

## **It's Up to Us—Together**

**By Richard Trumka, President, AFL-CIO**

Before signing the Declaration of Independence, Ben Franklin immortalized one of my favorite quotes: “We must, indeed, all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately.”

I don't think that's too melodramatic a statement for union members to consider today. We know we're in a political bulls-eye and that the goal of our opponents is to tie us up with defensive battles—in Washington, D.C., and in the states—because they think that will weaken our offensive for jobs, good living standards and an economy that works for all.

It's a perilous time—but one that is also ripe with opportunity. Right now, the American people, who repeatedly have voiced their desire for change, are hungry for leadership.

Someone has to turn this economy around—fast, before working families lose more jobs, more homes, more opportunity for a decent future for their children.

And it's not going to be the political lap dogs for Wall Street and the rich—they're not going to fix this economy. It's not going to be the conservative ideologues or the haters.

This job falls to us—a united American labor movement.

The corporate agenda we've lived under for the past three decades and the recent economic collapse have left our unions bruised, smaller than we should be. So we have to be stronger than we've ever been to meet this responsibility.

That means hanging together. It means solidarity.

It means fighting together united by our common beliefs. It means giving one another the courage to take on those offensive fights. It means growing. And it means refusing to be divided.

For decades, we witnessed the erosion of our manufacturing sector—the outsourcing of good, middle-class jobs. That didn't just hurt manufacturing workers. It hurt every one of us. It destroyed whole communities, fractured families, gutted the middle class and hollowed out our economy.

When President Reagan fired the air traffic controllers, it wasn't one union that was harmed. The message was clear to all of us: “Shut up. We make the rules and you can take them or take a hike. You can't stand up to us—we'll knock you down.”

When public employees are attacked because they have pensions and health care benefits, those pensions and benefits—which should be a basic right—are pushed further out of everyone’s reach.

Solidarity has always been essential in our movement—but never more than now. Sisters and brothers in one state will be fighting right-to-work for less proposals; in the next state over, they’ll be fighting for a Made in America law. Building trades workers may face attacks on prevailing wages, while public employees are threatened with layoffs and transportation and manufacturing workers demand green energy jobs in this country. And everywhere, unions will be helping workers organize and grow our movement.

If we only fight our own battles, we’re in danger of winning none. And we certainly won’t demonstrate the leadership America is counting on us for.

And when I say “leadership,” I’m not talking about me, or even your union president. I’m talking about *you*. As our political program demonstrates year after year, nothing is more powerful in turning co-workers into activists than your face-to-face, heart-to-heart conversations. That’s leadership.

We have so much to do in the coming months and years. And it’s a core of our history, of all we stand for, that the way we win is by winning together.

So hang together. Stand together. Fight together. Lead together. And no one—no one—can tear us down.