

Vermont AFL-CIO



Ten Point Program For Union Power



“The task before us today is not just to grow the power of Labor, but to become THE social & political power capable of making foundational change throughout the Green Mountains. The Vermont we aim to deliver is one where the working class, organized into Unions, see their hopes, dreams, and desires articulated and acted upon through an empowered Labor Movement & through an empowered Town Meeting system on the community level. This ten point program, perhaps the most progressive agenda of any AFL-CIO State Federation in the nation, is a first step in this direction. And with your active support, and with the mass participation of the rank & file, we will in not only win but we will change what is politically possible in Vermont and beyond. UNITED! we are UNION STRONG!”

-David Van Deusen,
President of the Vermont AFL-CIO



“After years of defensiveness and decline, there is something very exciting happening among working people in Vermont and across the country. Teachers, nurses, farm workers, auto workers, and many others have dared to stand up for themselves and their communities. They have shown that rank and file organizing, uniting with community struggles, and using the power of the strike can win big gains. Through the new leadership of the Vermont AFL-CIO, we have the chance to build on this momentum, organizing the kind of grassroots movement where labor is again a force to be reckoned with.”

-Tristin Adie,
*Executive Vice President of
the Vermont AFL-CIO*

Table of Contents

	Page #
Introduction	4
1. Union Democracy	7
2. Working Class Unity	10
3. Our Social Program	11
4. Popular Front	13
5. Green New Deal	15
6. Electoral Politics	17
7. Working Class Democracy.....	21
8. Priority On Organizing New Shops	22
9. We Are Not Afraid Of Strikes.....	23
10. Building A More Powerful Labor Movement	25
Conclusions.....	28
Contact Information For Vermont AFL-CIO Leadership	29

[Unanimously adopted as the official platform of the Vermont AFL-CIO by the elected Executive Board on October 6, 2019. Motion made by District VP for Windsor County Ed Smith, OPEIU. Seconded by District Vice President for Washington-Orange Counties Liz Medina, UAW. All voted in favor.]

INTRODUCTION: Organized Labor has been the most powerful force for change in the History of the United States of America. From the 8 hour day/40 hour work week, the establishment of the weekend, livable wages (in Union shops), to workplace safety standards; Labor has won these foundational victories through collective action and solidarity. However, for some decades Labor, nationally, has been on the decline. After endorsing Bill Clinton for President (1992), Clinton and the Democrats in Congress sent our manufacturing jobs to low wage (super exploited) nations through NAFTA and other free trade agreements (agreements which we opposed, and which we still oppose). And with these good manufacturing jobs, so went thousands of Union jobs.

Today in Vermont (2019), the 10,000 member strong AFL-CIO continues to be a major force within the Labor Movement, but few would rationally deny that we have largely stagnated. This stagnation comes as President Trump and his increasingly far-right Republican Party have launched existential attacks on Labor. The most dire of these include the politically motivated Supreme Court ruling outlawing fair share dues in public sector Unions, the Administration's so-called rule change outlawing even voluntary dues through payroll deductions for most Unionized home healthcare providers, and the appointment of corporate stooges to the National Labor Relations Board. This is not the time for Labor to stagnate...

This wilting of Labor does not have to be. We can (and must) be a social and political power once again; one capable not only of defending against the attacks we now face from DC, but also of going on the offensive and delivering positive life altering changes for working people.

But we will not achieve our potential if we stay on the road more traveled. We cannot continue to do what we have always done and expect a different result. Nor can we be satisfied with candidates that run for Union office who support all the good things, but who neglect to tell us how we will get there. Instead we must be bold, we must experiment, and we must forge a way forward which not only transforms the Vermont AFL-CIO, but also delivers a powerful Labor Movement with the muscle needed to transform Vermont as a whole. And here, the Vermont we intend to deliver is one wherein working class people not only possess the means to live a secure and dignified life, but one where we, as the great majority, wield the democratic power required to give social and political expression to the many. Such a transformative potential presupposes first a unity around an effective program, and second the development of our immediate political power.

Therefore, the Vermont AFL-CIO supports:

1. UNION DEMOCRACY: The fact is the next VT AFL-CIO election (as with all past elections) will not be as democratic as is desirable. The leadership of the VT AFL-CIO is elected by a limited number of delegates. The rank & file of our Unions have little to no direct say in who will be in these leadership positions. In many past elections, the rank & file are not even knowledgeable about who is running, what the issues are, and what is at stake concerning the direction of the Labor Movement. This is not acceptable. Therefore, the VT AFL-CIO shall:

a. Petition the National AFL-CIO for a change to our Constitution whereby every member of a VT AFL-CIO Union will have a single and equal vote concerning the election of officers. Elections shall continue to be held every two years at our State Convention. However, now a concerted effort will be made to reach

out to our 10,000 rank & file members in order to invite their participation and in order for them to become educated on the issues, the candidates, and ultimately place a vote in favor of those candidates they feel best represent the interests of the Labor Movement. By conducting elections in this way, we will also be able to build a stronger and more representative presence of our members at our Conventions;

b. Direct VT AFL-CIO President, Executive Committee, Executive Board, and elected officers to operate transparently, and to consult with the rank & file when contemplating action on an issue, as well as to report back to the rank & file after such bodies take action. This transparency shall be manifest through regular online and email updates which will be made available to members of affiliated Unions.

c. Direct the VT AFL-CIO President, Executive Committee, Executive Board,

and elected officers to act in accordance with the general will of the membership, even when such will comes into conflict with the private views of the leadership;

d. Make a priority of re-building our local Central Labor Councils all across Vermont in order to provide a better means of giving an organized voice to our rank & file and to promote the development of personal relationships of solidarity among members from different area Unions. Here we declare that rank & file members of non-AFL-CIO Unions (such as the VSEA, NEA, UE, etc.) shall be invited to participate, just as they have for years through the Green Mountain Central Labor Council;

e. Look into the feasibility of establishing a quarterly Labor newspaper in order to better facilitate discussion, debate, and education of Union members.

2. WORKING CLASS UNITY:
Like our grandparents who fought unapologetically with arms against Germany and Italy in World War II, we are anti-Fascist. We oppose fascism, racism, sexism, and discrimination of all kinds wherever it raises its ugly head, and we support those that actively resist the attempts by the further-right to normalize discriminatory, racist, and fascist ideologies. We understand that Labor is strong when we stand in solidarity with each other; when we are united as one single working class regardless of the difference we may experience between each other. What matters to us is not one's race, ethnicity, religion, country of origin, gender, or orientation, but rather that you stand in solidarity with your Union brothers & sisters and with working people as a whole. We shall not be fooled by those that want to divide us into antagonistic camps. We know our strength comes from our unity, and from this unity follows true working class power. An injury to one is an injury to all.

3. OUR SOCIAL PROGRAM: Within the great majority of our contracts we have already won livable wages, adequate paid time off, affordable quality healthcare, and degrees of shop floor democracy on the job for our members. In many cases, we secured these benefits for our members generations ago. And thus we will continue to place a priority on organizing new shops where we can seek to secure these benefits for thousands of more working people without the need for recourse to state government. However, we also appreciate our responsibility to the larger working class who is not yet organized into a Union, and we shall continue to fight for the universal realization of these standards for all working people. As such, we support actions and legislation which guarantees all Vermonters:

- a. \$15 an hour livable wage (adjusted for inflation);
- b. 12 weeks of paid family medical leave;

- c. Single payer healthcare;
- d. Free college tuition for all public colleges and universities;
- e. Affordable housing (housing costs suffered by a family should never require any more than one week of one's monthly pay);
- f. Affordable childcare for all;
- g. Access to healthy locally produced food;
- h. Access to a defined benefit pension plan;
- i. The right to a card check recognition in order to make the process by which workers gain Union representation more fair;
- j. And furthermore that the creation of these new social programs will NOT be funded through any new regressive

taxation schemes. Rather taxation must be progressive in nature, and we must demand that the wealthy & corporations pay their fair share;

We will fight to realize this agenda by working to build a Popular Front of fellow Labor organizations and allied groups from outside the Unions. Here we shall seek to increase levels of agitation within our communities, and we will also seek to support rank & file Union members as they advocate for these positions in their cities/towns/shops and in the Statehouse.

4. POPULAR FRONT: As we take steps to realize a more equitable and democratic Vermont, we recognize that the Labor Movement, while constituting the key strategic element concerning social forces with a direct interest in creating fundamental change, is stronger when we work in partnership with other organizations and community groups where our interests overlap (or where our interests are not in contradiction to each

other). After all, the forces that oppose us, while unable to muster the numbers that we have, are presently in possession of great resources and wealth. We counter this imbalance by building bridges to other organizations whereby our constituency is further enlarged. Therefore, where non-Labor organizations, be they farmer or environmental groups, are ready and able to embrace our core working class values, and where those organizations are ready and able to work with us on our program, we shall be ready to give them a seat at the table and to work to coordinate with them to create actions in support of a common, popular, agenda. To further the development of this Popular Front members of the Executive Board of the VT AFL-CIO shall:

- a. Seek to meet with non-Labor organizations in order to discuss areas where we share common interests;
- b. Seek to secure a commitment from those organizations concerning support

for this program;

c. Bring issues and concerns emanating from these organizations (that are not articulated in this program but which are also not in conflict with this program) back to VT AFL-CIO Conventions in order for our membership to consider taking a stand on said issues;

d. Invite delegates of such organizations to VT AFL-CIO Conventions as non-voting participants.

5. GREEN NEW DEAL: We recognize the threat of climate change and the environmental challenges which we face at this time in history. Adequately addressing these challenges will take a coordinated effort to, among other things, rebuild our ageing infrastructure in such a way so as to minimize our carbon footprint. This will mean the construction of new renewable energy plants. This will also mean hardening our existing infrastructure, such as power

lines, roads, bridges, culverts, etc., in such a way as to make them resilient in the face of an increasing number of extreme weather events. We also recognize the opportunities which such construction presents to a generation of workers. Therefore, the Vermont AFL-CIO supports a Green New Deal (in Vermont & nationally) insofar as such a program guarantees that:

a. Related construction projects involving public money (or tax breaks) shall be done via Project Labor Agreements (PLAs) that guarantee a prevailing wage, safe working conditions, and that this work is done with Union labor;

b. Infrastructure built with public money must be publicly owned. Furthermore, any work required to maintain or service the facility once it is operational shall be done by Union labor;

c. Any new taxation levied to pay for such projects, or that are used to encourage a

positive environmental change in society shall NOT be regressive in nature. The fact is that working class people are already paying their fair share. The wealthy & corporations on the other hand have seen their taxes cut time and again. It is time for the richest 1% (that has 40% of our nation's total wealth) to be compelled to surrender aspects of that wealth in order to right the wrongs that their profits have necessitated on the rest of us.

d. The Vermont AFL-CIO will work with climate justice organizations in order to realize a Green New Deal as long as such organizations share in our demand for economic justice (as articulated above) to be a non-negotiable aspect of this social project.

6. ELECTORAL POLITICS: The time of the VT AFL-CIO endorsing candidates simply because they are a Democrat is over. In the last election (2018) we endorsed the great majority of the Democrats who won. And in return, they

FAILED to hold a single hearing on card check, FAILED to pass the livable wage, paid family medical leave, & free college tuition bills. Single payer healthcare was not even manifest as a whisper in the Statehouse last year. In brief, our practice of making broad endorsements and often picking the least bad of two less-than-ideal options has again proven ineffective. At minimum, the VT AFL-CIO will only consider endorsing a candidate if they have a proven record of being a Labor champion. Here we shall require candidates who seek our endorsement to sign a pledge whereby they shall support us on our issues, as we define them, come hell or high water. Second, the VT AFL-CIO shall form a study committee, chaired by our Volunteer In Politics and composed of members from diverse affiliated Unions, who shall be tasked at looking at alternative approaches to electoral politics. These alternative approaches may include:

- a. Implementing a moratorium on PAC

contributions to political parties & candidates from political parties which refuse to be proactive on Labor issues;

b. Implementing a moratorium on endorsing candidates for the Vermont House & Senate from any party which refuses to be proactive on Labor issues;

c. Exploring an institutional relationship with the Vermont Progressive Party whereby

Labor delegates to their executive board would hold sway over party policy on Labor issues;

d. Exploring an institutional relationship with another pro-Labor third party;

e. Exploring the formation of our own political party;

f. Consider taking a step back from electoral politics & instead putting all our resources into organizing new shops and thus growing our base political power;

g. Any combination of the above, or a different approach as may be looked at by this committee.

This committee shall report its findings to the VT AFL-CIO COPE Convention which shall be held in January 2020. At the COPE Convention these electoral issues shall be discussed and debated by Union members. A vote shall be held in regards to which approach to take. The VT AFL-CIO Executive Board shall act in accordance with this membership vote.

We shall NOT re-join the Working Vermont coalition (with VSEA and NEA) until and unless these fellow Unions come to share our views on electoral politics and on the values expressed in this program, and further commit to engaging in a meaningful discussion as to how to better involve the rank & file in such a coalition. However, we will still seek to informally work with the VSEA & NEA on specific issues of mutual interest (be they legislative or otherwise).

7. WORKING CLASS DEMOCRACY:
We have seen the Democratic & Republican Parties time and again fail to sufficiently represent the interests of Organized Labor and working people generally in Montpelier (and in Washington DC). Even when they have done right by us, it often is years after Vermonters demanded action. We have also witnessed the disproportionate influence wielded by corporate lobbyists in the Statehouse. In short, even though working people constitute the great majority of Vermonters, our voice is often drowned out by big moneyed interests. We therefore propose a change in our Vermont Constitution whereby the people shall be empowered to circumvent the politicians in the Statehouse through a Town Meeting based referendum system. We shall work to realize this Constitutional change through an effort to build public support for this expansion of democracy culminating in a statewide vote on this proposal in accordance with the procedures set forth in our present

VT Constitution for amending this document.

8. PRIORITY ON ORGANIZING NEW SHOPS: Here it is not good enough to say ‘we support new organizing’; of course we do, just as we all do. Rather here we must dedicate more resources to this crucial aspect of our work. Thus the Vermont AFL-CIO shall:

a. Ask our Political Director to spend the summers working with affiliated Unions aiding in their efforts to organize new workers. Specifically, affiliated Unions shall request such AFL-CIO assistance from the five member Executive Committee. The Executive Committee shall weigh the request, typically authorizing the Political Director to provide such assistance for a defined amount of time;

b. Forgo spending money on a lobbyist, and instead dedicate that money towards short time organizers who shall

be retained on a standby list. These organizers will be paid a livable wage of \$15 an hour, and may be assigned for short periods of time to affiliated Unions who request assistance in organizing new shops. Organizers may be assigned to projects from one day to two weeks in order to provide concrete support to our affiliates;

c. Use our social media to publicize and build support for affiliated Unions which are engaged in new organizing drives

9. WE ARE NOT AFRAID OF STRIKES: The Vermont AFL-CIO knows that when our members are united, when we stand together with our allies, our ability to withhold our labor is a powerful tool. We have seen the power of strikes in Vermont, most recently when the UVMMC Nurses went to the picket line (2018) in order to secure a more equitable share of their employer's wealth. Nationally, in recent years, we have seen statewide teachers' strikes across the country (some wildcat

strikes), which as with our Nurses, have typically resulted in major wins for impacted workers. Historically we have also witnessed general strikes impacting entire cities, states, and even nations. Governments have been brought down by the power of a strike. And while we do not advocate for any irresponsible use of this powerful tool, we do not fear its use either. When strikes occur, the Vermont AFL-CIO shall:

- a. Provide vocal and physical support for the strikers utilizing our social media, letters to the editor, op-eds, sending rank & file members of our Unions to the picket line, and providing monetary assistance whenever possible;
- b. Encourage affiliated Unions to proactively establish a strike fund;

Furthermore, prior to the launch of a strike, when Unions are heading to the bargaining table, the Vermont AFL-CIO shall seek to coordinate Union building

proposals among our affiliated Unions. Here, model language shall be provided to affiliated Unions which, among other things, establishes a common right for our members to NOT cross picket lines, allows for all our Unions to establish political PACs, grants our members seats on employer hiring committees, as well as on language for any other issue which our affiliated Unions express an interest in. In addition, the VT AFL-CIO will seek to provide affiliated Unions a list of other contracts in which this language is already included, for use during fact finding. Point being, we are part of a Labor federation so as to receive support from other Unions and as a means to learn from each other. And here the VT AFL-CIO will manifest this role, as was intended by those that came before us.

10. BUILDING A MORE POWERFUL LABOR MOVEMENT: We understand that having progressive Labor members capture the leadership within the VT AFL-CIO (which we intend to do

on September 15, 2019), in order to implement the above program, will be a historic victory for Vermont's Labor Movement. However, the AFL-CIO does not represent the majority of Vermont's Organized Labor. The NEA has 14,000 members in our schools. The VSEA represents 7000 workers (largely employed by the State). The UE represents hundreds more, as do a number of other non-affiliated Unions such as SEIU & the Barre Granite Cutters. These Unions are not part of the AFL-CIO. The VT AFL-CIO recognizes that the foundational social, economic, and political change we envision, over the long run, will require a united Labor Movement (working with our allies) & a united working class in order to be victorious.

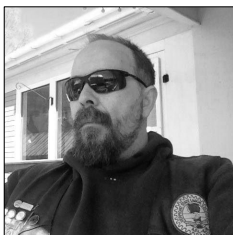
Therefore progressive elements within the Vermont AFL-CIO shall seek to organize ourselves as a kind of internal Union political party whereby rank & file members of these other Unions (those that agree with this ten point program)

will be encouraged to join this party, and in turn run for office within their Unions. Here the Vermont AFL-CIO will provide encouragement and moral support for these candidates. And as we demonstrate success inside our Labor federation, we project that candidates supporting our program will also gain internal electoral success in their efforts to capture the leadership within their Unions. As this process unfolds, we shall seek to coordinate the efforts of all the Unions in our common effort to move our working class agenda forward. But capturing the leadership positions of Labor is not an end in itself. For even with a progressive leadership in place, power will only be realized in its full potential through an active and engaged rank & file. Here the Vermont AFL-CIO will seek to grow such rank & file participation not only through seeking to expand the internal democratic rights of Labor organizations, but also by facilitating workshops on member engagement at Conventions and (upon invitation by affiliated Unions)

at Local meetings throughout the State.
TOGETHER WE WILL WIN!

CONCLUSION: The above represents the program of Vermont AFL-CIO. The Vermont AFL-CIO committed to carrying out this program in order to build a more powerful Labor Movement in Vermont. We further ask that Union members share this program with co-workers. It is not enough for a few of us to share a vision; our vision must be the united vision of Labor. In the end the Union is YOU and without an active and engaged rank & file we will not be able to make the changes our times demand. When we stand together, when we have that common vision and take those steps necessary to implement that vision, we are a powerful force. Our program is just the start, not the end. UNITED WE ARE UNION STRONG!

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Executive Board, 2019
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610

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