

Rough transcription of Mark Bradley's (Twin Cities) remarks to the National Board, November 6, 2005

There has been much talk about organizing here this weekend. I think we all understand that in our diverse union, organizing isn't one-size-fits-all, but perhaps we can establish some general policies that can help in all organizing efforts. Therefore, I rise to offer a report on a resolution passed recently by the Twin Cities Local Board.

I freely admit that the ideas in our resolution are currently in the category of "off the wall," so I will make no motion at this time. But I believe that it is our duty to come up with wild and crazy ideas. It's the job of our staff to tell us why our ideas are wild and crazy, and then, through the democratic deliberative process, we can come up with workable decisions, and we can take a step forward.

This resolution came from the ongoing efforts to address the problem of Equity actors working non-union in our jurisdiction. First, I would like to give enormous thanks to our national leadership for taking a firm and principled stance on this issue. As you know, the Twin Cities has been one of the loudest squawkers on this matter, and we appreciate the attention that has been paid. But it has occurred to us that we can't just tell AEA to threaten to discipline its members, and we can't just coerce people into joining AFTRA. We need a "carrot" to go with the "stick."

Of course, a big disincentive to joining our union is the high initiation fee. We applaud the creative ideas that have come from Kansas City on this question. I recently sent an email to President Connolly about my own feelings on initiation fees, and in the Twin Cities, we think that a reduced initiation fee can be an important part in all kinds of organizing. And of course, we should be organizing all the time.

But financial core raised its ugly head. We have learned that Equity cannot discipline any of its members for working non-union in our jurisdiction if they're fi-core with us. We appreciate the distinction, but it stinks. Our worry is that a lowered initiation fee may encourage a revolving door. New members who aren't immediately rewarded with union work may decide to go fi-core, since they wouldn't have made much of an investment. Our goal was therefore to find a way to encourage people to join AFTRA, and to keep them as members. We came up with an amortization scheme, and we think it would be a good policy across the board, but we do make three specific recommendations.

First, we call for this reduced initiation plan to be used as part of the AFTRA-AEA effort, to encourage members of sister unions to join AFTRA.

Second, we make specific reference to organizing broadcast stations, with the lowered fee to be coupled to an organizing tactic of "minority unionism," as outlined in the new book Called The Blue Eagle at Work, by Prof. Charles J. Morris. The idea is to organize the workers first, signing them up as members. Then they can go to the employer, who is legally bound to negotiate. This is not a new idea – it's a very old organizing tactic, and it avoids the expense of an NLRB election.

Finally, I recently joined the Steelworkers' Associate Member Program. I have attended one meeting, and they seem to be using their associate members as foot soldiers in their political efforts. That wouldn't be our style, but we think an associate membership for AFTRA would be an excellent "pre-organizing" program. The L.A. Local has had a "student Membership" for a few years. I'm not familiar with it, but we should establish such a program nationally.

Therefore, the Twin Cities Local passed the following resolution unanimously (with one abstention) on October 18:

"RESOLUTION: Restructuring AFTRA Initiation Fee

WHEREAS, AFTRA's current high initiation fee discourages both broadcasters and freelancers, especially younger people, from joining our union, and

WHEREAS, those who join AFTRA may feel "shaken down" by the high initiation fee, a practice which hardly engenders loyalty to the union, and

WHEREAS, it is both morally wrong and ultimately unsustainable for any organization to rely on initiation fees for a substantial portion of its operating expenses, and

WHEREAS, it would be unwise to summarily reduce the initiation fee to a low figure, because that may encourage the despicable system known as "Financial Core," and

WHEREAS, it is essential that we "dry up" the non-union talent pool that has captured a great deal of freelance AFTRA work, and

WHEREAS, traditional NLRB elections are extremely expensive, and another method for organizing broadcast stations must be explored, and

WHEREAS, The Constitution of AFTRA does provide for Associate Memberships, and a National Board action of 2001 allows for "Student Memberships," and

WHEREAS, it is simply in our vital interest to expand our membership,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the initiation fee charged to join AFTRA shall be retained, but a new Member will only be charged an initial payment of one hundred dollars, and as long as the new Member remains in good standing, one hundred dollars of the balance of the initiation fee shall be forgiven each year until the entire initiation fee has been amortized, and if the Member chooses to resign from AFTRA before the initiation fee has been amortized, the entire balance of the full initiation fee shall be due and payable; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that until the reduced fee can be applied to all new Members, the one hundred dollar initiation fee be offered immediately to Members of 4 A's sister unions, as part of our effort to combat the practice of such members working non-union in our jurisdiction; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that until the reduced fee can be applied to all new Members, the one hundred dollar initiation fee also be offered immediately to broadcasters currently working at non-union stations, and that this reduction be tied to a campaign to organize stations by organizing the workers first, a practice sometimes known as "minority unionism," which has precedent in earlier days of the labor movement; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that AFTRA also institute, for a fee of fifty dollars, an Associate Membership, open to anyone interested in our union and in our industry, and that a Committee be formed to implement a program of valuable and meaningful benefits for Associate Members."

Of course, there's an awful lot in there. It's really three big projects, and it's all in the realm of ideas right now. But again, we have a duty to think "out of the box." With all the challenges and uncertainties we face today, I'm not even sure where the box is. But we must organize. Membership is falling, drastically so in my own Local in the Twin Cities. And ultimately, it's all about membership.