

# Meeting the moment in Philadelphia



**Fredric V. Rolando**

**T**his month, delegates from our union will join those of 56 other national and international unions in Philadelphia to participate in the 29th quadrennial convention of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). Together, AFL-CIO-affiliated unions have 12.5 million members and are fighting to advance the interests of more than 100 million others who work for a living. As we noted in these pages back in March, we find ourselves in a moment of great promise for the labor movement, even as the challenges of the pandemic and inflation pose serious economic threats to us all. Public support for unions is

at near-record levels (68 percent, according to Gallup), organizing is exploding among some of the most recognizable companies in the country (Starbucks, Amazon, etc.), and a wave of strikes has helped shift the balance of power in the labor market to workers and their unions. Growing the labor movement to “meet this moment” is the overriding goal of the Philadelphia convention.

Secretary-Treasurer Nicole Rhine and I serve as delegates to the AFL-CIO convention by virtue of our elected offices with NALC, while seven other NALC members were elected to serve as delegates by the NALC convention in 2016: Anita Guzik (Los Angeles Branch 24), Charlie Heege (New York Branch 36), Elise Foster (Chicago Branch 11), Lloyd Doucet (New Orleans Branch 124), Ingrid Armada (Providence, RI Branch 15), Denise Brooks (Medford, OR Branch 1433) and Steve Hanna (York, PA Branch 509). As always, NALC will take an active role at the convention, focusing on issues of importance to the labor movement including union organizing, promoting the AFL-CIO’s Workers First Agenda (to advance the PRO Act, rebuild our national infrastructure with union labor, etc.) and strengthening our democracy. We also will host an NALC booth to solicit support for our campaigns to Stamp Out Hunger and to promote voting by mail with the National Vote at Home Institute. And we will offer our solidarity to workers struggling to achieve justice in the workplace (such as the striking mineworkers at Warrior Met in Alabama and the workers at Amazon struggling to unionize over the vehement opposition of their employer), as well as seeking the solidarity of other unions to advance the NALC’s workplace and legislative priorities.

I am serving as chairman of the convention’s Resolutions Committee. In recent weeks, we successfully offered amendments to

strengthen two major resolutions on retirement income security and support for the federal workforce. In the former, which already included support for the Social Security Fairness Act (to repeal the WEP and GPO provisions), we added a commitment to fight for enactment of the Federal Employees Fairness Act, which would give city carriers and other federal workers the ability to “buy back” pension service credit for periods of non-career work for the USPS and other agencies—including both transitional employee and CCA service. In the latter, we seek the labor movement’s support for providing “hazard pay” to letter carriers and others whose public-facing work exposes them to dangers during pandemics and other national emergencies.

As we’ve seen during my years as president, the AFL-CIO provides a powerful way to amplify the NALC’s voice in Washington. More than a decade ago, the federation lifted up our successful campaign to save Saturday delivery. For that, I will always be grateful to AFL-CIO President Rich Trumka, our great friend whom we tragically lost last year (see my message from the September 2021 issue). More recently, it provided support for our interests in the two COVID-19 relief bills and the Postal Reform Act of 2021 (H.R. 3076). NALC presented our priorities to each of the AFL-CIO’s regional training sessions in 2019, and the federation made the strengthening of the USPS a part of its Five Economic Essentials campaign in 2020 and 2021.

**We will have a full report on the AFL-CIO convention in an upcoming *Postal Record*.** It is my hope that both the Philadelphia convention and the NALC convention in August will help us spur the revival of the U.S. labor movement, which has been so desperately needed for many decades. In the 1950s, when 35 percent of American workers belonged to unions, workers received 64 percent of national income. Today, with 10 percent of workers organized, our share has fallen to just 54 percent. That 10 percent difference translates into more than \$17,000 annually in lower income for the average American worker. Wealthy investors and big business have benefited from this long-term trend and inequality has soared. Of course, workers with unions have been protected from this adverse trend—but tens of millions of our fellow workers have not been.

A stronger labor movement will strengthen our country, our democracy and our union. Unions raise living standards, promote equity and fairness at work, and serve as a voice for working families—including at all levels of government. When workers share the benefits of economic growth and living standards are rising, NALC is empowered to deliver more for its members in collective bargaining. In other words, letter carriers do better when all workers do better. That’s why we are going to Philadelphia to meet this moment at the AFL-CIO convention.