

The Journal



National Conference of Firemen & Oilers Newsletter



Florida Campaign Sweeps Away School District Maintenance Contractor

Thanks to an all-out campaign of public outreach and coalition building by NCFO Local 1227, the Palm Beach County School Board has given the boot to ServiceMaster, a greedy corporation it hired to run its maintenance and plant operation department back in 1998.

Local 1227 members quickly learned that the company aimed to reap profits at their expense. Staffing was cut, workload increased drastically and inferior cleaning machines and chemicals provided to custodians. Cuts and reorganization of skilled maintenance into teams wreaked havoc with school repairs.

The local began pointing out the failure of the company to deliver on its promises.

"Members regularly testified at school board meetings, picketed, distributed handbills to parents at

schools and in neighborhoods, ran radio ads and reached out to local businesses," explains Sharon Munley, Local 1227 trustee and an NCFO vice president.

Members and leaders wrote let-

Unions and Railroads Propose Vastly Improved Retirement

NCFO and its partners in the coalition of railroad unions have come to an agreement with their employer counterparts to propose major improvements in the railroad retirement system.

"This package of proposals, if approved by Congress, will produce the most sweeping improvements in railroad retirement in 25 years for current rail employees when they retire," explains NCFO President George Francisco, Jr.

Among the key improvements:

- Full retirement benefits at age

60 (down from 62) for those with 30 years of service;

Local 1227 won the support of the local teachers union as well as the organization of school principals. Finally, the school board sent ServiceMaster packing in early February by a 5 to 1 vote.

60 (down from 62) for those with 30 years of service;

- Increased surviving spouse benefits;
- Health insurance coverage for retirees age 60 and older;
- Vesting in the pension plan after 5 years of service instead of 10;
- Repeal of caps on retirement benefits for long-term employees;
- Employers will be required to absorb any future tax increase necessary to keep the railroad retirement system solvent.

"We will be asking all our members to help in the fight to pass the necessary legislation," notes Francisco.



Local 1227 members celebrate the ouster of ServiceMaster from management of school maintenance and plant operation.

Inside	
Health Coverage for All ..	2
Pumping Up Solidarity ..	3
Taking on WTO ..	4
Your Family Needs	
Your Vote ..	5

Ask The President

Q There are problems everywhere with health care coverage. I know people with union contracts but no family coverage. Shouldn't everyone in the country have the same?

—Local 7 member *Toribio Ortiz*, Chicago

A I believe that health care is a right and every American is morally entitled to adequate, affordable health care.

There is a serious—and worsening—health care crisis in our nation. Just ask any of the over 44 million Americans in working families who have no health insurance or a senior citizen who has to choose between buying groceries or filling an overpriced prescription.

We all have friends and relatives who have had to fight with faceless corporate bean counters about which doctor they may consult or what treatment will be covered.

NCFO has had great success in winning top-notch health benefits for our members over the years, but any union leader or member involved in contract negotiations in recent years will tell you the same thing: the solution to escalating costs and declining coverage in our country cannot be found just at the bargaining table.

In 1998 alone, insurance premiums rose an average of 8.2 percent, a reality that faces negotiators from every union in America when they bargain contracts.



Toribio Ortiz, Local 7, Chicago

The answer, of course, is health care reform and expansion. NCFO, as part of SEIU, has been in the forefront in the fight to expand health coverage, win a Patient's Bill of Rights and stop the obscene price gouging by pharmaceutical and other medical conglomerates.

It will come as no surprise to any NCFO member that those making huge profits are fighting hard to block reform. A recent report documents that in the first six months of 1999, a whopping \$95.5 million was spent by the health care industry to lobby Congress against health care reform—making it the biggest spender of all.

SEIU has put forth a plan to lead America to universal health coverage. It's based on the belief, which I share, that every American should have the same good health coverage that members of Congress enjoy.

Passing it will mean a long hard fight against entrenched special interests with deep pockets.

But it is a fight we can and must win.

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...And a thought

Just as we are concerned about health care for all Americans, the health of our local unions is of great importance.

I know that every NCFO member is extremely busy with work and family responsibilities, but finding the time to attend your local's regular union meetings is one of the best things you can do for yourself and your family.

Whether you're an officer, steward or rank-and-file member, your participation is a good investment. It keeps your union democratic and strong.

Pumped-Up Workers Win Retiree Health Coverage

The management of the Zoeller Pump Company in Louisville vowed it wouldn't give in and provide health insurance for retirees.

Faced with a five-week strike during which not a single member of NCFO Local 320 crossed the picket line and an outpouring of solidarity from workers at other Local 320 plants and the rest of the area labor movement, the company had to change its tune.

As a result, the victorious strikers overwhelmingly ratified a three-year agreement in January that phases in 50 percent company funding of health insurance for retirees 60 and over with 30 years of service.

"That was the main issue for our members—the voice from the body—and we'll be able to build it up in future contracts," explains Chief Steward Nick Morley, a 22-year Zoeller employee.



A Jobs with Justice rally mobilized widespread support for the victorious Zoeller strikers.

The local's involvement in the area's Jobs with Justice union coalition was key in mobilizing strong support from other unions, as was the pre-strike training provided to members.

"Our local has learned a great deal about solidarity in recent years and we've been out supporting other unions when they've needed our help," notes Local 320 Business Manager Bob Gunter.

Local 320's solidarity came home

Employees Win Back Union Shop

Sometimes it's not over even after it's over.

Three years ago, NCFO Local 320 members working for Cardinal Aluminum lost a bitter six-week strike and had to give up their union security clause and work side by side with nonunion replacement workers.

But just days before their brothers and sisters at Zoeller Pump struck, Cardinal workers celebrated their new contract, which brings back union security and denies the company the right to hire part-time workers—something it desperately wanted.

"We were prepared and determined and the improved economy worked to our advantage too," explains Local 320 Business Manager Bob Gunter, chief negotiator for the 400 workers in three plants.

"Our local union is much stronger than it was thanks to things like a local newsletter to keep members informed and our involvement in Jobs with Justice," points out negotiating committee member Stacy Brummatt, chief

to roost, as Teamster truck drivers refused to cross the picket line. Many other local unions participated in food and fundraising drives and attended a Jobs with Justice rally for the Zoeller workers.

The strikers also successfully pressed the company into transforming a signing bonus into an additional one percent raise, and won a 20 percent hike in funding for their 401(K) retirement plan.



Members of the Local 320 negotiating committee burn the old agreement that allowed replacement workers to remain nonunion.

steward at one of the plants.

Brummatt, a metal fabricator who collected money for the Zoeller strikers, notes that "up until the last day of negotiations the company was still insisting on hiring part-timers and in not giving us back our union security, but they finally gave in. It feels really good."

The Cardinal workers also won a dental plan, a doubling of life insurance, increases in disability coverage, higher company contributions to employee IRAs and 22 percent wage increases over the life of the five-year contract.

2000 in 2000 Campaign From Union Activism to Political Office

Even before he heard about the AFL-CIO's effort to identify union members holding local elected public office and to increase their ranks to 2000 by the end of this year, NCFO Local 578 member Mike Wood was already putting his union experience to good use as a member of the Walton, Kentucky, City Council.

Now a year into his second two-year term, Wood, 38, is excited about the difference union members can make in public office.

"Working families have been pushed to the side in favor of big business at all levels of government for too long," says the union regional representative and 20-year CSX employee. "By running for office in our communities we can help change that and make sure that average people and small business get treated fairly."

Wood says that his experience holding NCFO office helped him "learn how to listen to what your peers want and to work with them to get them what they want."



Years of activism in NCFO helped prepare Local 578 member Mike Wood to seek—and win—election as a city council member.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SEIU

SEIU members set out on a march against the World Trade Organization.

NCFO Members Stand Up to WTO

Before Dan Olah, Gary Zachar and 50,000 other union, environmental and human rights activists joined in a massive Seattle demonstration on November 30, few Americans had heard of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The massive AFL-CIO-led rally and march held on the eve of WTO meetings turned America's attention to the threat the faceless, corporate-dominated organization poses to jobs, labor rights and environmental standards.

"We put on the map the danger WTO—with its unfair approach to global trade—poses to good jobs in America and to labor rights and the environment all over the world," says Olah, former president of NCFO Local 764.

Despite excessive media attention to property destruction by a small group of people not part of the November 30 activity, "we won the public opinion battle for

now," adds Olah. "Americans don't like the fact that WTO operates in secret without democratic input from citizens affected by its decisions."

The presence of both trade unionists and environmentalists sent a message that, says Olah, is long overdue: "a healthy environment is a key thing for healthy work and healthy families. They're linked."

Zachar, Local 764's new president, explains that "this was the biggest and most enthusiastic gathering of people I've ever been to. With union members, students, families, and human rights and environmental groups, it was a true cross-section of America."

The gathering also impressed President Clinton, who revised his speech at the WTO meeting to make a strong push for the inclusion of labor and environmental standards in WTO decision-making.

SEIU Backs Gore for President

The 59-member SEIU Executive Board—which includes NCFO representation—has recommended to the union’s 1.3 million members that they support Vice President Al Gore for President of the United States.

The AFL-CIO voted at its October convention last year to back Gore, but SEIU felt that any endorsement should be made by its leadership body and not just by the union’s AFL-CIO delegates.

At the November SEIU board meeting, a resolution of endorsement was passed, citing the Vice President’s “proven commitment to working families.

“Vice President Gore has earned the enthusiastic support of working families,” the resolution continued. “He will be a dynamic and effective President for working Americans.”

The same resolution noted that SEIU will “continue to provide information about all the major candidates to all members so they can make up their own minds.”

The union also noted that “none of the Republican candidates has demonstrated enough concern for working families’ issues to earn a recommendation of support” for the Republican nomination.

“All of this campaign’s serious proposals addressing Social Security, Medicare, health care, a voice at work, and public services have come from the Democratic side,” said SEIU President Andrew L. Stern. “We encourage the Republican candidates to get serious about these issues as well.”

REGISTER: Your Family Needs Your Vote!

STATE	PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY/CAUCUS	REGIST. DEADLINE	GENERAL ELECTION	REGIST. DEADLINE
Alabama	June 6	May 26	Nov. 7	Oct. 27
Arizona	passed*	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 9
Arkansas	May 23	April 24	Nov. 7	Oct. 9
California	March 7	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 10
Colorado	March 10	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 9
Connecticut	March 7	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 24
Delaware	passed	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 17
Dist. of Columbia	May 2	April 3	Nov. 7	Oct. 9
Florida	March 14	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 9
Georgia	March 7	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 10
Idaho	May 23	May 23	Nov. 7	Nov. 7
Illinois	March 21	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 10
Indiana	May 2	April 3	Nov. 7	Oct. 9
Iowa	passed	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 28
Kansas	April 4	March 20	Nov. 7	Oct. 23
Kentucky	May 23	April 24	Nov. 7	Oct. 9
Louisiana	March 14	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 9
Maine	March 7	March 7	Nov. 7	Nov. 7
Maryland	March 7	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 13
Massachusetts	March 7	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 18
Michigan	passed	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 9
Minnesota	March 7 caucus		Nov. 7	Nov. 7
Mississippi	March 14	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 8
Missouri	March 7	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 10
Montana	June 6	May 8	Nov. 7	Oct. 10
Nebraska	May 9	April 21	Nov. 7	Oct. 20
Nevada	D Caucus 3/7 R Caucus 2/29		Nov. 7	Oct. 7
New Hampshire	passed	passed	Nov. 7	Nov. 7
New Jersey	June 6	May 8	Nov. 7	Oct. 10
New Mexico	June 6	May 9	Nov. 7	Oct. 10
New York	March 7	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 13
North Carolina	May 2	April 7	Nov. 7	Oct. 13
North Dakota	D Caucus 3/7 R Caucus 2/29		Nov. 7	No Reg.
Ohio	March 14	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 13
Oklahoma	March 14	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 13
Oregon	May 16	April 25	Nov. 7	Oct. 17
Pennsylvania	April 4	March 6	Nov. 7	Oct. 10
Rhode Island	March 7	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 7
South Carolina	D 3/9 R 3/19	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 7
South Dakota	June 6	May 22	Nov. 7	Oct. 23
Tennessee	March 14	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 8
Texas	March 14	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 9
Utah	March 10	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 18
Vermont	March 7	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 28
Virginia	D Conv., 6/2-3, Caucuses 4/15-17 R primary 2/29	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 9
Washington	Feb. 29	passed	Nov. 7	Oct. 8
West Virginia	May 9	April 10	Nov. 7	Oct. 9
Wisconsin	April 4	April 4	Nov. 7	Nov. 7
Wyoming	March 19 caucus	No Reg.	Nov. 7	No Reg.

* TOOK PLACE BEFORE FEBRUARY 29

Legal Resources for Injured Rail Members

Don't Let Them Add Insult to Injury

To help rail members of NCFO who have been injured on the job, the union has a list of skilled attorneys experienced in fighting for workers' rights under the Federal Employers Liability Act (FELA).

In the event of an on-the-job injury or death, members or their surviving family should contact one of these attorneys to get advice concerning their legal rights under FELA *before reaching any settlement with a railroad.*

These attorneys—selected for their competence in this area of the law—have made special arrangements with NCFO to limit their fees.

Remember, *non-railroad NCFO members are not covered by FELA.*

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Contract Fluffs Up Pay for Pillow Workers

The NCFO Local 193 negotiating committee celebrates the new three-year contact negotiated with Pacific Coast Feather Company, a Seattle-based manufacturer of pillows and down feather comforters. The agreement, ratified by more than a 4 to 1 margin, ups wages \$1

per hour over the next three years, provides a \$250 signing bonus and introduces vision coverage in the health plan. Shown are (front) Ben Tagoai, (rear from left) Local 193 President Bradley Rioux, "Ziggy" Mefi and System Council #15 President Roger Burdill.



Sexual Harassment: It's Against the Law

Stuart is Roberta's supervisor. He repeatedly asked her for dates but she always declined. Now he is criticizing her work and says that if she does not "get with the program" she could lose her job.

The men who work around Anne constantly make sexual comments regarding her appearance. They make a game of brushing against her as she walks by.

These cases both illustrate sexual harassment, which the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission defines as (1) unwelcome sexual advances, (2) unwelcome requests for sexual favors, or (3) unwelcome verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

Under the law, it is management's responsibility to provide a work environment free of this denial of workers' rights.

Sexual harassment can cause serious emotional and physical stress and cost workers promotional opportunities and even their jobs.

All NCFO members have a stake in stopping it. When we show management that we will defend workers' rights and insist on basic respect for all, we become much stronger in dealing with other issues as well.

Unwanted Attention

In one kind of sexual harassment, toleration by the employ-

er of unwelcome sexual conduct and sexual advances of a supervisor becomes, in effect, a term and condition of employment. The above example involving Roberta is of this type.

The second example shows sexual harassment creating a "hostile work environment." This includes unwelcome sexual conduct by a fellow employee, supervisor, manager or non-employee which unreasonably interferes with an employee's work performance or creates an offensive work environment.

A hostile work environment can

also be caused by lewd comments and the excessive display of pornographic material.

Defending Rights

If you believe you are being sexually harassed, alert your steward, chairman, business agent or other union representative.

If the harasser is a supervisor, there are a number of steps to consider, depending on the circumstances:

1. Check to see if other members are also affected.

2. Inform the supervisor that his (or her) behavior is illegal and that you want it stopped.

3. If necessary, go to the harasser's boss or the company labor relations office. Remind the employer that management is legally required to maintain a workplace free of sexual harassment.

4. Maintain records of all discussions with management.

5. Publicize the situation among the membership.

6. File a grievance.

If these steps do not resolve the problem, you can file a complaint with the appropriate government agency—usually within 180 days of the incident.



"I can't go out with you ANYweekend, Mr. Wankley . . . I'm too busy researching sexual harassment litigation."

Yes, I'll Fight for My Family's Future

There's one very simple reason that over 80 percent of the members of NCFO Local 311 have signed up to contribute to the Firemen & Oilers Political League/SEIU COPE.

They were asked.

"I believe that members are helping themselves and their families when they pitch in, so I feel really good about approaching them," says Local 311 General Chairman Dean Devita.

"Just about everyone I asked agreed to contribute because they understand that when everyone kicks in just a

little, it means we can have more political clout to defend working people," he adds.

If you haven't been asked to support the Firemen & Oilers Political League/SEIU COPE, contact your local union to

get our brochure that explains the various ways you can join the fight.

You can also get brochures by writing to NCFO, 1900 L St., NW, Suite 502, Washington, DC 20036, calling us at 202-872-3600, or sending an e-mail to Claudia Garcia: Garcia@bellatlantic.net



NCFO members at the Long Island Railroad Morris Park Locomotive Shop were ready to do their share when Dean Devita (center) asked them to contribute to the union's political action fund.



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