

County Workers Win Voice at Work In First Win Under NCFO Organizing Plan

After 20 years as a Pennsylvania local government employee, Janet Kervin knows that at long last, things are going to get better for her and the other 60 Warren County employees who voted overwhelmingly for SEIU/NCFO representation.

"I had to go to work every day without a voice to stand up for me the entire time," says the senior probation officer. "And believe me, I've been stomped on many times. We're way behind in pay compared with state employees,

county officials change vacation and other policies at whim, and nobody seems to know what's going on with our retirement plan."

But now that she and her coworkers are the first to successfully organize under NCFO's newly initiated organizing plan, the new secretary-treasurer of NCFO Local 22W is confident that things will change for the better.

Like Kervin, new Local 22W Chief Steward Rod Nobles was involved in organizing three years ago with another union, "but it fizzled."

Nobles had been surprised how much he felt the need for union representation when he started as a county maintenance worker almost four years ago after retiring from the Navy: he just assumed he'd have more rights on the job in public service than he had in the military.

"At least in the Navy there were consistent rules and policies that everybody followed and you knew where you stood," he says. "There were avenues of appeal through the chain of command."

In contrast, when Nobles and 40 other employees signed a petition a year ago protesting changes in vacation policies that cost them considerable accrued leave,



NCFO's newest members—employees of Pennsylvania's Warren County—are all smiles as they celebrate winning a union voice at work. They are the first workers to organize with NCFO since recent adoption of the union's organizing program. PHOTO: JOHN MCCANNA

"the county commissioners didn't even bother getting back to us."

This time, Nobles made contact with long-time NCFO Local 22 activist John McCanna, now retired and a part-time business agent. A core group of workers soon met in his home and, with the strong backing of NCFO Vice President Robert Franco and organizing help from NCFO Organizing Director Johnny Thacker, the

workers were quickly on their way to what turned out to be a better than 95% vote for NCFO.

"Labor and NCFO have been an important part of my life and to help do something like this for my neighbors feels great," McCanna says proudly.

For Franco, involvement in an organizing drive was a new experience, after decades of union work.

"I've come to realize that neither NCFO nor the rest of organized labor will have much of a future without intensive efforts at organizing," he explains. "I just wish I were younger so I could be involved in a lot more of it."

"Working together, we all made quite a statement," Kervin sums up. "We're finally going to have a voice and a say-so in our lives in the working world."

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Ask President Francisco

Q What do you think the election results mean for us? And, are there still things to do that can make a difference?

—Local 70 member Laura Frederick, Berea, Kentucky

A I'm writing before we know for sure whether Al Gore or George W. Bush will be our next president. There's no question that we would be much better off with a friend like Gore in the White House.

But no matter which one is inaugurated, we're going to have to fight like hell on issues that matter to our families. With Congress so evenly divided between the parties, we'll have to keep raising money, writing letters, lobbying and sometimes hitting the streets with a new intensity.

There are a few things we can all start doing. An old slogan took on a deeper meaning this year: **every vote counts**. I hope that every NCFO local—and every member—will take to heart the need to make voter registration and education an ongoing part of their lives.

Second, every dollar counts. More than a few candidates who were good friends of working families didn't have the resources they needed. Don't wait for the next election: if you haven't signed up to contribute to the Firemen & Oilers Political League, please do so. Even if you can only afford a dollar a month, it will be a dollar well spent and



Laura Frederick, Local 70
Berea, Kentucky

much appreciated.

Third, this election showed how great a force for progress and justice unions are and how much stronger a force we can be. Consider these statistics:

- Though we are a much smaller percentage of the population, union households accounted for 26 percent of all the ballots cast this year. In some states the percentage was even higher—like 43 percent of all the votes in Michigan.
- Voters from union households went for Al Gore by just about a 2:1 margin.
- A recent study concluded that 40 million Americans would vote for a union if they got the chance.

If together we can organize millions of Americans into unions in the coming years, and get them involved, together we can remake the political landscape.

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Joyous Holidays

Whatever your personal religious affiliations and beliefs, this holiday season is of special significance: a time of spiritual renewal and of celebration of family, friendship and community.

Secretary-Treasurer Dan Anderson and I, on behalf of the Conference Executive Board and all the fine women and men who serve on the NCFO staff, want to wish each and every one of you all the blessings of the season. We hope it's the best ever for you and your family.

Senate Villains Block Railroad Retirement Improvements

As far as she can recall, NCFO widow Mildred Craig never said or did an unkind thing to Senator Phil Gramm (R-TX).

But because of Gramm and a trio of other Republican Senate leaders—Pete Domenici (NM), Don Nickles (OK) and Majority Leader Trent Lott (MS)—at least for now, Craig will be denied the considerable widow's pension improvement she really needs and richly deserves.

Earlier this year, NCFO and its partner rail unions worked out an agreement with employers and asked Congress to approve the most sweeping package of improve-



Mildred Craig, widow of deceased NCFO rail member Leland Craig, writes her Senators urging passage of legislation that would have greatly increased her monthly check. But a handful of right-wing Republicans blocked Congress from delivering the help she needs.

ments in railroad retirement in 25 years.

Totally self-funding, the agreement would not have cost taxpayers a dime and would have:

- Sharply increased surviving spouse benefits for some 75,000 widows and widowers;
- Provided health insurance coverage for retirees age 60 and older;
- Offered full retirement benefits at age 60 (down from age 62) for any rail worker with 30 years of service;
- Vested rail pensions after five years of service instead of 10;
- Repealed the cap on retirement benefits for long-term employees;
- Put the burden of any future cost increases on employers.

Rail workers—and fellow union members who understand how improvements for other workers help provide upward pressure on their own benefits—flooded Congress and the White House with letters, calls and e-mails.

The Clinton Administration fully supported the package and it overwhelmingly passed the House of Representatives, also winning widespread support in the Senate.

But the cabal of right-wingers—some of the same ones pushing higher retirement ages and reckless privatization of the Social Security system—stopped the Senate from even voting on the measure before it adjourned for the year.

“I have to watch my money very,



“So many people who finish a life of hard work and stress aren't healthy enough to enjoy the retirement they worked so hard for,” laments Local 362 member Jerry Gross.

very carefully,” says Craig, whose NCFO member husband, Leland, died eight years ago. Hopeful of the measure's passage, she had looked forward to more room in her budget for Christmas presents for her two grandchildren and two great-grandchildren when she penned letters to her Senators.

Current rail workers on the cusp of retirement eligibility—like Local 362 member Jerry Gross—saw their hopes dashed too.

“So many people who finish a life of hard work and stress aren't healthy enough to enjoy the retirement they worked so hard for,” adds Gross, who had been “thrilled” at the prospect of congressional approval of the reforms.

“This is a terrible, mean-spirited, undemocratic outrage,” fumes NCFO President George J. Francisco, Jr. “Come hell or high water, we will continue the fight to win passage of this legislation next year.”

SEIU/NCFO Builds Union C

Determined to work together this year and in the years to come, more than 30 SEIU and NCFO activists gathered in Lexington, Kentucky. Their goal: to build statewide muscle to elect pro-labor officials; to build the capacity in the state legislature to defend the interests of working families; and to build solidarity among union members working in different industries.

In the weeks that followed before the November 7 election, the locals concentrated on voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts, distributing more than 4,000 pieces of literature to members.

Opening the conference, NCFO Secretary-Treasurer Dan Anderson stressed the potential power—and the shared problems—facing the various locals.

“It’s important that we all get to know each other,” he explained. “While you’re here, hang out with the people you don’t already know. You’re going to need each other and you can make a difference for each other.”

Wood Nails Another Term on City Council



Local 578 Chairman Mike Wood, after returning home from the conference, continued his own campaign. He handily won re-election to a third term on the Walton, Kentucky, City Council on November 7. The 39-year-old Wood vowed to continue standing up for working families—both on the job at CSX and in his community.

DEMOCRATIC CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATE Scotty Baesler calls for an all-out effort to elect a Congress that will stand up for working families as he addresses the NCFO/SEIU meeting. Targeted for defeat by a well-funded National Rifle Association campaign, Baesler lost to incumbent Republican Ernie Fletcher, who has a dismal record on labor and working family issues.



REPRESENTATIVES from five of the nine locals participating in the union’s first statewide political/legislative gathering in Kentucky demonstrate their unity. Pictured (from left) are J.C. Collins of Local 5 (Cooks Family Foods), Diane King of Local 77 (Gibson Greetings), Kathy Sadler of SEIU Local 541 (racetracks), Gwen Estes of Local 320 (Quality Manufacturing) and Bill Bormann of Local 362 (CSX railroad).

out in Kentucky

Strength in Numbers: Local 320 Gears Up

As the process of statewide unity in political and legislative action unfolded, another unification became official, yielding a more than 2,000-strong NCFO local in Louisville.

Following a lopsided favorable vote by the membership of SEIU Local 557 earlier this year, the merger of that local into NCFO Local 320 became official on November 1.



"I've seen in the newsletter what the union can get done," says new Local 320 member Irene Howard, shown here on the job at Quality Manufacturing. "Strength in numbers is the whole idea. If we don't stick together we ain't got nothing."

The local, which now represents workers at 38 different commercial and public sector employers, put out a special newsletter celebrating the merger, which also was celebrated by individual members.

"We're building up a feeling that the union can get things done," says new Local 320 member Judy Warner, chair of the local's chapter at Quality Manufacturing. "We had four times as many people at a recent union meeting than we used to get."

Both the merger and the statewide efforts were music to the ears of 12-year Local 320 member Lafayette McDonald. "It's all good news to me," he adds.

"It's impossible not to feel the energy, confidence and optimism throughout our expanded local," says Bob Gunter, Local 320's business manager, citing growing determination in recent contract negotiations.



"It's all good news to me," says 12-year Local 320 member Lafayette McDonald both of his now larger and stronger local and of the statewide efforts.

"Granny Gwen" Signs Up 100 New Kentucky Voters

Attending the first statewide legislative/political conference of her union gave Local 320 member Gwen Estes a new burst of energy.



"More than ever before, I really felt part of something much greater than myself and got the sense that together we could really accomplish things," says the new Local 320 executive board member and secretary of the union chapter at Quality Manufacturing.

At the September meeting, she was given a handful of voter registration cards, but quickly needed more, which she picked up at the county courthouse.

"I called all of my relatives and asked for people they knew who were not registered to vote and began contacting them," explains the mother of three and grandmother of eight. "And off I went."

She carried voter registration cards in her purse and began signing people up at work, at the supermarket, and other shopping stops, and even at flea markets.

By the registration deadline for this year's elections, she had met the goal she set for herself: 100 new voters.

"Just think of the power unions could have if every member just signed up one or two other people to vote," she muses. "We could really change the country."



Indianapolis Local Raises Colors On Labor Day

Wasting no time in putting to good use their new banner, Local 131 members (top) carry their proudly during the annual Labor Day Parade in Indianapolis. Just weeks earlier, NCFO distributed banners of every local at the 34th Convention. Shown (from left) are President Robert Smith, Executive Board Member Dale Martin and Business Agent Chris Burton. Local 131 kids (bottom) then enjoyed themselves at the local's 4th annual Labor Day Picnic where Vice President Robert Reed was honored for his 20 years of service to the local.

Get the SEIU Edge with Members-Only Benefits and Discounts

Through the *SEIU Edge*, NCFO members get access to discounts at theme parks, a college scholarship program, a great deal on a MasterCard, a 30 minute free consultation with an attorney, a discount home mortgage and real estate program, supplemental insurance programs, a computer loan program, and much more.

For information on the overall *SEIU Edge* program and the specifics on the various benefits, call 1-800-448-7348. There is no cost to join, though some specific programs require an annual membership fee.

Union Mourns Death of Chris Hill

NCFO Local 64 President Chris Hill, a towering figure in the Washington area labor and civil rights movements and in his community, died recently after a courageous fight against cancer. He was 66.



During his almost three decades of NCFO activism while working as a power plant controlman for the U.S. Navy, Hill held a variety of NCFO posts, while also serving for more than 20 years as President of the Washington Area Metal Trades Council.

Hill, who was serving as president of the Greater Montgomery County (Maryland) Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference at the time of his death, also was active in a number of other youth activities and community and local government groups.

He was instrumental in founding the Blacks in Government organization and in launching a prison ministry at the Clinton AME Zion Church in Rockville, where he served as chairman of the steward board.

Too ill to attend the 34th NCFO Convention in Washington in August, Hill was cheered up by a huge get-well card signed by the entire assemblage.

Speaking at a memorial for Hill, NCFO President George Francisco, Jr. noted that "Chris Hill's life was lived in the spirit of solidarity on many fronts—from the continuing fight for equality to a life-long commitment to making things better for working families."

Hill is survived by his wife Rene, two children, four grand children, eight brothers and sisters and thousands of other brothers and sisters in his union family.

The Uneven Right to a Safe Workplace

Recent budget maneuvers by Florida's Republican governor Jeb Bush left that state's public employers with no workplace safety standards or enforcement under state law at least until March of next year, when the legislature reconvenes.

That's because the Republican-controlled legislature passed Bush's reorganization plan eliminating the agency charged with protecting the safety and health of public workers on the job.

This shocking development highlights the often-ignored fact that the 1970 OSHA law leaves it up to each state to decide whether or not to cover public workers. While 23 states cover public employees under their federally approved OSHA laws and a few other states that don't have federally approved plans also cover public workers, over *eight million* public sector workers are left unprotected unless their union contracts include safety and health provisions.

In contrast, private sector employees are automatically covered by federal OSHA in all states that don't have federally approved plans.

Under OSHA, most American workers do have a number of important rights:

1. To a workplace free of hazards that are known to cause death or serious harm;

2. To enforcement of OSHA standards—which employers are legally obligated to follow;

3. To file a complaint with OSHA without revealing their name to their employers;

4. To have a union representative present when OSHA performs an unannounced inspection in response to a complaint;

5. To refuse life-threatening work or work that would cause seriously bodily harm. This right should not be asserted without first contacting your union representative;

6. To be protected from any retaliation by their employer for filing a complaint;

7. To view the employer's safety record, which must be posted in the workplace every year in the month of February.

It is estimated that OSHA has saved 220,000 lives of American workers since 1971.

However, the agency has been under relentless—and increasingly

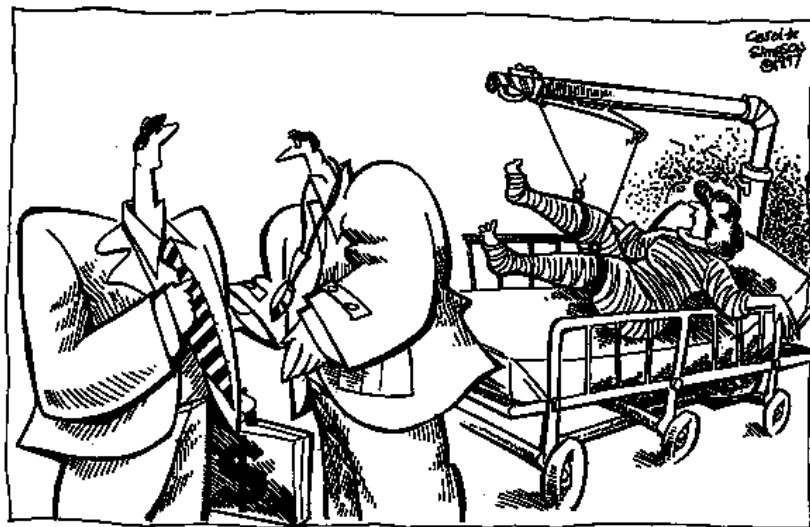
effective—attacks by its short-sighted corporate foes and their supporters in Congress.

OSHA is supposed to routinely inspect all covered workplaces, but because of sharp budget cuts, the job has become all but impossible to do. According to an AFL-CIO study, with the current number of inspectors on its payroll it would take the agency about 107 years to inspect all workplaces.

Corporate America has been successful in stalling—sometimes for decades—important new standards, like the one on ergonomics. Moreover, the current average penalty for a serious violation of federal job safety standards is only \$776. In states that carry out enforcement themselves, it's only around \$600.

While the federal OSHA budget is but \$382 million, *The Archives of Internal Medicine* estimated in a 1997 study that workplace injuries, illnesses and deaths cost our society a whopping \$171 billion per year.

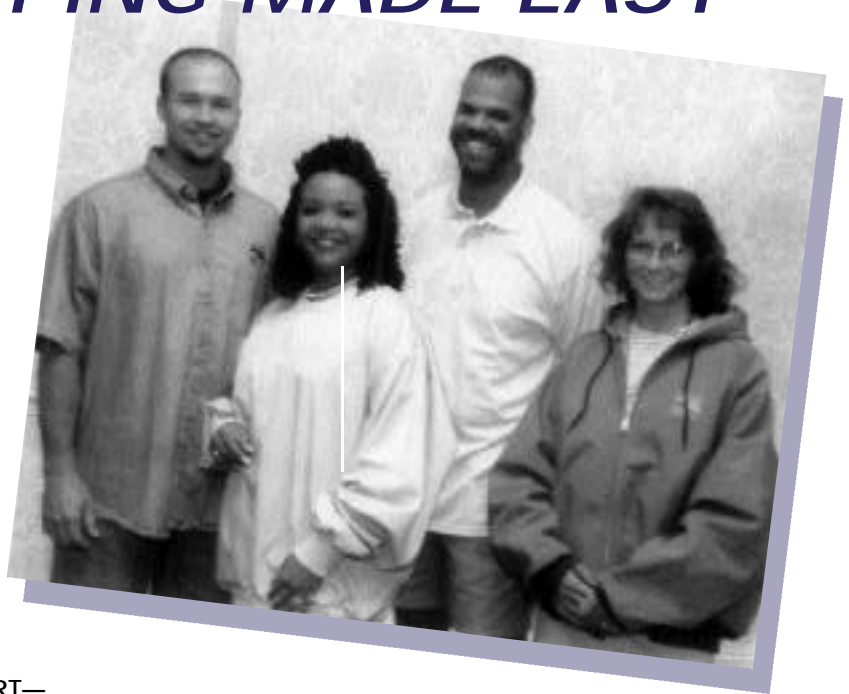
There are few rights more important to working families than the right to a safe workplace. It's a right that needs to be expanded to millions of public employers and considerably reinforced and strengthened for all American workers through tougher laws and increased funding.



*"She can't remember the accident?
Does that include the OSHA violations that led up to it?"*

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