

Talking UNION

CWA public, healthcare & education workers Winter 2008

NEW YORK

Local 1180 sets its sights on nonprofits

When he came into office, Mayor Michael Bloomberg promised to bring corporate-style management to New York City government, and the outsourcing of city services to the private sector has been part of his approach from the start. So, CWA Local 1180, which represents some 9,000 city workers, decided to follow the work. “Most of the public sector in our city is already unionized,” says Local 1180 president Arthur Cheliotis. “So where do we go?”

New York City is home to an estimated 10,000 not-for-profit organizations, including giant service organizations such as Catholic Charities and high-profile advocacy groups such as Amnesty International—and the vast majority of these organizations lack unions. In recent years, Local 1180 organized a few shops, including Human Rights Watch, Human Rights First, Planned Parenthood of New York City, and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Through the union, members in these shops have won some significant victories at the bargaining table, including extending health benefits to part-timers,



The staff at Human Rights First in New York City discusses a contract proposal last spring.

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CALIFORNIA

Union members affected by wildfires

The massive wildfires that spread across much of Southern California in late October affected thousands of University of California (UC) employees, especially in San Diego. The UCSD campus was closed for a week, and 11 staff members lost their homes. Thousands more were evacuated, or unable to travel on local roads and freeways

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UPTe members who work as clinical laboratory specialists at UCSD's Thornton Hospital.

Hard Work for Hard Times

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

Local 1180 is searching out non-profit campaigns in New York. Local 3865 is building CWA in Tennessee Universities without dues check-off. Local 9119/UPTE is organizing the non-union groups in the University of California system. Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Iowa, Mississippi, and New Jersey locals are all doing the hard work of building our union.

Local 6355/Missouri State Workers Union just won a contract with the State of Missouri, against all odds. The Governor had his administrators throw one roadblock after another at Local 6355's leadership. Since his election, Governor Blunt has tried to push out all the public employee unions representing state workers—Local 6355 represents those at the Department of Social Services and the Department of Health and Senior Services. When the State of Missouri threatened to do away with dues check-off, the local campaigned among its members to sign-off on a bank draft for their dues. The final contract kept payroll deduction in place. The hard work of the

local officers, stewards, and organizers won this temporary victory. Local 6355/MSWU knows that only with all the state agencies organized, high membership numbers, and thousands of activists, can we win in Missouri.

Our locals are working off their commitment, determination, idealism and an understanding that we will not rebuild our union movement with one easy trick. A lot of hard work by many of our members will give us the strength to turn our country around. Our locals are engaged in the grassroots organizing that will build into a tide of justice.

We can win IF we keep organizing. I recently saw the movie "The Great Debaters," set in Marshall, Texas, during the 1930s. It is an inspiration to all who fight for social justice. Go see the movie, and keep organizing for justice.



Yes, we can — Sí, se puede

California wildfires

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during the regional emergency. While workers at the UCSD's main campus received a week's paid leave, those employed by the medical center did not. Until, that is, the union got involved.

"It was unconscionable," said UPTE's local San Diego president, Carolan Buckmaster. "Many workers

were either under evacuation orders, or had family who were, and local emergency officials were asking people to stay off the roads."

Management said that because the medical center was not in the direct line of the fires, it remained open. Because employees were mandated to work in

additional day if your home was damaged," said Buckmaster.

Some members of UPTE's national union, CWA, also lost their homes in the wildfires. CWA locals conducted a survey of their members to assess the extent of damage, and reported that many members helped through volun-

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"We're asking our members with serious losses to contact their locals for help in applying for assistance from the CWA Disaster Relief Fund."

emergency situations, they were required to report to work, even if their neighborhoods were engulfed in flames. Buckmaster helped organize a response by the local coalition of unions to convince UC to do the right thing. "UC agreed to give two days administrative leave to any employee who had to evacuate their home, and two days administrative leave to those who did come into work as a reward, and an

teen efforts, as well as donations of food, blankets, water and dollars to the Red Cross and the San Diego County Labor Council.

"We're asking our members with serious losses to contact their locals for help in applying for assistance from the CWA Disaster Relief Fund," said Cherie Brokaw, a representative of CWA's District 9, which includes UPTE. For more information, contact your local. ●

Organizing Shorts

Nevada

Nevada District 8 negotiated a collective bargaining agreement with the judicial courts in Clark County. Both Republican and Democratic judges supported the effort. In a secret ballot election, 50 judges elected to recognize the union, and only two abstained. Next, the county must approve the agreement that will cover 82 court marshals. Major accomplishments are four step upgrades with yearly increases of 3.75% for each of the three years. Previously, marshals were at-will employees—if a judge was not re-elected, the marshal had only 90 days to seek other employment in the courts.



Signing of the collective bargaining agreement with the Nevada District 8 Judicial Courts in Clark County.

New York

Local 1180 won voluntary recognition through card check for 10 employees at Democracy Now!, a radio program that feeds into Pacifica Radio and other alternative media outlets around the country. NY Jobs with Justice conducted the card count. Organizer Erin Mahoney and VP Bill Henning worked on this campaign.

Local 1168 won an NLRB election on Nov. 29, 2007, for 36 DeGraff Memorial Hospital Professionals. The vote was 17-13 after the employer, Kaleida Health in Buffalo, N.Y., took a position of neutrality. Lead organizer Donna Stefancci, Ron Hosinski, Pat Sullivan, Jim Hannotte, Karen Howard, Carole Sirianni, and DeAnn Daniels all worked on the campaign.

New Jersey

In a PERC-supervised card check, Local 1031 won representation for 12 librarians employed at the Summit Library in NJ. René Garzón and Phyllis Haefner were involved in the organizing drive.

California

On Sept. 13, 2007, Local 9111 won an election to represent the San Bernardino California County Probation Officers in a 156-54 vote. Michael DiCesare, a local organizer under the 75/25 program, worked on this campaign.

Arizona

On Dec. 20, 2007, the City Council of Nogales recognized Local 7000 as the exclusive representative for the 125 city workers. Earlier in the year, the city council had ruled that the resolution giving CWA representation of the group was illegal. President Linda Hatfield, organizer Maritza Broce, and Vice President Frank Lopez led the successful effort to pass a new ordinance and re-sign the city workers.

SPEAKING OUT

Our Fight to Protect Health Care



Robin Gould
President,
Local 7076
New Mexico
State
Employees

Here in New Mexico, Gov. Bill Richardson formed a task force to explore methods of achieving universal health care. Our union served on the task force to represent labor's point of view. We continue to fight for affordable care so that our members are not squeezed in negotiations.



Bill Henning
Vice President,
Local 1180
City of
New York
Employees

We have mobilized our members to stop reductions in benefits and are resisting attempts to have workers pay part of health care premiums. Our union is also working with the New York City Central Labor Council to develop educational programs for affiliates so that we can all understand the issues in the health care debate and develop a unified position citywide.

New York organizes nonprofits

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hikes in entry level pay of 28 percent over five years, and overtime pay. A year ago, the local hired Erin Mahoney, a dynamic shop steward from one of these shops, to step up new member organizing in this sector.

"Many New York City nonprofits rely on government funding," points out Mahoney, a former associate in the Women's Division at Human Rights Watch. "Yet despite some bloated

Mahoney says. "I tell them what we've found is that unionizing actually improves the organization. Nonprofits are able to retain workers when they treat them right, and it makes organizations more transparent when, through negotiations, they create clearer job descriptions, disciplinary procedures, and channels for communication."

The local's new organizing campaign has begun to bear fruit: In August 2007, staff at Democracy Now!, the progressive television and radio program, filed a petition for representation by Local 1180 with the show's host and executive producer, Amy Goodman. Goodman, a well-known progressive



New members of CWA Local 1180 at Human Rights First (above) and Human Rights Watch (below).

executive salaries, most of the workers at these agencies are earning far less, with worse benefits, than their public sector counterparts. We believe these workers deserve a salary they can live on and benefits good enough to allow them to start a family."

Over the past year, Mahoney has launched a rank-and-file organizing committee, which phone banks Local 1180 members to find out the names of nonprofits their City agency contracts out to, in search of organizing leads. She has also worked with the union to produce a brochure that specifically addresses the concerns of nonprofit workers. "The thinking in nonprofits is you're supposed to be doing the work for the good of others, and so it's selfish for you to want anything from your job in terms of salary, benefits, or working conditions,"



journalist, agreed to recognize the union through card check.

Arthur Cheliotis sees the new organizing campaign as crucial not only to the union's growth, but the protection of its current members. "If we don't have people organized in the private sector, our benefits are threatened in the public sector," he says, "because workers will ask, 'Why is it that I can't get these benefits myself, and yet my tax dollars pay for these benefits for City workers?'" ●

NLRB Election Victory at LifePath

On Sept. 19, 2007, Local 13500 won an NLRB election on behalf of 467 workers at LifePath, Inc. These workers provide direct care for developmentally disabled adults living in group homes and day programs in 90 different locations in seven counties in Pennsylvania. The vote was 166-138, with five challenged votes.

LifePath is a private, non-profit organization that receives most of its money from county and state funding.

During the organizing campaign, the state Auditor General advised LifePath that his office had received allegations that public funds may have been spent to influence employees' decisions about whether to form or join a union and that the Auditor General has historically taken the position that tax dollars cannot be used for anti-union activities. After the Auditor General sent the letter, the company discontinued mailings to the employees, cancelled captive audience meetings scheduled at

group homes, and was largely silent the last week before the election.

The Auditor General was alerted through the efforts of Gregg Potter, Local 13500 Steward and President of the Lehigh Valley CLC, who, with the assistance of Chris Snyder, NorthEast AFL-CIO representative, also secured

homes. More than 25 stewards and members—in Units 21, 22, and 33 of Local 13000 and the Central and Eastern Divisions of Local 13500 volunteered their time to participate.

District organizer Pam Tronsor led the campaign, with the help of Local 13500 organizers Nicole Daywalt and

The state **Auditor General** has historically taken the **position** that **tax dollars cannot be used for anti-union activities.**

public support from Pennsylvania state representatives and senators, as well as an Allentown City councilman who was a former LifePath employee. It was a great example of using our political program to create space for workers to organize.

The campaign utilized the already-mobilized Steward's Army. Many LifePath group homes are located in neighborhoods where existing members live and work so Stewards were asked to reach out to the workers in these

Mark Lender, and District Administrative Director Marge Krueger. Also assisting and providing support across the state were Local 13500 officers Sandy Kmetyk, Terri Senich, Carol Coultas, Jazmin Torres, Julie Daloisio, Mike McCalla, Karen Sparks; Staff Rep Jim Byrne; Local 13302 VP Chris Fox; Local 13000 organizers Harry Arnold and Dave Hoskowicz; and Local 13500 campaign organizers Tom Ballek and Debbie Edwards. ●

WORKER INSECURITY IN INDIANA

IBM to Shift Jobs in State Contract

In September, IBM announced the closing of its East Fishkill help desk as part of a consolidation into a new call center in Indiana. Greater "efficiency" would cause 40 or more IBMers and an unspecified number of contractors to lose their jobs if they were unable to find new positions. This is part of IBM's ongoing scheme to shift and cut jobs rather than create new ones.

In April 2007, IBM announced the signing of a 10-year deal worth \$1.6 billion to modernize the State of Indiana's application process for its federal food stamp program. As part of this deal, IBM was to create 500 jobs at its new call center in Indiana. A day after the signing, IBM fired 1300 workers nationwide.

The signing is part of Gov. Mitch Daniels' push to privatize Indiana's public services. Daniels, ex-Bush

Administration budget director, ended collective bargaining with state employees shortly after his election. The governor claimed the deal would save the state \$500 million, but did not provide any information to back the figure. Some 1500 state employees are to move to IBM and its partners, but with a job guarantee for only two years. Savings could come on the backs of state employees who may eventually be laid-off, with increased workloads for those who remain.

A curious side-note—Mitch Roob, director of Indiana's social services, used to work for ACS, one of IBM's partners on the contract.

Privatization—outsourcing government jobs to the private sector—sounds enticing with claims of cost savings and efficiency. But strong

oversight is needed to ensure companies meet their job creation requirements for receiving taxpayers' dollars, as well as achieving performance measures. Privatization also makes workers feel less financially secure because they are the target for savings.

IBM's moving jobs from New York to Indiana highlights the danger of states competing with each other—jobs shifting rather than a net creation of jobs that benefit our entire nation. Today's worker may be tomorrow's unemployed living on food stamps.

IBM workers in Indiana and the U.S. must organize to protect their pay, benefits and job security from the whims of executives. Happy workers are productive workers. ●

—Alliance Mid-Hudson NY chapter

UPTE's #1 Priority: Raising Wages and Safeguarding Benefits

Techs and researchers convene to set negotiating agenda, elect rank-and-file bargaining team

Union members worked long and hard in 2007 on benefits issues, winning several major victories. After a concerted campaign by the University of California Union Coalition (of which UPTE-CWA is a key member), the university agreed to no new employee pension contributions, as well as to the principle that University of California (UC) will help pay for any future contributions.

On the benefits front, average health care premiums for UPTE-CWA-represented employees decreased by 4 percent, after the unions persuaded UC to roll back its plans for double-digit increases.

“Historically, UC benefits were free and the university’s insistence on a waiver didn’t hurt employees,” said Kevin Rooney, UPTE’s RX/TX coordinator and a technician at UCSF (San Francisco). “But lately, UC has been raising costs at employees’ expense. We need to deal with benefits issues directly at the bargaining table in order to protect the salary gains we’ve made in recent years.”

Health care reform— Single payer is key

Larger issues of health care reform are being actively debated in Sacramento, the state capital. In November, the

per year for a family of four would be covered by free or low-cost public programs. Those earning more would have to pay full cost, unless their employers covered them or joined a state-run insurance pool.

Rodney Orr, UPTE’s legislative director, said the deal with the governor amounts to “cost shifting to those who can least afford insurance,” and is a boon to insurance companies. He believes true reform will come only if legislators stand up to the insurance and drug companies to create a single payer plan. Democrats also lowered the minimum amount that employers must spend for employee insurance. That amount, included in the Democrats’ last attempt at reform, was part of a bill the governor vetoed. Any health care reform will still need to go to the voters for funding, most likely in November 2008.

UPTE’s RX/TX bargaining

With bargaining for UPTE’s Technical (TX) and Research (RX) Units about to gear up in 2008, union members attended a systemwide bargaining conference in Berkeley to discuss goals and strategies for a new contract, and to elect a bargaining team to negotiate with the university.

“This is an exciting time, when we have a chance to brainstorm about what kind of changes we’d like to see in our wages and working conditions,” said Jelger Kalmijn, UPTE’s systemwide president and a researcher at UC San Diego. “The union is casting a broad net—through surveys, workplace meetings, one-on-one discussions and local bargaining conferences—to solicit ideas for improvements and welcome everyone into the bargaining process,” he said.

The December meeting came after UPTE locals held meetings around the ▶



UPTE members in Berkeley meet to choose their representatives to a systemwide tech/researcher bargaining conference.

Democratic leadership agreed to key elements of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger’s health care reform

plan, including a mandate that all Californians have insurance.

However, mandatory insurance places the burden on individuals, many of whom cannot afford it. Organized labor has opposed this approach, arguing instead for a “single payer” system that covers everyone equally, and that is paid for by employers rather than individuals.

Under the new Democratic plan, families earning up to about \$62,000

UC also retreated on a two-tier “high-low” HMO health plan that would have negatively affected employees. As bargaining for a new contract for UPTE’s Technical (TX) and Research (RX) Units gears up, benefits issues will again be a top priority. One central issue will be ending the health benefits “waiver” that UC has insisted upon for many years, which has allowed it to unilaterally determine benefits plans and co-pays.

TSEU Mobilizes Support for Pediatric AIDS Foundation

CWA members at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (UTHSCSA) organized a successful Pediatric AIDS Foundation bake sale Thursday, Dec. 6, 2007, in the middle of their union drive. Twenty-one members of University Health Science Employees United (UHSEU) contributed baked goods and helped sell items. Other union members stopped by to purchase so that, in total, nearly 150 employees and students supported the fundraiser. The UTHSCSA departments donating the most included Pathology, Pediatrics, the Library, Biochemistry, Periodontics, Microbiology, and the Medical Dean's Office. Union members raised \$240.64 for the Pediatric AIDS Foundation and four new members joined the union during the event.

Judy Lugo, President of CWA Local 6186 TSEU said, "We used this opportunity to educate non-members about the union, our legislative struggles and our support for the Pediatric AIDS Foundation. These employees and their public university colleagues are in the midst of a major legislative fight to get increased funding for the health science center as well as for raises, health care, pensions and tuition relief. We felt that the fundraiser was a great opportunity to raise the visibility of our union on campus while serving the cause of our union's charity."



The Texas State Employees Union (TSEU) is organizing the University of Texas Health Science Centers throughout Texas. Members of the San Antonio Health Science Center Organizing Committee decided to raise funds for the Pediatric AIDS Foundation. CWA is the largest contributor to the Pediatric AIDS Foundation.

UHSEU is a grassroots organization fighting for increased state funding for university health science centers, fair pay, decent health care, secure pensions, and affordable tuition for students. ●

UPTE Continued from previous page

state this fall for techs and researchers to give input and elect local delegates to the systemwide bargaining conference. In all, 80 delegates gathered to take on the task of developing overall bargaining goals and planning the initial campaign.

"We had a large and enthusiastic turnout," said Tanya Smith, UPTE's TX/RX mobilizing coordinator, who also works as an editor at UC Berkeley. "This bodes well as we enter bargaining next year," she said, adding that the union will need every member to take action to support positive contract changes.

New challenges coming

Delegates reviewed the results of surveys completed by UPTE members at hundreds of meetings conducted by zone contacts at every campus. These showed members' top concerns as protecting health benefits and pensions, and bringing compensation up to market levels. Other issues of concern included health and safety protections, extra pay for hazardous work, childcare and tuition waivers.

Members of UPTE's other units (health care professionals and administrative professionals) also attended the meetings to offer their ideas and support. The UC Union Coalition brought together activists from other unions to discussion common goals. Delegates also attended training workshops on mobilizing tactics, legislative action and media work.

UPTE represents approximately 8,000 techs and researchers systemwide, in a wide range of job titles. UPTE and UC are scheduled to exchange initial proposals in early spring. Contracts for both units expire on June 30, 2008.

While UC workers successfully fought pension and benefits cutbacks last year, they will face new challenges in 2008. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has already directed all state agencies to plan for 10 percent budget cuts, amid projections of a shortfall driven by the troubled housing and mortgage markets. The governor is expected to announce substantial cuts in all state programs, including higher education. ●

STORIES WANTED

Public, Healthcare and Education Workers Sector

■ *Talking Union* needs articles from all Locals about the issues you face. We would like your stories and pictures about organizing campaigns, fights against privatization, contract victories, and efforts to save public services.

Send your contributions, including digital photos, to dfetonte@cwa-union.org.

Please include your name, email, and best phone number of editor or officer responsible for your Local's newsletter.

State Workers Defend their Right to Bargain; Succeed in Securing Contract

The State of Missouri made a contract offer to state employees represented by CWA in December. This followed a month-long battle involving the union, the courts, and the Governor.

On Nov. 12, 2007, more than 100 union activists, led by CWA Local 6355, rallied at the Missouri Supreme Court building in support of collective bargaining rights for Missouri's public sector.

CWA members supported the Court's ruling that the state's constitution, which reads, "Employees shall have the right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing" includes public employees. Missouri's right-wing Governor Matt Blunt immediately called the decision reckless and an example of "judicial activism."

Members marched from the Supreme Court to the Governor's mansion where workers tied postcards and signs to the iron fence demanding the Governor respect the Missouri constitution and workers' rights. When a security officer arrived and demanded to know who was in charge, an enthusiastic worker replied, "We all are!," showing the spirit of the crowd.

The rally had an immediate impact on negotiations and the state realized that CWA members would not be bullied into accepting less than what the constitution guarantees. Although Governor Blunt appeared determined to ignore the Supreme Court ruling, a proposed agreement arrived at CWA offices in early December.

Public sector employees in Missouri will continue to be active during the upcoming legislative session, where anti-worker forces are expected to attempt to limit workers' rights. CWA is prepared to lead the fight for collective bargaining rights in both the public and private sector in the state. After a very difficult fight CWA Local 6355 won a contract under a very hostile administration. ●

