

# NEWS & VIEWS



LEHIGH VALLEY LABOR COUNCIL, AFL-CIO "UNIONS JOINING TOGETHER AS ONE"

December 2024

www.lehighvalleyclc.org



to the company's workers and warned that Donald Trump "will side with the billionaires and sell out the working class." After Fain's speech, union canvassers visited Lehigh County union voters ahead of the 2024 Election.

## **Election post-mortem**

Part I: Don't' mourn, organize

by Liz Shuler, President AFL-CIO

residential administrations change, but the labor movement's values do not. We stand for the freedom to organize and for the right to collectively bargain. We stand for solidarity—the kind that is built when working people stand together to take on the biggest, richest bosses and the



Liz Shuler AFL-CIO President

most powerful extremist politicians. Most importantly, we know how to fight back when anyone comes after our freedoms.

This result is a blow for every worker who depends on our elected leaders to fight for our jobs, our unions and our contracts. We organized for months to produce a nearly 17-point advantage for Vice President Kamala Harris with union members. But it is clear that the economic struggle working-class people are facing is causing real pain and neither party has sufficiently addressed it.

Now we are faced with the reality of a second Donald Trump term. The Project 2025 agenda promises to dismantle labor unions because we are a pillar of democracy and a check on power. We've seen assaults on our fundamental rights before. In the days, months, and years ahead, labor's task will be to defend working people when it happens again. The labor movement gives voice and clarity to the struggles of working people—that's what we do, and what we've always done.

Every workplace we organize is a victory for democracy. Every contract we bargain for is a step toward a fairer economy. Every strike is a lesson for rich bosses that they can't keep the working class down. No one-not Donald Trump or JD Vance, nor any one CEO—can stop solidarity.

Organized labor is the path forward. In unions, people have power to build a stable foundation for themselves and their families. To say, "It's Better in a Union," is not simply a slogan—it's the way to level the playing field and create a path to economic security for every working person. The nearly thirteen million union members of the AFL-CIO won't be divided and we won't back down. We will be there for each other and we will fight every step of the way for every worker in this country, no matter who sits in the Oval Office.

#### Lehigh Valley Labor Council Holiday events

Wednesday, December 18 Labor Council party at Shepherd Hills Golf Club Wescosville

Friday, December 20 **Holiday Toy Drive for Roosevelt Elementary School** Allentown

For details, visit: www.lehighvalleyclc.org



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### **Election post-mortem**

Part II: Don't' mourn, organize

by the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO

In preparation for the November 5 election, the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO launched the largest union-voter to union-voter mobilization effort both in the United States and in its history. Union voters across the state mobilized and rallied in support of the candidates who are committed to standing up for union families.

"The outcome of the election is evidence that our efforts to educate must grow and our conversations with our neighbors must begin to intersect," said Angela Ferritto, president of the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO. "While I suspect there is going to be a lot of Monday-morning quarterbacking on what could have been better — and I am looking forward to those conversations — it's way too early to fully unpack the divided realities that resulted in the out-



Angela Ferritto President PA AFL-CIO

come, but never too soon to begin the work ahead to unite toward a collective future that protects working families and the union rights they have earned.

"We're trade unionists; we don't get discouraged when things don't go our way. We organize.

"Here's what I know today: every single vote must be counted," she continued. "The strength of our democracy depends on counting every vote, no matter how long it takes and we're here to make sure this process is fair, transparent, and complete."

Maurice Cobb, secretary-treasurer for the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO added, "We represent more than 700,000 workers across Pennsylvania. All of those voters, and their families, were contacted multiple times. We had representation from over 40 international unions leaning in to do the work, and we met our people where they were—online, on doors, on phones, and at their worksites.



Maurice Cobb Sec.-Treas. PA AFL-CIO

"We endorsed candidates that support unions - many of those folks didn't get elected on Tuesday, which means we must continue the conversation we began in the spring, so our campaign is not over. The pro-union, proworking family coalitions must be strengthened and grown."

Pennsylvania's labor movement remains steadfast in our dedication to ensuring a future that prioritizes the rights and dignity of working people.



"Protestant lady" wanted, 1910. (Credit: Allentown Morning Call, October 13, 1910)

## Buy American, Buy Union Shopping for the holiday season

by Gregg Potter, International Union of Operating Engineers #542 Executive Vice-President, Lehigh Valley Labor Council

The holiday season is fast approaching, but there is still plenty of time to start thinking about buying gifts for friends and family. Check out the websites below for union-made and American made products



Remember, companies often relocate their manufacturing facilities. If you should buy anything from the online retailers, check to be sure their products or services are domestically manufactured.

www.madeinusaforever.com

www.howtobuyamerican.com

www.unionplus.org

www.unionlabel.com

www.usstuff.com

www.americansworking.com

www.madeinamerica.com

www.buyamerican.com

www.labor411.org

www.unionproudusa.com

Computers and computer-related gear are high on the list of holiday gifts. Check out TDS Technologies, 1728 West Allen Street, Allentown. They also specialize in alarm and surveillance systems and can be reached at 610-351-4994. Best of all, the shop is represented by members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers #375.

I hope that none of you ever experience significant damage to your home, whether it be water, fire or other acts of nature. If you do, I sincerely recommend that you contact the Butz Co. You won't find a better company employing union construction tradesmen anywhere. My family chose to employ them for our home restoration project and the results speak for themselves. For more information, visit: https://butz.com/restoration/



Remember Butz Co.: Property Repair & Restoration should disaster strike your home or business.

## Educating the rank-and-file one union member at a time

Part I: Rick Bloomingdale, former president of the PA AFL-CIO, shares past lessons with future labor leaders

by Ron Ennis, Editor Lehigh Valley Labor Council

he inspiration for serving working people can spring from many sources. For Rick Bloomingdale, it started with his family.

Bloomingdale's father, Richard, served in the Air Force during the Second World War and Korean War. He remembered his mother, Georgia, having "a profound effect on me," ensuring that her son would become "a decent human being." But growing up in a military family meant the

Bloomingdales moved often. The family lived in Japan, California, Arizona, and Germany after Rick was born in Texas. While they were stationed in Germany, Sen. Bobby Kennedy visited the troops and their families at the US military base in Heidelberg. President John F. Kennedy had recently been assassinated and the crowd's enthusiastic greeting for his younger brother was clearly evident.



**Rick Bloomingdale** 

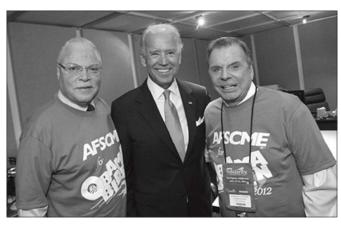
Bloomingdale returned with his family to Arizona where he graduated from high school. By then, his father had achieved the rank of lieutenant colonel when the Air Force offered him a promotion to colonel with the stipulation that he serve in Vietnam.

"Two wars are enough for me," Bloomingdale's father replied, ending his military career.

Besides his parents, his father's sibling, Mary, and her husband Howard also shaped his career path. Although all three were Democrats, Aunt Mary and Uncle Howard often engaged with his father in lively political debates that captured Rick's attention growing up. After graduation from high school, he enrolled at the University of Arizona with the aim of a political-science related major.

It is no surprise, therefore, that Bloomingdale developed a taste for politics that eventually led to his election as president of the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO. His years growing up overseas nurtured in him an appreciation for our country's freedoms. His family's military service gave him an understanding that without sacrifice those freedoms could not exist. And the debates between his family members sparked his interest in how Americans define those freedoms.

Shortly after college graduation, Doug Kennedy visited the Bloomingdale home. He needed campaign volunteers for his local city council race and asked Rick to help. Rick began worked with Paul Sullivan, president of a local chapter of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). He also met Peter and Carol Zimmerman, the campaign manager and volunteer manager respectively for Kennedy's council race. He learned many important political lessons from the Zimmermans, nudging him toward politics in the labor movement. Kennedy's city council race proved successful, and Sullivan urged him to accept an invitation to work at AFSCME's Washington, D.C. headquarters. From small beginnings, bigger opportunities came knocking.



**Fig. 1:** Jerry McEntee (*right*) with then-Vice President Joe Biden and current AFSCME President Lee Saunders (*left*) in 2012. (*Credit*: AFSCME)

While working for AFSCME during the 1970s, Bloomingdale traveled across the country organizing the union's members for its endorsed candidates. In between campaigns, he taught union members about the importance of politics and the issues that they shared as workers. And he served as president of the union's staff at its headquarters. Bloomingdale recalled, "It was at this time that I began a life-long relationship with Gerald McEntee and Edward Keller." (*Fig. #1*)

McEntee, Keller and other Pennsylvania AFSCME workers had prodded Harrisburg lawmakers to pass Act 195 in 1970, giving state, local and municipal employees the right to collectively bargain. The statute made Pennsylvania the first state in the nation to allow public-sector workers to collectively bargain and, remarkably, was signed into law by a Republican governor.

Shortly after the union's Council 13 signed a three-year agreement with the commonwealth, inflation began to spike, threatening the labor contract. When Harrisburg attempted to renege on its agreement, McEntee led District 13 state employees on the largest public employee strike in American history. He was elected international president of AFSCME in 1981 after the death of Jerry Wurf.

Later that year, AFSCME members elected Keller as District 13 executive director to replace the departing McEntee. Keller reached out to Bloomingdale and asked him to leave Washington, D.C. and work in the union's legislative department in Harrisburg. It didn't take much prodding from Keller for Bloomingdale to move to Pennsylvania in 1983. "Although I enjoyed my union work, I had grown tired of being on the road and traveling across the country," Bloomingdale said. "I wanted to settle down in one spot, and I looked forward to working with Keller." (*Fig. #2*)

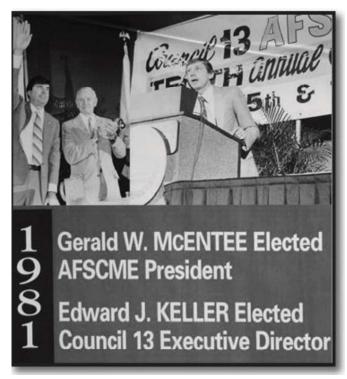
History teaches us that few labor victories came easy. The bosses and their political friends in Harrisburg and Washington often mounted fierce campaigns to thwart even modest reforms. For Bloomingdale, the agency shop fight in the late-1980s underscored this historic truth.

"The struggle for agency shop began after public-sector workers had persuaded Harrisburg lawmakers to pass Act 195," Bloomingdale said. The law granted state, local and municipal employees the right to collectively bargain but had no language mandating every employee pays union dues who receives the benefits of a union contract, such as wage increases, health insurance and dispute representation. Without agency shop, public-sector workers could chose to receive union services and benefits for free.

AFSCME leaders eventually saw the omission of agency shop legislation as a serious oversight, said Bloomingdale, but in the immediate aftermath of Act 195's passage, the legislation seemed unimportant as workers rushed to join the union and gain their newly-won rights at their worksites. They remembered how poorly they were compensated and how patronage and favoritism ruled state and local government agencies. "Union membership soared under McEntee and Keller in the early 1970s," Bloomingdale added.

Then, the mood of activism began to weaken, said Bloomingdale. Older workers, after receiving a series of successful contracts thanks to union negotiators, forgot the years of struggle before Act 195's passage and believed union dues were no longer necessary. Younger workers, hired after the struggles that led to the landmark labor bill, felt disconnected to financially supporting the union and believed Harrisburg politicians willingly granted wage and benefit increases. And members, recognizing that their union needed money to function, felt resentful of the "free riders" in their midst and demanded Harrisburg legislators pass agency shop legislation.

Prospects for the passage of agency shop brightened after the election of Bob Casey as governor in 1986, Bloomingdale recalled. As a former state auditor general, Casey supported staffing government agencies with professional employees and eliminating patronage. With the Democrats holding the governor's mansion and a majority in the state House, the roadblock to passing an agency shop bill rested in the state Senate where Republicans held the slimmest of margins, 26 to 24. The presence of a few moderate Republicans, something rarely seen today, improved the union's odds that a long sought-after measure could pass.



**Fig. 2:** After AFSCME elected Gerald McEntee (*left*) as its international president, Ed Keller (*at the podium*) took over as Pennsylvania's Council 13 Executive Director. Keller had helped McEntee organize 75,000 Pennsylvania public service workers to pass Act 195 in 1970. (*Credit*: AFSCME Council #13 40th Anniversary, 1973-2013 booklet)

Ed Keller, Pennsylvania AFSCME's executive director, put agency shop passage at the top of the union's agenda. As the union's legislative and political director for Pennsylvania, Bloomingdale worked closely with other public-sector union leaders and Harrisburg legislators to enact a bill, building on groundwork laid out by previous labor activists. The bill breezed toward passage in the Democratic-controlled state House. In fact, thirty-three state House Republicans crossed the aisle to support the bill. AFSCME held its 1988 international convention in San Diego and Keller had to attend, but he kept in touch with phone calls to Bloomingdale, knowing how important the measure was to Jerry McEntee, the union's international president and a Philadelphia native.

"Rick, are we going to pass agency shop in the state Senate?" Keller asked late one night over the phone. "I'd really like to tell Jerry and have him announce the news at our convention."

"I don't know, Ed," Bloomingdale replied. "It's going to be tough."

Keller did not like his legislative aide's answer and told him so in no uncertain terms. Bill Lincoln, the Democrat's state Senate minority whip, had shared with Bloomingdale his belief that agency shop seemed doomed. Lincoln thought state Sens. Clarence Bell and Frank Pechora, both Republicans, would vote for the bill, Act 84. But he was unsure of state Sens. Joe Rocks and James Rhoades, who eventually voted for the bill after pressure from Bloomingdale and other labor leaders. After the state Senate passed the measure, it was sent to Gov. Casey, who signed it on July 13, 1988.

Thirty years later, the US Supreme Court declared Act 84 and similar bills passed in other state legislatures as unconstitutional. Years of hard work went up in smoke with a stroke of a pen by six justices, all appointed by Republican presidents, in *Janus vs. AFSCME*. "I've sympathized with our dues-paying members ever since the court's June 27, 2018 decision," Bloomingdale lamented. "They so continue to believe in the solidarity of the labor movement that they willingly shoulder the financial burden of their union for their free-riding coworkers who enjoy all the wage and benefit gains without paying a cent in support. I believe *Janus* should be overturned, but doubt I will live to see it happen."

Bloomingdale never bought the claim made by the six Supreme Court justices voting to outlaw agency shop in *Janus* that Act 84 violated a worker's First Amendment right to free speech. No one can demand membership in a country club and not pay dues to the club, he said, and he remembered one employee asking him after the *Janus* decision, "Why should I pay dues, when the Court said I can get the union benefits and representation for free?" The US Supreme Court's decision had "nothing to do with free speech rights," he argued.

After agency shop passed in 1988, Keller and Blooming-dale focused AFSCME's attention on passing the Public Employee Occupational Safety and Health Act (HB 1300). The story behind public-sector workplace safety and health provides another cautionary lesson.

The federal government had passed in 1970 the Occupational Safety and Health Act, which established a nationwide set of safety and health regulations in private-sector workplaces. Workers at state and local government agencies had no OSHA protections unless their state enacted an OSHA-approved program. According to then-state Rep. Mark Cohen, who spearheaded HB 1300 in 1990, state and local government employees were written out of OSHA's coverage as a compromise to pass the federal law in 1970.

(continued on page seven)

## **Election Day's real winner**

Disinformation scored big gains on November 5

by Ron Ennis, Editor Lehigh Valley Labor Council



A fter the 2012 Sandy Hook massacre, a union member approached me to talk about the school shooting that left twenty-six dead, including twenty children between the ages of six and seven years old. The tragedy in Newtown,

Connecticut had prompted a nationwide call for Congress to pass gun legislation.

Roughly ten-years older than me, I found my coworker pleasant to work with whenever we shared assignments. He seemed affected by the massacre, but admitted that demands for gun legislation fueled by the deadliest mass shooting at an elementary school in American history worried him. When I asked him about his fears, he described an internet influencer that warned his audience of a National Guard plot to take away the guns of homeowners in response to Sandy Hook. My coworker, who owned several firearms, saw this as the first salvo in killing the Second Amendment.

His son, a member of another union, was also an avid listener of this podcaster. The alleged National Guard scheme sounded preposterous, but I wanted to know the author of the story. "Alex Jones," my coworker replied.

I had never heard of Alex Jones until that 2012 conversation. I began following Jones over the course of the next ten years as lawsuits mounted against the online pundit for his defamatory falsehoods about the Sandy Hook shooting. Along the way, I discovered a cadre of internet bloggers and personalities who peddled an alternative universe that went beyond even the extremes of Rush Limbaugh, *The Fox Channel*, and *The Wall Street Journal* opinion pages. In 2022, juries in Connecticut and Texas ordered Jones to pay \$1.5 billion to victims of his libelous broadcasts.

Knowing how union members receive "news" about the world around them may help explain what happened on Election Day. Campaign donations by the ultra rich, racism and misogyny all played roles in the outcome, but these features have shaped our politics for over two centuries. The emergence of "news" published in alternative outlets had an unprecedented impact on voters in this election and may have had a depressing affect on the vote for Kamala Harris.

Appearing on MSNBC's *Deadline: White House* for a postelection analysis, Angelo Carusone explained how "a large rightwing misinformation engine" had distorted people's perception of reality in recent years. Campaign examples this past fall included stories about immigrants eating pets, hurricane disaster relief funding going to undocumented migrants and children returning home from school after having a sex change operation. "We have a country that is pickled in right-wing misinformation and rage," said Carusone, president of *Media Matters*.

Sara Fischer, media correspondent for *Axios*, reported on June 11 that "the number of partisan-backed outlets designed to look like impartial news outlets has officially surpassed the number of real, local daily newspapers in the United States."

One such "newspaper" included The Catholic Tribune, according to a ProPublica report on October 20. Published by a network funded by billionaires, the massmailed publication was "inflammatory and overtly partisan" designed to "undermine Vice President Kamala Harris and prop up former President Donald Trump." The Catholic Church had no connection to the publication.

Fischer also identified over 1,200 websites "backed by dark money or intentionally masquerading as local news sites for political purposes." Nearly half the sites targeted their fake news stories to swing states, such as Pennsylvania. The Brookings Institute added that these efforts successfully shaped the campaign in two ways. First, these outlets broadly disseminated disinformation on social



Miraculous—He Can Walk on Mud. The Republican Party remained wedded to reelecting Richard Nixon in 1972 despite his mounting scandals. In imagery alluding to Jesus walking on water, Nixon rises above the muck of "scandal" as GOP hands create a path for him to walk on. Nixon went on to win reelection. Herb Block, recognized as one of the most prolific political cartoonists in the second half of the twentieth century, drew the above illustration for *The Washington Post* just before the 1972 Election.

Block's cartoon offers a history lesson for understanding the re-election of Donald Trump, a convicted felon, to the White House. A vast network of social media enablers helped Trump win on November 5. (*Credit*: The First Amendment Museum)

media platforms. And second, polling data suggested that the false claims "affected how people saw the candidates, (and) their views about leading issues such as the economy, immigration and crime."

Writing for *The New Republic* immediately after the election, Michael Tomasky explained how right-wing media "fed their audiences a diet of slanted and distorted information that made it possible for Trump to win." Many of the most bizarre campaign issues, such as the pet-eating story, came from right-wing outlets, wrote Tomasky.

Although too early to draw conclusions, this red wave of disinformation may have had the effect of depressing the vote for Harris. Trump received slightly more votes in 2024 than he did in 2020, but Harris tallied nearly seven million fewer votes than Biden. Where did those voters go?

There are many reasons for the Election Day outcome, but we can not ignore the disinformation campaign that shaped views about the candidates and the issues. Neither can we pretend that disinformation will end anytime soon.

### **Educating the rank-and-file**

(continued from page five)

AFSCME and other unions began drafting HB 1300 based on twenty years of experience with the federal OSHA law. They wanted to address the failures existing in the federal law and proposed a wide-ranging public-sector safety bill. Keller and Bloomingdale joined other labor leaders beginning in 1990 to help Rep. Cohen and his Harrisburg colleagues enact HB 1300.

Not surprisingly, state House and Senate Republican leaders asked that the union leaders scale back HB 1300. They argued that borough and county officials had complained to them that the legislative proposal was unworkable on a local level and provided no money to implement a new program. "Many of the union leaders I worked with refused to budge," Bloomingdale remembered. "They pointed to provisions that had already been negotiated out of the bill, such as minimum staffing levels for firefighters." Both sides dug in and, three decades later, Harrisburg lawmakers have yet to pass OSHA protections for state, local and municipal workers.

Hindsight almost always provides 20/20 vision, and Bloomingdale believes that AFSCME and other public-sector unions might have achieved a workplace safety bill for their members had negotiations resumed. Nevertheless, union members and their leaders have continued urging their state law-makers to pass a state OSHA plan.

After the defeat of public-sector safety in 1990, McEntee wanted someone from AFSCME to advise Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton on his 1992 presidential run. Keller offered Bloomingdale's name and he soon found himself in Arkansas advising the Clinton campaign on labor issues. No sooner had Bloomingdale arrived in Little Rock, the first of a series of controversies broke out. Jennifer Flowers had held a press conference announcing she and Clinton had a twelve-year extramarital relationship. Other issues that roiled the campaign soon followed, such as his alleged use of marijuana and failure to serve in Vietnam.

Bloomingdale got phone calls from President McEntee after each controversy broke out on the evening news. "What's going on down there, Rick?" an exasperated McEntee asked. He had gone out on a limb for Clinton and thrown the union's support behind his presidential run.

Bloomingdale tried to explain the situation to McEntee, but after he hung up the phone following one particular Clinton revelation he said to himself, "I'm not going to be in Arkansas very long."

Unlike McEntee, many union leaders wanted Tom Harkin, the labor-friendly Iowa senator, as the Democratic nominee. McEntee, however, had a keen eye for spotting talent and he saw a savvy candidate in Bill Clinton. He knew Clinton, a southerner, did not have US Sen. Harkin's labor record, but he saw the Arkansas governor as a winner. After twelve years of the Reagan-Bush administration, McEntee wanted a winner.

McEntee's gamble paid off. Clinton not only won in 1992, he appreciated the AFSCME president's early endorsement and steadfast support for his campaign. "They remained close friends for the rest of their lives," Bloomingdale said, "and when McEntee passed away in 2022, Clinton spoke at his funeral."

While on the Clinton campaign, Bloomingdale met James Carville. He had successfully run Bob Casey's 1986 gubernatorial campaign and is famously known for his political slogan "It's the economy, stupid," highlighting the importance of jobs, inflation and the economy in elections. Carville had another slogan plastered on the Clinton campaign wall declaring "Speed Kills." To him, "Speed Kills" meant taking quick advantage of your opponent's weaknesses and countering his attacks. Bloomingdale learned a lot on the highest level of political campaigns and enjoyed it, too.

Keller suggested Bloomingdale serve in the new Clinton administration, and McEntee wanted him as the international union's new political director. He considered both opportunities and even began looking at homes in the Washington, D.C. area with his new bride, Karen. Ultimately, returning to his old job in Harrisburg as AFSCME's political and legislative director for Pennsylvania suited him best.

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"Politicians should not delude themselves with the thought that the continual advance in prices in almost every line is not going to have an effect on the elections. Political orators may speak eloquently and present forcible arguments and still their words have no effect on the voters, but when a man must go down into his pockets and pay an increased price for the necessaries of life without getting a corresponding increase in income, he begins to think, and then something happens along about Election Day. This is history. The Morning Call is not prompted by any political motives in referring to this fact. . . . The tremendous advance in the price of beef, the exorbitant figures asked for coal and the advances along other lines make the cost of living a great deal higher than a year ago. . . .

"Unless conditions change, we believe that there will be some surprises in the congressional elections. Man's tenderest spot is his pocketbook. 'Twas ever thus.'"

The Allentown Morning Call, in an editorial entitled "Man's Tenderest Spot," August 16, 1902. When anthracite coal mine bosses faced miners seeking a contract in early 1902, they argued that profits were too low and refused to negotiate. The impasse led to a strike that lasted from May 12 to October 23. With the closure of the mines, a major energy source dried up and consumer prices soared, resulting in Democratic congressional gains at the expense of President Theodore Roosevelt and his GOP. The 2024 Election served as a reminder that economic fears have often outweighed other issues.

BRICKLAYERS TO ORGANIZE—The bricklayers of Allentown are engaged in forming a union similar to the one organized in Bethlehem recently. One of the objects is to secure a reduction of the hours of labor from ten to nine hours a day, also a readjustment of wages. It is not likely that any of the new rules and regulations will go into effect this summer, since by the time they can be perfectly formulated the season for building will have about come to an end. LEHIGH VALLEY LABOR COUNCIL, AFL-CIO PO Box 20226 LEHIGH VALLEY, PA 18002 NON-PROFIT ORG. U.S. POSTAGE PAID LEHIGH VALLEY, PA PERMIT NO. 1895



WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2025

Executive Board @ 7:00 PM - Delegate meeting @ 7:30 PM
Teamsters #773 3614 Lehigh Street, Whitehall PA 18052

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