

UFCW Members Under Attack in Indiana Continue Fight Against “Right to Work” Legislation



Members of UFCW Local 700 gathered in the Indiana Statehouse on the opening day of the legislative session to educate their representatives about the harmful economic consequences that so-called “Right to Work” legislation will have on working families.

Indiana Republicans have introduced so-called “Right-to-Work” legislation designed to weaken unions in that state. This is the second year in a row they have introduced this type of anti-worker legislation, and once again UFCW members are on the front lines mobilizing against it.

On January 4, UFCW members had meetings with their legislators to reiterate that the legislation is wrong for Hoosier families. Amy Hale, a member of UFCW Local 700 who works at Kroger in Fishers, Indiana, was one of the participants. “I believe in the middle class and I’m fighting for workers’ rights and to keep my head above water,” she said. “Without my union I wouldn’t be where I am today. If this legislation passes, incomes would drop significantly. Our standard of living would go down. We can’t let that happen.”

On January 10, the House Employment, Labor and Pensions Committee passed the legislation out of committee. The legislation now goes to the full House for a vote.

While Indiana Republicans control every lever of state government, the process requires a working quorum, which House Democrats have been denying. “We refuse to let the most

controversial public policy bill of the decade be railroaded through with the public being denied their fair and adequate input,” said House Democratic Leader and UFCW-ally Patrick Bauer.

Workers from UFCW and several other labor unions continue to voice their concerns to legislators about the negative effects this legislation will have on the quality of life for Hoosier working families. **OP**

President Obama Ensures Continuity for NLRB

President Obama used his recess powers to fill three vacancies on the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Prior to this announcement there was great concern among workers and unions that given the expiration of board member Craig Becker’s term, the NLRB would lose its quorum, and with it, its power to decide on labor matters.

Given the obstructionism Obama nominees have faced in Congress, confirmation for NLRB nominees using the regular procedure would have been highly unlikely.

UFCW International President Joe Hansen issued a statement praising President Obama’s leadership in making the appointments and underscoring their importance. “We applaud President Obama’s recent decision to fill vacant posts at the National Labor Relations Board. This agency plays an important role in safeguarding the rights of workers and their families.”

“The President’s appointees are each eminently qualified, and have long deserved an up-or-down vote. The U.S. Constitution makes it possible for the President of the United States to break through political obstructionism to ensure that our laws are enforced. These appointments are a victory for working families over partisan gridlock in Washington. We thank President Obama for his leadership in standing up for workers and curtailing the excesses of Wall Street.”

President Obama appointed union lawyer Richard Griffin, current Labor Department official Sharon Block, and NLRB counsel Terence Flynn. **OP**

Macy's Members to Act Together for Growth and Strength



UFCW Locals 1*, 3*, 5, 21, 23, 75, 101*, 367, 400, 655 and 1445 are coordinating their bargaining efforts with Macy's.

As thousands of Macy's employees gear up for upcoming negotiations, local leaders across the country are coordinating efforts to give members the strongest hand to take to the table.

Recently, at a meeting of Local unions with Macy's employees, information was shared about how members are facing similar experiences: Macy's corporate human resources inconsistencies, poor implementation of "My Schedule Plus," reduced hours, and pending changes to employees' pension plans.

These local leaders will be meeting regularly to coordinate and collaborate on future member actions.

As UFCW's largest non-food retail employer, Macy's saw strong holiday sales at the close of 2011, and overall has weathered well despite the downturn of the economy. Macy's is one of the nation's largest retailers, and its workers make up 77 percent of UFCW's non-grocery retail membership. Retail jobs currently account for more than 22 percent of all employment in the U.S. As this sector continues to grow, so will its importance. As more and more Americans join the ranks of retail workers, the quality of these jobs will define the quality of life in our country. **OP**

Local 951 Kroger Workers Approve Three-Year Contract

Michigan Kroger workers represented by the UFCW Local 951 have voted to approve a new three-year contract by a vote

of 84 percent "yes" to 16 percent "no."

"The proposal had the full recommendation of the bargaining committee as it preserved members' health benefits and pension, and provided top rate wage increases, which was a significant accomplishment given Michigan's challenging economy and high unemployment rate," said Marv Russow, President of UFCW Local 951. "The committee felt this was the best contract possible under these circumstances. By their overwhelming ratification of the contract, I would say the membership agreed."

In November, Kroger members rejected the company's first contract offer and authorized a strike. They had been working under a contract extension of the previous contract.

"The last month has been stressful for Kroger members as there was a great deal of uncertainty about the future," Russow said. "With the ratification of the new contract, they will have peace of mind and security for the next three years. Hopefully, the economy will turn around by 2014 and we can enter contract bargaining under improved circumstances." **OP**

Michigan Pharmacy Distributor Workers Choose UFCW for A Voice on the Job

On January 4, workers at VPH Pharmacy, a Michigan-based distributor of pharmaceutical products, voted to join UFCW Local 876. For VPH workers the reasons for wanting a union voice on the job were clear: worker schedules were inconsistent and sometimes unfair (one employee reported working for 22 days straight without a day off), there was no job security, and workers lacked a process for solving problems on the job. VPH workers contacted Local 876 and asked for their help in forming a union. Not surprisingly, the company took an aggressive anti-union stance.

"I like my job at VPH. I like my coworkers. But I know improvements need to be made, and I want what's best for everyone," said filing clerk Jerri Gilbert. "That's why I voted yes for our union to support my coworkers. "No meetings with Versula or anti-union flyers in our break room were going to change my mind." **OP**

Dutch Pension Fund Dumps Walmart Over Labor Standards

Dutch pension fund Algemeen Burgerlijk Pensioenfonds (ABP) announced on January 3rd that it would no longer invest in Walmart. The decision was based on Walmart's repeated violation of international labor standards and its unwillingness to modify its behavior, even after the fund requested that Walmart change its policies.



Past and present associates brief analysts on Walmart's labor practices during the alternative analyst meeting in Bentonville, Arkansas.

As of September 30, 2011, ABP, the world's third largest retirement fund, had over \$147 million invested in Walmart. Its decision to withdraw from Walmart sends a message to investors, and to Walmart, that violating labor standards will not, and should not, be tolerated.

Last October, Walmart associates brought that message to company shareholders during the annual analyst meeting in Bentonville, Arkansas. Workers testified about the unfair tactics deployed by management against employees. One of those workers, Ernestine Bassett, hailed today's decision.

"I've been targeted for simply talking to my coworkers about working together to improve things at our store," said Bassett, an associate at the Walmart store in Laurel, Maryland and a leader in the Organization United for Respect at Walmart. "I'm subject to all kinds of arbitrary discipline and unfairly written up by management. In fact, my managers often refuse to let me go to the bathroom, despite the fact that I have diabetes. I'm glad that ABP has heard the cry for respect coming from Walmart workers." **OP**

BLS Stats Show Decline in Meat Packing Injuries, but Accuracy is Questionable

According to the latest statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, workplace safety is improving in the meatpacking industry. In 2009, the injury and illness rate for animal (other than poultry) slaughter was 9.3/100 (full time workers) going down to 8.8/100 in 2010.

However, in comparison to general industry and manufacturing, the meatpacking and poultry industries are still among the most dangerous. Food manufacturing workers are twice as likely to experience injuries and illnesses than workers in general industry, and in manufacturing as a whole. In 2010, injury and illness rates in meatpacking were more than double general industry (8.8/100 vs. 3.5/100) and manufacturing (8.8/100 vs. 4.4). Meatpacking (animal slaughter) also remains in the top 25 industries for injury and illness cases with days away from work, restricted work activity or job transfer, and severity of injuries. The poultry industry was fifth highest of all industries for highest rates of illnesses.

Recently, American Meat Institute (AMI) President and CEO Patrick Boyle highlighted the dramatic drop in meat packing injury and illness rates over the years, using data that does not reflect the most dangerous jobs in the industry. AMI uses injury and illness rates for meat processing versus the more dangerous animal slaughtering, a rate of 6.5/100 versus 8.8/100.

BLS statistics reflect a continued decline in the number of employees reporting an injury or illness. However, there is concern that the BLS numbers are not accurate. Studies conducted by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) conclude that both BLS and OSHA miss between 20 and 50 percent of the nation's workplace injuries. These may be the result of a number of factors, including fear of reporting among undocumented workers, employers' incentives to undercount injuries – safety games or bonuses to management for low reported injuries, and programs in which drugs tests are required for employees who report being injured.

In ten years, the reported rates in the meatpacking industry have slid from 14.7/100 workers down to 8.8/100 workers, but there is still a long way to go, before declaring the industry safe. **OP**