

Labor News Digest

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Scabs Vanquished

When the company contacted the union requesting early negotiations in December 1998, the 411 members of Local 240 employed at Rubatex in Bedford, Va., were optimistic that a decent contract would be negotiated. The company said it wanted to consolidate its operations by shutting down a non-union plant and transferring about 100 jobs to the Bedford location, which produced miscellaneous, unfinished rubber products that included material for skin diving suits, rubber tubing, sheet insulation, and parts for the auto industry.

The talks had barely started when union negotiators saw a major fault in the company proposal. Rubatex wanted to cut ties with its retirees. It wanted to discontinue all retiree health and prescription drug benefits. When USWA Sub-District Director Guy Hartless questioned the commitment of 100 added jobs, the company reduced the promised number of jobs to 75. Later it dropped to 50 jobs, and finally when Hartless asked if the company could promise just one job, the answer was "No."

Going Nowhere

Early talks proved fruitless. When negotiations resumed five months later, union reps discovered that Rubatex had hired a union-buster to represent it at the bargaining table. Rather than negotiate in good faith, Rubatex's negotiator made a mockery of the process. The union-buster made a habit of coming to the negotiating table late and he often cancelled meetings without sufficient explanation. On the eve of contract expiration, the company made its final offer and left. The local union officers took the insulting proposal to the membership. They voted to go on strike by a 311 to 12 margin.

"They new what it would take to force a strike," said Local 240 President Richard Walker. "The company's final demands not only went after retiree benefits, they wanted to eliminate our pension plan, make us pay into our health insurance, and increase our out-of-pocket medical expenses."

With the meager one percent pay increase in the proposal, the workers would have been taking less money home after deductions than they were under the old agreement.

Hitting the Bricks

Having forced its workers to go on strike, the company moved quickly to hire replacement workers. It chartered Greyhound buses to transport the scabs on a two-hour trip from the Farmville, Va., area. "They spent a lot of money on those scabs," Walker said. "The scabs were told that they had job security, but every scab hired was made to sign a paper acknowledging that their jobs could be terminated at any time." Later they would come to understand what that paper meant.

The scabs were made to work 12-hour shifts, a schedule the union refused to accept. And not all scabs arrived by Greyhound bus. Some drove their own cars. One morning three scabs were driving home after working a 12-hour night shift. Apparently the driver fell asleep and crashed his car. Both his passengers were killed and he was injured. The state trooper on the scene said that the accident was due to exhaustion.

Challenging Union-busting

With the members of Local 240 on the picket lines, the International union wasted no time in supporting them by waging a campaign against Rubatex's union-busting tactics. "At the time, I had no idea how important the corporate campaign was," Walker said. "We went to trade shows and passed out leaflets exposing the company's cold-blooded tactics. We met both customers and suppliers. Our union put up billboards while our members put up yard signs.

"One day about 100 of us showed up at corporate headquarters in Roanoke," he said. "The company people panicked. They called the cops. We were merely hanging in forms requesting pension information that the company is required by law to give us.

"When the cops showed up, a Rubatex vice president was ranting and raving about us occupying his building and demanding that the cops get us out of there," Walker said. "The cop in charge was smiling the whole time. He asks the Rubatex guy, 'Did you ask them to leave?' The guy says, 'No.' The cop says,

(Continued on page 5)

Bush Record Exposes Anti-Worker Agenda

Despite his campaign pledge of healing America through compassionate conservatism, no sooner had President George W. Bush taken office than he revealed the true nature of his administration.

Bush disposed of 10 years of careful review of worker-safety rules with the stroke of a pen, rejecting Occupational Safety and Health Administration ergonomic standards designed to protect workers from job-related injuries. He then moved on to slash funds for job training and wage and hour enforcement. And who will benefit most from his highly touted \$1.35 trillion tax cut? People making more than \$300,000 a year.

The President also appointed a commission to study Social Security, all of whose members support the privatizing of this most vital retirement benefit. Through these actions and more, Bush has revealed his cold, uncaring brand of corporate conservatism.

***'The one force,
the only force,
that has the
strength to
stand up to
corporate
power is the
labor
movement.'***

---- Newly UNITE elected
president Bruce Raynor

Did You Know?

Unions Stay Strong in New York State

New York State is the nation's leader in union members, and its union density continued to grow last year. Over 61,000 New Yorkers joined unions last year, lifting total union membership to almost 2 million in the state. That's over a quart of the state's entire workforce. "The increase in union strength in New York State in 2001 is very positive for working people in the state and a tribute to a revitalized labor movement," said Greg Tarpinian, executive director of Labor Research Association. New York's union density is followed by Hawaii at 24.8 percent, Alaska at 21.9 percent, and Michigan and New Jersey both at 20.8 percent.

J for Jobs Surpasses \$1.5 Billion in Total Assets

Last year, J for Jobs reached another milestone in its 23-year history, surpassing the \$1.5-billion asset threshold. Performance results were outstanding, asset growth accelerated significantly, and job creation remained robust as Union Labor Life continued to utilize various lending strategies to maximize union job creation. The strong asset growth over the last six years has enabled Union Labor Life to become recognized as one of the premier lending sources for new commercial construction projects throughout the country. In addition to using J for Jobs' expanded asset base to increase market share, J for Jobs guarantees the projects will be 100 percent union.

A Workers' Monument

The Michigan Labor History Society is celebrating Detroit's 300th birthday by honoring the city's working men and women. It created a Labor Legacy Project, which raised over \$800,000 for constructing a monument honoring workers in downtown Detroit. Rank and file union members as well as community artists are invited to submit their own designs for the monument. A jury will then choose three finalists who will create a model based on their winning designs. The Models will be unveiled on August 28.

Low Bid, Low Ball

The AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades Department has asked the state of Maryland to scrutinize the apparent low bidder in a multimillion-dollar bridge project over the Potomac River between Maryland and Virginia. The low bidder, a Virginia-based, nonunion firm, submitted a bid that includes estimates that "are materially less than the cost of such work," BCTD President Edward C. Sullivan said in a letter to Governor Parris Glendening (D) in support of a bid protest by Pile Foundation, Inc., the second-lowest bidder, which is union.

Canadian Human Resources Council to Study Construction Sector Issues

A labor-management council has been created to study human resource issues in Canada's construction sector. Construction has more highly skilled jobs than is generally believed, but working in construction is still not considered desirable, particularly by Canada's young workers, according to Bob Blakely, Canadian Director of the Building and Construction Trades Department of the AFL-CIO. The council will review issues such as the industry's changing demographics, mobility problems, and the uneven nature of demand for skilled trades.

Play Ball!!!

More than 4,500 union construction workers from 30 unions that built baseball's newest stadium, Miller Park, home of the Milwaukee Brewers, were honored at the March 31 preseason game. The stadium, with a one-of-a-kind retractable roof, was built in four years under a project labor agreement. Before the game, workers wearing hard hats stood along the first and third base lines, and the fans gave them a standing ovation. Dave Needom of Bricklayers Local 8 sang the national anthem, and Jack Kangas of Iron Workers Local 8 threw out the first pitch. A moment of silence was observed for the four workers who died while building the stadium; three in a crane collapse and one from a heart attack.

Triangle Fire Remembered

Rose Friedman, the last survivor of the tragic Triangle Shirtwaist fire in New York, died recently in California. Her death reminds us that it took the death of 147 apparel workers, many of them teenaged girls, to move the nation to create the Department of Labor and to begin addressing the need for worker protections.

The Ironworker, 1750 New York Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20006.

Issue Ballots: Keep 'em Coming

Thousands of UNITE members are filling out issue ballots, indicating their top priorities for political action. Judging by the four concerns most expressed so far--health care, wages, Social Security, and job security/trade, Bush is working against the members.

Health care should be a right, not a privilege.

UNITE members are fighting for affordable comprehensive health care for working families and retirees by supporting the expansion of the State Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP) and Medicaid, getting a strong Patients' Bill of Rights enacted, and seeking price controls on prescription drugs and adding a comprehensive prescription benefit to Medicare.

\$5.15/hr. keeps millions of workers in poverty.

UNITE supports raising the minimum wage by \$1.50 over the next three years, as spelled out in Senate Bill 277 and House Bill 665. UNITE members are also fighting in their states to enact a living wage ordinance.

Don't gamble with Social Security.

Bush's plan to create private individual Social Security accounts and put them at the mercy of the stock market would end today's guaranteed benefits that are protected against inflation.

Fast Track is the wrong track.

The President is seeking Fast Track authority from Congress so he can negotiate unfair trade deals without their input. The last time this happened, NAFTA was signed. UNITE members defeated Clinton's bid for Fast Track authority in 1997 and 1998, and we can do it again.

- **Talk to your co-workers** and friends about the dangers of FTAA, another unfair trade agreement.
- **Arrange call-in days** in your shop to tell your representative in Washington to vote NO on Fast Track, 1-800-648-3516.
- **Organize a demonstration** and speak out with other UNITE members and allies.
- **Visit your Congressional Representative** in his or her district office.
- **Write or call President Bush** 1-202-456-1414, President Bush, The White House, Washington, DC 20500--and tell him Fast Track is the Wrong Track!

UNITE, 1710 Broadway, New York, NY 10019.

Ain't No Stoppin' Us Now!

With great enthusiasm and a shared sense of purpose, over 700 delegates to our Legislative/COPE Endorsement Conference joined together, reviewed, and endorsed candidates for office who care about working families--and we thank all of you who participated in this event. We were also proud that AFL-CIO President John Sweeney and AFL-CIO Political Director Steven Rosenthal recognized the significant achievements accomplished already by our labor movement through politics and organizing, and they expressed their continued commitment to supporting the important work we have ahead of us during this crucial election cycle.

When our delegates unanimously endorsed Jim McGreevey for Governor, we set a high standard for dedicated, committed political activity by the New Jersey labor movement. Our endorsement is our pledge to work. Ultimately, the political action pursued by every union member in every NJ State AFL-CIO affiliated union will make the difference in the outcome of the elections for our endorsed candidates running for Governor, Senate, Assembly, and local government office. Though our efforts, we will elect union members to all levels of government, including State government. And, as accountable and responsible as we promise to be to our endorsed candidates through our work, they have expressed to us that they share the same level of commitment to the working families of New Jersey.

In his inspiring Conference remarks, President Sweeney said, "We proved before what we can do when we come together and act like one movement instead of just a collection of unions." In New Jersey as "One State, One Voice, One Labor Movement," we make the voices of working families heard in workplaces, communities, and government. Our labor movement will make the difference on Election Day.

Labor Fax, New Jersey AFL-CIO.

Press Washington for Solution to Import Crisis

Members of the United Steelworkers of America marched in Washington to deliver a half million letters demanding a solution to the growing wave of imports that threatens to swamp the domestic steel industry. The rally on Capitol Hill was the last of a series of demonstrations the union organized to prod lawmakers to enact HR 808, a proposal with 213 co-sponsors in the House of Representatives. This bill would roll back steel imports to the level of the mid-1990s and provide federal loan guarantees to enable domestic steel producers to modernize their facilities. The measure would also impose import taxes on foreign steel to help pay for retiree health care.

Speakers at the Washington rally included five U.S. Senators from steel producing states, as well as members of the House, and Bush Administration Commerce Secretary Donald Evans. Evans promised that the White House would work to "find lasting solutions to the crisis and not a band-aid."

USWA President Leo Gerard vowed that the union will "hold him (Evans) to everyone of those words." U.S. steel makers find themselves at a competitive disadvantage with foreign producers in part because of huge liabilities for retiree health care.

Union Member Rights and Officer Responsibilities Under the LMRDA

The Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act (LMRDA) guarantees certain rights to union members and imposes certain responsibilities on union officers. The Office of Labor-Management Standards (OLMS) enforces many LMRDA provisions while other provisions, such as the bill of rights, may only be enforced by union members through private suit in Federal court.

Union Member Rights

Bill of Rights - Union members have:

- equal rights to participate in union activities
- freedom of speech and assembly
- voice in setting rates of dues, fees, and assessments
- protection of the right to sue
- safeguards against improper discipline

Copies of Collective Bargaining Agreements - Union members and nonunion employees have the right to receive or inspect copies of collective bargaining agreements.

Reports - Unions are required to file an initial information report (Form LM-1), copies of constitutions and bylaws, and an annual financial report (Form LM-2/3/4) with OLMS. Unions must make the reports available to members and permit members to examine supporting records for just cause. The reports are public information and copies are available from OLMS.

Officer Elections - Union members have the right to:

- nominate candidates for office
- run for office
- cast a secret ballot
- protest the conduct of an election

Officer Removal - Local union members have the right to adequate procedure for the removal of an elected officer guilty of serious misconduct.

Trusteeship - Unions may only be placed in trusteeship by a parent body for the reasons specified in the LMRDA.

Prohibition Against Certain Discipline - A union or any of its officials may not fine, expel, or otherwise discipline a member for exercising any LMRDA right.

Prohibition Against Violence - No one may use or threaten to use force or violence to interfere with a union member in the exercise of LMRDA rights.

Union Officer Responsibilities

Financial Safeguards - Union officers have a duty to manage the funds and property of the union solely for the benefit of the union and its members in accordance with the union's constitution and bylaws. Union officers or employees who embezzle or steal union funds or other assets commit a Federal crime punishable by a fine and/or imprisonment.

Bonding - Union officers or employees who handle union funds or property must be bonded to provide protection against losses if their union has property and annual financial receipts which exceed \$5,000.

Labor Organization Reports - Union officers must:

- file an initial information report (Form LM-1) and annual financial reports (Forms LM-2/3/4) with OLMS.
- retain the records necessary to verify the reports for at least five years.

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Officer Reports - Union officers and employees must file reports concerning any loans and benefits received from, or certain financial interests in, employers whose employees their unions represent and businesses that deal with their unions.

Officer Elections - Unions must:

- hold elections of officers of local unions by secret ballot at least every three years.
- conduct regular elections in accordance with their constitution and bylaws and preserve all records for one year.
- mail a notice of election to every member at least fifteen (15) days prior to the election.
- comply with a candidate's request to distribute campaign material.
- not use union funds or resources to promote any candidate (nor may employer funds or resources be used).
- permit candidates to have election observers.
- allow candidates to inspect the union's membership list once within thirty (30) days prior to the election.

Restrictions on Holding Office - A person convicted of certain crimes may not serve as a union officer, employee, or other representative of a union for up to thirteen (13) years.

Loans - A union may not have outstanding loans to any one officer that in total exceed \$2,000 at anytime.

Fines - A union may not pay the fine of any officer or employee convicted of any willful violation of the LMRDA.

This is a summary of the LMRDA. Full text of the Act, which comprises Sections 401-531 of Title 29 of the United States Code, may be found in many public libraries, or by writing the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Labor-Management Standards, 200 Constitution Ave., N.W., Room N-5616, Washington, DC 20210, or on the Internet at www.dol.gov.

Scabs Vanquished

(Continued from page 1)

"Well...?" And then the Rubatex guy asks us to leave. We had already done what we came to do, so we left." It was just one of many encounters at Rubatex headquarters. Most of the time, the union members just set up informational picketing. Rubatex officials called the cops every time. The demonstrators were always peaceful and legal. After a time the cops quit showing up.

"When we attended our first trade show and left our fliers at different booths, Rubatex officials didn't know what to do," Walker said. "But during the next show, Rubatex had cameras, taking our pictures. It didn't stop us. We weren't doing anything illegal, and we were determined to continue the fight."

There was a big trade show in Canada. The company thought it was outside the union's reach, located hundreds of miles from Bedford, Va. It was wrong. The USWA is an International union, with plenty of local unions in Canada. Members of Canadian Steelworker locals wore Local 240's corporate campaign t-shirts and flooded the trade show with leaflets telling how the company was screwing its workers. Rubatex officials were shocked.

Courting Bankruptcy

Unfair labor practice charges were pending against the company for its failure to bargain in good faith. Scabs occupied the plant, and they were running it into the ground. Some of the first workers hired by Rubatex came from convict camps. They wore ankle bracelets while on work release programs. Other scabs came and went as they pleased. Some worked a day or two a week. The company's foolish scheme to break the union only put it on a path toward bankruptcy.

The scabs could never replace the skills and experience of the members of Local 240. The union members realized that the company could go out of business if the negotiating stalemate continued. So in order to save the company and their jobs, they made an offer to return to work under the old contract.

"When we went back in there," Walker said. "The place was in shambles. It was much worse than we thought."

The scabs were sent packing. The union workforce was back on the job. Negotiations resumed. With the new respect gained by the union workforce, a new three-and-a-half year agreement was reached that preserved retirees' medical benefits.

The company's right to demand up to a 92-hour workweek was significantly curtailed under the new contract. Workers now must be scheduled off every third weekend. It was a big win for union members who had been forced to work long hours and nearly all weekends in the past.

Unlike the scabs' schedule, the union did not agree to work 12-hour shifts, and continuous operations of the plant can only be implemented with the union's agreement.

The union's cooperative efforts to save the plant did not prevent the company from filing Chapter 11 bankruptcy. But all benefits and wages are intact. The union retained its defined benefit pension, negotiated a 15 percent wage increase over the term of the agreement, and made improvements to successorship language. If the plant can be saved, the workers are determined to save it.

A League of Their Own

Just about everyone has, at least once, cooled their fingers in the air blowing from the vent in the ball-return machine, then picked up a shiny bowling ball and released it with a silent prayer in the direction of those distant pins.

For some, the experience is a familiar ritual--a weekly league game or a casual bowl with friends. But how many bowlers--rookies and pros alike--have thought about how that ball came to be?

At the Ebonite bowling ball factory in Hopkinsville, Ky., recently joined UNITE members think about it every day. Bob Gemblar, for instance, handles hundreds of bowling balls each shift. As a final inspector, he looks for chips, cracks, and any other surface defects. "It's a little hard on the eyes, but it's all right," said Gemblar, who has worked at Ebonite 34 years.

Making the balls Gemblar inspects begins with the balls' cores. The fanciest balls, which go for as high as \$200 and up, have a small core surrounded by a larger core; standard models only have a large core. Workers make the cores by using plastic molds of various shapes and sizes. Each mold has two halves clipped together by large "butterfly" clips like those found in any office supply store. A round opening on top allows for the molds to be filled.

Workers make the small core by placing small weights inside an oval-shaped mold about the length of a grown man's hand. The asymmetrical weighting in the core makes a ball that will "hook" in a specific trajectory down the lane. Then the molds go down a line to get squirted full of a polymer mix, which can include zirconium metal for the heaviest cores, or dust-like glass microspheres whipped into a foamy blend for the lightest cores. Core grinder operators like Local Vice President Billy Garland grind hard cores to precise measurements. His years of experience with the machines help when he needs to adjust the model's specifications. "I know what will work and won't, after all my time with these (grinding) machines," said Garland.

Next, the cores go back into molds to get covered by at least a half inch coating of liquid urethane (for high-end balls) or polyester (for standard models), of the color of that ball will be. Coatings are formulated to have more or less "grip" to work better on more or less heavily waxed lanes. Finger holes are drilled, balls are weighted, polished, and inspected and sent out into the world of bowling alleys and pro shops.

In all, it takes the dedication of 100 Ebonite workers to satisfy the pickiest of bowling enthusiasts. "We're lucky to have a lot of long-term employees who have a lot of knowledge and really care about quality," said Local President Willie Duncan, who himself has worked at the plant since it opened 34 years ago.

The Ebonite bowling ball company was founded near the turn of the century in Newton, Mass. (Dutch settlers brought the sport to America in the 17th century, and the earliest evidence of bowling, with stone pins and balls, was found in an Egyptian tomb dating from 3200 B.C.) The factory moved to Hopkinsville, Ky., in 1967, and the Leather Workers Union organized the workers immediately.

In the 1900s, the Leather Workers affiliated with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). This past spring, SEIU recommended that Ebonite workers (Plastic and Novelty Workers Local 350) join UNITE, which represents thousands of workers in the plastic industry. The Ebonite workers voted to do so in March.

"Before we voted, we found out a lot about UNITE and what we could expect," said Duncan. "It seemed like a pretty good fit."

UNITE, 1710 Broadway, New York, NY 10019.

AFL-CIO National Boycotts

Building Materials & Tools

Brown & Sharpe Manufacturing Company

Measuring, cutting, and machine tools and pumps.
- *Machinists*

Southwire Company

Commercial and industrial wire and cable; Do-It-Yourself brand homewire.
- *Electrical Workers*

Entertainment & Recreation

Black Entertainment Television (BET)

Cable television, Action Pay-per-view, Bet on Jazz.
- *Electrical workers*

Troika Entertainment

Troika's touring production of *The Sound of Music*.
- *Actions' Equity Association*

Furniture

Straits Furniture Company

Jackson, Miss., manufacturer of entertainment centers, dining room and bedroom furniture. Brands include: Canborough Oak Collection, Downing Street Collection, Cherry Creek Collection, Hood, Straits.
- *IUE-CWA Industrial Division (formerly Electronic Workers)*

Others

CF&I Steel and Oregon Steel Mills, Inc.

Steel, including rod, bar, rail, pipe and steel plate.
- *Steelworkers*

R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company

Cigarettes: Best Value, Camel, Century, Doral, Eclipse, Magna, Monarch, More, Now, Salem, Sterling, Vantage, and Winston; plus all Moonlight Tobacco products.
- *Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers*

Union Label & Service Trades Department, 815 16th St., NW, Washington, DC 20006.