

Resolution on Defending the Right to Form Unions and Bargain Collectively  
Adopted by The 2004 Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) PLENUM

In the wake of World War II, on December 10, 1948 delegates of the newly-formed United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This Declaration is a central document of the modern human rights movement. The Declaration sets forth inalienable economic, social, civil and political rights of every individual, no matter where he or she lives.

Fundamental workers' rights are an integral part of the Declaration, which states unequivocally that "everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association," and "everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests." The Declaration recognizes the freedom of workers to organize and bargain as fundamental human rights, on par with and deserving of the same protection as others such as freedom of speech and religion.

Despite the lofty words of the Declaration and the protections theoretically provided under U.S. law, working men and women in the U.S., the wealthiest and most powerful country on earth, are often unable to exercise their freedom to form unions and bargain collectively. When workers in the U.S. seek to exercise this right they are often confronted with intimidation, coercion and disinformation that suppress their rights with devastating effectiveness.

Working people in the United States and the society as a whole pay a heavy price for this suppression of the freedom to form unions. When collective bargaining is suppressed, wages lag, inequality and poverty grow, race and gender pay gaps widen, society's safety net is strained, civic and political participation is undermined and a crucial counterweight against unbridled corporate power is weakened. The bottom line: millions of U.S. workers want collective bargaining but are denied it in a wholesale violation of human rights that leaves them and the nation worse off.

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) believes that:

Collective bargaining is a vital public good that makes for a more just, fair, open and democratic society and that workers should not be impeded in their efforts to organize. The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), enacted by Congress in 1935, remains an essential cornerstone of workers rights, setting forth fair procedures for collective bargaining, prohibiting employers from discriminating against employees who take part in union or collective activities, requiring employers to bargain with the appointed representative of its employees, regulating what tactics each side may employ to further their bargaining objectives, and establishing procedural guidelines on good faith bargaining.

Therefore, the Community Relations field should work with members of the Congress so that U.S. law will:

- allow workers to freely choose unions without interference, threats or coercion;
- establish strong penalties when employees' rights to organize and bargain are violated, including timely injunctive relief and meaningful monetary damages.
- support efforts of local unions and workers in their efforts to secure better working conditions for themselves and their co-workers, in accordance with long standing principles of Jewish community relations.