

A PROPOSAL FOR A LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE
FOR U.S. UNIONS IN THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY

Introduction:

The challenges to the very existence of the tobacco industry continue unabated. Despite the enormous commitment of resources by the cigarette manufacturers, opponents of smoking continue to score victories in their "guerilla war" for prohibition. With a substantial popular base among non smokers and their ability to mobilize hard core supporters for emotional performances before law makers groups like ASH, GASP and the health organizations can be expected to continue to step up their attacks.

In response the industry has steadily broadened its popular base, organizing sectors of the wholesale and retail industries involved in distributing tobacco; making alliances with the hospitality industry and other groups adversely affected by anti smoking legislation; reaching out to political representatives from outside tobacco land.

Part of this broadening process has been increased cooperation with the BC&T and other sectors of organized labor. However, the potential for support from unions in the tobacco industry alone has only begun to be tapped. At least seven international unions have members in the industry. These unions belong to several national AFL-CIO departments, as well as a host of state and local AFL-CIOs. Direct and indirect contacts with and through these organizations, their lobbying arms, and local affiliates have proven helpful to the BC&T in mobilizing a broadened, "popular" opposition to specific anti-smoking laws and excessive taxation.

However, aside from the BC&T, the tobacco sections of the relevant unions are minor parts of larger wholes. This has meant that tobacco concerns have not generally been central to international union staffs. On the other hand the national scope of the unions offer the possibility of interventions "in solidarity" by brother and sister unionists in the far corners of the U.S. since the continuation of the industry is a "jobs" issue for tobacco sector unionists.

What is needed to begin to tap the possibilities for union solidarity in defense of industry jobs are essentially two things: awareness and organization. Awareness on the part of international union and federation staffs of the existence of their tobacco sectors and of the problems facing the industry; organization, or coordination of mutual aid in opposition to measures aimed at crippling the industry.

To begin to meet these needs we offer the following proposal: to call a Legislative Conference of U.S. unions in the Tobacco Industry.

Goals:

The specific goals of convening the legislative conference are the following:

1. To raise the awareness of officers of local unions in the tobacco industry re: federal and state legislation affecting the industry and employment.
2. To raise the awareness of national legislative staffs of those unions and AFL-CIO staffs re: tobacco legislation.
3. To educate local leaders and national staffs re: economic importance of tobacco industry; specific issues and legislation; sponsors of anti-smoking legislation and their strategy and tactics; role of labor in opposing anti-tobacco bills.
4. Develop coordination between unions with AFL-CIO for mutual assistance in opposing federal, state and local anti-tobacco initiatives.

Convener

In order to achieve the broadest participation, the call for the conference should come from a broadly based labor organization. The Food & Allied Service Trades (FAST) Dept. of the AFL-CIO is the logical choice. It is the trade department the BC&T belongs to, as well as the RWDSU (Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union) which represents many cigar workers. FAST also represents workers in the hospitality industry and other sectors of the food industry. FAST Legislative Director Jay Harvey represents BC&T on Capitol Hill and elsewhere on tobacco issues and is familiar with the industry and its opponents. FAST Pres. Robert Harbrant would be invited to serve as chairperson of the conference

Co-sponsors

To further broaden participation in the conference the Industrial Union Dept. of the AFL-CIO (with BC&T, the International Association of Machinists and others as affiliates) can be invited to be co-sponsors, as can the International headquarters of the unions involved.

Participants

Local tobacco sector leaders and national legislative staffs or representatives of the following unions with members in the industry would be invited:

1. BC&T - Bakery, Confectionery and Tobacco Workers International Union
2. IAM - Intl. Assoc. of Machinists and Aerospace Workers
3. RWDSU - Retail, Wholesale and Dept. Store Union
4. Fireman and Oilers - International Brotherhood of
5. UA - United Assoc. of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry of the U.S. and Canada
6. UBC - United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America
7. IBEW - International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers

Legislative or other representatives of the following Departments of the AFL-CIO who represent or provide services to the above unions would be invited:

1. FAST - Food and Allied Service Trades Dept.
2. IUD - Industrial Union Dept.
3. BCTD - Building and Construction Trades Dept.
4. Legislative Dept., AFL-CIO
5. COPE - Committee on Political Education, AFL-CIO

Representatives of major tobacco manufacturing state AFL-CIO's would also be invited. Through these officials other state AFL-CIO's could be reached. Additionally national AFL-CIO representatives responsible for relations with state feds can be invited. Targeted tobacco states include:

1. Virginia
2. North Carolina
3. Georgia
4. Kentucky
5. Pennsylvania

Representatives of local central bodies in major manufacturing areas (e.g. Richmond, Louisville, Macon) could also be invited to encourage their contact with other local central bodies.

Summary

Each group of invitees represents a potential network within organized labor along which labor's position re: saving jobs in tobacco could be communicated.

Proposed Dates

After the November election and prior to the beginning of the January legislative session. During what should be a lull full attention can be directed by the invited union officials and staffs to the tobacco industry's issues.

Suggested site

The George Meany Center for Labor Studies in Silver Spring, MD. A residential educational center equipped with hotel style lodging and dining facilities, the Center would provide a conducive environment for the conference.

Tentative program

One day, one evening:

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| Day One | <u>PM</u> | 1) Registration |
| | | 2) Plenary - state of industry |
| Day Two | <u>AM</u> | 1) Tobacco's economic contribution to the U.S. |
| | | 2) Tobacco's opponents and their strategies |
| | | 3) Federal legislation impacting tobacco |
| Lunch | | Member of Congress from tobacco land |
| | <u>PM</u> | 4) State legislation impacting tobacco |
| | | 5) Major local legislation re: tobacco |
| | | 6) Coordinating labor's response... |
| | | Wrap up |

Resources

Experts from the Tobacco Institute as well as the BC&T and FAST would be drawn on to present the substantive sections of the program. Specifically, representatives from TI's state and federal legislative arms as well as its economists could be invited to make presentations. If appropriate, company representatives could also be invited for the "technical" sections of the program.

The assistance of TI's Public Relations operation in the planning and "nuts and bolts" running of the conference would also be useful.

Conclusion

While there can be no guarantee of the outcome of a gathering of such a diverse group of trade unionists, the opportunity to present in detail the situation faced by those working in tobacco manufacturing should prove rewarding. If successful, the conference should result in the formation of a network (somewhat similar to TAN) of trade unionists willing to intervene and oppose federal, state, and local initiatives which threaten tobacco jobs. At minimum, contacts made during the conference should facilitate the current efforts of the BC&T and FAST in opposing anti-tobacco legislation.