

## Workers at Pilgrim's Pride Plant in Alabama Vote "Yes," Join RWDSU for Union Voice on the Job

Twelve hundred workers at the Pilgrim's Pride poultry plant in Russellville, Alabama have voted for a union voice on the job. Workers voted 706 to 292 in favor of joining the RWDSU in an election held on June 7 and 8. JBS, Pilgrim's Pride's owner, is the country's largest chicken producer.



*Pilgrim's Pride workers outside the plant the day of the election.*

The election marks one of the largest successful union organizing campaigns in Alabama in the last decade in terms of new members, and it is in one of Alabama's largest industries. The workers' victory came in spite of weeks of company held captive audience meetings where managers threatened massive layoffs, hinted at the possibility of plant closure if the workers voted for the union, and produced anti-union literature and "vote no" t-shirts.

In addition, the company put pressure on local businesses like the service station to stop allowing union activists inside, and tried to book meeting rooms at local hotels so union staff couldn't use them in the weeks leading up to the elections.

For workers at the plant, the election was about far more than economic considerations. According to RWDSU Mid-South Council President John Whitaker, "The key issues were the right to redress grievances at work, and the ability to have some input into how the place is run. They knew the difference it would make to have a union on their side."

"We had no respect from management, and absolutely no voice in anything that affected us," said Cheryl Kowalski, who works in the sanitation department at the plant. "They told us what to do and when to do it, and there were no questions allowed. And if there were any problems, you couldn't go to management because they did not want to deal with resolving them. Workers here were left bitter and angry. The bottom line was 'do what you are told or you don't have a job.' But the union provided us with a glimmer of hope," Kowalski added.

"This is a day in my life I will never forget and I am proud of it," said Pilgrim's Pride worker – and new RWDSU member – J.R. (Morris) Harris of the poultry production department. **OP**

## Local 1189 Kowalski's Workers Ratify New Contract

On June 3, 400 members of UFCW Local 1189 who work at Kowalski's Markets in St. Paul, Minn., voted overwhelmingly in favor of a new contract.

The one-year contract meets the area and industry standards of other local operators. Kowalski's workers negotiated 10 cents per hour in wages as a bonus. The contract restores full funding for retirement plans and also addresses sick days, holidays, and progressive hires.



*Kowalski's workers during a rally to save their contract last summer.*

For decades, all the major retail grocery employers in the St. Paul area have bargained together with their workers for a common contract covering wages, benefits and working conditions in this industry. Together, UFCW members and their employers built a strong industry with fair wages, dignity on the job and a strong and affordable benefit package. But,



last summer, Kowalski's Markets decided to pull out of major retail negotiations and tried to force major changes on their workers. In July 2011, Kowalski's declared an impasse and refusing further bargaining. In August, Kowalski's imposed a contract on its employees. The imposed contract froze wages, ended Sunday premium pay for part-time workers, ended the participation in the multi-employer pension and 401k among other negative changes.

UFCW Local 1189 filed charges with the NLRB on Kowalski's failure to bargain in good faith. The NLRB found merit in the charges and found that Kowalski's had undermined Local 1189's representative status, had bypassed the union, and had disparaged and denigrated the union, among other charges.

The workers stuck together and overcame several obstacles during the negotiation process. The main issue in negotiating the contract was the withdrawal of the employer from a multi-employer defined-benefit retirement plan and the migration to a retirement plan that had previously been supplemental.

Negotiations are continuing with Supervalu's Cub stores in the area, the Rainbow Foods stores owned by Milwaukee-based Roundy's, and the local Festival Foods/Knowlan's chain. Agreements have already been reached with Jerry's Cub stores and with Lunds and Byerly's. **OP**

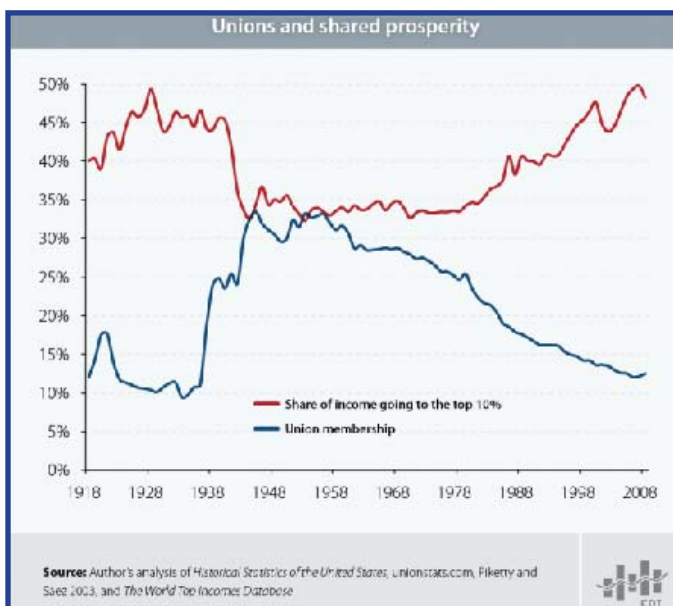
## Wisconsin Voters, Union Members Check Scott Walker's Power, Build Momentum for 2012

Last week, the people of Wisconsin voted to put the Wisconsin State Senate back into Democratic control, and came within 200,000 votes of removing Governor Scott Walker from office. Nearly 100 UFCW members and staff from across the country participated on the ground in Wisconsin. The odds were long. Governor Walker and his deep-pocketed supporters outspent his opponent Tom Barrett by 7-1. Only two governors have been recalled in the history of the United States.

In response to the election, President Hansen released the following statement, "Scott Walker leaves this recall bruised and weakened. And he will now have a Democratic Senate holding him in check. Walker will try to spin the outcome as an endorsement of his anti-worker policies. Nothing could be further from the truth. In Ohio and now Wisconsin, we've seen

the great possibilities when ordinary citizens band together to fight for their rights. Collective bargaining is a fundamental right like free speech, not some line item in a budget to be cut. Politicians across the country should take notice that if they attempt to take this right away from workers, they will be in for the fight of their lives. I want to commend the people of Wisconsin for their extraordinary efforts over the last 15 months. I have no doubt that they will finish the job on Scott Walker in 2014." **OP**

## EPI Research: As Union Membership Declines, Inequality Rises



The latest research from the Economic Policy Institute shows to a remarkable extent, the level of economic inequality—which fell during the New Deal but has risen dramatically since the late 1970s—corresponds to the rise and fall of union membership in the United States. The EPI research contrasts the historical trajectory of union membership and the income share claimed by the richest 10 percent of Americans. It finds that as union membership has fallen to around 1920s levels, inequality has worsened.

You can read more about the correlating relationship between union membership and economic inequality and the rest of the findings here <http://bit.ly/MF1vB6> **OP**