

**Document Profile: "American Institute for Free Labor Development:  
A Union to Union Program for the Americas"**

**Title:** American Institute for Free Labor Development: A Union to Union Program for the Americas

**Contributor:** American Institute for Free Labor Development

**Publisher:** [Washington, D.C.]: AIFLD

**Date:** 1977-1979

**Description and Contents Summary:**

This document gives an overview of the work of the American Institute for Free Labor Development, which defines itself as “a non-profit organization engaged in technical assistance for the development of the democratic trade union movement in Latin America and the Caribbean” (4). It begins with a layout of their objectives, the most important of which are to maintain workers’ human rights and to support trade unions. They argue that through providing services like education and leadership training to Latin American labor movements, they are improving life in Latin America.

The text argues its case by listing AIFLD’s accomplishments, providing evidence that they’ve improved the lives of workers. Some of these pieces of evidence include their adult worker education programs, the establishment of one of the first worker’s banks in Latin America, their construction of 18,000 units of low-cost worker housing, and their aid in worker’s construction projects. The formation of the AIFLD is explained in great detail, to show they had strong American government support from the beginning. Their union-to-union program is emphasized because of its efforts to connect powerful American unions to Latin American unions in need of support. The accomplishments of their educational programs are listed throughout the text: they educated 338,000 trade unionists; provided specialty training to 2,500 workers; graduated 205 workers from their University Labor Program, which provides a university-level education; their economic research centers have caused significant improvements in collective bargaining contracts; their Industrial Training Center in Guyana helped workers gain the necessary skills to become tradesmen. They also emphasized their commitment to helping organizers: they educated 69 organizers who proceeded to add 36,000 new union members and 183 new unions. Finally, they displayed their complexity by explaining their different departments: the Agrarian Union Development Department (AUDD) has set aside \$150,000 for the social projects of impoverished agricultural workers and the Social Projects Department helped build and fund housing for workers.

There is nothing known about the specific authors of this pamphlet, however, it was published by AIFLD, so we can assume it was written to portray the organization in the best possible light. The intended audience is likely Americans who are looking for an overview of the work of the AIFLD. Specifically, we believe it targeted those who doubted the work AIFLD was doing in Latin America and questioned their conservative past. In the 1980s, AIFLD rebranded as an organization that worked cooperatively with Latin American governments, so it would likely have been important for AIFLD to make this transition clear, perhaps through a pamphlet to showcase all of their recent projects.

The pamphlet includes many large images of their projects to advertise their work and create a sense of productivity. To combat the criticisms of AIFLD, they chose photos and captions that portray AIFLD as a savior of Latin America.

**Significance:**

The ideology of the pamphlet is that the intervention of government-funded democratic trade unions in Latin American countries was positive because the pamphlet praises AIFLD. The AIFLD supported “democratic trade unions” that worked within capitalism—democracy being synonymous with capitalism—against the socialist and communist tendencies of Latin American labor movements of the time. Thus, AIFLD hoped Latin American countries remained under a capitalist democratic system. AIFLD chairman J. Peter Grace explained these political beliefs saying, “We need to understand that today the choice in Latin America is between democracy and communism... Above all, we have to act together as Americans defending our interests abroad and helping the people of Latin America... fortify the bases of their democratic life” (7).

The AIFLD emphasizes in this piece that they are helping Latin American workers, yet they did not include the perspective of any workers. From this piece we know AIFLD *thinks* they are helping, but not if the workers find AIFLD helpful. According to Paul Buchanan, the AIFLD faced scrutiny during the 1970s. After transitioning from an anti-communist organization involved in aiding authoritarian regimes to an organization that supported labor unions and the human rights of workers, many questioned AIFLD’s motives. Critics saw this change as an effort to save face amidst the public’s changing perspectives on capitalism and international intervention. Thus, this pamphlet could have been written to convince AIFLD skeptics that they were genuinely changing their ways and working collaboratively with Latin American countries to provide resources, educate workers, and aid the leaders of Latin American unions.

Americans have changed their perspectives on international intervention many times, often leading to changes in the organizations involved in such intervention. The AIFLD is an example of this as they drastically redefined their mission and identity during a post-Red-Scare era as the public’s perspective on intervention in Latin America shifted. The study of AIFLD could help answer the following questions: What is the best way for organizations to help Latin American countries? Should the United States intervene at all? And how should organizations react when public perception changes?

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### **Works Cited**

Buchanan, Paul G. “‘Useful Fools’ as Diplomatic Tools: Organized Labor as an Instrument of US Foreign Policy in Latin America.” Kellogg Institute, April 1990.  
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