

TORRES, IDA INÉS (1924–)

A product of a union family, Torres was influenced by a father who helped found the National Maritime Union, and a stepmother who worked in the needle trades, an active member of the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union. After graduating from Wadleigh High School in Central Harlem, Torres became employed in the same factory where her stepmother worked as a sewing machine operator. Her first union job was as a telephone operator, a position that became her union training ground. In 1954 she became an office manager in Local 3, which represented Bloomingdale's Department Store workers. Torres' organizing skills blossomed with the Bloomingdale's strike of 1965, and workers petitioned that she become an organizer. She was appointed, and thus began a lifelong commitment to protect workers' rights. She assumed a leading role in unionizing nonunion shops, and was subsequently elected vice president, secretary treasurer, and in 1998, president. Worker education became a key concern for Torres. A graduate of Empire College and Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations, she has taught at her Alma Mater, at the Harry Van Arsdale Center for Labor Studies, and served as coordinator of the University and College Labor Educator Association's Summer Institute for Union Women. Aware of the special needs of women workers, Torres has been instrumental in the founding and development of numerous women's rights and community organizations, including the Hispanic Labor Committee, the Coalition of Labor Union Women, and the National Council of Puerto Rican Women.