

Talking UNION

CWA public, healthcare & education workers

Winter 2009

Stop Starving State Services

Fund States, Cities, Health Care and Education

Workers in the education, healthcare, and public sectors face challenges in 2009 as never before. The economic system that rewards elites with sky-high salaries, has caused a crisis that demands dramatic cuts in funds to states, cities, universities, and health care institutions.

The year of 2009 will generate budgets that dictate frozen wages, no funds for our pensions, cuts in our health care, and staff cuts in the delivery of vital public services. We must fight at the local and federal levels to prevent this from happening.

In California, for example, Governor Schwarzenegger ordered all state workers to take two days off each month without pay, claiming the state will run out of money by February 2009.

—continued on page 2



UC THRIVES WHILE CLERICALS STRUGGLE

LORENA ALTAMIRANO



These were the sentiments voiced in signs and chants by more than 400 students, staff and faculty who came together on the campus of the University of Tennessee Knoxville (UT) on October 22. State representatives and union members who made the journey from Chattanooga to Knoxville to protest the impact of budget cuts on the University, joined with the United Campus Workers (UCW) at the biggest rally ever organized by the union. Members of Knoxville's City Council and the Knox County Commission stood with the crowd in a show of solidarity.

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SAVE THESE DATES

Friday, Sept. 11 – Monday, Sept. 14, 2009

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A Future for All Our Families

By Brooks W. Sunkett, VP,
Public, Healthcare & Education Workers Department



I write this as we face the wonderful promise of a pro-worker president. We are all proud of our work to ensure Barack Obama's victory. We are all proud of our country for choosing hope over fear, unity over racism, and respect for all Americans instead of subservience to the power elite.

This is our country and we have to use this opportunity to improve our lives. We have a lot of work ahead of us but after our November victory there should be no doubt about our own strength.

Now, we must work to win CWA's Economic Recovery

Plan:

- ① Create 21st Century jobs and infrastructure
- ② Pass the Employee Free Choice Act
- ③ Fund health care for all with a broad-based tax

Our families deserve the good pensions that are currently threatened in New Jersey, California, and across America. It is time to properly fund our pensions.

Our families deserve increased funding for higher education rather than the new lows we see in Tennessee and Texas. In 1970, Texas paid 85% of the cost for running the University of Texas. Today, the state funds less than 20% of the University of Texas' budget. The appropriation cuts to higher education institutions must be reversed.

State services have been starved to give tax cuts to the rich. We have to organize to win the PHEW program and CWA's Recovery Plan. At PHEW we are calling for:

- ① Federal bailout funds for state operating budgets
- ② A broad-based tax to fund health care and support a decent standard of living for healthcare workers
- ③ Additional aid to higher education to support a fair living standard for higher education workers.

Yes, we can win, if we have the same unity and determination we used to elect Barack Obama our President.

Join me in this fight!

Stop Starving State Services —continued from page 1

Where we have contracts, administrations will try to force cutbacks saying there are no funds. In places where we do not have contracts, like Tennessee, Texas, Oklahoma,

Virginia, Arizona, and Mississippi, legislators will say there are more critical priorities and workers have to make sacrifices.

Advocates for privatization will promise public officials that they can deliver better services without the bother of pension payments, health care increases, pay demands, and unions. The privateers will make promises, but in reality they will cut services and rake in the profits.

Our PHEW program calls for us to push forward the economic recovery plan that pours dollars into state and local budgets to deliver services needed. Now more than ever, we need funds for unemployment benefits, highway construction, human services, aid to police forces, and aid to higher education. Developmentally disabled citizens and the state employees who work with them should not suffer for excessive executive salaries and Wall Street bonuses. The bailout must rebuild quality public services.

We call on President Obama to pump funds into providing health care for all Americans, including public employees. The universal health care program must ensure a good standard of living for healthcare workers.

In addition, the recovery package must provide funds for higher education so that workers who are the innovators in developing green technology and researching solutions in health care can have decent pay, pensions, and health care. The United Campus Workers of Tennessee has called for these actions and all public, healthcare and education workers should support this agenda so our elected representatives understand what is important.

We have to build our organizations and expand our numbers to maintain a force in all our communities that stands up for workers. President Obama's election is not enough to insure justice—we must build our union and the power to win a secure standard of living for our families. ●

Talking UNION

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CWA Members Work to Elect Obama



November 4, 2008

What Obama's Election Means for All of Us

By Larry Cudek, RN, Local 1168, Buffalo, NY

"REMEMBER THIS DAY!" parents told their children.

You know why: if you heard Barack Obama speak, if you read about him, if you saw or listened to him during the presidential debates, you understand.

Obama's victory was historic in its size and scope. He won more votes than anyone else in U.S. history. As noted in TIME magazine, Obama won men, he won 54% of Catholics, 66% of Latinos, and 68% of new voters.... There was such excitement that 70% more people voted in the Democratic primaries than in the Republican.

The old barriers of racial prejudice were jolted. Newsweek columnist Ellis Close wrote that the "Southern strategy" always depended on whites to vote their racial anxiety over their economic self interest. "It is unlikely that strategy can survive an Obama presidency given that Americans, overcoming centuries of prejudice, proved more interested in ending our collective economic misery than in keeping the White House in white hands," Close declared.

As he demonstrated in his near landslide election, Barack Obama is a president who can bring us all together. He can be the one to unify us in the battle against some of the most formidable foes this country and the world have even known: a looming economic depression, catastrophic climate change caused by global warming, two wars, erosion of our Constitutional rights, and America's international disrepute after eight years of unilateral, and, many would say, "Cowboy" foreign policy.

Obama is showing his ability already in addressing our economic crisis. He is well on it, beginning two months before his inauguration. Look at the quality of the Cabinet and economic people he chooses; they are competent, experienced, and often, consensus choices.

For us as unionized health care workers, Obama's victory is probably life saving. Under a McCain-Palin administration, the destructive, anti-union programs of George W. Bush would have continued. We would have seen the continued gutting of OSHA regulations, the continued perversion of the National Labor Relations Board into an instrument of workplace repression, and probably, the loss of union membership for registered nurses under the Kentucky River decision.

Excerpted from "Stat!" available online at www.CWA1168.org

September 18th was a beautiful late summer day—sun shining, weather warm—and 45 Local 1180 members in Chester, Pa., knocking on union members' doors to ask them who they supported for President. Once a "mixed" neighborhood, in recent years Chester has become almost 100% black and working class with many of its houses in need of repair.

The bus arrived at the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers union hall and was met by volunteers from the United Food and Commercial Workers who chauffeured groups of three to their target areas. Lorraine Gamble Lofton, Shirley Littman, and Gary Schoichet each accompanied a group and talked with the members about their experience.

Cecil Robinson

(Department of Buildings)

"I was looking to go into places to convince people why they should vote for Obama. We were in a battleground state and we were a union army going to do battle.

"Once I started engaging with some union members I really enjoyed myself. People were open and friendly and responsive. The man we talked to over the fence, the guy in the van who came back to talk, and the woman who put on her scarf to have her picture taken—politics was part of their lives. They would have convinced me to vote for Obama.

"One thing I learned, or affirmed, was that I am a slow starter talking with people and once I warm up, it's hard to stop me. I would definitely do this again."

Desiree Waters

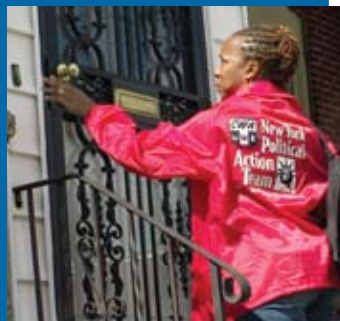
(Department of Youth and Community Development)

"I loved the passion of the people we met—their passion to vote and to vote for Obama.

"One thing I learned was that I'm fortunate in where I live and that I have a job. My husband pushed me to do this and I'd go again without his pushing. It's important to me to do the work and it was fun and educational, too."



GARY SCHOICHET



GARY SCHOICHET

CWA Pushes **Economic Recovery Plan** for American Families

CWA is proposing a bold plan for the country's economic recovery built on creating 21st Century jobs, restoring bargaining rights for U.S. workers through the Employee Free Choice Act, and reforming our broken health care system in a way that ends the current system's tax on jobs while ensuring coverage for all.

This "Economic Recovery Plan for American Workers is exactly what working and middle income families need in this time of economic crisis, and we'll be working with members of Congress to make sure workers are included in plans for economic recovery," said CWA President Larry Cohen.

Fighting for **American Jobs**, Restoring **Rights for American Workers**

The economic crisis and financial chaos that surround us are part of an even bigger story. The U.S. has been borrowing enormous amounts of money while shipping quality jobs overseas and not producing enough domestically. Predictably, that's resulted in a crushing decline in the standard of living for working families.

While even most conservatives now agree that government must act to end this economic crisis and support providing a handout to the biggest bankers on Wall Street, they continue to attack government involvement in health care reform and bargaining rights for workers.

In their view, the government rescue of Wall Street bankers and investment firms is just a necessary fix. Health care reform, on the other hand, is an unwanted intrusion.

We take a different view. We believe that the best way to restore the economy and restore the living standard of millions of American families is to focus on quality jobs and bargaining rights.

1 Create 21st Century Jobs and Infrastructure

We need wind farms across America and development of more alternative energy, high mileage cars produced in the U.S., and the build out of high speed Internet networks—the economic engine for the 21st Century—for rural and urban families and businesses. Necessary repairs to our highways and bridges and communities will require a massive infrastructure investment, with the materials and technology all produced by millions of new jobs. This is a real investment in our future, one that supports middle income and working Americans. These kinds of quality jobs and real economic development will address our country's financial crisis and should come before any further financial bailouts or tax rebates to Wall Street. We've had enough bailouts for companies that outsource manufacturing and services, and get a tax break for doing so.

2 Pass the Employee Free Choice Act

We are through listening only to the organized voices of bankers, brokers, and billionaires. Around the world, workers are increasingly bargaining their stake in the global economy. In the United States, however, bargaining coverage only exists for 12% of U.S. workers; that is one-third the typical rate for the large economies in the global North or South. In the U.S., our health care crisis, retirement insecurity and pay cuts have only made the economy worse, not more competitive. Consumption has been fueled by borrowing and trade deficits have cut our jobs and transferred wealth to Asia and the Middle East. Promoting bargaining rights for U.S. workers must be part of any recovery plan. This is the best economic stimulus, one that will restore the middle class and our standard of living.

3 Health Care for All, Funded by a Broad Based Tax

If all Americans had world class health care, millions of jobs would be created for healthcare workers and our nation's health care crisis could be addressed. If funded at least in part by taxes on imports, health care for all could help create millions of additional jobs. Almost every other global democracy funds health care with Value Added Taxes on imports (and often other goods). We need to move most health care funding away from being a "tax" on our jobs, share the burden among all U.S. employers, and have the right to bargain supplemental health care as 12 million union members still do.

We need to step up and step out to build a coalition for a 21st Century New Deal. We will join together with labor and youth, civil rights and progressives, faith-based groups and environmentalists, everyone who wants to sign on to a new economic recovery plan for America—one that benefits American workers, not just Wall Street. Let's get started!

A Recovery Plan for All of Us

*Jobs, not just rebates
Jobs, not just bailouts*

Support for American Workers, Not Just Wall Street

CWA PHEARN Is There for You

Activists from CWA locals representing public, healthcare, and education workers met on December 3 and 4 to share information and plan activities for the sector in 2009. Local 3179 and President Steve Sarnoff hosted the group in conjunction with the District 3 statewide meeting that took place in Clearwater, Florida.

Public Healthcare and Education Action Resource Network (PHEARN)

PHEARN functions as an activist group within PHEW to provide support for locals that need additional resources or expertise in various fields. The network is available to advise on the development of programmatic work and is currently looking to develop a strategic industry front for the sector.

At the December meeting, attendees voted to approve governing by-laws. Locals will soon receive a letter inviting them to join PHEARN at no cost.

Voluntary Strategic Organizing Council (VSOC)

At the 2008 national convention, PHEW delegates overwhelmingly approved the establishment of the VSOC to pool resources and target organizing and policy issues. At the



December meeting, representatives set up interim officers for the council: Linda Hatfield of Local 7000, chair; John Vasko of Local 81831, treasurer; Steve Sarnoff of Local 3179, secretary.

Initially, the VSOC will begin developing educational literature and will recruit participation from sector locals.

Pension Analysis and Training

CWA researcher Bob Patrician reported

on the current state of pensions and benefits—particularly the problem with underfunding. As a result, participants decided to include a “train the trainer” session on pensions at the PHEW meeting in San Diego this coming September. The training will focus

on a basic understanding of how pension funds work and how to talk about them at the bargaining

table and with members. The materials, once developed, will be available on the sector’s website.

PHEW is also developing a database of public, healthcare, and education workers sector pension plans. Locals will soon receive a request to send descriptions of their pension plans to the sector for inclusion in the database.

By sharing the strength throughout the sector, everyone will benefit. ●

NEW YORK



New York Senior Citizens Guardian Services Organizing Committee

Guradianship Program Unionizes

Workers at the New York Foundation for Senior Citizens Guardian Services, Inc., a community guardianship program, overwhelmingly voted to authorize CWA to represent them for the purpose of collective bargaining. The unit is made up of 20 members including caseworkers, specialists, and administrative staff. The Bargaining Committee will fight for improved safety on the job, reasonable workloads, and better pay and benefits. ●

RAs Are Workers Too

In an NLRB supervised election, 736 Research Assistants employed at the SUNY Research Foundation in Stony Brook, NY voted decisively to join CWA Local 1104. The vote was 214 to 135 with 35 challenged ballots.

Despite being affiliated with the State University of New York, the private Research Foundation launched an anti-union campaign but the workers held firm thanks to a public 50-plus Organizing Committee, and great work by the Local.

Local 1104 75/25 Organizing Director Jim McAsey was joined by project organizers Li Ming, Kevin Young, Xu Xiao, and Kira Schuman. Project Organizer Ari Gold came from District 7. Local 1104 Chief Steward and Political Organizer Anthony Eramo helped create political pressure on the Research Foundation.

The GOTV operation was critical, and many unions and allies helped during election day, including three people from the Long Island Progressive Coalition, six volunteers from the



SUNY RAs Organizing Committee

Working Families Party, Local 1037 Organizing Director Anne Luck, Local 1180 Organizer Erin Mahoney, Newspaper Guild Local 3 Organizer Alanna Stone, Pete Sikora from District 1, and more than one dozen 1104 Stewards from Verizon. In addition to these 25 volunteers, the Organizing Committee came out in force to “get out the vote.” ●

UCW Defends Public Education

—continued from page 1



University of Tennessee workers rally

The UCW, joined by the Progressive Student Alliance, decided to hold the demonstration in the wake of drastic budget cuts that have left the University bleeding to the level of \$38 million. With more cuts expected, union members and supporters gathered to make their voices heard.

Setting the tone, Janet Miles, UCW secretary and employee in UT's Office of Information Technology, warned about the problems students, staff and faculty would face. Several students spoke about the difficulties of filling schedules with so many classes cancelled. Two professors, Shela Van Ness from UT Chattanooga and Jon Shefner from UT Knoxville talked about declining resources and the pressure to increase student numbers in classes.

Betty Lou Newcomb from UT's Center for Executive Education and Ernestine Robinson, UCW founding member and senior custodian in Reese Hall, provided comic relief. Robinson warned a cardboard cutout of UT President John Petersen not to make it harder for UT students.

Rep. Mike Turner from Old Hickory, firefighter and union leader, acknowledged that the large rally size and growing union membership made workers' voices heard at the statehouse.

With more than 700 members across the state, UCW's message to the Governor and the legislature is clear: use the state's rainy day fund, totaling nearly one billion dollars; close exemptions to Tennessee's sales tax that won't further damage Tennessee's workers; close tax loopholes that allow corporations to avoid paying millions of dollars each year; and, increase taxes on Tennesseans earning more than \$250,000 per year.

The legislature clearly recognizes the importance of higher education in job creation and attracting manufacturing to the state. The state government recently gave \$6.4 million to Austin Peay State University for curriculum development to train employees for Hemlock Semiconductor's new polycrystalline silicon production facility in Clarksville, Tenn.—a facility that will employ between 500 and 800. Ultimately the investment in education boosts the state's overall productivity and improves Tennessee's economy. ●

What's at Stake in Tennessee

The state faces a budget shortfall predicted to reach \$1 billion due to lower-than-expected tax collections. As a result, Governor Bredesen and state lawmakers are proposing massive cuts to state services, including a 20% reduction in funding for higher education. Without funding public colleges, universities and technical institutes, it will be nearly impossible for the economy to get back on track.

The federal government has committed nearly \$1 trillion in bailouts to the financial services industry in an attempt to revive the economy. Yet nothing has been done to assist states that face an impending crisis.

Congress must act now to help at the state level and to ensure that funding for public higher education is preserved. Now, more than ever, colleges and universities need resources; they provide some of the best job-creation programs we have.

Missouri Local 6355 Wins Award for Collective Bargaining Success



Missouri state workers with President Larry Cohen (at right)

The Progressive Vote Coalition, Pro-Vote, presented the "Outstanding Labor Organization Award" to CWA Local 6355 for its work negotiating and reaching an agreement on the first collective bargaining agreement for state workers in Missouri since 1947. The agreement covers 6,000-plus workers in the Department of Social Services (DSS). CWA President Larry Cohen joined the local leadership at the awards dinner in St. Louis, Mo. on Sept. 27, 2008.

The organizing campaign came about as a result of a Missouri Supreme Court reversal of a 60-year-old ruling that exempted public workers from collective bargaining declaring them "public servants," not workers.

Watched closely by other organizations, negotiations went on for more than three months before the State delivered their best and final offer in December 2007. It provided access for organizing, the right to represent the members, and full protection provided by the Missouri Constitution for the right to collectively bargain.

"We were able to achieve this agreement by mobilizing our members, relying on relationships with legislators, and asking for the support of our friends at the Missouri AFL-CIO to help broker the agreement," stated Bradley Harmon, Local 6355 Area Representative.

NEVADA

Hospital Workers in Reno Vote CWA

By a four-to-one margin, 540 hospital workers voted for CWA Local 9413 to represent them at St. Mary's Hospital in Reno, Nev., following a year-long campaign.

"We started our organizing drive last year as workers began to see the potential benefits of collective bargaining," stated Local 9413 Vice President Liz Sorenson, who served as a lead organizer along with Maria Rosa of the same local.

The election covered a wide range of the staff including certified nursing assistants, environmental services staff, food service personnel, monitor techs, phlebotomists, central supply and transport workers, emergency medical technicians, intake reps, orderlies, sterile techs, and linen workers.

Making St. Mary's a **better place** for the workers makes it a **better hospital** for the patients and the community.

"I'm so excited to welcome the workers at St. Mary's into the CWA family. This election victory brings hope that positive changes can now be negotiated through the collective bargaining process. Making St. Mary's a better place for the workers makes it a better hospital for the patients and the community. We hope to begin negotiating a contract as soon as possible," Sorenson added.

The union will also immediately move forward with other St. Mary's



bargaining units with the goal of having prompt elections.

Strong support on the drive came from CWA District 9 staff, including Mark Bixler, Ed Venegas, John Doran, Nancy Biagini, Janine Munson, and organizers from Locals 9400, 9586, 9509: Marco Ramierez, Victor Serrano, and Melinda Hawkins, who conducted an eight-day house calling blitz with local leaders.

Critical bilingual language assistance was provided by two CWA members at AT&T—Sophia Guadron and Lili Vega—who took leave from their jobs to help in key departments.



New CWA members at St. Mary's Hospital pictured in all photos

Members of the California Nurses Association also provided help, letting organizers use their offices, and providing assistance.

The St. Mary's workers are the first to be included under the CWA health care sector in Nevada. The union represents health care workers in many other states. ●

Sparks-based CWA Local 9413, AFL-CIO, is the longest continuously operating labor organization in Nevada, beginning as the Washoe Typographical Union in the days of the Comstock Lode. It once counted Mark Twain as a member and now represents more than 5,000 Silver State workers.

