

Labor News Digest

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Union Membership Doesn't Cost, It Pays!

As local union leaders, we understand clearly the many advantages union members have over unorganized workers. Union representation allows us a real voice in the workplace. It gives us a contractual right to be treated with dignity and respect on the job.

Our wages, hours, and all other conditions of employment are set down in writing in the collective bargaining agreement. We can only be disciplined for just cause. The grievance and arbitration system provides due process procedures when workers disagree with management actions. These union rights are truly priceless, but the figures on wages and benefits can also illustrate the union advantage.

Union members continue to earn higher wages and benefits than non-union workers, according to two new reports from the federal government. The figures showed that union members earned \$143 a week more than non-union workers, based on median wages in 2001.

Union workers' weekly pay was \$718 as compared to non-union workers' pay of \$575. This 25 percent advantage is worth nearly \$7,500 a year, according to the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The union wage advantage is even greater for women and people of color. Union women earn 30 percent more than the unorganized. Unionized African-Americans earn 30 percent more than their non-union counterparts.

Latinos who are union members earn a whopping 45 percent more than those who work without a union contract.

The union advantage is just as impressive when it comes to benefits. Union members are much more likely to have more benefits and higher quality benefit plans than non-union workers.

As an example, 79 percent of union members are covered by a retirement plan as compared with only 44 percent of non-union workers.

Union members are much more likely to have a pension they can count on. Among non-union workers who have a retirement plan, only 16 percent have a defined-benefit plan, which provides a pension check in a set amount each month. By comparison, 70 percent of union members are enrolled in defined-benefit retirement plans. It's the same story when it comes to health insurance. Union members are more likely to have health insurance, and it shouldn't be a great surprise that they also pay less for their insurance than non-union workers.

Union members lead the way in most other benefits, which include paid vacations, paid holidays, life insurance, and disability pay, just to name a few.

The Union Advantage by the Numbers

Union workers' median weekly earnings:	\$718
Non-union workers' median weekly earnings:	\$575
Union wage advantage:	25%
Union women's median weekly earnings:	\$643
Non-union women's median weekly earnings:	\$494
Union wage advantage:	30%
African-American union workers' median weekly earnings:	\$603
African-American non-union workers' median weekly earnings:	\$463
Union wage advantage for African-Americans:	30%
Latino union workers' median weekly earnings:	\$578
Latino non-union workers' median weekly earnings:	\$398
Union wage advantage for Latinos:	45%

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Union Membership Doesn't Cost, It Pays!

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Union workers with guaranteed (defined-benefit) pension:	70%
Non-union workers with guaranteed (defined-benefit) pension:	16%
Union pension advantage:	54%
Union workers who get health benefits:	73%
Non-union workers who get health benefits:	51%
Union health benefits advantage:	22%
Union workers who get short-term disability coverage:	66%
Non-union workers who get short-term disability coverage:	33%
Union disability coverage advantage:	33%
Union workers who get life insurance coverage:	78%
Non-union workers who get life insurance coverage:	53%
Union life insurance coverage advantage:	25%

Sources: U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Earnings, January 2002; Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employee Benefits in Private Industry, 1999.

Did You Know?

The United Auto Workers Union reported membership gains of 4.3 percent in 2001, the first increase in its membership in more than 20 years. In annual reports filed with the United States Department of Labor, the UAW claimed 700,000 members in 2001, an increase of 30,000 over 2000. The UAW's ranks had slowly thinned starting in 1979 as the "Big Three" auto makers trimmed their workforces in response to competitive pressures from overseas. The gains in membership have resulted from the UAW's aggressive attempts to recruit workers from other industries such as aerospace, defense, farm workers, health care employees, the service sector, and even graduate teaching assistants at certain colleges. Workers in non-automotive related industries now comprise almost one-half of the UAW's membership.

Peter & Lyons, 25 East Washington St., Chicago, IL 60602.

Union Goods and Services: They're Everywhere!

If you can eat it, drink it, or ride it...If you can sit on it, play on it, work in it, or stay in it...If you can tell time with it, build with it, or cook with it...If you watch it, listen to it, or keep things cold with it...If you use it for work, or just to have fun... You can find one made by union workers. But, did you also know that union members treat you when you're sick and help you stay well...They teach kids, and help them stay safe...They fight fires, fly airplanes, drive buses, and trucks...They build houses and buildings, churches and schools...They make trains, airplanes, and boats...and the engines that move them...They build autos and trucks and the roads they follow...They run railroads and subways, and ships big and small...They make glasses to wear...and the kind that you drink from...They keep you warm in the winter, and cool in the summer...They make music and movies and they film TV news...They write newspapers and print them, take pictures and tint them...They do thousands of things to make life more secure...So look for the union label—just to be sure.

Union Label & Service Trades Department, 815 Sixteenth St., N.W., Washington, DC 20006.

Hope Kept Alive!

When Cooper Industries got out of the transformer business and closed its plant in Canonsburg, Pa., in 1995, many of the workers refused to give up hope that the facility, known locally as McGraw-Edison, would be re-opened.

The plant always had a reputation for producing high-quality transformers. Almost two years later, a new owner purchased the assets and called the new company Pennsylvania Transformer Technology, Inc. The company hired many of the experienced, former employees.

With production well under way in the state-of-the-art facility in 1997, many of the returning workers wanted their old union back and approached the local Steelworkers' office seeking representation. Investigation showed that more than half of the workforce had been Cooper bargaining unit employees, covered by the previous USWA contract.

Overcoming Roadblocks

The union asked that Pennsylvania Transformer recognize it as the representative of the Canonsburg workforce, as well-established law requires new employers to recognize unions in these situations. The company refused and the union filed an unfair labor practice charge

with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). The NLRB agreed with the USWA that Pennsylvania Transformer had to recognize the union. Rather than acknowledge the union and begin bargaining, the company appealed to the NLRB in Washington, D.C.

The union prevailed when the decision came down in 2000, but the company again refused to concede and appealed to the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia circuit.

Meanwhile, the workers were getting restless and began circulating cards to request an NLRB election for USWA representation. The company's legal maneuvers, while intending to stall the process, only gave the union additional time to increase support among the workers, especially the new hires.

"Either way, the workers were determined to get union representation in that plant," said Local 14693 President Mark Cummings. "But the NLRB told us that if we submitted the cards, our legal challenge would be dismissed. Since we had two legal victories, we talked to the members and decided to stay the course."

Staying the Course

It was the right move because the Circuit Court agreed in a 3-0 decision rendered in June 2001, that the USWA must be recognized as the official bargaining agent for Pennsylvania Transformer workers in Canonsburg.

Following more than six months of bargaining, union members ratified a first agreement by a 144 to 41 vote.

"It's a lot better here now," said Kenny Bowers of the tank shop. "Everybody got a wage increase, our health insurance improved, and we have better Sick & Accident benefits.

"We've established an equalization between guys doing the same work," said Jamie Farmer, a control apparatus assembler. "We had different sets of work rules and pay scales for different people." A major union goal was to bring workers into parity. The 181 different wage scales were reduced to five job classes, identifying 27 jobs in those classes.

"Now things are done by seniority," said transformer technician Rick Palone. "All the favoritism is gone."

The five-year agreement provides an average annual wage increase of 67 cents per hour. The 401(k) plan has been converted into a defined benefit pension plan under the Steelworkers Pension Trust, and most of the workers will be vested under the agreement. Health care contributions by the workers were cut in half.

Pennsylvania Transformer is the only U.S.-owned power transformer manufacturer that produces a total range of sizes to the electrical transformer industry.

USWA, 4069 Bradley Circle, N.W., Canton, OH 44718-2565.

Research Your Employer to Improve Your Contract

To bargain effectively, your local needs information to protect against the company's strengths and to exploit its weaknesses. Researching your employer will supply you with the facts to get a fair contract.

Your local's research should begin at least six months prior to negotiations. The negotiations committee should review the current contract, paragraph by paragraph, to identify areas in need of improvement. Look for shortcomings in the existing contract by reviewing old grievance and arbitration records and talking with stewards and grievance committee members who deal with problems arising under the agreement.

By using its own records or issuing information requests to the company, the local can get the following demographic information on its units: number of employees; dates of birth; dates of hire; minimum, maximum rates of pay by job classification; average weighted hourly rate; cost of living adjustments; total and average hours worked; job descriptions; and vacation eligibility; etc.

External information on the employer, the economy, and contract settlements achieved by other unions can be accessed via public libraries, governmental agencies like the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and the Department of Labor (DOL), as well as the PACE Research and Education Department.

External Resources of Information—Director of Corporate Affiliations ("Who Owns Whom")

This invaluable guide will help you trace the parent company of most U.S. and international publicly traded firms and major privately held companies. It is available in larger branches of most public libraries.

Standard & Poor's Register of Corporations, Directors and Executives

Available in most public libraries, this directory lists information on public and private companies, including the names, titles and backgrounds of their executive officers.

Best's Directory of Insurance Companies

This resource, also available in most public libraries, lists insurance companies, rates, and their level of financial soundness.

Fast Manual of Corporate Investigation

Available through the PACE Research and Education Department, this resource is a step-by-step guide on how to research public and private companies as well as nonprofit organizations.

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Research Your Employer to Improve Your Contract

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Unicore Reports—to determine level of union organization

The AFL-CIO Department of Corporate Affairs produces Unicore Reports, which are available through the PACE Research and Education Department. They provide the following information:

- Listing of a parent company's U.S. and Canada locations
- Number of employees at each location
- Service or product produced at each location
- Which union, if any, represents the employees
- Local union and telephone number of representing labor union
- Unfair Labor Practice record at each location
- OSHA inspection and penalty record at each location

Other information available from the AFL-CIO includes Employee Benefit Plan and National Labor Relations Board Election History reports.

Corporate Research Online

Most Internet sites are free, but some require user fees to enter a site or gain access to key information. Begin your search at the PACE homepage, www.paceunion.org by clicking on the "contents" graphic and then clicking on "links." From here you will have direct links to websites like the Securities and Exchange Commission's Edgar database, which will provide you with financial documents for all publicly traded U.S. companies. The PACE "links" section also will connect you to useful search engines like www.metacrawler.com and numerous publications and media sites.

One of the most useful fee-based sites is www.dnb.com (Dun & Bradstreet), which provides credit and financial information on thousands of companies worldwide. The Dun & Bradstreet site is especially useful when you are researching a private company.

Using your credit card, you can get a *Company Profile Report* for \$3.50 that will supply you with an estimated annual sales figure for most U.S. business locations. Dun and Bradstreet's *Business Background Report* is \$35, and contains a company's business history, key officers, and important events.

It's never too early to research your employer, so start digging up information right away!

PACE International Union, P.O. Box 1475, Nashville, TN 37202.

Union Label Week 2002

Labor Day is Monday, September 2. That is also the first day of Union Label Week 2002, which runs through Saturday, September 7. Union Label Week was designed by the AFL-CIO as a way to increase public awareness of the tremendous contributions that union families make to our economy and the nation.

Beyond the direct benefits that union families receive in wages, job safety, employment security, benefits, and working conditions, the entire workforce enjoys a higher quality of life because of the positive influence of unions on the overall economy.

The need to educate the public about who we are and what we do is greater than ever as unions struggle to protect jobs, wages, working conditions, and benefits in an economy dominated by global corporations whose only allegiance is to profit, at any cost.

We've got our work cut out for us because the media doesn't really pay much attention to labor and its issues. That's too bad, because we have a great story to tell. It's going to be up to us to tell it.

Time and again, over the past year, we have proven that when America faces tough times, union families are the first to respond.

Union families poured out their money and volunteered their time in response to 9/11. In the weeks that followed, our members and their children were among the first to step forward to serve the nation.

As many as one out of three of those killed in the terrorist attacks were from union families or were, themselves, union members. The bonds of solidarity that connect union workers were strengthened by that fact, but that wasn't the only reason for the outpouring of generosity by union families. The bedrock of patriotism that is basic to labor's philosophy motivated this natural unselfish response. The principles of justice, freedom, and equality upon which our nation was founded are also the guiding principles of organized labor.

At the economic level, America's union families add value to the projects and services that our labor creates and that added value is symbolized by the union label and shop card. We add that value through our devotion to quality, through the additional training that many unions provide, and through the protections and principles that a union contract establishes.

Our message for Union Label Week 2002 is more relevant today than ever: ***Union-made products add value for America—learn to look for and use union-made in America products and services.*** Let's make sure this message goes out to all corners of the nation for all to hear.

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

Taking Aim at the "Intolerable Violation"

ILO Tackles Abusive Child Labor From Many Angles

New statistics reveal that some 179 million children aged 5-17, or 73 percent of all working children, are in the worst forms of child labor that cause "irreversible physical or psychological damage, or that even threaten their lives." This represents "an intolerable violation" of these children's rights, says the ILO in a new global report.

According to *A Future Without Child Labor*, 8.4 million of these children are trapped in the "unconditional worst forms"—slavery, trafficking, debt bondage, prostitution, and other illicit activities—and should be "immediately withdrawn." Children like 14-year-old Dacie, a Burmese girl who "was tricked into leaving her home" by a Thai police officer who sold her to a brothel where she was raped repeatedly, according to Gary Haugen, CEO of International Justice Mission.

The ILO global report offers a comprehensive review of the scope of the child labor problem, and looks at strategies in place to combat it. The document forms part of the follow-up to the ILO's *Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*, which requires the ILO's director general to prepare a "dynamic global report" each year for the International Labor Conference on the status of one of four principles set forth in the declaration. This global "snapshot" enables the ILO to determine how effective it is in the area under review, and which countries fall short of fulfilling the principle studies and could benefit from technical cooperation.

This year's report draws many of its statistics from another recently released ILO publication, *Every Child Counts: New Global Estimates on Child Labor*. The data is broken down by category, including age, gender, region, and type of work.

For example, the data shows that child labor isn't confined to poor countries. While the vast majority of child workers are in developing countries (over 127 million in the Asia-Pacific region alone), an estimated 2.5 million are in the industrialized world.

At a press conference for the report's release, at UN headquarters in New York, Director General Juan Somavia noted that while "consciousness had led to action...obviously the action is not enough to deal with the enormity of the problem."

The global report "makes it clear that much remains to be done to eliminate the worst forms of child labor," Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao told the International Labor Conference. She stressed the need "to ensure that all children—particularly young girls—are given equal access to education and training."

The global report makes three recommendations for tackling the problem:

- reinforce the work of the ILO's International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC);
- do a better job of incorporating anti-child labor efforts in all ILO programs; and
- forge closer partnerships and global alliances with employers' and workers' organizations, NGOs, and other groups involved in the process.

A Future Without Child Labor offers some insights into what constitutes an effective technical assistance strategy. A key component to success, says the report, is combining short- and long-term approaches, so that an individual program both "respond[s] to the immediate needs of child laborers" and stays "firmly embedded in a long-term, property reduction, and rights-based perspective."

Other key components include ensuring that projects match local conditions, using a variety of different tools and approaches, putting children first, and taking information collection and analysis seriously.

World Day Against Child Labor

The ILO has been doing its part to build public awareness of harmful child labor. The ILO marked the first World Day Against Child Labor to build broader support for the global campaign to end child labor. Earlier this year, the organization launched the Red Card Campaign at the start of the African Cup of Nations in an effort to reach large numbers of people at soccer tournaments around the world to educate them about the worst forms of child labor.

"The world is increasingly aware of child labor and demanding action to stop it," said Somavia. "A majority of governments across the world now acknowledge the existence of the problem—on greater or smaller scales and in different forms. Many have already set out to measure and understand it, and are taking action against it."

G8 Kudos

IPEC has been at the forefront of that work and received kudos at the G8 summit. "Stronger efforts must be made to eliminate the worst forms of child labor and to mainstream working children into formal schools," leaders of the top industrial countries declared. "We applaud the efforts of the International Labor Organization in this regard."

Launched 10 years ago with one donor (Germany) and projects in six countries, IPEC today is supported by 26 donor nations, including significant funding from the United States. It is the ILO's largest technical cooperation program, working in 75 countries and with over 150 non-governmental organizations. For example, IPEC recently signed a memorandum of understanding with Pakistan's First Woman Bank to establish microfinance projects in three cities. The aim of the program is to train women as carpet weavers so they can earn a living—and thus send their children to school rather than putting them to work.

And, last year, IPEC initiated programs in Tanzania, Nepal, and El Salvador to eliminate the worst forms of child labor in 10 years or less. The U.S. Department of Labor recently awarded IPEC a \$4 million grant for education programs for former child workers in El Salvador. The children include victims of commercial sexual exploitation, scavengers at dumpsites, and those working in sugar cane production and commercial fishing. Under the grant, IPEC will also work with the government of El Salvador under the time-bound program to develop a model to broaden access to education.

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Taking Aim at the "Intolerable Violation"

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An IPEC official told a State Department conference last July that "IPEC's experience...shows that child labor can be reduced and eliminated—effectively and sustainably. This has happened not only with pilot projects, but with entire industries or complete geographical areas. We have managed to get child workers out of factories or workshops, and into schools—with accompanying measures to improve employment and incomes for parents and to prevent siblings from ending up in child labor."

The IPEC-led campaign for universal ratification of ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor also reveals that governments are stepping up their commitment. Seventy-two percent, or 126, of the ILO's 175 members have ratified Convention 182 since it was unanimously adopted in 1999—a record rate for any ILO convention.

A publication just released by the ILO and the Inter-Parliamentary Union offers guidance to policy makers wrestling with how to make a difference. *Eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labor* recommends action to combat child labor and gives examples of successful policies and programs in countries as diverse as Kenya, Brazil, and Yemen.

International Labor Organization (ILO), 1828 L St., NW, Washington, DC 20036.

Hints for Making Your First Impression Count

First impressions are often the most important, especially in the world of sales. Here are several ways to make sure your first impression is a winner:

- *Be on time.* Tardiness can show a lack of respect toward the person you are meeting. If a delay is unavoidable, be sure to give notice before your appointment.
- *Treat all contacts with respect.* If you plan to build a relationship with your prospect, it's important to make friends with everyone you meet along the way, especially secretaries and the people who deal with you directly.
- *Do your research.* Prepare yourself by gathering background information about the company you plan to visit.
- *Get organized.* Remember to bring important brochures, business cards, samples, etc., and make sure they are organized and easy to locate.
- *Talk less and listen more.* Be sure to ask questions, but allow the other person to fully respond. Avoid monopolizing a conversation, or you may come off as someone who is only interested in looking out for their own interests.
- *Be slow to offer recommendations.* Make sure you fully understand a situation before offering solutions.
- *Use appropriate language.* Avoid slang and words such as "yeah" and "nope."
- *Dress for success.* A well-groomed appearance is critical in first impressions. At the same time, the nicer you look, the better you will feel about yourself.
- *Attitude is everything.* Wear a smile to show the person you are greeting that you are happy to meet them. Show your confidence by sitting straight, listening attentively, and giving positive reactions.

Business Review, published by Kwik Kopy Printing, 20 West Third Street, Jamestown, NY 14701.

Safety and Health Department Report

The signs and symptoms of heat exhaustion are headache, nausea, vertigo, weakness, thirst, and giddiness. This condition responds readily to prompt treatment, however, heat exhaustion should not be dismissed lightly. The fainting associated with heat exhaustion can be dangerous if the victim is working high above the ground or over protruding objects, such as reinforcement steel. Also, the signs and symptoms are similar to those of heat stroke, a medical emergency. Workers suffering from heat exhaustion should be removed from the hot environment and given replacement fluids, such as water.

Performing hard physical labor in a hot environment usually causes heat cramps, also known as a Charlie Horse. These cramps have been attributed to an electrolyte imbalance causing sweating and appear to be caused by the lack of water replenishment. Thirst cannot be relied upon to gauge the need for water; instead, water must be taken every 15 to 20 minutes in hot environments.

In heat collapse, or fainting, the brain does not receive enough oxygen because blood pools in the extremities, such as the hands or feet; as a result, an individual may lose consciousness. This reaction is similar to that of heat exhaustion and does not affect the body's heat balance. However, the onset of heat collapse is rapid and unpredictable. To prevent heat collapse, the worker should gradually become acclimatized to a hot environment.

Heat rashes are the most common problem in hot work environments. Also called Prickly Heat, it is manifested as red papules, usually in areas where clothing is restrictive. Prickly Heat occurs on skin that is persistently damp with un-evaporated sweat. In most cases, heat rashes will disappear when the worker returns to a cool environment.

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Safety and Health Department Report

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The last heat disorder is known as heat fatigue, and the major factor is lack of acclimatization. The signs and symptoms of heat fatigue include the impaired performance of skilled sensor motor, mental, or vigilance jobs. There is no treatment for heat fatigue except the removal of heat stress before a more serious heat-related condition develops.

The biggest thing to remember when dealing with any heat-related problems is to drink cool (50 to 60 degrees F. or 10 to 16 degrees C.) water or any cool, non-alcoholic beverage. Liquids should be made available to workers, and they should be encouraged to drink small amounts frequently. The supply should be placed close to the work area, and if workers feel the on-set of any of the symptoms listed, they should alert the nearest person.

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

Revolt in Rhode Island

The battle officially began on January 21, after the Local took a strike vote and the company immediately locked out the gas workers and attempted to replace them with unlicensed outside contractors protected by security brought in from out of state.

The Local refused to roll over. "We decided from the beginning that we would fight this thing all the way—no matter the cost," said Local 12431 President Ray Lang. Lang and the Local members dug in and began to enlist numerous allies in what would become a fight lasting more than four months.

Rallying Our Allies

The Rhode Island AFL-CIO immediately came on board, pledging its full support and enlisting all member unions in support. It also added its weight as the chief state lobbyist for Rhode Island's workers. (In Rhode Island voters from union households make up more than half of the voting public. Also, the State Democratic Party retains the ethic of "Roosevelt Democrats" who support labor on a broad range of issues. Seven state senators are active union members.)

The Local received assistance from a former communications chairman of the State Democratic Party, and received research and writing assistance from the USWA's Strategic Campaigns Department.

Research pointed to a number of factors that would become important in the *Campaign for Justice at New England Gas*. First—and most importantly—the Local knew that it was not dealing with a locally-owned utility, but with a multibillion dollar utility conglomerate that was created when utility deregulation laws took effect in the 1990s.

Containing a Giant Conglomerate

The conglomerate is controlled by the George Lindemann family of Austin, Tex., Chicago, Ill., Palm Beach, Fla., New York, N.Y., (and other places). According to *Forbes Magazine*, the family is the 363rd wealthiest in the world with a net worth of 1.2 billion.

The family patriarch, George Lindemann Sr., ironically amassed much of the original family fortune in telecommunications in New England before moving to Austin, where he acquired control of Southern Union Gas Company. Armed with the lever of utility deregulation, he quickly expanded the single Texas utility into a multinational conglomerate, taking on billions of dollars of debt to finance the growth.

Meanwhile, Lindemann's namesake—George Jr., a former director of the company—achieved international notoriety when he was convicted of conspiracy in a scheme to kill racehorses for insurance money. He originally received a 15-year prison term for the transgression.

In addition to Junior's legacy and the massive debt burden, the new Southern Union acquired a huge toxic waste liability caused by former MGPs (manufactured gas plants). MGPs are outdated coal gasification plants that leave a highly-toxic residue of chemicals such as cyanide and coal tars.

Bolstered by the knowledge of Southern Union's shaky financial status and ballooning environmental liability, the Union took its case to elected officials, the public, and the Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission (PUC).

Winning Public Backing

The union suggested that the company intended to skim profits from its highly profitable New England operations to feed the massive corporate debt burden, to pay for the growing environmental liability, and to pad the pockets of many of Southern Union's executives and board members who receive extremely high compensation—and who have numerous apparent conflicts of interests in direct dealings with the company.

The Rhode Island community, incensed by Southern Union's arrogant behavior, warmly received the union's message. The company had changed its policy on shutoffs, demanding 100 percent pre-payment of overdue bills, rather than negotiating settlements. The company also attempted to win a \$7.2 million rate *increase*, in spite of Rhode Island's warmest winter on record and low natural gas prices.

In addition, the locked-out workers, demonstrating at gas hook-up sites and local company headquarters, pointed out unsafe construction practices and the use of unlicensed contractors. They also joined with the George Wiley Center—a poor peoples' advocacy center—and brought in numerous other community groups to fight the rate increase requests before the PCU.

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Revolt in Rhode Island

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Politicizing the Struggle

Meanwhile, the joint community/labor coalition lobbied the Rhode Island legislature over the use of unlicensed contractors and conducted a number of demonstrations around the state protesting the prospective rate increases.

The results were overwhelming. In a period of four months:

- The coalition won a law in the State Legislature that mandates two years of experience and proper training before a gas hook-up worker may be licensed;
- A state judge issued an injunction mandating licensing, even before the law was passed;
- The legislature over-rode Republican Governor Lincoln Almond's veto of the licensing law with a unanimous vote in the Senate and a near-unanimous vote in the House;
- The PUC reversed the rate increase and is now proposing a \$3.9 million rate *decrease* as well as \$1 million cap on the state's MGP liability on the grounds that the liability belongs to the company and not the ratepayers;
- The Union won a five-year contract with improvements in every economic area, strong disability language, continuation of a good health insurance program, strict limits on the use of temporary workers and contracting out, and a continuation of successorship language;
- And the 70 members in the Union's office and technical unit, led by Joyce Sousa, won a "me-too" agreement on June 1 (without a work stoppage) featuring especially strong contract language prohibiting the abuse of temps—always a major issue for O&T workers.

The Ultimate Victory

Most importantly, the people of Rhode Island, uniting in the fight for justice for 250 Steelworkers in Local 12431, created a power-base that will carry them in future struggles with New England Gas, a company that they formerly called "our gas company."

Today, elected officials, community leaders, and union leaders are beginning to publicly discuss the possibility of state, municipal or even worker-ownership of New England Gas.

Now that's revolutionary.

USWA, 4069 Bradley Circle, NW, Canton, OH 44718-2565.

9 Ways to Retain Your Most Valuable Employees

One of the hottest topics on the minds of many successful companies is retaining MVEs (Most Valuable Employees). Here are nine ways that leading-edge organizations can keep the people they need:

1. Tailor retention efforts to meet your individual employees' needs.
2. Create a positive work environment that provides flexibility.
3. Integrate career development opportunities with business goals.
4. Involve employees in the company's decision-making progress.
5. Give feedback, whether positive or negative, and recognize all accomplishments, big or small, when they happen.
6. Be quick to listen and slow to speak.
7. Ask the right questions and show concern for the future of your employees. Everyone appreciates knowing they are valued.
8. Deal with conflict immediately by attempting to understand underlying problems and by working quickly to resolve them.
9. Recognize nonverbal communication, since the majority of employees will communicate problems via nonverbal body language.