

RESOLUTION 27

In the Interests of the Public, Professionals Belong in Unions

Submitted by Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO
Referred to the Organizing Committee

LIKE ALMOST ALL WORKERS, professionals want the ability to do their jobs right. They see that freedom under attack. Unions offer a route for professionals to defend against external political and commercial pressures and, with the integrity of their work intact, protect the quality of life for all.

The importance of having unions play this role grows each year. By 2008, professional and technical people were more than 60 percent of the U.S. workforce and more than 52 percent of all U.S. union members.

Polling across many professions and many years shows a consistent pattern: For professionals, the ability to do the job right is a priority as important as, sometimes *more* important than, compensation and benefits. Professionals choose their professions and value the intellectual freedom that is required to meet professional standards.

Through education, training, specialization, standards and accountability, professionals serve as guardians of accumulated experience. They are the ultimate pragmatists, continually honing their ability to determine what works and what doesn't. Their skills deliver high performance. The collective skills and judgment of professional workers offer enormous value in achieving democratic goals.

Professionals see their professional integrity at risk. External pressures may include

inadequate staffing and resources, censorship or misreporting of ideas and information, and demands to endanger personal or public safety.

External financial and political pressures that imperil the ability of professionals to do their work also imperil the public they serve. Having professionals do their jobs right matters—in the air we breathe, the water we drink, the health and health care all Americans deserve, our safety when we travel, our freedom to exchange information and ideas and the education our children receive.

Unions representing professionals champion professional integrity in the public interest against external pressures in many contexts. Here are a few examples:

- In education, the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO calls itself "A Union of Professionals." It has put education standards on the national agenda. At the state and local levels, it works for the conditions and resources that allow teachers and school employees, health workers, higher education faculty, public employees and others to do their jobs effectively.
- In health care, the chances of surviving a hospital stay for a heart attack are higher in a hospital with registered nurses in a union than in one whose RNs lack representation. (See Ash, M. and Jean Ann Seago (20 December 2001). *Do Unionized Registered Nurses*

Reduce AMI Mortality? Political Economy Research Institute Working Paper Series, Number 28. University of Massachusetts: Amherst.) The unions representing health workers provide these workers a collective means to defend their professional integrity, seek adequate staffing and advocate for the people for whom these workers care.

- In aerospace engineering, unions negotiate for continuing professional development, product quality and public safety. The Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace (SPEEA), Local 2001 of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers, represents—among other employees at several employers—almost 20,000 professionals at Boeing. In 2000, SPEEA engineers at Boeing undertook the largest and longest strike by professionals in the United States. Many carried picket signs that said: “SPEEA on Strike for Boeing.” They saw themselves as defending the professional integrity that would guarantee the company’s future. (See Kusnet, David, *Love the Work, Hate the Job: Why America’s Best Workers Are More Unhappy Than Ever* (John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2008).)
- At the intersection of science and government policy, unions at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency—local unions affiliated with the American Federation of Government Employees, the International Association of Machinists, the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers, and others—have defended scientific integrity against political pressures for decades. Collectively they seek the latitude for federal scientists to gather and report scientific data accurately and transparently, so policymakers and the public have honest information with which to make crucial decisions.

Connecting unions to professional integrity, and professional integrity to the public, dramatically reframes the objectives of organizing professional

and technical employees. Redefining the role of unions for professional and technical people has been a profound shift that grows out of a prolonged sequence of research, analysis and discussion that the Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO (DPE) and its affiliated unions began in 2004.

DPE and its affiliated unions expanded that discussion in unprecedented ways. Over two-and-a-half years, they reached out to national and global professional associations around the theme of professional integrity. On May 20, 2009, 19 organizations, including 10 national unions, DPE and eight professional associations, launched **Professionals for the Public Interest: Associations and Unions Defending Professional Integrity** (PftPI) and the PftPI website, www.pftpi.org.

Professionals for the Public Interest: Associations and Unions Defending Professional Integrity includes organizations representing professionals in science, engineering, health, the arts and human services. It advocates for allowing professionals to do their work on the basis of expertise, experience and high standards, with transparency and trust. Achieving that goal means a better quality of life for all of us. President Obama recognized as much on March 9, 2009, when he directed the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy to develop recommendations for strengthening scientific integrity in the Executive Branch.

The AFL-CIO salutes the professional associations that have already joined in PftPI with the DPE unions to launch this important common endeavor: the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Chemical Society, the American Library Association, the American Library Association-Allied Professional Association, the American Public Health Association, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers-USA, the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Social Workers. Since the PftPI launch, many

other associations and unions have expressed interest in participating.

The AFL-CIO and its affiliated unions offer their congratulations and support to PftPI. Unions have long honored good craft. The building trades maintain rigorous apprenticeships. The maritime

unions offer world-class training facilities. Manufacturing unions negotiate joint training and education programs. The public-sector unions defend public services. A common defense of professional integrity against external pressures bodes well for professionals, other workers and the public.