

Ohio Welcomes MLK Observance Activities



From left, Aerospace Staff Secretary Karen Peek, Diane Babineaux, Chief of Staff to the IP, District 837 member Sessie Spencer, a Steelworkers volunteer and District 837 member Pam Sanders and other volunteers helped package more than 6,000 meals for families in need.

The 2011 AFL-CIO Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Observance was held in Cincinnati, OH. The Queen City was an important way station on the Underground Railroad and is the site of a current struggle for economic civil rights.

In one of his first acts after being sworn in as Ohio's new Governor, Republican John Kasich declared war on the state's home health-care workers, a largely female and African-American workforce, saying those workers' bargaining rights are "toast."

The IAM demonstrated its commitment to keeping Dr. King's dream alive by helping at an area food bank. Volunteers included a large group from District 837 in St. Louis, MO, IAM Headquarters and other unions.

Hundreds of civil, labor and human rights activists, in Cincinnati for the annual MLK Holiday Observance, responded with a candlelight march to City Hall to demand an end to the new administration's assault on Ohio workers' pay and bargaining rights.

"The situation in Ohio is being repeated in Indiana, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and

other states where right-wing conservatives are targeting collective bargaining rights and public sector pay and pensions," said Diane Babineaux, IAM Chief of Staff to the International President. "These are just the latest battles in a war on working people that goes back to Dr. King's time and beyond."

Community Service

After the vigil, delegates resumed the business of the annual observance, and spent a full day of community ser-





Thousands of Ohioans joined AFL-CIO activists for the traditional parade marking the final day of the 2011 AFL-CIO Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Holiday Observance in Cincinnati, OH.

vice, including tutoring students at an urban elementary school, packaging thousands of meals at a local food bank and providing needed carpentry and electrical services.

IAM members who volunteered for the food bank filled pallet after pallet with individual meals for families and children in a state where more than 560,000 workers remain unemployed.

“One in five children in Ohio is living in poverty,” said Babineaux. “This one food bank provides more than

a million pounds of food every month, and serves children in 20 counties in Ohio and Kentucky.”

Many children receiving the food aid get little or no food outside of school.

Today’s Challenges

“Dr. King would be proud of what the Machinists are doing here, helping to feed hungry people,” said Babineaux. “Just because you are fortunate today does not mean you’ll be fortunate tomorrow.”

The 2011 MLK Observance also included speakers, panel discussions and workshops for delegates to discuss challenges facing the civil and labor rights movement nationwide.

Jacqueline A. Berrien, Chair of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, spoke about the need for unity and solidarity in the most polarized political environment in decades. “There would have been no civil rights movement without collective action,” said Berrien.