



The Workers' Edge

Voice of the Tompkins County Workers' Center

Workers' Rights Hotline: Organizing Through Advocacy

In early February of this year, Greg Evans visited the Workers' Center to ask for help in a situation that was causing him a great deal of concern. Greg

was working at a local restaurant near The Commons in Ithaca as a line chef and was fed up with how he was being treated.

complaint. Every situation is unique.

In Greg's situation, we informed him that he could easily file a complaint with the Human Rights Commission, a County agency that specifically helps people who have been discriminated against. Greg, however, decided that he wanted the situation at the restaurant to be resolved more quickly. So we sat down with Greg and crafted a letter to the eatery from the Workers' Center saying that the treatment Greg was receiving due to his racial background (both the racial comments as well as the lowering of hours) was unjust. In the letter, we asked the owners to meet with us. That evening, Greg also confronted management, himself, about the situation.

A month passed by. Greg stopped in to the Workers' Center and said that the negative behavior had seemed to stop and that his hours had been restored. Greg still feels to be in a vulnerable situation in his employment, as many workers do. Greg and the Workers' Center's investigation will continue as long as Greg feels the need.

Greg's situation is one example of the many complaints the Workers' Center gets from workers who feel they have been treated unfairly at work. As the data below shows, the cases are quite varied. For each individual coming to us we decide whether that individual just needs some information, a referral to another agency or perhaps, as in Greg's case, assistance with direct advocacy. We have had several high profile cases of advocating with workers at their workplaces

(most cases stay under the radar, but we are no less effective). Examples of some of our more public cases include the College-town Pizzeria; Diamonds Restaurant; and Kinko's.

Workers' Rights Hotline as Organizing Tool

Whenever a person comes to the Workers' Center with a workplace, or other, complaint, we now encourage the person to become a Member of the Workers' Center. Membership is a newly-developed component of the Workers' Center, designed to involve more people who are most directly affected by economic injustice. It has served as an excellent way to involve more people in various aspects of our work. One of our very first Members has become a strong member of our Steering Committee. Greg Evans has become a Member and is interested in getting more involved with organizing for economic justice.

When we started this aspect of our work in 2003, we envisioned the Workers' Rights component of our work as a way to have more direct contact with the people we want to be organizing with. While many people strongly agree with the concept of Living Wage, the Workers' Rights component has allowed us to touch people in the here and now, and allows us the space to organize on community wide issues.

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Workers' Center member Greg Evans

Greg felt that he was working in a hostile environment as the result of racially derogatory comments from one of his supervisors. Additionally, his hours were arbitrarily being cut back for no apparent reason, he felt, except for the color of his skin.

The Workers' Center holds the principle that we must work collaboratively with the person who brings us a complaint. We work together to bring about a solution, never doing anything beyond the comfort level of the person making the

“The Workers' Rights component helps us to reach people in the here and now”

Call the Workers' Center at (607) 269-0409!



Workers' Center teams up with Jobs with Justice

Pete Meyers

The Workers' Center proudly announces our new affiliation with Jobs with Justice (www.jwj.org) which happened in mid-March! Jobs with Justice (JwJ), as does the Workers' Center, engages workers and allies in campaigns to win justice in workplaces and in communities where working families live. JwJ was founded in 1987 with the vision of lifting up workers' rights struggles as part of a larger campaign for economic and social justice. We believe in long-term multi-issue coalition building, grassroots base-building, organizing and strategic militant action as the foundation for building a grassroots movement, and that by engaging a broad community of allies, we can win bigger victories.

There are 42 local coalitions that comprise the JwJ network. JwJ has identified 4 priority programs that unify its network and strengthen local work:



1. Right to organize and collectively bargain: supporting workers efforts to exercise workplace democracy;
2. Healthcare for all: ensuring everyone in the U.S. has access to affordable quality healthcare;
3. Global justice: highlighting the domestic impacts of globalization and fostering international solidarity among workers and communities around the world; and
4. Immigrant rights: denouncing attacks on immigrant workers and communities.

These issues are interconnected and we will continue to make connections between them. Winning healthcare benefits on the job is a key reason that many workers organize a union. Greedy corporations pushing for egregious trade deals do so in order to exploit our brothers and sisters in other countries and abandon a commitment to living wage jobs with benefits in the U.S. Immigrant workers are a key constituency in many of our campaigns for collective bargaining and community justice.

Unemployment Insurance Reform on the Move!

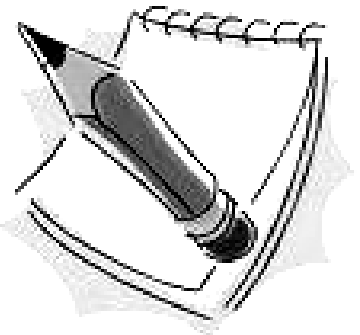
Workers' Center members took the lead during the first two weeks in March in getting legislative support for Unemployment Insurance reform.

The Tompkins County Legislature, Common Council and the Town of Ithaca Board each passed a resolution supporting increases in benefit levels especially for low-income workers and supporting the right of hourly-paid employees of Cornell, ICSD and other educational institutions to get unemployment during seasonal layoffs.

And legislators in Albany are beginning to take note! In mid-March, UAW Local 2300 President Terry Sharpe and others from the Cornell union were joined in Albany by 90 other UAW members from around the State to participate in a press conference and to lobby legislators in Albany about this.

Here's what you can do now:

Write your State Senator asking their support for UI reform. If you don't know who your State Senator is call the Workers' Center at 269-0409 or e-mail tcwrc@yahoo.com. To view a copy of the resolution the local legislatures just passed, go to our website, www.tcworkerscenter.org



Support These Living Wage Certified Businesses!

Advocacy Center

P.O. Box 164, Ithaca

Alternatives Federal Credit Union

125 N. Fulton Street, Ithaca

Ancient Wisdom Productions

202 E. State Street, Ithaca

Autumn Leaves Used Books

115 E. State Street, Ithaca

Blue Spruce Painting and Decorating

598 Hayts Road, Ithaca

Boyce Thompson Institute

Tower Road, Ithaca

Catholic Charities of Tompkins/Tioga

324 W. Buffalo Street, Ithaca

Colonial Veterinary Hospital

2369 Triphammer Road, Ithaca

Community Foundation of Tompkins County

309 N. Aurora St., Ithaca

Contemporary Trends, Inc.

121 N. Aurora Street, Ithaca

Custum Construction

123 Sears Street, Ithaca

Day Care & Child Development Council of Tompkins County

609 W. Clinton St., Ithaca

Green Clean

118 E. Falls Street, Ithaca

GreenStar Cooperative Market

701 W. Buffalo Street, Ithaca

Hospicare and Palliative Care

172 E. King Road, Ithaca

Ithaca Downtown Partnership

171 E. State Street, Center Ithaca, Ithaca

IthacaMed

404 N. Cayuga St., Ithaca

Jewel Box

301 Taughannock Blvd., Ithaca

Loaves and Fishes

210 N. Cayuga Street, Ithaca

Money with a Mission

490 Lower Creek Road, Ithaca

Morris' Men's Wear & Morris Too

134-136 E. State Street, Ithaca

Renovus Energy, Inc.

102 Cherry Street, Ithaca

Shade Tree Auto, Inc.

1047 Teeter Road, Ithaca

Significant Elements, A Program of Historic Ithaca, Inc.

212 Center Street, Ithaca

Singlebrook Technology, Inc.

433 W. Buffalo Street, Ithaca

Snug Planet LLC

416 N. Titus Avenue, Ithaca

Sparks Electric

208 N. Titus Avenue, Ithaca

St. John's Church

210 N. Cayuga Street, Ithaca

St. Luke Lutheran Church

109 Oak Avenue, Ithaca

Sunny Brook Builders

2147 Slaterville Road, Ithaca

Taitem Engineering

109 S. Albany Street, Ithaca

Taughannock Aviation Corporation

66 Brown Road, Ithaca

The Frame Shop

414 W. Buffalo Street, Ithaca

The Strebel Planning Group

944 Dryden Road, Ithaca

Tompkins Community Action

701 Spencer Road, Ithaca

Tompkins County

320 N. Tioga Street, Ithaca

Tompkins County Public Library

101 E. Green Street, Ithaca

Town of Ithaca

215 N. Tioga Street, Ithaca

Upscale Remodeling Corporation

176 Hurd Road, Freeville

Ward & Murphy (Law Firm)

170 Main Street, Groton

William Henry Miller Inn

303 N. Aurora Street, Ithaca

Workers' Right Hotline Reports To Date

Termination: 21%

Unpaid Wages: 14.6%

Bullying/Managerial Abuse: 11%

Discrimination: 8.5%

Unemployment: 8%

Health and Safety: 6%

Workers' Comp: 5.5%

Housing: 4%

Other: 22%

Need help? Call us at 269-0409

Join us on May 1st to Celebrate Immigrant Rights: No Human Is Illegal!

On Tuesday, May 1st, from 12-2 p.m., a broad coalition of immigrant, community, labor, and student groups will join together, in coordination with millions around the nation, for a rally and celebration on The Commons (Bernie Milton Pavilion) in Ithaca to declare that "No Human Is Illegal". The issues of workers' rights, guestworker programs, globalization, law enforcement, and education will be special topics of interest. Music and poetry will abound. Students will be marching from their respective campuses to join the rally.

On May 6th, from 1-5 p.m., a Teach In/Where Do We Go From Here event will be held (location to be determined). Workshops on: Law Enforcement and Immigration; Immigrant Access to Education; Immigration and Globalization, and Bridge Building Across Racial Divides will be offered.



400 People Gather on May Day in 2008
Marty Luster



Please contact 607-269-0409 or email TCWRC@yahoo.com for more information on how to get involved!

Mark your calendar!

Jeci Brown, Editor



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