

BETTER LATE THEN NEVER ...

Our local is dying. Not that this is anything new--the decline has gone on for almost a decade now. At local meetings we are told to pitch in, to go out and organize the organized, to rebuild the local in order to save our jobs and our pensions. We are told over and over that we, not Dave Livingston or Frank Brown, are the union.

Well, better late than never that the leadership should acknowledge that it can't survive without the rank and file. But if we are the union, why do we seem always to take second place in its decision-making? Where were the full details of the merger negotiations with the UAW not laid out for us before we were asked to ratify it? Why isn't our right, as stated in the contract, to time off for union meetings enforced?

At the May 20th General Council meeting, it was stated that, "They (the Garment and Textile locals) must be made healthy if we are to survive." There was even talk of putting a whole organizing crew in the Garment Center. Better late than never, we say, but how can we honestly attract new members when our Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLA) are capped, our contracts are poorly enforced and when the rank and file is not consulted about contract demands until the last few months before the old contracts expire?

Could it be, perhaps, that, through our own initiative and self-activity, our demands might be more than the leadership is willing to bargain for, especially if we had enough time to formulate them? And why does the leadership endorse socially progressive causes, yet fails to educate and mobilize the membership? Is it afraid that here, also, the rank and file might want to go beyond them and fight for even more?

It is not too late. The leadership is right--only we can rebuild our faltering organization. But to do this we need real democracy, that is, a chance to participate full in all important decisions, to know what's going on and to plan carefully for the future. To begin with, we propose an industry-wide newsletter by and for the members themselves, where we can voice our views and grievances and make specific proposals for action. Better late than never.

--Needle Trades Workers Action Committee
June 23, 1981

The Needle Trades Workers Action Committee is a group of rank and file workers in the textile, garment, fur, millenary and allied trades. For more info write:

c/o LWG
P.O. Box 692
Old Chelsea Station
NY, NY 10113
Or call:
Steve or Tony (212) 477-6617