

Talking UNION

CWA public, healthcare & education workers

Summer 2011

SPRING INTO ACTION

Build Our Movement

Across the U.S., CWA activists are united in the face of massive attacks on public employees, public employee unions, and public services. The leaders' and members' determination is shaking the confidence of the union busters. Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker did not expect public workers, joined by thousands of telephone workers, steelworkers, auto workers, electrical service workers, teachers, students, professors, graduate students, and community groups, in the streets of Madison demanding an end to union busting. Police and firefighters, excluded from the attacks, joined in the rally and march.

Citizen resistance was fierce, from Wisconsin to Ohio, New Jersey, Texas, Tennessee, California, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Missouri, and Florida. CWA public employees worked with other CWA locals to build coalitions. It's clear, CWA members have just begun to fight.

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie vetoed a tax on millionaires while refusing to fund state employee pensions. The right-wing claimed budget hard times to roll back collective

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TEXAS

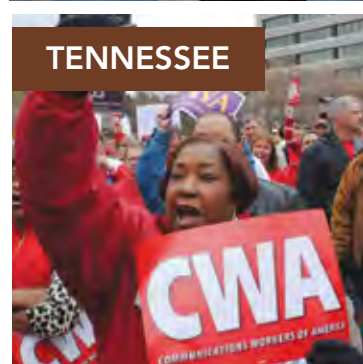
PHEW VP Brooks Sunkett, TPLC Director Currie Hallford, CWA Local 6222 President Claude Cumming, and (kneeling) CWA Local 6215 President Eric Wilson are in solidarity at the Texas march.



OHIO



MISSOURI



TENNESSEE



NEW YORK

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Solidarity = Build our Movement

Brooks Sunkett, VP, Public, Healthcare & Education Workers Department



This spring thousands of members have stepped forward to demand an end to union busting, attacks on public services, and the gutting of public employee pensions and health care. We should all be proud of the solidarity within CWA and the labor movement. Coalitions that CWA helped build, like Stand Up for Ohio and Texas Forward, have involved hundreds of organizations standing up to the right-wing offensive. We are in a fight for the very existence of organized labor. Our opponents want the destruction of our unions—the people’s single strongest defender.

“Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can quietly become a power no government can suppress, a power than can transform the world.”

— Dr. Howard Zinn, the people’s historian
(Aug. 24, 1922–Jan. 27, 2010)

In May, President Cohen and I attended the induction of the Memphis Sanitation Workers into the Labor Hall of Fame. During the sanitation workers’ strike in Memphis, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated while defending their rights. The workers organized under the slogan, “I Am A Man,” demanding to be treated as human beings with dignity. Today, the right-wing wants to drive working men and women into subsistence living, without our basic human rights.

We must stand up for ourselves and our families. There is no room for spectators. We can not win as individuals; we can

only win together as active union members. We must use this moment to bring in and involve the thousands of members who support our union, but who may not have worked to build our movement.

WE MUST

- 1 Reach out to members who are not yet involved, to rebuild our labor movement. We need everybody’s effort.
- 2 Recruit our families, friends, and coworkers to join us in marches and rallies for our cause, like Dr. King in Memphis. This will be a long fight for the soul of America and will determine who our country serves—the elite or working families?
- 3 Join COPE, vote and organize coworkers, family, and friends to vote. A decent living for working people is at stake in this political battle. We run the risk that the greed of the top 1% will be the only factor in decision-making.
- 4 Build firm coalitions that include labor, civil rights, human rights, women’s rights, environmental groups, and even small business groups that share our concerns. Our coalitions must include all the willing.
- 5 Organize every public employee within our reach. We have to encourage our families working in wireless, airlines, media, and manufacturing, to assist in organizing campaigns.

The actions of April 4th, April 6th, and April 10th show that we have the strength and will to win. We must resist every attack and organize a broad movement for workers’ rights. We can do it—now is the time.

Talking UNION

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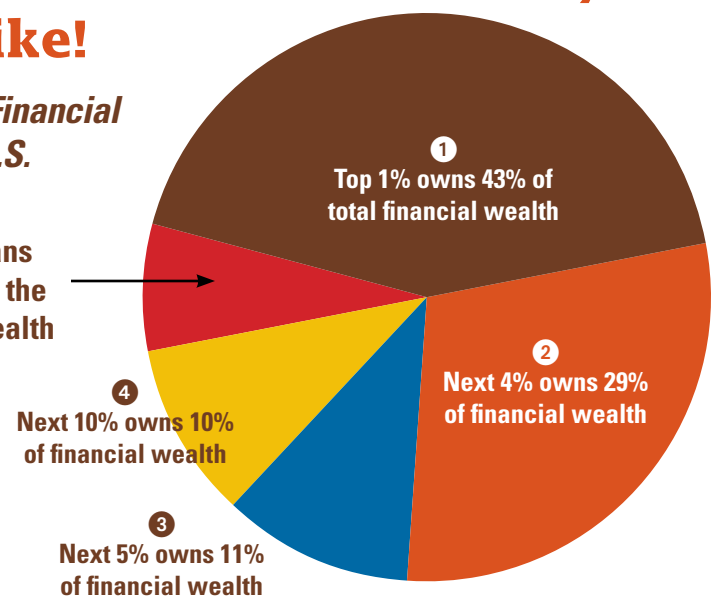
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PHEARN Meets in Memphis

Fifty public employee officers and activists met in April, to share strategies to combat the assault on public employees. The meeting began with CWA President Larry Cohen joining Vice President Brooks Sunkett in an around-the-room discussion about the attacks and CWA's resistance.

Katherine Sciacchitano, a professor from the National Labor College, focused on the 30-year history that led to this moment. John Schure, director of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, talked about ways to build a positive response. Both speakers framed the U.S. economy as shifting from a manufacturing base to one that relies on financial services.

Political conservatives claim that corporate tax cuts are the solution to the U.S.'s large national debt. However, the speakers believe that investment in the country's physical infrastructure and human capital are key to restoring the U.S. economy. Financing these investments should be done by ending the Bush-era tax cuts given to the wealthy.

Tom Smith of Tennessee and Mike Gross of Texas conducted a training session called, "Collecting Dues without Payroll Deduction," that focused on organizing to building unions in a hostile political climate. There was also a discussion on public sector SIF. Bill Henning, Vice President of Local 1180, spoke about how the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have negatively impacted public sector budgets around the country.



Serrette Retires from CWA

After more than 48 years of service to CWA, activist Dennis Serrette is retiring. He was the District 2 Staff Representative and CWA's Director of Education.



In 1971 as Vice President of Local 1101, Serrette led a long and militant strike against the New York Telephone company. He was also a founding member of the CWA Black Caucus that year.

In 1972 Serrette became a founder of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists. He has also served as the president of the United Association of Labor Educators.

Serrette has maintained a life long commitment to human and civil rights and community action in addition to his work in the labor movement. CWA will miss his presence but knows he will be an ally always.

NEW JERSEY

State Workers Demand Bargaining on Health Benefits

Gov. Chris Christie wants to legislate increased health care costs for state workers and destroy collective bargaining in New Jersey.

The Governor's proposal would make it illegal for a union to negotiate health benefits and would force every worker to pay 30% of their health care premium regardless of income level. For the average state worker with family coverage, that is a \$5,017 pay cut—every paycheck will be \$193 lighter.

On the other hand, CWA's bargaining proposal would save the state 20% of health care costs, provide for a fair contribution, and deliver affordable health care. But if Gov. Christie has his way, the proposal will not be considered.

CWA is asking all state legislators to sign a pledge defending state workers right to bargain health care.

NEW MEXICO

Court Restores Public Employee Labor Board

Governor Without Authority to Fire Board Members

New Mexico's Supreme Court has ruled that Gov. Susana Martinez overstepped her authority when she effectively dismantled the Public Employee Labor Relations Board by firing two of its three members and its executive director.

The Court's unanimous decision ordered Martinez to reinstate the two fired in March and "refrain from any further efforts" to remove them.

The ruling vindicated CWA and other public worker unions that joined forces to focus attention on the board's functions and its need for independence from the governor and administration.

"It's a classic example of an anti-worker governor overreaching," said CWA District 7 Vice President Mary Taylor. "Whether it's Scott Walker in Wisconsin or Gov. Martinez here in New Mexico, the public knows an illegal power grab when it sees one. We're pleased that the New Mexico Supreme Court so strongly affirmed our position."

Steve Harvey, executive director of the New Mexico Coalition of Public Safety Officers-CWA, called the decision "a refreshing victory for public workers who are determined to protect the public and provide critical services in the best way possible."

Michelle Lewis, president of New Mexico State Employee Alliance-CWA said Martinez's action fired up her members. She observed, "We're mad about watching our rights deteriorate. And we're fighting back."

Spring Actions **Build**

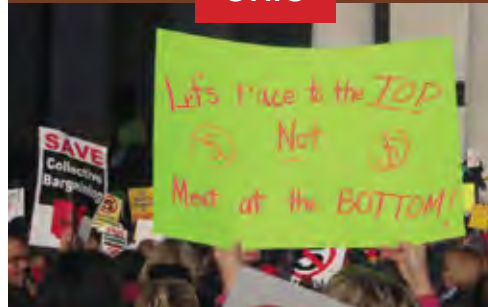


OHIO

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bargaining in Oklahoma. Saving money was the justification for trying to end dues check-off for public employees in Tennessee and Florida. A broad coalition fought the Florida bill to a legislative standstill, where the law included automatic decertification if dues-paying membership fell below a majority. But, the broadest attack appears to be in Ohio where the state moved to outlaw all collective bargaining, including among police and firefighters. Every state has a version of this story.

The solidarity in Ohio, Texas, and Florida has been multiplied in states across America. Our families' lives depend on organizing and mobilizing our members, joining with progressive organizations in coalitions, and building our movement.



Thousands of **OHIO** citizens have joined in rallies outside the state Capitol in Columbus to protest Gov. John Kasich's (R) budget, which makes drastic cuts to education and public services, privatizes state services and gives tax breaks to businesses and the wealthy—including a repeal of the state's estate tax.

They also are gathering signatures to put on the ballot a repeal of Kaisch's Senate Bill 5 (S.B. 5) that eliminates collective bargaining rights for public employees. "Regardless of what happens on S.B. 5 this is not the end of a fight, but the beginning of a movement," CWA District 4 Vice President Seth Rosen said.

Rosen is spearheading the "Stand Up for Ohio" coalition, bringing together unions, civic groups, civil rights activists and other allies to fight for Ohio's working families. They are planning major street demonstrations this spring and summer in cities across the state. "The politicians have a strategy of divide and conquer," Rosen said. "Our strategy is unite and win."



TEXAS

TSEU President Judy Lugo joins members of the Sheet Metal Workers union at the Austin solidarity march.

TEXAS State Employees Union (TSEU) and Texas Forward marched 5,000 strong in Austin on April 6th. The support from CWA locals and Texas labor created enthusiasm that TSEU members carried back to their workplaces. At TSEU/CWA's Lobby Day, Telco Dallas Local 6215 Secretary Nancy Hall said, "We won't sit quietly while unions are crushed. We will be in the streets to face every attack."

Telephone workers Local 6215 sent five full buses of members, and more in cars, to the march and rally. Local 6222 Houston, Local 6201, and groups of Telco members from Harlingen, Beaumont, Abilene, Wichita Falls, and Midland arrived in more buses. Members from Tyler IUE/CWA, Euless Airline, and Austin NABET joined the rally. Steelworkers, Teamsters, sheet metal workers, auto workers, and electrical workers formed large contingents.

TSEU/CWA Local 6186 helped build the Texas Forward coalition that united labor, community groups, and advocacy groups like ADAPT and the Grey Panthers, who all marched to defend state services.



NEW YORK



Our Movement

TENNESSEE



At the Capitol in Nashville, **TENNESSEE** on March 15th, nearly 1500 workers attended the "Rally for Good Jobs, Living Wages and Our Public Services" that coincided with UCW-CWA's legislative day and the CWA District 3 conference.

"When we first started building a coalition of groups for the rally a lot of folks looked at us like we were crazy," explained UCW President and full-time higher education employee Tom Anderson. "It was right after the 2010 elections and before the battle in Wisconsin. We knew we had to be playing offense." UCW-CWA went to work, ultimately building a coalition of nearly 30 labor, community and faith organizations.

On April 8th, a coalition of UCW members, community and student supporters, and faith leaders rallied at the University of Memphis demanding that all campus workers be paid a living wage. A delegation delivered more

than 1,000 signed postcards to university president Shirley Raines' office. Union members also used the rally to collect petition signatures demanding due process rights that allow for employees to bring a union representative into grievance hearings and meetings with supervisors where discipline is possible.



On April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. At the time he was engaged in an exercise in economic democracy: the right of sanitation workers to be represented by a union and to collectively bargain for wages, benefits, and safety conditions.

Forty-three years later many states have taken on aspects of pre-1968

Memphis. Unions are being demonized and attacked by newly-elected governors, including the Democrat in **NEW YORK** state. Collective bargaining rights have been stripped and dues check-off revoked.

In New York City, some 3,000 people stood up for labor rights in City Hall Park. There were also rallies in Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Queens.



MISSOURI



In **MISSOURI**, CWA Local 6355 joined with a broad coalition of civil rights, disability rights, legal groups and religious leaders to fight against the "fix the six" legislative initiative launched by the state Chamber of Commerce. Their package focused on the elimination of whistle blower protections and a change to the state's civil rights laws that would allow discrimination to be a contributing factor in employment decisions.

During the March 30th lobby day, hundreds of state workers met with legislators to reveal the dangers posed to public employees if these laws passed. While CWA was able to produce bipartisan opposition to the bills, the Republican majorities could not be stopped.

CWA members called and wrote to Gov. Jay Nixon, demanding that he veto the bills. As a result, the governor announced his intention to do just that. Based on earlier lobbying efforts, CWA is confident there is enough support to preserve the veto.

CWA leaders and members of the Missouri legislative black caucus recognize that without the coalition, victory would not have been possible. "I am proud to have been part of this alliance between labor and the community. Together we helped protect not just union members, but all working people," said executive board member Dauris Hall.

Organizing Shorts

FLORIDA

Ohio

City of Monroe, Ohio, dispatchers won an election 5-1. Local 4322 organizer Tomeka Cooley Pettus led the effort.

New York

With a 78% "yes" vote, the unit of 740 Research Assistants at SUNY Stony Brook ratified their first contract with The Research Foundation. Elections for leadership posts will be upcoming. The RAs are part of Local 1104.

New Jersey

Local 1040 won an NRLB election to represent 41 bus drivers and loaders at the Red, White, and Blue Thrift Store in Hamilton, NJ. The vote was 20-16, with five abstentions. The company fired the lead activist on the inside organizing committee, but CWA is challenging the termination. 75/25 organizer Connie English and Staff Representative Christopher Young worked tirelessly on this campaign.

Victory and Loss in the Legislature

The end was not glorious or victorious. Very little was accomplished to help the economy of Florida or to provide jobs. For the public servants of Florida, there were definite victories and a few losses.

The good news is that the "Worker Gag Bill" failed. It was intended to stop employers from providing payroll deduction for dues and COPE. It would have restricted any union funds from being used for political purposes, including dues to the AFL-CIO and local labor councils. It would have required a refund of dues used in the past 24 months for those purposes. The effort led by the Florida AFL-CIO together with the FOP, IAFF, AFT-NEA, SEIU and thousands of e-mails and phone messages stopped the bill.

Another bill failed that would have required automatic decertification of every bargaining unit having less than 50%-plus-one active union membership. Decertification election requests by anyone in the unit, whether or not a union member, would have been allowed. It also empowered the Attorney General to investigate a union local on behalf of an aggrieved member, for criminal activity or injunctive relief.

Some bills passed that will make life more difficult for members. First were changes to the Florida Retirement System. Members who are part of FRS will have to contribute 3% more to their pensions and, for many, that comes on top of no pay raises for the last two to six years.

Changes to local pensions also passed. In the police, fire and some other pension systems, overtime inclusion was capped at 300 hours per year. Local pension plans must be fully funded and all disability policies will be reviewed.

The movement to push extreme anti-worker legislation will not stop. This coming fall, committee meetings leading up to the 2012 legislative session will begin as will an escalation of attacks. Stephen Sarnoff, President of Local 3179, said, "We will continue to build awareness and activism with the goal of being proactive for the next Session. We must keep organizing, mobilizing, and educating ourselves to make our union and the labor movement the strongest voice for working families in our country."

CALIFORNIA

UPTE Organizing 14,000 Administrative Professionals

UPTE members in the 14,000-strong Administrative Professionals (AP) unit at the University of California (UC) are engaged in an organizing campaign to designate the union as their exclusive representative. Job titles in the AP unit include administrative analysts, student affairs officers, programmer/analysts, publications coordinators, senior editors and writers, and others.

While many APs have voluntarily joined UPTE and participate in the union, they do not have a contract to allow for collective bargaining on wages, benefits and working conditions.

Mark Pabst, who works as a clinical research coordinator (Analyst II) at UCSF (San Francisco), answered questions about the campaign.

What are the biggest issues facing Administrative Professionals?

The biggest issue facing APs is similar to the issue that is facing the university as a whole. UC is facing changes in its funding and its mission. For APs, change on the university-wide level translates into changes in our pensions, in the cost of our benefits, and in the structure of our work. We know

we have to change to remain successful, but we need a voice in the process.

Do you have an opinion about handling the shortfall of state funding?

These are difficult times for people and I respect that the university needs to carry out its mission with fewer state resources. However, the university is not making a genuine effort to listen to its students and employees when making decisions. Although all parts of the university are facing cutbacks, I think UC is ignoring certain elements in the university community when deciding how to allocate precious resources.

How would UC Administrative Professionals benefit from union representation?

Union representation would give APs both a voice and a seat at the table when the university sets its priorities and disperses resources. Individually APs are not considered important enough to merit a place in this process, but union representation means that UC cannot take our work for granted when it comes to making decisions.

APs can sign a "commitment card" supporting the union at www.upte.org/99.

Vicksburg City Workers Move Toward Union Recognition

After organizing for more than a year, Vicksburg, MS, city employees hope they will soon gain union recognition from the Mayor and Aldermen.

Mississippi Alliance of State Employees (MASE) President Brenda Scott, who met with the workers, said, “All of these workers want a seat at the table. The only thing we are trying to accomplish is to bring the workers into an organization where their interests are being represented because right now, every interest is geared toward management.”

To gain union recognition, MASE must gather signatures from at least 50% of about 260 eligible employees, which excludes police officers and firefighters, Scott said. They have been meeting monthly since April in the attempt to form a union. Scott is modeling the Vicksburg union after the City of Jackson, which was unionized in 2008.

Mayor Paul Winfield said his administration, which gave 3% pay

raises to most city employees this year—the first since 2001—has been “employee-friendly.”

“I joined the union the first day they came,” said William Crawley Jr., a construction supervisor in water mains. “A lot of improvements need to be done, especially about pay raises. Laborers in the water department need to start with at least \$9 per hour instead of \$7.25 per hour. You need someone with a backbone to fight for you.”

The 3% pay raises were not enough to adjust for the cost of living, Crawley said. Other city workers agree. “Three percent ain’t nothing,” said Albert Johnson, a foreman in water mains. “I’ve been with the city for 11 years and I’m not making what a foreman should be making. I have retirement invested and I can’t just leave.”

“It’s not all about the money,” said Tyrone Moore, also a foreman in the water department. “We can complain about anything to Human Resources, but they always believe the supervisor.”

More from Mississippi

In preparation for Mississippi’s April 4, 2011 action, civil rights icon James A. Meredith answered organizers’ questions. Meredith integrated the University of Mississippi and led voting rights marches in Mississippi.



1968 Memphis Sanitation Strikers in Hall of Fame

On April 29th, CWA President Larry Cohen and Vice President Brooks Sunkett joined Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis at the Labor Hall of Fame induction ceremony honoring the workers of the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Strike, and their historic campaign for workplace rights and a living wage. As Secretary Solis said, “They took a stand for human dignity with four simple words: ‘I AM A MAN.’”



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., described the struggle in Memphis. “Whenever you are engaged in work that serves humanity, it has dignity. And it has worth. It is a crime for people to live in this rich nation and receive starvation wages.” Dr. King was assassinated while addressing the workers.

In addition to the eight survivors of the strike, civil and labor rights activists Ambassador Andrew Young, Bill Lucy, and Jesse Epps were recognized for their contribution to the struggle.

This is the first time a group of rank-and-file workers has been inducted into the Hall of Fame. Earlier in the day the strikers met with President Obama at the White House. The program included the film, “At The River I Stand.”

CWA honors and salutes the 1,300 brave men who stood up and fought for justice, while risking everything. Their battle was more than a civil rights fight; it was for health and safety, and it was for dignity and justice. It was also the fight that kicked off a wave of organizing in the public sector all over the U.S. and helped build the labor movement.

Secretary Solis said, “Today, some governors are using the financial crisis as an excuse to take this country backward, instead of forward. But we know American workers still want and need a voice at the table. We know collective bargaining gives them that seat.”

"ALL HANDS ON DECK, or ELSE!"

Traveling throughout the state of Oklahoma, CWA/Oklahoma State Workers Union (CWA/OSWU) area-wide committee members mobilized across agency lines, asking their co-workers to "give a hand." CWA/OSWU collected more than 1,000 "hands" inscribed with personal messages to legislators, as well as names and addresses, and delivered them to the Republican-majority state legislature throughout the session.

The "ALL HANDS ON DECK, or ELSE!" campaign is geared toward legislators who support laws targeting state workers. This legislation includes attacks on pension plans, reduction in benefit allowances for health care, agency privatization, furloughs, and a refusal to provide state workers with a living wage.

Members created "Wear Red" stands, mini lobby day stands, a group phone protest, legislative town halls, and "hand delivery" at the capitol. Thus far, state workers have been able to hold off attacks through member education, political involvement, mobilization, and organizing efforts.

say State Workers to Legislators



CWA/OSWU members kick off their 2011 campaign for state worker justice calling for "ALL HANDS ON DECK, or ELSE!"

Oklahoma Repeals Bargaining Law for City Workers

Jeopardizing the wages and benefits of thousands of workers, the Oklahoma state government repealed a collective bargaining law for city employees that CWA organizer Sandy Rusher helped to write and that passed in 2004.

The law required cities with more than 35,000 people to grant bargaining rights to non-uniformed workers. Republican Gov. Mary Fallon signed the repeal, which passed along party lines in the Republican-controlled House and Senate.

"It's a sad day for everybody here," said CWA Local 6012 President Cindy Mills, who represents about 350 workers in Broken Arrow and Stillwater. "We're not giving up. We're going to try to bargain new contracts and lobby the city councils to honor them," Mills said. Their annual contracts expire June 30, but the repeal will not be in effect until November.

CWA members in the two cities are employed in public works, parks and recreation, jails, and clerical jobs. The law applies to 12 Oklahoma cities, affecting thousands of other unionized workers.



CWA/OSWU Executive Board Members Jodi White, Secretary-Treasurer (far left), DeRosa Newton, Department of Mental Health Representative (far right) pictured with CWA President Larry Cohen, and CWA/OSWU Organizing Coordinator Lisa Sells during PHEARN President's Meeting in Memphis, Tenn. "We are elated and encouraged that President Cohen took part in our conference. His willingness to join us was a big step toward the 'WE ARE ONE' vision," said White.



CWA/OSWU members rally at the Oklahoma State Capitol as part of the AFL-CIO "WE ARE ONE" rally, on April 4, 2011.