



Retiree activists, labor leaders, elected officials, and community groups at the New York City Alliance for Retired Americans Town Meeting and Convention last month hailed the history-making 2008 election results and called for continued "bottom up organizing." The impact of the economic crisis and organizing to ensure that government measures on all levels are fair to working people and retirees was the top concern.

National Issues Panel

ARA Executive Director Ed Coyle, whose organization represents 2.5 million retired union members and community activists in 30 states, analyzed the relatively low senior vote for Barack Obama. He said senior issues were not prominent until the end of the primaries, so many seniors did not know a lot about Obama at first. What they heard were the distortions advanced by the McCain campaign. However, as a result of ARA's aggressive education campaigning on the issues, particularly in battleground states, support for Obama among ARA members went up 20 points. "We need to continue educating and organizing seniors," said Coyle. He said that senior issues now go beyond "traditional concerns" like Social Security and Medicare, because seniors are severely affected by the general economic crisis.

"When we elected Barack Obama to be the 44th president of the United States, we effectively, and loudly, proclaimed that we want a change, a change we can believe in!"

*Local 237 Retiree Doris Welch
NYCARA executive board*



Local 237 retiree Doris Welch, a member of the NYCARA board welcomes participants. Seated at right is NYCARA Chair Stuart Leibowitz

NYC Alliance for Retired Americans

'It's a New Day, but Keep Organizing'

"The movement that elected Obama was an expression by people demanding not just change, but progress. Keep the movement going. I'll see you in the streets!"

*Ed Ott, executive director
NYC Central Labor Council*

Political consultant Hank Sheinkopf warned that even with friends in power, "You have to keep organizing." There are pressures from all directions on the government, he said. "Labor's job is to present another point of view."

State and Local Issues Panel

Faye Moore, president of Social Service Employees Union Local 371, AFSCME, said that after eight years of being shut out by the Bush administration, labor went back to what labor knows how to do to get Obama elected: organizing from the ground up. The victory has energized labor, she said. "We are faced with an urban city crisis, a public housing crisis. Community services are at risk now, senior services are threatened with cuts down the road. We need to use our feel-good feeling to fight these cuts."

Ed Ott, executive director of the NYC Central Labor Council, said that after decades of deregulation and the belief that the market will make us all wealthier, the stock market and the private sector have collapsed. Things are fundamentally different now, he said: Before, government was seen as the problem. Now, government is seen as the solution.

"The government has given one trillion dollars in taxpayer money to the banks," Ott said. "We have to ask, how will we get it back, and what's in it for us. Where are our stimulus programs? We need to get people back to work."

Referring to Mayor Bloomberg's budget proposals, Ott said, "Today it is not possible to cut our way out of the crisis. One, it won't work, and two, it shifts the burden directly to the backs of working people." He called Bloomberg's plan to cut the police force "devastating." "Part of the economic revival of the city was safe streets," he said.



NYCARA Town Meeting panelists (l-r): Fay Moore, president of SSEU Local 371, AFSCME; ARA Executive Director Ed Coyle (at microphone); NYC Central Labor Council Executive Director Ed Ott; NY Statewide Senior Action Council Executive Director Maria Alvarez, and political consultant Hank Sheinkopf. Not shown is City Councilmember John Liu.

Obama Wants to Hear from You

"There is no more important resource for changing the direction of this country and defining the ideas that will transform America than the American people," President-Elect Obama says on change.gov, his transition team's web site.

You can express your views on what direction the country should take on the economy, Iraq and foreign policy, education, health care, retirement security, and other issues on www.change.gov.

Ott called for action in support of the Employee Free Choice Act, which will empower workers to organize and raise their wages. "That should be part of the economic stimulus package," he said. Obama said he would sign the EFCA if it comes to his desk, Ott said, "But we can't take anything for granted. This is going to be a battle."

Maria Alvarez, executive director of the Statewide Senior Action Council, deplored state and city proposals for cuts in services for the elderly and the sick. Thirty to sixty percent of seniors will have to pay health premiums out-of-pocket for the first time, she said.

City Councilmember John Liu of Queens called the mayor's reversal on term limits, reneging on his promise of a \$400 rebate for homeowners, and changing the budget process "a disturbing trend." Changes may be needed, he said, noting that he opposed term limits, "but the mayor can't just make them unilaterally, he can't just toss democracy out the window." He spoke against the Department of Aging's plan to consolidate senior centers, which he warned will result in cuts in social services for seniors, and MTA plans to raise the cost of Access-A-Ride and cut back on vans. "This is a critical time," Liu said. "No one can do it alone, we have to do it together."

I want to wish you all a happy holiday. This holiday season is filled with contradictory emotions. I've seen a number of references recently to Charles Dickens's opening words describing the era of the French Revolution in *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." Those words certainly apply to the state of our nation today.

The best of times is reflected in the tremendous movement that succeeded in electing Barack Obama president of the United States. After eight years of one assault after another under the Bush administration, that is truly a cause for celebration.

As for the worst of times, we are faced with an economic crisis that affects all of us and which economists expect will get worse before it gets better. Last month alone more than half a million people lost their jobs; there are now 10.3 million unemployed people in the United States, an increase of over 3 million over the past year. In New York City, 2,477 families got foreclosure notices over the past two months.

Shining a bright light amid the growing sense of desperation, though, are the workers at Republic Windows and Doors in Chicago, who staged a six-day sit-in earlier this month when the company shut down the plant, with just three days notice, illegally, and told its 240 workers they would not receive severance or earned vacation pay. Their health insurance was also canceled. Just before Christmas, no less.

Republic blamed its primary financier,



A Message from the President

Bank of America, for cutting off credit to the company. This is after receiving \$25 billion in taxpayer bailout cash.

On their last day, December 5, the workers, members of Local 1110 of the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America (UE), refused to leave the plant. As the UE said in a flyer calling for support, "They stood up by sitting down."

The Republic plant occupation was more than just a local confrontation. Workers everywhere are faced with the same threat. Unions around the country spoke out and demonstrated in their support and took up collections of money and holiday gifts for them. President-elect Obama spoke out in their defense. He said, "I think they are absolutely right." And he added, "What's happening to them is reflective of what's happening across the country." Can you imagine George W. Bush supporting workers over the banks?

And the workers won. The Bank of America finally agreed to lend the company money to give the workers severance and vacation pay. The workers will also receive two months of health care coverage.

The Republic workers are still going to

lose their jobs, but they put Wall Street and Washington on notice that working people have had enough. They have set a tone of struggle for workers and their unions everywhere. As a UE Local 1110 organizer said, "This might not be the right tactic in every situation, but people know we need to be fighting back."

This fightback sentiment was also expressed at the New York City Alliance for Retired Americans Convention and Town Meeting last month.

I agree. Our nation's economic recovery is going to be difficult. It must not be done in a way that puts the primary burden on working people and retirees, which some are trying to do. Agreement on a rescue package for the auto industry is an example. A group of Republicans were insisting on driving down wages and benefits and destroying the contract negotiated by the union and the companies.

To work, the nation's recovery program must include a stimulus plan that will first and foremost create jobs, invest in our infrastructure, place a moratorium on home foreclosures, provide universal affordable health care, and help local and state governments (and public workers) survive the crisis without massive budget cuts. It must also include the Employee Free Choice Act, which will enable workers to organize.

Rest assured, Local 237 and the rest of the labor movement will be fighting for an economic recovery that is fair for workers and their families.

This year has been so busy, and it's gone by so quickly, I can hardly believe we're in the midst of the holidays and that the year is over and a new one is about to begin.

Last December I wrote about a survey I took part in that asked participants to select from a list one positive emotion and one negative emotion that should be used to promote the messages of the De-



Keep Hope Alive

By Nancy B. True
Director, Retiree Division

mocratic Presidential ticket in 2008.

Confidence and hope were the biggest positive choices by far. Confidence was chosen almost 33 percent of the time, and hope, just over 24 percent.

I chose hope. I said, "This is an emotion that so many of us have not felt during President Bush's tenure in office. The absence of hope leads some to believe that change is not possible."

If we think back on Barack Obama's campaign for president, it is clear that many people voted for him because he conveyed a sense of hope and confidence that change is possible. *Si se puede*, yes we can.

Many of you have talked to us about

economic hardships you and your families are experiencing. Prices are going up—food, public transportation, prescription drugs, rent. Some of you have younger family members who have been laid off, grandchildren's college tuition is going up. Meanwhile, banks are getting bailouts with our tax dollars, and so far we have little to show for it.

But I am hopeful. In his victory speech, Obama said, "Let us summon a new spirit of patriotism; of service and responsibility where each of us resolves to pitch in and work harder and look after not only ourselves, but each other." He said, "We cannot have a thriving Wall Street while Main Street suffers—in this country, we rise or fall as one nation, as one people."

For the first time in years, we have a president who is on our side. If we support each other, if we work together, we can overcome adversity.

I wish you all a happy holiday season.

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Celebrating Our Italian Heritage



A rainbow of Local 237 retirees and guests had un grande tempo at the Retiree Division's first Italian Heritage Celebration October 23. The Marguerite Feinstein Conference Room was festive, decorated with Italian flags hanging from the ceiling and colorful posters covering the walls and columns.



Special guest was Lorenzo Gigliotti, Italian television and film director, journalist, author, professor, and all-around Renaissance Man, who made an inspiring multimedia power point slide show presentation on the history of Italy's rich culture.



Tables carried displays of Italian art work and information about the Centro Raccontami, the Garibaldi-Meucci Museum on Staten Island, the Italian Heritage and Culture Committee of New York, contributions of Italian Americans to American life, programs offered by the Calandra Italian American Institute, and other material.



Giovanna Bellia LaMarca, author of *Sicilian Feasts* and other Italian cookbooks, talked about Italian food from the perspective of Italy's "rich history of diversity." Tomatoes, for example, she said, a common ingredient in Italian food, actually came from the New World—America. She and Italian cookbook authors Brian Yarvin and Maria Grazia Asselle, authors of *Cucina Piemontese*, had their books on hand for sale and signing.



Retiree Division Assistant Director Susan Milisits, who is Italian-American, greeted the delighted crowd in Italian and presented Retiree Activist Awards to Paul Asaro, Anthony Cottone, Liborio (Larry) Torregiano, Antonio Riccio, and Rocco Brienza, all members of the event's organizing committee.



And of course there was delicious Italian food.



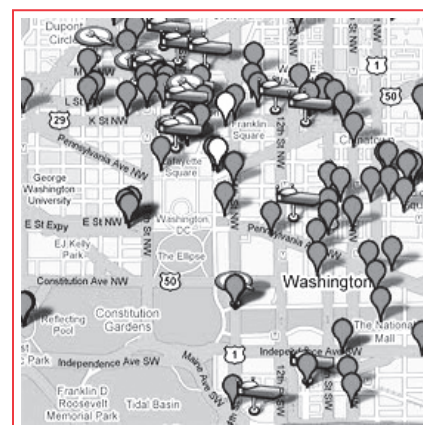
Local 237 President Greg Floyd invited the retirees to attend the Italian Heritage Celebration the union was having that evening for working members. Several did, and saw former Local 237 Vice President Lou Partenza receive a Lifetime Achievement Award from Floyd for his years of service to Local 237 and the labor movement.

Take a Labor Tour with the DC Labor Map

Many retirees would like to give their grandchildren (and their children) a better sense of unions and the labor movement. Now there's a modern, 21st Century way: the new, online interactive DC Labor Map.

If you want to find current and historic labor sites in Washington, DC, including union hotels, restaurants, international and local union organizations, labor art and historic labor sites, the map is the way to go.

You can use it at home for a virtual online tour or to plan a real-life visit. Just go to http://www.communitywalk.com/washington_dc/dc_labor_map/map/315109. There, you



can click on a site on the map or choose a category. Selecting "labor art" will pop up 11 sites around town where you can take in murals, sculptures and other artwork dedicated to workers and their jobs. For example, you can get a description directions to Depression-era artist Harold Weston's murals and depicting the construction of government buildings and office activities during the New Deal.

The map was created in time for the presidential inauguration next month by Chris Garlock, editor of the Metropolitan Washington AFL-CIO Council's *Union City*, with help from his father, labor historian Jon Garlock, and Lisa Garlock, Saul Schniderman, and Peter Winch.

Retiree Photo Exhibition



The Retire Division photography class exhibited their work from Fall '08 December 8 at the division office on the eighth floor. Shown here are (standing, l-r) instructor Adrienne Haywood-James, William C. Barbee, June Harris, and Catherine Hayes; (seated, l-r): Furman Donawa, Gerard Enright, and Lucille Eversley. The class goes on field trips together, in addition to doing assignments in between classes on their own. Retirees who are interested in taking the class should fill out the course registration form they receive in the mail or register in person.

Older Population Growing

By 2030, nearly one in five U.S. residents will be 65 and older. By 2040, there will be 88.5 million people in that age group, more than double the current 38.7 million. The 85 and older population is expected to more than triple, from 5.4 million to 19 million nationwide between 2008 and 2050.

U.S. Census Bureau

Visit Local 237's web site
www.local237.org

Season's Greetings
Happy New Year

From the Retiree Division Staff

Nancy B. True, Director
Winston George • Donna Ristorucci
Susan Milisits • Shavon Banks
Karen Giordano • Dennise Franco
Lea Vela • Paul Asaro

Yes We Can!

Retiree Personal Notes



A group of Housing Authority retirees celebrated Thanksgiving together on November 20 with a hearty lunch and great conversation at Greci's Staaten on Staten Island, reports **Anthony Cottone**. "We hold these luncheons so retirees have a chance to reach out and not feel isolated after leaving the comradeship of NYCHA," says Cottone. "Retirees of all titles are welcome. We

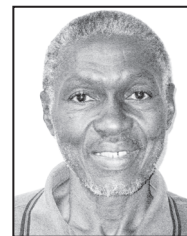
hope you come and join the fun." Anyone who would like more information about the gatherings may contact Cottone at 718-745-7565 or navydude64@aol.com.

* * *

Retired NYCHA maintenance worker **Jack Alston** and wife Lillian are delighted over the birth of their great grand-daughter, born November 1 to granddaughter Erica Mezz. Their daughter, Miriam Mehl, is equally delighted. More good news for the Alstons: Granddaughter Laura Mehl, a student at Cardozo Law School, is engaged to be married . . . Get well wishes to Barbara Panzer, **Jack Panzer's** wife, who fractured both knees and is in rehab.

* * *

Retired NYCHA maintenance worker **Hubert Williamson**, now living on the island of Jamaica, stopped by the office during a visit to family in the Bronx a while back. He's working with a human rights group called Jamaicans for Justice. "Families of inmates come to us for help and we investigate," said Williamson. "It's rewarding, because we are able to help people who are picked up just on suspicion, with no evidence, and are locked up without a trial. We try to speed up the process." He said the organization goes to prisons and works with youth in the community, the police, and churches to help youth get a good education and stay out of prison.



If you would like to share a new development or special event in your life in the Retiree Personal Notes column, call, mail, or e-mail the information to Retiree News & Views, Teamsters Local 237, 216 W. 14 St., New York, NY 10011; 212-807-0555; retirees@local237.org.

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