

# RWDSU

UFCW

RECORD

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## *Looking Back, Moving Ahead*

### **Poultry Workers Fight for Justice**

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Left to right: Ethel Jackson, Mary Keaton, Lonnie Williams, Juanita Williams, and Chief Steward Dorothy A. Scott with Sue Mae Frazier (sitting). Jackson, Williams, Keaton, Williams and Frazier helped lead the drive that brought the union to the poultry plant in 1972.

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The objectives of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union are to unite into this organization all workers employed in its jurisdiction in order to advance and safeguard their economic and social welfare...The Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union will strive to preserve democratic processes, protect civil liberties, aid in the adoption of legislation which will promote the economic and social welfare of its members and that of labor in general and to improve the educational, social and cultural standards of society as a whole. *Through unity of purpose and action, through collective bargaining and legislation, the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union is dedicated to the ideal of making the jobs of its members the best jobs that can be devised from the point of view of wages, hours of work, physical conditions and human relations. Preamble RWDSU Constitution.*



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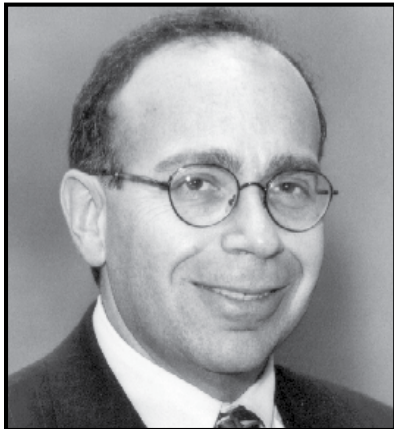
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## MESSAGE FROM YOUR OFFICERS

# Justice for Poultry Workers

In this edition of the Record you'll have the opportunity to read about an important episode in our union's history: the Camilla, Georgia poultry strike of 1972.

The story of the strike — what led to it and what followed — is an inspiration to every trade unionist. How could it not be? The battle for union recognition in Camilla is a saga of African-American women and men who suffered bitter exploitation for many years but, armed with little else but the courage of their convictions, stood up to their bosses — and the power structure that backed them — to win their right to an RWDSU contract.

Today, of course, there are many people who think that battles like the one in Camilla are part of our union's past. However, if you ask the veterans of that strike they'll be the first to tell you that, for poultry workers, the struggle continues to this day.

It has to.

## The Same Old Same Old

The simple truth is that, in 2008, the working conditions facing tens of thousands of poultry workers aren't much different than they were when the workers in Camilla organized more than three decades ago.

Today, reported injury rates for poultry workers are twice as high as they are for manufacturing workers. It's no wonder why: poultry workers make the same cutting motion with their hands as many as 40,000 times every shift. And the problem is only getting worse. Workers today process far more poultry per hour than they did just a decade ago. The result? One out of every five poultry workers is injured on the job.

The scandal doesn't end there. That's only where it begins.

The average poultry worker continues to make poverty wages. Measured in real dollars, nonunion worker paychecks in the poultry industry are roughly what they were 29 years ago. On average poultry workers are so poor that their families qualify for Food Stamps, low-income energy assistance, and the National School Lunch Program.

Given these facts many people might assume that these are hard times for the poultry growers and processors. In fact, the opposite is true: business has never been better.

## Poultry Growers: Living High on the Hog

On average, Americans consume 87 pounds of chicken per person every year. In 1972 we ate less than half as much. And it isn't only U.S. families who are eating more chicken: last year, the value of U.S. poultry and egg exports set an all-time record: \$3.55 billion — a 43 percent increase over 2006!

The growth in consumption has left the poultry industry sitting pretty. In 2007 one company, Pilgrim's Pride, the largest poultry producer in the U.S., announced that in the course of 12 months it had made more than \$7.6 billion

in sales and now has the capacity to process more than 45 million birds every week.

If poultry growers are riding high then why are poultry workers being left behind? The reason is the lack of union representation.

## The Answer? Organize

Like the workers in Camilla in 1972, poultry workers in the South are still faced with employers who'll do whatever they can to keep them from exercising their legal right to union representation. Now there's a new wrinkle in the poultry industry's attempt to keep unions out: exploiting undocumented immigrant workers who are often terrified to join unions for fear of employer retaliation. Not surprisingly, managers routinely work to drive a wedge between African-American workers and immigrants to try to keep them from coming together to organize.

Of course, there are steps our leaders in Washington can take to help poultry workers to organize. One is to enact the Employee Free Choice Act to strengthen the right to organize. Another is to reform our immigration laws to give undocumented workers legal standing so employers can't use the threat of deportation to keep them from organizing.

However, at the end of the day, the key ingredient to successful organizing will always be the willingness of workers to join together. They need something else, too: the backing that can only come from a strong union like the RWDSU.

The workers of Camilla wrote a new chapter in the history of poultry worker organizing. Now, with the support of the entire RWDSU family, it's up to this generation of poultry workers to write theirs. ■

## Winning Pay Equity for Canadian Women

This year Ontario's Pay Equity Act is celebrating its 20th Anniversary. There is no question that the law's passage was a milestone in the cause of economic justice. It required that jobs mostly performed by women offer the same pay as jobs of comparable worth traditionally performed by men. However, despite the progress that's been made, women workers in Ontario still earn on average 29 percent less than men who perform work of comparable worth.

What's the real solution to sex-based wage discrimination? Unionization. As RWDSU Northern Joint Council President Derik McArthur put it: "Even the best law can only do so much. At the end of the day every Canadian working woman needs to have a strong union."

To some politicians the struggle for pay equity ended 20 years ago in Ottawa. In our union we understand that it's a fight we have to take to every workplace in Ontario. ■

# RWDSU LOCALS IN ACTION

## RWDSU Mourns Passing of NEJB President Brian M. Sabourin



**R**WDSU New England Joint Board President Brian M. Sabourin died on Monday, February 4. He was 56 years old.

"I can't begin to tell you what we have lost," said Tina Buonaugurio, who was elected to serve as NEJB president following Sabourin's death.

"He was a friend and union brother. Someone who celebrated the good times in our lives and cried with us in the valleys. Someone who was so knowledgeable regarding union issues and was able to answer so many of our questions. There is a huge void left in his passing

for us both personally and professionally," Buonaugurio said.

Sabourin became an RWDSU member when he began working at Engelhard Industries in the 1970s and eventually became president of Local 583A. From there he went to work for the Attleboro Joint Board as a union organizer. Later, he became an organizer with the RWDSU's Bay State Council and New England Joint Board. At the

NEJB he served as an organizer and business agent before being elected president in February, 2005.

In addition to his service to the RWDSU, Sabourin also was elected and served as city councilor for the City of Attleboro, Massachusetts for six years and served as a vice president of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO.

"Brian was a union man through and through," said RWDSU President Stuart Appelbaum. "He met challenges head on, and always gave everything he had for RWDSU members in New England. We will all miss him and never forget his service to the union and dedication to working people." ■

## Graduation Day for Local 1-S ESL Students

**T**wenty two RWDSU Local 1-S members can look forward to brighter futures thanks to a training partnership between the union and Macy's. The workers, housekeeping employees at the company's flagship store in midtown Manhattan, recently graduated from a special English as a Second Language (ESL) class Local 1-S created in cooperation with Macy's.

"This is a great day for everyone here," Local 1-S President Ken Bordieri said at the program's graduation ceremony. "These workers are leaving here with skills that will help them do their jobs more efficiently."

Local 1-S Secretary-Treasurer Gail Rogers added that the ESL program is "an important class because it helps members better communicate with their co-workers, management, and their union representatives."

The ESL class was such a success that Local 1-S and Macy's are now discussing the possibility of offering a high school equivalency program for workers and preparing to start a second ESL class. ■



The graduating class of the Local 1-S ESL program, with Local 1-S officers.

## Local 108 Helping Kids in New Jersey

**H**elping kids from families affected by AIDS is a year-round job for the members of Local 108, based in Newark, New Jersey. Since 2000, local members have helped raise critically needed funds for the AIDS Resource Foundation for Children. The ARFC provides resources for children of families where one or both parents suffer from AIDS.

"It's often kids who suffer the most in a family affected by AIDS, and it is heartbreaking," Local 108 President Charles Hall, Jr., said.

"The ARFC helps by providing these kids with summer camps and activities, computer labs, special holiday events, and more," Hall said. "We are proud to help them out with their mission of making the lives of these kids easier." ■



Serving food, left to right: Local 108 Representative George Giordano, Bookkeeper Bianca Cortes, and Representative Jasper Parnell serve food at an ARFC dinner for kids affected by AIDS.

## Local 338 Marches for the Cure

**L**ast year Local 338 members in New York City raised \$75,000 for the American Cancer Society's "Making Strides Against Breast Cancer" initiative and are planning to raise more in 2008.

"October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month and each year hundreds of our local's members march to help raise money to fight breast cancer. Thousands of other members contribute their hard earned dollars to keep our commitment to help find a cure," Durso said.

Durso said that since the local began raising

money to fight breast cancer eight years ago, union members, their families, officers and staff have marched throughout New York City in Queens, on Long Island, and on Staten Island to help the American Cancer Society. The result? To date Local 338 has raised over \$600,000.

"Each year close to 200,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer and more than 40,000 will die," Durso said. "Raising this money for research may one day help our mothers, sisters and daughters." ■



Local 338 President John R. Durso (front left) and the large Local 338 group make their eighth annual "Making Strides Against Breast Cancer" march.

# RWDSU LOCALS IN ACTION

## Workers Organize in Ontario

**W**orkers at Industrial Service and Maintenance, an industrial cleaning company in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, have joined RWDSU Local 582. The new members, who clean warehouses, factories and other worksites, chose the RWDSU to improve their wages and benefits.

*"Word of mouth in Sault Ste. Marie is very positive regarding the RWDSU, and that helped sway the workers' opinions when it came time to choose a union."*

"The workers at ISM really want to do better with their wages and benefits, and they saw how much better workers are doing at industrial cleaning companies represented by the RWDSU in Ontario," said Northern Joint Council Organizer Rob Cullen.

"After talking with us, they realized how important it was to join a union. Word of mouth in Sault Ste. Marie is very positive regarding the RWDSU, and that helped sway the workers' opinions when it came time to choose a union."

On January 14 the Ontario Labour Relations Board conducted a representation election where the workers voted overwhelmingly to join the RWDSU. Cullen said the newly organized workers and RWDSU staff are now preparing to open contract talks with ISM. ■

## Officer Elections in Indiana

RWDSU Indiana Joint Board members at three different units have elected officers to new terms of service.

### Shenandoah School Corporation

On February 9, the custodial/maintenance employees at the Shenandoah School Corporation in Middletown, Indiana, members of Local 357, elected three members to new two-year terms in office. The members elected were Chairman/Chief Steward Danny Troxel, Executive Secretary Brenda Troxel, and Alternate Steward Lynn Marsh.

### Connersville EMS

On January 31, Local 512 members working for the City of Connersville / Fayette County Emergency Medical Services elected three members to serve new two-year terms. The officers elected are Chief Steward David Stephens, Executive Secretary Karen Lee, and Alternate Steward Charles Mitchem.

### Coca-Cola

On December 1, members of Local 835 who work at Coca-Cola in Fort Wayne Indiana, elected the following members to new two-year terms of office: Chairman Travis Fleischman, Vice Chairman Frank Messenger, and Chief Steward Bruce Reuille. ■



Left to right: Lynn Marsh, Brenda Troxel and Danny Troxel.



Karen Lee and David Stephens.



Left to right: Frank Messenger, Bruce Reuille, and Travis Fleischman.

## RWDSU LOCALS IN ACTION

# New York Retailer Pays \$1.4 Million for Weaseling Wages from Workers



Activists rally in front of the Yellow Rat Bastard store in New York City in the wake of \$1.4 million judgement in favor of mistreated workers.

**O**n Monday, February 11, New York Attorney General Andrew Cuomo announced a settlement between his office and the Yellow Rat Bastard clothing chain in New York City. The settlement requires the chain to pay \$1.4 million to over 1000 former and current employees who had been cheated out of wages.

“Given its treatment of its employees there’s no question that Yellow Rat Bastard more than lived up to its name,” RWDSU President Stuart Appelbaum said. “We think the Attorney General’s lawsuit and the following settlement sends a powerful message to employers that there can be zero tolerance for corporate lawlessness.”

The lawsuit was filed by the Attorney General Cuomo as a direct result of the efforts of the RWDSU-backed Retail Action Project. The project helped uncover widespread worker abuse at the hands of Yellow Rat Bastard and affiliated stores Boys and Chicks, Dirty Jane/Sloppy Joe, Rubber Sole Shoes, Antique Orange, Tempo, and F.A.T. Jeans & Shoes. Workers were often paid as little as \$5.25 per hour and received no overtime pay. In some cases the company also reduced the work hours and even fired employees suspected of cooperating with Attorney General Cuomo’s investigation.

“For almost two years, I worked earning less than minimum wage without overtime pay,” said Eddie Dyer, a former employee of Boys and Chicks, one of the stores in the Yellow Rat Bastard chain. “All the owners cared about was making money, and they had no concern for the workers who helped them make it. This settlement is so exciting because it shows that workers don’t have to take this kind of abuse. We can fight back!”

“No employers are above the law,” Appelbaum added, “and we will turn up the heat on any employers who think they are.” ■

## Hoosiers Train to Improve Skills

**O**n January 19, 22 RWDSU officers and stewards took part in a special union training program in Fort Wayne, Indiana. The session was organized by the RWDSU Indiana Joint Board and featured Indiana University’s Division of Labor Studies professor Mark Crouch.

“The women and men who came to this training are dedicated to serving their co-workers and protecting their interests,” IJB President David Altman said.

“The program helps stewards and other leaders by giving them the most current information available on the responsibilities of representing their co-workers and the best ways to perform their duties,” he added.

Altman said the union will organize other training programs in the future. ■

## TDC Honors Betty White

**T**he RWDSU Tennessee District Council recently honored retiring Local 150 Secretary-Treasurer Betty White for her years of service to the union’s members at U.S. Tobacco in Nashville, Tennessee.

“It has been an honor to work with her through the Tennessee District Council for the past 22 years. I wish her lots of luck in her retirement,” said Carol Foster, Secretary-Treasurer of the Tennessee District Council. “She worked hard to keep the union strong at U.S. Tobacco, and kept union membership there at over 90 percent, which is not easy in a right-to-work state.” ■



The TDC Executive Board presents Betty White with a plaque commemorating her years of service to RWDSU members. (Left to right): Geoffrey Hamlett, Howard Roberts, Bobby Hatfield, Jaunifer Stevenson, Marcus White, Betty B. White, Brian Leming, Terry Jaremko and Shadden Johnson.

## Local 338 Members Honor Veterans

**F**or Local 338 member Lorraine Boccio, Veterans Day is not just another holiday. For four years Boccio, her family and co-workers at Waldbaum’s #681 in Huntington Station, New York have joined forces with local brownie troops and dozens of local businesses that donate time, money and food to honor our veterans on Veterans Day.

“We want to let the veterans know they matter,” said Boccio. She pointed out that union members and others treat local veterans to a luncheon where their contributions are saluted.

“School children take part, too, by creating posters and ‘thank you’ cards that are given to all the veterans who attend.”

This year, close to 1,000 veterans came together at St. Peter’s Church to receive thanks from their community for their service to their country. ■



Lorraine Boccio (2nd from right) and her family help organize a celebration for veterans every year on Veterans Day.

# Looking Back, Moving

## RWDSU Members Remember their Fight to Organize and its Lessons

By Levi Nayman

The year was 1957. Susie May Frazier was a young woman looking for work in her home town of Camilla, Georgia. There weren't many options for African-American women back then. Like many small towns throughout the Deep South, race decided every aspect of life in Camilla: where you lived, where you went to school, where you prayed and where you worked. That's what led Frazier to the Royal Poultry plant near the edge of town. It was a decision that changed her life forever.

Preparing chicken for market was hard work. And it still is. Workers routinely stand for hours cutting one chicken after another and struggle to keep pace with machinery that carries thousands of birds through a plant each day. For many workers a job in a poultry plant almost guarantees permanently injuring their hands, arms and back. In 1957 that's how it was at Royal Poultry, only worse. Much worse.

"We weren't treated right at all," Frazier recalled. "The supervisors were mean to you, and Lord help you if they were mad. They would grab chickens off the line and throw them at workers who they thought had messed up! They would hit them in the head with chickens!"

"They paid us the minimum wage and we never got one raise. There was no holiday pay, no vacations and no health care coverage," Frazier said.

And the abuses didn't stop there. Just ask Juanita Williams, one of Frazier's coworkers at the plant.

*"They paid us the minimum wage and we never got one raise. There was no holiday pay, no vacations and no health care coverage."*

"When I look back, I can't even believe I was able to work like that and still raise three kids," Williams said.

"We would have no idea when the truck was coming. We would sit around for two hours waiting, and then word would come that the truck broke down somewhere. They would send us home, and tell us to come back two hours later, and we never got paid for any of this. That's time that we could have been cleaning the house, or preparing dinner for the family. And the company didn't care. After all it wasn't their time that was getting wasted."

### Time for a Change

Though the civil rights movement of the 1960s brought change to Georgia, by the end of the decade conditions at Royal had improved little. Workers knew things needed to change, but how? In 1972 they found the answer: forming a union with the RWDSU.

According to Lonnie Williams, who started working at the plant six years before, the last straw was an incident that left the plant's workers outraged and ready to act.

"We had a young lady working there, and she was having an argument with the supervisor," Williams said. "She turned away from him, and he kicked her in the butt! He kicked her! We decided we weren't going to allow them to treat us like that."

Organizing a union in Georgia has never been an easy proposition. By outlawing the union shop, Georgia's "right to work" law had made it difficult for organized labor to gain the political strength they had in New York, Michigan and other states where union power helped restrain anti-union employers.

With state and local officials usually in their back pocket, employers in Georgia often felt free to violate worker rights with impunity. That was true when any group of workers chose to organize, but it was especially the case when the workers were African-American. Even working class whites, who had little reason to side with wealthy business owners, saw African-Americans organizing less as fellow workers deserving of their support than as a threat to a white power structure they mistakenly believed they were part of.

The Royal workers voted in a National Labor Relations Board election to join the RWDSU, but that was just the beginning of a long fight. Believing that it had the backing of city officials and white community leaders Royal refused to sit down with the workers to negotiate a union contract. Faced with no other choice to make their voice heard, the workers at Royal – about 300 in all -- did what workers have often done to force management to change their ways: they went on strike. The company's response was as harsh as it was immediate.

"They would shout at us and they would threaten us," Frazier recalled of her first days on the picket line.

"Once a supervisor came tearing through with his car, and I swear if we hadn't jumped out of the way we would have been run over. It was really tough but we knew we needed a union," Frazier said.

But as the strike went on the company and community grew even more vicious.

*Workers knew things needed to change, but how? In 1972 they found the answer: forming a union with the RWDSU.*

"When we would go out at night, the cops would pull us over for no reason and harass us," Lonnie Williams said. "I remember one night I was stone cold sober, but the cops made me perform a sobriety test."

"I even got a call at home one night from the president of the Chamber of Commerce. He said I should keep my mouth shut if I liked living and working in Camilla."

With the support of Camilla's African-American community, the workers stood together on the picket line while the RWDSU's lawyers went to federal court in Macon to demand that the company recognize and bargain with the union. There, Lonnie Williams and other workers testified about Royal's mistreatment of workers and failure



Pictured (L-R) Lonnie Williams, Committee Member; W.C. Marcus, Spokesman for the local union; Hatie Bryant, Committee Member; Robert Lumpkin, Committee Member.

# Ahead

## ns for Workers Today

to bargain in good faith. Faced with overwhelming evidence of the company's wrongdoing the courts ruled in favor of the union's unfair labor practice charge. After 13 weeks on strike the workers demonstrated that they were tougher than the company. They taught Royal that if it wanted to stay in the poultry business they would have to respect the workers' right to an RWDSU contract.

### Winning Respect

What difference did having a union contract make for the workers at Royal? Plenty.

"Oh yes!," Frazier said. "It was like a new day. We got treated better by supervisors. Our pay went up, and we got holidays and all the other benefits we never had. If the trucks with the chickens didn't show up, we got paid while we waited for them. It was such a huge difference for us."

The first RWDSU contract brought wage increases, paid vacations and time off, in addition to establishing grievance procedures. In future negotiations, the workers also succeeded in bargaining for health care benefits and a pension plan. Things had come a long way for workers whose only previous "benefit" was the option to take out interest-free \$25 loans from the company.

*"Today's poultry workers could learn a lot from the workers who took their stand at Royal. Maybe the most important thing is how, by standing together, workers can beat even the toughest boss and win better lives for themselves and their families."*

However, as Juanita Williams points out, one of the biggest gains workers made was something that can't be measured in dollars and cents: respect.

"For the first time we weren't afraid to speak up if there was a problem. We didn't have to be afraid of being fired just for speaking out. We didn't have to accept what they said or go home. When we got hurt, the supervisors couldn't ignore it or just patch us up and send us back to work. We had a voice and they had to respect us."

In the years that followed the plant changed hands and names. It went from Royal to Cagle's, to Cagle's/Keystone, and, finally, to Equity. But it wasn't only the employer's name that changed, it was also the relationship between management and the workers' union. Where, in the past, the company resisted every union initiative they now recognize that they have some common ground with the workers.

"The members at the plant have constantly improved their relationship with their employer, and with Equity's acquisition of the plant it is much better than it was in the past," said Southeast Council Secretary-Treasurer Edgar Fields.

### The Fight Goes On

Fields and others are quick to point out that while the workers at Royal won their fight for a union contract 36 years ago, in the poultry industry the battle is never over.

"Nonunion poultry workers are being driven harder than ever while pay has stagnated," said RWDSU President Stuart Appelbaum.

Since the 1980s, the world's appetite for chicken nuggets have caused poultry consumption to soar — and so have line speeds and production quotas. The speed of the line, the low temperatures at the workplace, and repetitive awkward motion with poorly-designed tools have resulted in a reported injury rate that is 50 percent higher than the rest of private industry.

"The injury rate is actually much higher, because injuries are often unreported or swept under the rug by supervisors who's main concern is keeping a clean safety record," RWDSU Health and Safety Director Steve Mooser says. "Many employers



Left to right: Ernestine Lilly, Juanita Williams, Ethel Jackson, Annie Barnes, Mary Keaton, Betty Brown, Robert Hope Rosa Knight, and Jennie V. Graham receive awards honoring their service to the union.

### Equity Poultry Workers Celebrate Contributions Past and Present

On February 24, RWDSU Southeast Council members who work at the Equity Group poultry plant in Camilla, Georgia, and their families attended the *Black History Celebration — Still Going Strong* banquet. The dinner, held at Open Door church in Camilla, provided a chance for members to salute both the activists who brought the union to the plant after an epic 13-week strike in 1972 and members who currently serve as stewards at Equity. "It's really great for the younger workers to see the pioneers of the union movement at Equity and hear about those days," said Dorothy A. Scott, chief steward at Equity. "It's easy to take some of the things we have for granted, and hearing about the mistreatment, poor pay, and complete lack of benefits the workers before us had without a union can be a reality check and encourage people to work to bring others into the union."

Current stewards at Equity were recognized for their hard work in representing their fellow workers. Awards were given to Joyce Hearst and Eloise Willis for longest tenure, Dorothy A. Scott and Robert Hope for most back pay recovered for a member during grievance procedures, Iona Moses for showing determination during a grievance procedure, and Joe Mango for most improved steward in learning the contract and steward responsibilities.

"Stewards are the face of the union for workers, and they work hard to protect the interests of workers at Equity," said Southeast Council Secretary-Treasurer Edgar Fields, adding "each day they make our union stronger." ■

offer extravagant awards such as new cars to supervisors if lost time injuries are not reported. And many workers leave the job because they have already started to develop musculoskeletal injury symptoms, which doesn't get reported either."

The poultry industry is still rife with wage and overtime violations, too. Supervisors are under pressure to keep production high and overtime costs low, which creates a recipe for abuse in non-union plants. In 2000, the U.S. Department of Labor found that every poultry plant it had visited had failed to properly compensate workers for overtime. It is estimated that poultry workers in the U.S. may be owed between \$300 and \$400 million in back pay.

According to RWDSU Organizer Linda Cromer, the changing face of workers in the poultry industry has also helped keep poultry safety problems and wage violations from being accurately reported. At a time when unions are needed to protect poultry workers more than ever, many are unlikely to seek them out because of their legal status.

"Immigrants, many of them undocumented, are making up a larger portion of poultry workers these days," Cromer said. "These workers are much less likely to complain about injuries or abuse, since they live under the constant fear of deportation. For this reason, many are also afraid to fight back by joining a union."

"I think today's poultry workers could learn a lot from the workers who took their stand at Royal," Cromer said. "Maybe the most important thing is how, by standing together, workers can beat even the toughest boss and win better lives for themselves and their families." The veterans of the 13-week strike in 1972 couldn't agree more. ■

# RWDSU BARGAINING FOR BETTER LIVES

## Flav-O-Rich Workers Say Change "Like Night and Day"

Last October workers at Flav-O-Rich in Kingsport, Tennessee, cast a unanimous vote to join the employees at four of the company's other warehouses who are represented by RWDSU Local 323. Six months later the workers say the difference is enormous.

"I feel great about joining the RWDSU," said new Local 323 member Terry Bryant. "We are seeing huge increases in pay and benefits with the RWDSU contract, and for the first time ever we have pension benefits." Marty Shaffer, a coworker of Bryant's, added that "because of the RWDSU, workers now have better job security and are making more money than ever."

The immediate wage increases and benefit improvements came about as the result of a union demand that the Kingsport workers be covered by the same contract that protects the company's other RWDSU-represented employees.

"They worked 100 miles down the road from a RWDSU Flav-O-Rich plant, and knew they'd earned their fair piece of

the pie," said RWDSU Tennessee District Council President Terry Jaremko. "Now they're getting it."

RWDSU members at the Flav-O-Rich depots are route drivers who distribute Flav-O-Rich dairy products like milk and ice cream. ■



Left to right: Terry Jaremko, president of the Tennessee District Council, Terry Bryant, Flav-O-Rich employee, Wayne Smith, president of Local 323, Marty Shaffer, Flav-O-Rich employee and RWDSU organizer Joseph Dorismond.

## Health Now Members Ratify First RWDSU Contract

Employees at ten Health Now, Inc., stores in New York and New Jersey ratified their first RWDSU contract on October

18. Since then, the new RWDSU Local 2006 members have been working with a two-year contract that, for the first time, provides

employer-paid health care. Health Now employees have also been working with their first raises in 23 years thanks to their RWDSU contract. For Health Now employees, their first contract is the reward for a long struggle for respect in their workplace.

*For Health Now employees, their first contract is the reward for a long struggle for respect in their workplace.*



Health Now employees celebrate their first union contract. The organizing drive was led by RWDSU Organizers Joseph Dorismond (far left, back) and Louie Lopez (far right).

Jamaica, Queens store employee Julio Aragon was tired of working without wage increases.

"We work very hard for this company, doing all sorts of different jobs, and we never got any kind of respect," said Iris Torres, an eight-year Health Now veteran who works at the 2nd Avenue store in upper Manhattan.

For Arelis Payano, a six-year employee who also works at the 2nd Avenue store, joining the union was worth the fight.

"They showed us movies, gave us pamphlets, anything they could do to discourage us from joining the union," Payano said. "They took away our microwave ovens in the break room, claiming the fire department made them do it! But we knew that it was all a

smokescreen, and that with the union we would finally have a voice."

The treatment of Health Now employees was the same at each of the company's ten stores. Julio Aragon, an eight-year employee at the Jamaica, Queens, store was ready for a change.

"I worked here eight years, and no raises! No health care either, and when you tried to take vacation it depends on the mood of the boss if you got it. That's all changed with our RWDSU contract."

Health Now employees work a number of jobs at the health products stores, including sales, cleaning, and clerical work. ■

# RWDSU BARGAINING FOR BETTER LIVES

## Health Care Secure at Heinz

**A**t a time when many Michigan workers are struggling to hold on to what they have, the members of RWDSU Local 705 in Holland can breathe easier. The reason? A five-year contract with H.J. Heinz that the 255 workers ratified November.

“The health care plan was absolutely unchanged from last time around, and that was extremely important for us,” said Chuck Atwood, a lead mechanic at the company’s sprawling plant.

“When the negotiating committee came back with the contract, which protects all of the health benefits without any insurance premium increases, people were actually applauding,” Atwood added.

Pointing out that “everybody’s health care is under attack,” Local 705 President Reginald Martin said the union “battled the company to make sure that we wouldn’t become victims of management’s cost-cutting.”

“We fought for and won a great contract, and nobody will have to worry about their health care coverage for five years. When we look back on negotiations, we are very proud of what we achieved with this agreement,” Martin said, adding that the union also successfully negotiated a wage increase.

“These are tough times for Michigan workers,” said RWDSU Secretary-Treasurer Jack Wurm.

“The fact that Local 705 members not only protected their health care, but even won a wage increase, is no small achievement.”

Local 705’s negotiating committee was led by RWDSU Representative Rose Dietz, and included Stella Soto, Brenda Byrne, Debbie Gray, Reginald Martin, Chuck Atwood, and Calletano Stegenga.

Members at the plant produce mustard, Jack Daniel’s barbecue sauce, relish and other sauces, and package pickles for Heinz. ■



Local 705 members showed their solidarity going into negotiations.

## Local 513 Members Ratify Pepsi Pact

**A** new four-year agreement between RWDSU Local 513 members and the Pepsi Bottling Co. of Merrimack

protects health care, raises wages, and contains a series of other gains.

“The high cost of health care is a constant worry of workers and their

families,” said Local 513 member and steward Steve Boyd. “The negotiating team knew how important the issue is and made protecting our health care coverage a top priority.”

“Management came into negotiations trying to double the cost of health care at Pepsi,” added New England Joint Board President Tina Buonaugurio. “It was completely unacceptable and the negotiating committee fought tooth and nail to protect the health care benefits.”

Thanks to the determination of the negotiating team and the support they received from the local’s members, the 52 workers at the bottling plant will see their wages increase by 12 percent over the life of the contract with no additional costs to their health care coverage. Pension benefits will increase and short-term disability benefits will be boosted by up to 75 percent for some employees. Buonaugurio noted that, under the old formula, short-term disability benefits

*“Management came into negotiations trying to double the cost of health care at Pepsi. It was completely unacceptable.”*

were \$250 per week. Now, workers will receive 60 percent of their weekly salary, up to \$1,000 every week.

The probationary period for new employees will also be shortened. As a result new employees will see their pay rise to non-probationary levels six months earlier than before.

All employees received a \$300 lump-sum bonus after ratifying the contract. ■



Left to right: Local 513 members Victor Hererra, Joe Pica, Patrick Lynch, Steven Boyd and Nathan Battle celebrate their new contract.

# RWDSU BARGAINING FOR BETTER LIVES

## Workers Beat Subcontracting at Heiner's

The 400 RWDSU Local 21 members at Heiner's Bakery in Huntington, West Virginia have a lot to celebrate thanks to their new three-year contract. The new agreement, ratified on February 20, doubles pension benefits, protects health care, increases wages, and, maybe most important of all, provides iron clad protection against subcontracting.

"The protection we won against subcontracting is almost unprecedented," said RWDSU Representative Allen Mayne, who assisted in negotiating the agreement. "We made it clear that we wouldn't tolerate the company giving away workers' jobs."

For example, one provision of the new contract says that if the company subcontracts any work, the new workers must be current Heiner's employees and become part of the RWDSU bargaining unit. Mayne said the new guarantee helps eliminate the incentive many employers have for subcontracting: avoiding their contractual responsibilities to unionized workers.

"If an employer knows that subcontracting won't let him dump employees and avoid the union contract he's much, much less likely to sub work out," Mayne said. Mayne pointed out that, in addition to protecting workers against subcontracting, the new contract will also create 17 new full-time union jobs at the bakery.

In an important breakthrough the new agreement also doubled pension benefits. "Doubling the pension benefits was a huge gain at Heiner's, especially considering how

many long-term workers we have here," said David Sands, a route sales representative at Heiner's and Local 21 vice president. "We have wanted to improve the pension benefits for a long time, and thanks to the work of the negotiating committee and the solidarity of the members we were able to get it done."

Wages will increase three percent per year over the life of the new contract, and health care benefits will be protected with a minimal cost increase in premiums, which will rise only \$6.36 over three years.

"At a time when a lot of unions are fighting to survive, we succeeded in winning our strongest contract ever," Sands said. "It's a real tribute to what union solidarity can achieve."



Route sales drivers at Heiner's celebrate their new RWDSU contract.

Members of the union's negotiating committee were Dennis Look, Mike Baker, David Sands, David Means, Tim

Riley, and Allen Mayne. Workers at Heiner's produce breads, buns, and other bread products. ■

## Niagra Fiberboard Contract Cuts Health Care Costs

Last November, the members of Local 139 ratified a new three-year agreement with Niagra Fiberboard of Lockport, New York. Six months into the pact workers are already seeing the benefits.

"It's still hard to believe that we succeeded in cutting our health insurance costs, but we did that and more," said RWDSU Representative Michael Flannery.

Under the terms of the new contract, the cost of monthly premiums for family coverage was slashed by 38 percent. What's more coverage was extended to members' kids up to age 23. Previously, all children of workers were only covered until the age of 19.

The agreement also pays 100 percent of the costs for preventive health care measures such as mammograms and physicals. In the past workers were faced with co-pays for these and other procedures.

In addition to winning major gains in health insurance, the new contract also provides workers with a wage increase of more than ten 10 percent over the life of the agreement.

Mike Killian and Jim McCloy served on the negotiating committee with assistance from RWDSU Representative Michael Flannery. ■

## New IJB Contracts Bring Gains

### Stuart Manufacturing

The 150 workers at Stuart Manufacturing in Fort Wayne, Indiana, have won a new three-year contract that includes gains in wages, benefits, and workplace rules. The workers are represented by RWDSU Local 835.

"This contract really is a great total package," said Indiana Joint Board President David Altman. "The negotiating committee did a great job in securing wage increases and other changes that will make working at Stuart better. Protecting health care and retirement benefits were among our highest concerns this time around, and the committee came through for us."

The contract, which was ratified on February 11, improves wages three percent

per year, and maintains workers' current health insurance and retirement plans, while increasing life insurance benefits.

In addition to providing added economic security, the new contract also guarantees workers will have access to the training they need to become eligible for higher-paying jobs. In another gain, the agreement also requires the company to provide more advance notice of overtime and assures that employees working overtime will now receive an additional work break. The new contract also provides workers with more flexibility in using their vacation time.

Workers at Stuart Manufacturing produce cables for military equipment including radios.

### Shenandoah School Corporation

On November 3, the custodial and maintenance employees who work for Shenandoah School Corporation in Middletown, Indiana, ratified a new four-year contract. The employees, represented by Local 357, are now seeing their wages increase \$1 per hour over the course of the contract.

Going into negotiations, health care was a primary concern for the workers. The new contract protects and maintains the members' health insurance coverage. Also included in the new agreement was an increase in retirement benefits.

### Holsum Bakery

On November 20, RWDSU Local 835 members in Fort Wayne, Indiana, ratified a new two-year agreement with their employer, Holsum Bakery. The contract covers semi drivers and route salesmen for Holsum, which produces breads and other baked goods.

The new agreement protects health care benefits for the duration of the contract and increases hourly pay. In addition, the company will increase its weekly contributions to the pension plan. ■

# RWDSU BARGAINING FOR BETTER LIVES

## Strike Threat Yields Contract Victory

**A** new three-year contract was ratified by 43 RWDSU Local 262 members at White Conveyor in Kenilworth New Jersey on November 29. The agreement brought an end to difficult negotiations that came within days of a strike. Workers at the plant manufacture conveyor belt systems used at dry cleaners, hotels, and other businesses.

“The company swore up and down that they simply couldn’t offer more, but wouldn’t offer any evidence to confirm that this was really the case,” said Local 262 Secretary-Treasurer Pat Spurduto.

“The members were upset at being told they would have to accept a bad contract, with only the company’s word that this was the best they could do. They voted to authorize a strike,” he added.

Armed with the strike authorization, Local 262 forced the company to back down. White Conveyor agreed there would be no change or increase in cost to any of the benefits, and workers would receive a 35 cent increase in hourly pay each year of the contract -- more than triple the company’s original wage increase offer. ■



RWDSU members at White Conveyor stuck together to win a fair contract.

## Kellogg’s Contract Brings Pension Increases, Protects Health Care at 184-L

**A** new three-year agreement at Kellogg’s Snack Division in Kansas City, Kansas, guaranteed 450 Local 184-L

members wage increases and a big boost in pension benefits. The workers’ health insurance coverage will remain the same, with members paying no contributions

toward their insurance.

“In this day and age a health plan without worker contributions is virtually unheard of, so it was a top priority to keep it that way,” said Local 184-L President and Kellogg’s employee Derwin McNeely.

The negotiations were long and tough, with the company coming after the health care benefits and also trying to open up a “24/7” production line. But Local 184-L members stood strong and the negotiating committee wouldn’t budge on issues important to the Kellogg’s workers.

“The company was trying to change the health plan, and also open a 24-hour line at the plant, which a lot of companies are doing these days. They threatened to move some products to other plants and pushed hard for the 24-hour line,” McNeely added. “But we don’t want a round-the-clock schedule, and management backed down when they saw determination of the workers.”

The pension benefits were increased considerably. The improvement amounts to an increase of \$150 a month for a member at 25 years of service.

“This was the biggest pension increase we’ve ever gotten here, and is a real accomplishment,” said McNeely. “These days, companies are going after everyone’s pensions, but we kept ours intact and improved it a lot.”

“We fought hard for a pension increase and secured a good one with the new contract,” said RWDSU Representative Roger Grobstich. “This was a high priority going into negotiations, along with protecting health care.”

RWDSU members at Kellogg’s produce snacks like Cheez-It crackers.

Serving on the Negotiating Committee were Derwin McNeely, Tammy Allen, Mary McDaniel, Jim Brewer, Gina Ramirez, Dwayne Fields, Jesse Collins, Derrald Levels, Dennis Williams, and Roger Grobstich. ■



Left to right: Negotiating Committee members Derrald Levels, Gina Ramirez, Tammy Allen, Derwin McNeely, Mary McDaniel, and Jesse Collins. Not pictured are Jim Brewer and Dwayne Fields.



# Combustible Dust: A Ticking Time Bomb

**O**n February 7, 2008 workers reported for their shift at the Imperial Sugar Refinery near Savannah, Georgia. At 7PM, a massive explosion took place. 13 workers never returned home alive to their families. Scores more were hospitalized with severe burns and other serious injuries. One week later, sections of the refinery were still too hot for inspectors to enter.



A massive combustibile dust explosion ripped through the Imperial Sugar Refinery in February.

The terrible explosion at the plant was not some kind of “freak accident”. It was predictable because hundreds of fires and explosions have occurred at workplaces around the U.S. in recent years. It was preventable because we know why similar explosions have taken place, and what safety standards ought to be enforced to reduce the chances of this kind of horror happening in other workplaces.

Sugar, flour, grain and other food dusts, as well as dusts from chemicals, wood, metal, plastic and coal can all be highly explosive under the wrong circumstances. There are almost 30,000 facilities in the U.S. that have potential combustibile dust hazards, many where RWDSU members work or near where they live.

How can these explosions occur? If dust is allowed to build up in a workplace some of it may be dispersed and become a cloud that gets confined in a container, ceiling area or other part of a building. It becomes fuel. Add a source of ignition such as heat, a flame, sparks from welding, static electricity etc. and the dust, aided by oxygen, can burn very rapidly and/or explode.

## Grain Standard

Back in the 1970s and 1980s deadly explosions were common in grain storage facilities. In 1987 the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued the Grain Handling Facilities Standard which included specific provisions for reducing the accumulation of grain dust in these worksites. Implementation of the standard has been credited with a 60 percent reduction in the number grain explosion fatalities.

At the same time, activists urged OSHA to extend the provisions to cover all combustibile dust particles such as food, plastic and metal. But under heavy industry pressure it refused to do so.

## Chemical Safety Board (CSB)

Enter the Chemical Safety Board, an independent federal agency that investigates the causes of major chemical accidents, conducts studies and develops recommendations to help prevent future accidents. After three deadly explosions in 2003 at pharmaceutical, acoustic insulation and auto wheel facilities, the CSB launched a study of combustibile dust explosions. The study looked at 281 dust-related fires and explosions which occurred from 1980 – 2005, not including any coal or grain accidents. These accidents killed 119 workers and injured 718. Based on their study, the CSB urged OSHA to adopt a comprehensive standard for dust explosions in general industry. They pointed

out the National Fire Protection Association long ago developed good engineering and safety practice standards that OSHA could adopt which would significantly reduce the risk of dust explosions. Current general OSHA standards on housekeeping, for example, are limited because they do not set specific enforceable dust limitations or engineering controls, work procedures or training requirements.

In response to the report, OSHA announced a national emphasis program on combustibile dust in October, 2007. But OSHA continues to resist issuing a standard. As the agency director wrote in USA Today in late March, “Issuing additional combustibile dust regulations may not necessarily translate into safer workplaces”.

## Time for Action

In response to the Imperial Refinery disaster, the RWDSU and a number of other unions petitioned the Secretary of Labor to act immediately to issue an Emergency Temporary Standard covering combustibile dust in general industry. In addition, Congressman George Miller (D-CA) has introduced and held hearings on H.R. 5522 which would require the Secretary of Labor to issue an interim and final dust standard. This legislation needs our strong support.

Starting with the repeal of the Ergonomics Standard in early 2001, the Bush Administration has established a clear agenda on health and safety: avoid and delay issuing new standards, form alliances and partnerships with businesses and trade associations while shunning participation from labor, cut enforcement and strongly advocate voluntary compliance to reduce safety and health hazards.

How well does voluntary compliance work? One month after the Georgia refinery disaster, OSHA inspected the Imperial Sugar refinery in Gramercy, Louisiana. The same company and yet they found accumulated sugar dust that posed an imminent hazard to workers at that plant!

## More information

If you are concerned about possible combustibile dust exposures at your workplace, contact the RWDSU Health and Safety Department at (212) 684-5300 . ■

## Standing Up for Safe Jobs

**R**WDSU Health and Safety Director Steve Mooser conducted a health and safety training session late last year in Lansing, Michigan. Twenty-four stewards and members of health and safety committees at various Michigan RWDSU locals attended the training as part of the union’s continued efforts to make workplaces as safe as possible for RWDSU members.

“Seven years of George Bush and Dick Cheney have gutted OSHA,” Mooser told the Michigan activists. “That means it’s more important than ever that local unions have the training they need to act against dangerous conditions on the job.” ■

