class Americans, the labor movement and civil rights will continue to suffer.

Constituencies and allies (organizing the middle and working-class...not "progressives")

There is no reason to believe the recent uptick in political activism, anger and frustration will translate into a real counter to the right wing trajectory of the country. Movements don't change things; power does, and labor has been selling off its power for many years - and for cheap. Not only has it invested heavily in a nearly exclusive "lesser of two evils" relationship with one member of our two-party system, but also it has had transactional, shallow, and often exploitative, relationships with external allies and organizations it has supported and sometimes created.

We call these allies the "usual suspects." They are the progressive activists and urban advocates that labor unions typically support or partner with. Often these coalitions are designed to engage on a single issue or with a narrow constituency over a short period of time. They rarely involve or have much connection to the membership or the middle-class

constituencies that the labor movement needs to restore its standing and protect itself against right wing governors and legislators.

They are usually disproportionately white and work on race-neutral issues, or they are involved in racially divisive campaigns and engage in rhetoric and actions that alienate potential allies and members. They are rarely real leaders within a community or constituency. They are usually self-appointed leaders or people we anoint as leaders because they say what we want them to say.

Real power comes not from mobilizing progressives but from organizing ordinary working people and advancing progressive causes for civil rights and economic justice.

Building One America works with and teaches others to work with, identify, recruit, and develop leaders and allies among key constituency groups especially in middle and working-class communities, institutions and workplaces. This includes civil rights organizations, churches (especially the traditional black church), local elected leaders, and civic leaders, especially in suburbs and middle and working-class communities.

Suburbs are often overlooked as less progressive, whiter, and wealthier than the urban centers that have been a traditional base of support for Democrats and labor. But suburbs have changed dramatically in recent decades. Suburbs today are the places of America's greatest racial change and diversity. They are where the middle-class and many union members live today. Ignoring these places means ignoring the middle-class; it means ignoring some of the most politically competitive districts and towns; and it means ceding these places to an anti-union ethos, corporate exploitation, and the right wing politics of both parties.

Building One America has significant experience and expertise working with such communities and their leaders on the issues that they care about such as housing, schools, taxes, and infrastructure. And it has extensive relationships with elected leaders in their towns and legislative and congressional districts across the country, particularly in the Midwest, Northeast and Southwest.

Conclusion

Well-funded far-right politics continues to block efforts to fix our infrastructure, create jobs, or address our nation's most profound problems from racial segregation to climate change. Growing inequalities and persistent injustice have given rise to protests, media attention and electoral insurgencies, both progressive and reactionary. Without sustained organizing for a multiracial working and middle-class movement for justice, today's activism and anger can produce more backlash than progress. Just as the labor and civil rights movements came together in the 1950s to act on the critical opportunities of their time we need to act together on the critical opportunities of *our* time to move toward greater inclusiveness, economic justice and power.