

Be vigilant and relentless: Fight anti-worker laws

By **DAVID COOK**
President



Anti-worker legislation is running rampant in Jefferson City where some politicians support laws to silence the voice of workers.

Paycheck Deception and the “right-to-work/freedom-to-work/workplace freedom” laws are proposed for the near future, but the good news is that recent lobbying efforts by Local 655 members and others have been successful.

Mike Lewis, lobbyist for the Missouri AFL-CIO, said House Bill 1617, Paycheck Deception, did NOT come up in the Missouri House last week as was expected.

“If you’re one of the many who attended a lobby day, made a phone call, sent an email or a letter or otherwise spoke up, THANK YOU,” Lewis said. “We’re sending a strong and consistent message to Jefferson City politicians that Missourians are opposed to Paycheck Deception and ‘Right-to-Work’ bills.”

I am proud to see working people from

across the state speaking up and demanding that their elected officials start focusing on jobs instead of unnecessarily attacking working men and women with laws that will diminish their strength in the workplace.

Paycheck Deception and “Right-to-Work” laws are unfair, dangerous legislative attacks on working people.

Stand together for a good contract, and stand together to fight this anti-worker legislation. Some politicians and big-business supporters have the script already written — that we’ll be a Right-to-Work state by 2015 — but they’re wrong.

Local 655 has volunteers out fighting against the threat of a Right-to-Work law in Missouri, but it’s also up to union members to stand tough and fight back.

In 1978, when proponents tried to push a Right-To-Work law through Missouri, that’s when I got involved with my union. We have a contract that affects 10,000 people, and as you see, action and involvement with Local 655 can make a difference. Get angry; get mad. You are the best advocates that we have.

The continued bipartisan opposition to these bills is heartening.

Let’s hope House leaders start listening and refocusing their priorities. Until then, we’re going to keep making sure our voices are heard.

New Shop Steward training sends ‘Union Proud’ message

It sounds like a dream state. You’ve gone to work with a guardian angel of sorts. There’s always someone ready to back you up, give help when needed, answer questions when they come up or to stand and support you when troubles in the workplace arise.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Shop Steward.

Shop Stewards are one of the many arms of Local 655, trained and aware of Union rules and ready to help members resolve workplace issues, grievances and more.

Last week, Union Representatives Merri Berry and Gary Torpea met with prospective shop stewards to teach them the ropes and to educate them on how to help Local 655 members in the workplace.

Attendees included: Don Hargate Jr. (Schnucks-Zumbahl), Krista Placht (Schnucks-Dillon), Tim Matt (Schnucks-Festus), Rebecca Schuster (Schnucks-Cross Keys), Ken James (Dierbergs-Wentzville), Tom Vierling (Schnucks-Brentwood), Katrina Chapple (Schnucks-Cool Valley), Sherry McGee (Shop n’ Save-Dardenne Prairie), and Crystal Massey (Shop n’ Save-Dardenne Prairie).

Torpea said union stewards are the key “link” in the union. Stewards make collective bargaining agreements meaningful by helping co-workers to implement and defend their rights on a day-to-day basis, he said.

“You are in the best position to educate co-workers about our union’s concerns and priorities. Organize with them to take action,” Torpea said. “You are our communicators in the workplace; the best spokespersons we have in Local 655.”

Torpea said when new employees arrive, let them know who you are. When long-time members have issues, let them know you are there.

Berry said Local 655 wants to strengthen its identity in the community, and urged stewards to be proud to say, “I’m a Local 655 member.”

“Tell everyone, ‘I’m a UFCW member, because I have a contract that protects me,’” Berry said.

The United Food and Commercial Workers

International Union has 1.3 million members working at supermarkets, meat-packing plants, food processors and even at Payless Shoes.

“Being union is about quality of life. As a group we have strength,” Berry said. “We can achieve greater improvements when we are united, rather than as individuals. Without a union contract you would be an at-will employee in the state of Missouri and management would not have to have just cause to terminate you”

Torpea said Local 655 has seven union servicing representatives serving 10,000 members, but it’s the shop stewards at the core, communicating closely and helping the union representatives by handling work-site issues.

“Actions speak louder than words, and a steward sets the example as a unifying advocate for workers’ rights,” Berry said. “Be an active participant in your union and actions, build unity, and try to get every member involved in our union. Involve members when advocating on their behalf.”

Torpea urged stewards to establish a good relationship with management and workers.

“We are always looking for union leaders, and those members in the stores need a relationship with management. Educate and mobilize members to come to meetings. Invite co-workers to join a meeting with you,” Berry said. “President David Cook is charismatic and engaging, and our Union meetings keep members informed during these difficult economic times.”

Torpea said one of the stewards’ most important jobs is to build an active, united membership in the workplace.

“Our ability to defend and improve conditions will always depend on the collective power of our membership,” Torpea said. “Welcome new employees and let them know how to become involved. Ask non-union workers to join our union, and constantly find ways to involve more members in the activities of the union.”

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Local 655 Union Representatives Gary Torpea (left) and Merri Berry (standing right) train prospective shop stewards (from left, seated at table) Don Hargate Jr. (Schnucks-Zumbahl), Krista Placht (Schnucks-Dillon), Tim Matt (Schnucks-Festus), Rebecca Schuster (Schnucks-Cross Keys), Ken James (Dierbergs-Wentzville), Tom Vierling (Schnucks-Brentwood), Katrina Chapple (Schnucks-Cool Valley), Sherry McGee (Shop n’ Save-Dardenne Prairie), and not available for photo, Crystal Massey (Shop n’ Save-Dardenne Prairie).



Union Representative Merri Berry (left) demonstrates how Shop Stewards should make the first contact with new members as prospective stewards Sherry McGee (center) and Crystal Massey listen and learn.



Union Representatives Gary Torpea and Merri Berry present New Shop Stewards training. — Labor Tribune photos



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