Jobless, unions bring plight to Congress

By Mark Gruenberg
PAI Staff Writer

WASHINGTON (PAI) — The nation’s jobless, aided by the Communications Workers, the Service Employees and other unions, brought their plight directly to Congress the week of Dec. 5-9, with 2,000 people marching on Capitol Hill, buttonholing lawmakers, confronting corporate lobbyists and pitching a camp on Washington’s Mall.

Unions brought busloads of supporters to “Occupy Congress,” as lawmakers appeared to be shuffling the issue of extending jobless benefits to the back of December’s legislative calendar. The extended benefits end Dec. 31.

The AFL-CIO blamed congressional Republicans — who are noticeably unenthusiastic about aiding workers — for the stall, as it launched a new website to promote the plight of the jobless. Some 2.2 million people could lose aid if Congress fails.

House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, “continues to block a clean and immediate extension of emergency unemployment benefits,” the website said.

Though Occupy Congress was confined to D.C., other events accompanied it nationwide. An ever-lengthening list of events and union backers, many of whom scheduled press conferences and rallies for Dec. 8, were also designed to bring the message home to lawmakers, especially recalcitrant Republicans.

“In late December, the federal unemployment insurance fund will run out of money,” wrote Roxanne Pauline of the Lehigh Valley Central Labor Council in a “Dent, We Can’t Pay The Rent,” rally planned for Dec. 8 in Allentown, Pa., outside the office of GOP Rep. Charlie Dent.

“Unless Congress acts, millions of Americans face the prospect of going hungry and getting thrown out of their homes soon after the holidays. Politicians predictably will demand cuts to other progressive programs before authorizing more spending for unemployment. Meanwhile, jobless union members, veterans, students and millions of others are struggling to make ends meet while these leaders support the wealthiest 1%,” Pauline added.

“That’s why, as part of the AFL-CIO’s America Wants To Work campaign, we will join with unions and allies across the country on Dec. 8 to give voice to the jobless and hold members of Congress accountable as the 99% call on our representatives to reauthorize the unemployment insurance benefit program.”

The D.C. march and camp, plus the local events, came as Congress kept wrestling with extending unemployment benefits for another year, covering up to 99 weeks of joblessness for each unemployed worker. The extension is important: Even though unemployment declined to 8.6% in November, almost half of the 13.3 million jobless have been out for more than six months, exhausting their state benefits.

The GOP-run House refuses to extend the benefits without cutting other programs to pay for them — and dozens of the Tea Party-influenced Republicans don’t want to extend jobless...page 11

Cravaack, Congress pushed to extend U.I.

Area labor activists and concerned citizens joined similar folks nationwide Dec. 8 in trying to influence their congressional representatives to extend unemployment insurance through H.R. 3346 and S. 1804.

If Congress fails to renew federal unemployment insurance before years end, the program expires and almost two million people will lose their benefits in January. About six million workers would be without benefits to start 2012.

The Duluth group wanted to make their pitch to Rep. Chip Cravaack at his office and had called to let staff know they were coming. When they got past security at the Gerald Heaney Federal Building, however, no one was in Cravaack’s office, or at least no one answered the door.

“It’s very disappointing that there isn’t even a staff person in Cravaack’s office in the largest city in his district,” said North East Area Labor Council’s Jason Metsa. “Especially when we let them know we were coming.”

NEALC President Alan Netland said unemployment insurance is important for union and non-union working families alike, and important to the struggling economy.

“We’re talking about $296 a week on average to help families get through the hard times,” said Netland. “These are people who have track records of being employed and productive.”

Metsa said studies have shown that for every dollar spent on unemployment insurance it rolls over 1.8 times through the economy.

Duluth AFL-CIO Central Labor Body President Dan O’Neill said America has a history of stepping up when the economy is bleak.

“When I got out of high school there was job training available to help us get into the job market in tough times,” O’Neill said. “We reinvested in training citizens and we supported unemployment insurance.”

America is in the worst jobs crisis since the Great Depression and economists say unemployment will be at least 8.5% through next year. Congress has never cut off unemployment benefits when the rate has been above 7.2%. Six million people—nearly 45% of the jobless—have been unemployed for six months or more.

Standing outside an empty Cravaack office, Tom Koehler remembered the tough times in the 1980s when he was laid off from his railroad job for two years because the economy was in the tank and taconite wasn’t being pro-cessed or...page 10

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Happy Holidays & A Great 2012!
Last chance to help needy union families

This Saturday, Dec. 17, the Community Services Program will conduct their Santa Sack Distribution Event in Freeman Hall of the Duluth Labor Temple, 2002 London Rd. (look for signs, but enter via South St. facing lake). Santa will be available for children in the Reef Bar’s back room too (enter via far right Labor Temple door on London Road).

Needy union families and their children will be given gifts that have been donated and wrapped with the age and gender of recipients in mind.

In this tough economy with so many families having their bread winners out of work, the Community Services Program has been kept very busy trying to keep up with requests it has received from local unions. That’s where you can help. It’s not too late to make a donation of gifts or cash to the effort.

Another good way to show your holiday spirit is to make a donation to the Holiday Food Basket program. Families that are in difficult circumstances have been referred to the program by their local unions. They will receive a holiday ham dinner with all the trimmings to make their Christmas more enjoyable one.

For more information about the Community Service Holiday Programs, contact Beth Peterson, Liaison, 218-726-4775 or bpeterson@unitedwayduluth.org.

Donations can also be sent to: Duluth Central Labor Body, Room 110, Duluth, MN 55812. Make your check out to Community Services Program and put Holiday Programs in the memo line. Thanks & Happy Holidays!

Peace for Our Planet, Prosperity for All People

AFSCME Local 3801
University of Minnesota Duluth-Clerical & Technical Employees

Wishing the Best of the Holiday Season to all our friends in the Labor Movement

Happy Holidays! -Jennifer & Larry Sillanpa

...and so it was, in a land long ago, citizens worked for the common good.
That’s all the time we have for fairy tales tonight, so go to sleep and Santa will come down the chimney with your great gifts.

Happy Holidays! -Jennifer & Larry Sillanpa

I.U.O.E. Local 70
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Tuesday, Jan. 10, 2012, 5:00 P.M.
Duluth Labor Center, Hall B
Dave Monsour, Business Manager, (651) 646-4566

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Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!

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Frank & Jo-Ann Sramek wish all of their Union Brothers and Sisters a Merry Christmas

I.B.W. 242 & family members volunteered again making new cables at Bentleyville in 2011.
Jeno Paulucci was a busy guy, even working and selling Michelin’s Inc. the day before he died Nov. 24, so I can forgive him for not thanking me for all the money I made him.

I worked for him in March 1970 or thereabouts as the last man, I think the only man, on his assembly line that packaged pizza making boxes of ingredients on an upper floor of his building next to the Aerial Bridge. I was young, fit as fiddle, but I couldn’t keep up with the ladies that were loading flour, paste, meat, etc on the line that led to me at the end. Pretty soon the cases would jam up, a bell would sound, the line would stop automatically. Pretty soon the cases would be loading cases on pallets so the line would start again.

My foreman was a guy named Chris. He had just got married and was using the sack on those meat and white coats behind me. I saw many shiny black shoes and white coats. As we left work one dark afternoon one of the line ladies grabbed my jacket from behind and whispered, “Two people did your job before you started. There’s a red button under the line by you. Push it and the line will stop.” That was it, then. No wonder I couldn’t keep up. I felt better but not as good as I did when I smashed that red button the next day. Smiles beamed from all the way up the line by you.

The meat pizzas got loaded separately on their pallets and I was told to hit that load with a piece of pillow case that was loaded with white powder and twist tied. I did it a few times, but the dust would choke me so I quit doing it. A little later, as I was bending over to pick up another case of pizza boxes I was bending over to pick up another case of pizza boxes I saw many shiny black shoes and white coats behind me.

“How come you’re not using those on meat pizzas,” a white coat asked me.

“Because I can’t breathe when I do it,” I answered.

My foreman was a guy named Chris. He had just gotten a full set of false teeth the day before and talking wasn’t going so well.

“Edur yu yuse da sak ur yule neva wurk a Jenose agin,” Chris told me. I never did, either, even tho’ I’m sure Jeno could have used the money.

Wasn’t too long after that I was broke again so I tagged along with a friend one day to the Lake Carriers Association across from where the M&H gas station is near 13th west and Michigan St. or so, and signed up to go out sailing on the lakes. I was surprised one Saturday evening to get a call from them. They needed someone in Silver Bay at 6:00 a.m. the next morning, which is why I got lucky at the bottom of the list. “I’m there, thanks a lot,” I said. I was replacing a guy who got fired after they found him against the smokestack the day before crossing Lake Superior stoned from snuffing glue.

No matter how much I spent in port I couldn’t help but have a $100 a week left over to put in the bank. I felt like I should have sent some to that fine lady who told me about the red button but I didn’t even know her name. She reminded me of my mom. I hope she made it through the rest of her life okay. Jeno did, without any more help from me.

Christmas stories can really soften you up for the holidays can’t they?

This Day In History
www.workdayminnesota.org
January 11, 1943

Former Texas agriculture commissioner, radio talk show host and political spark plug Jim Hightower was born. In books such as “There’s nothing in the middle of the road but yellow stripes and dead armadillos,” Hightower takes on corporations, political fat cats and others on behalf of the working people of the world. “I’m an agitator,” Hightower says, “and an agitator is the center post in the washing machine that gets the dirt out.”
Hold Gov. Scott Walker accountable by signing a recall petition

By Senator Bob Jauch

The effort to recall Governor Walker is being undertaken by thousands of citizens who are engaged in a grass roots effort to use the ballot box to hold the Governor accountable for the damage he has done to a state they love. Scott Walker’s extreme policies have so deeply hurt citizens across this state that a recall effort is the only way in which they have a chance to restore a government whose policies are balanced for the best interest of all citizens.

Across Wisconsin and America people are wondering what happened to Wisconsin. Wisconsin has been a national role model of good government and our policies have always been a beacon for the common good. However, since January Scott Walker has undone a century of progress in which citizens shared responsibility to achieve the commonwealth.

A recent poll shows 58% of Wisconsin citizens support a recall of Governor Walker. The results clearly reflect public disapproval for leadership that has badly divided our state. Citizens are overwhelmingly bothered with his policies that are moving Wisconsin in the wrong direction.

His extreme policies have attacked workers rights, public education and voting rights. His heartless budget has eroded the social safety net for our most vulnerable citizens while at the same time it enacted tax breaks to corporations and the economic elite.

The Governor is disconnected from the harmful consequences of his policies. He claims that public education is the same or better throughout Wisconsin when there are 3500 fewer teachers and staff in our public schools as a result of his disastrous $1.6 billion in cuts for public education. The tools he promised are woefully inadequate and education quality is suffering as a result. Class sizes are increasing while class offerings are decreasing at the same time the Governor expanded private school subsidies by over $35 million.

Citizens are rightfully bothered that the Governor is abandoning our moral and constitutional obligation to equal education for every child and they are especially offended by his callous initiatives that will strip thousands of working families of their health care coverage.

Just as Governor Walker was out of touch when he sought to slash the popular senior care program and force seniors to take Medicare Part D, he is out of touch with his plan to force 65,000 residents, including 22,000 children out of Badger Care. He is abandoning the bi-partisan commitment to health care protection started during Tommy Thompson tenure and using the revenues for tax breaks to those who have health care.

The average person has good reason to be upset about a Governor whose agenda has catered to the corporations and left the middle class struggling to make ends meet. Instead of putting more money into health and health care education programs to meet worker shortages his priority was to lower corporate taxes and pay for them with deep cuts to the University and Vocational Schools.

The Governor believes that it is a priority to protect drug companies and medical device companies from lawsuits while it is urgent to make it harder for consumers to recover from costs of a lemon car. Somehow he believes that jobs will be created when victims have less opportunity to obtain legal assistance.

In Ohio citizens are given the right to veto legislation. In Wisconsin Citizens are given the right to recall officials. It hasn’t been used very often and it is a very tough standard to achieve. Across Wisconsin thousands of retirees, laborers, health care workers, students and homemakers who represent the face of Wisconsin are involved in the recall effort to protect the state they love.

The recall effort is not a “do over” of the last election. There are many who regret that they voted for him but most are exasperated by his disregard for their opinions until after he was elected. Had Governor Walker laid out his plans 13 months ago to destroy unions in Wisconsin he would have never been elected in November.

The citizens did not give Governor Walker a mandate to destroy the fundamentals of our democratic system by enacting the most restrictive voter identification law that will make it harder for students, seniors and minorities to vote. They did not believe they were electing a Governor who would make public education a public enemy number one or use police, firefighters, nurses and snow plow workers as a wedge to polarize our state.

The Governor’s policies limit public and legislative oversight while he has accumulated more power for his own sake. Had Governor Walker been truly listening to citizen opposition to his plans and demonstrated a sincere willingness to compromise he could have avoided the recall effort.

We are at an important crossroads in which the citizens are exercising their rights to restore balance, fairness, social justice and shared responsibility in our government. People are signing these recall petitions in record breaking speed because they don’t believe that their government shares the values, traditions and priorities that make Wisconsin special.

It appears that far more than the minimum 540,000 signatures will be submitted to require a recall election. As our founders intended, it is the citizens who are petitioning their government to assure that we will have a government of the people, for the people and by the people.
Recall has dedicated volunteers

The Recall Walker office at 1810 Belknap in Superior is well marked compared to its opening days over a month ago. Originally without any signage, the sidewalk and windows are covered with signs to let eligible Wisconsin voters know they can come in and sign a petition to recall Governor Scott Walker or Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch. On the wall is a hand drawn thermometer that shows the local goal of collecting 5,000 petitions. It’s colored up to the 4,500 mark.

A bookcase contains food shelf donations collected in a “Can Walker” event.

On Saturday morning canvassers had left to go door to door to find more people who hadn’t had an opportunity to sign a petition yet.

Sue Bombich is seated at the first table with her mother Mary Paquette to help anyone that comes in. Bombich is on the phone talking to a caller. At another desk near the back Mike Raunio is also on the telephone preparing the next move for People First Superior, a grassroots group that is full speed ahead on the recall effort.

The United Wisconsin to Recall Scott Walker grassroots organization (www.unitedwashington.com) says over 300,000 petitions were collected in the first 12 days of the recall.

While many were getting ready for the holidays, Sue Johnson and Mary McCauley volunteered to give Wisconsin residents an opportunity to sign recall petitions outside the Superior post office last Saturday. A recall office is at 1810 Belknap, where volunteers are available so residents can walk-in and sign petitions.

Thanks to all for a great 2011!

Happy Holidays &
Happy New Year

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LABOR WORLD NEWS, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2011   PAGE 5
Unions slam judge’s order delaying child care provider unionize vote

AFSCME Council 5 and SEIU Local 284, the unions seeking to represent child care providers, slammed Ramsey County Judge Dale Lindman’s decision to delay a union election among the providers.

Following a hearing Dec. 5, Lindman issued a temporary restraining order in response to the lawsuit filed by the corporate conservative think tank, the Freedom Foundation of Minnesota, and Republican legislators. The order halts a vote among 4,300 child care providers that was scheduled to begin Dec. 7.

The judge’s order means “it could be months before child care providers get to vote on whether or not they want to join a union,” Council 5 said in a statement posted on its website.

“In issuing a temporary restraining order, Judge Dale Lindman said the unionization issue should have gone through the Legislature. But taking our case to the Legislature would be futile. It’s led by the same Republican legislators whose lawsuit denies providers their right to vote and have a voice in decisions that affect their work and the families they serve.

“These are the same legislators who cut providers’ pay, who slashed quality improvement grants for child care, and who have ignored the 7,000 families waiting for child care so they can go to work. For six years, providers have been fighting for a voice in decisions that affect their profession and we will not give up fighting for Minnesota’s children and their parents.”

SEIU Local 284 released the following statement from Executive Director Carol Nieters:

“Minnesota’s family child care providers have been asking for a voice in St. Paul since 2005. Now, on the eve of their opportunity to choose a representative for meetings to support vital and threatened state programs, conservative corporate interests from the Freedom Foundation of Minnesota and their lapdogs in the Minnesota state Legislature have succeeded in throwing a wrench into the wheels of democracy.

“This sham lawsuit and their entire campaign of misinformation is just another example of the vicious attacks on working families by national corporate interests and the politicians who do their bidding. From Ohio to Wisconsin and New Hampshire to Minnesota, the story is the same: they will stop at nothing to deny working people the right to form a union for a voice in our democracy.

“Minnesota’s family child care providers, and the children they care for, deserve better than to have their voices muted by corporate zealots like the Freedom Foundation of Minnesota. We are disappointed that Judge Lindman did not take this opportunity to stop this lawsuit in its tracks.”

AFSCME Council 5
www.workdayminnesota.org

Happy Holidays To All!

AFSCME
Minnesota Council 5

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Page 6
Labor World News, Wednesday, December 14, 2011
Postal unions continue to protest latest service cuts to uncaring USPS

WASHINGTON (PAI) – The nation’s postal unions strongly protested the Postal Service’s latest cutback plans, which would close hundreds of distribution centers and lengthen delivery times. The USPS announced its cuts would be open for public comment, but the last line of its statement says it will go ahead with the cuts, anyway.

The cuts, which the agency calculated would save 32.1 billion annually, would shutter just over half of its 487 distribution and processing centers nationwide and cost thousands of workers their jobs. In Ohio, for example, three of five centers would close.

The cuts would also slow delivery of all types of mail, with first-class letters taking a minimum of two days to get from where they’re mailed to their destination, rather than – in some cases – overnight. Periodicals could take up to nine days.

WASHINGTON - Postal unions have launched a TV ad that salutes our nation’s “real life heroes” and points out that a bill pending in the House of Representatives would force the Postal Service to fire tens of thousands of military veterans.

The ad, which is sponsored by the American Postal Workers Union and the National Postal Mail Handlers Union, urges viewers to tell their representatives in Congress to vote no on H. R. 2309 when it comes to the House floor for a vote.

The bill, sponsored by Republicans Darrell Issa of California and Dennis Ross of Florida, was approved by the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on Oct. 13. It would force the Postal Service to lay off workers, including veterans who served our nation.

The ad says, “Our nation’s veterans are real-life heroes. But when they come home, they don’t want a parade, they want a job.” “The Postal Service employs more veterans than any other civilian employer,” the spot notes.

“What Congress is debating is a bill that will force the Postal Service to fire tens of thousands of veterans, close post offices, shut mail processing plants, and disrupt mail delivery. Drastic cuts won’t fix the postal service and aren’t needed,” the ad continues. The ad concludes with a call to action. “Tell your representative to vote ‘no’ on House Resolution 2309. It’s time to deliver for our veterans — and America.”

The Postal Service announced in August that it wants to reduce the workforce by 220,000, and is seeking authority to lay off as many as 120,000 workers. H.R. 2309 would grant authority to a newly-established control board to carry out such layoffs, despite any provisions in union contracts that limit these actions. It also calls for $3 billion worth of cuts in post offices and mail processing facilities within two years.

If 120,000 postal workers were laid off, approximately 26,000 veterans would be affected.

The APWU has denounced H.R. 2309 as a “reckless assault on postal services and postal employees.”

“H.R. 2309 would destroy the Postal Service as we know it,” said APWU President Cliff Guffey. “In the process, it would devastate many dedicated workers, including thousands of military veterans.

“We are asking members of the public who value the contributions made by our military veterans to tell their House representatives to oppose H.R. 2309,” Guffey said. The ad will run on CNN, MSNBC and Fox News for approximately one week. It will also air on broadcast networks in several media markets.

The TV ad is a part of a broader campaign to oppose destrucive legislation such as H.R. 2309 and to build support for legislation that would address the cause of the USPS financial crisis and restore financial stability to the cash-strapped agency.

While USPS must put its cuts out for public notice and comment, it contends the changes will “have minimal impact” on most customers. And the last line of its fact sheet says 90 days after it sent its proposals to the Postal Rate Commission – which can issue an “advisory opinion” on them – management can make the cuts, regardless of what the panel, the unions or the public thinks. USPS announced the cuts on Dec. 5.

Letter Carriers President Fredric Rolando said slowing the mail and closing the distribution centers would only make things worse for the financially strapped USPS.

“We are very concerned about the proposal to reduce delivery standards. High-quality service is essential to preserving the value of our network and to any future growth strategy. Degrading standards not only hurts the public and the businesses we serve, it's also counter-productive for the Postal Service because it will drive more people away from using the mail,” Rolando said.

No word on local closures

As postal officials ended their dog and pony shows of public hearings on their studies of closing Duluth’s Area Mail Processing center and post offices, no word has come down yet on final decisions.

The meetings have many convinced that all suggested closures will occur. The Associated Press reported Dec. 5 that four mail processing centers in Minnesota would close, including Duluth, leaving only the Eagan facility to process all mail in the state. That report was refuted by United States Postal Service official Peter Nowacki, who said no final decisions had been made yet. Other USPS officials stated that it may be spring before USPS reveals its decisions for the nation.

With Best Wishes for a Safe and Happy Holiday Season

National Association of Letter Carriers Zenith Branch 114 Merged Duluth, Two Harbors and Silver Bay

From all of us at the Greater Northland Area Local 142 American Postal Workers Union/AFL-CIO

We wish you and your loved ones A Safe and Happy Holiday Season!

Greater Northland Area Local 142, APWU/AFL-CIO, PO Box 16321, Duluth, MN 55816

LABOR WORLD NEWS, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2011
Cost of American Crystal Sugar lockout is at $30 million for communities

By Amy Masciola

MOORHEAD - When a company locks out workers and won’t negotiate a contract, the entire community suffers a massive economic loss—as a new report on the economic effects of American Crystal Sugar Co.'s lockout of 1,300 workers in the Upper Midwest details.

According to “A Region on the Ropes,” even as the company reported record profits during its annual meeting last week, families of locked-out workers are losing $1,000 to $2,300 per month, and the local economy of the Red River Valley has had direct losses of nearly $12 million during the four months of the lockout.

The report, issued by the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers’ Union, reveals at a public meeting with Minnesota Gov. Mark Dayton in Moorhead Saturday, Dec. 3, he urged the two sides to return to the bargaining table and commit to negotiating until a resolution is reached.

Dayton offered to host negotiations and to stay involved in the process until it’s resolved. Union members have embraced the governor’s proposal and are willing to meet the company and the governor as early as Dec. 13 to resume negotiations.

Local BCTGM unions organized the meeting, along with area labor councils and the Minnesota AFL-CIO and North Dakota AFL-CIO.

Roger Delage, president BCTGM Local 267G, says the report’s findings “reveal the true cost of this lockout to our communities in dollars and cents. It’s time we ended it and got back to the bargaining table. Our members want to work.”

Union members expressed frustration at the company’s priorities.

“Their recent financials looked very good in part because of our hard work,” said Renae Fredrickson, a locked-out worker. “Dave Berg told the shareholders that our contract was like a tumor and that his strategy is to cut that tumor out, and that strategy is coming at a high cost to all of us.”

Melanie Holbeck, the wife of a locked out worker, said, “This lockout has taken a toll on my family. We lost our health insurance on Aug 1—with a month-old baby—we didn’t dare go without insurance. The outrageous COBRA coverage of $1,346 a month was out of the question. My employer picked us up right away. But, others haven’t been so lucky.”

Holbeck also described the emotional toll.

“The emotions I go through on a daily basis are overwhelming,” she said. “I become so angry that the people I know have for years are not stopping this.”

Paul Woinarowicz, who has worked for the company for 34 years, described how hard it’s been for him and his co-workers to ask for help. “My wife, my son, and my son-in-law all work for the company. We’re all locked out. You know, when you get to be my age, you expect that when your kids need something, mom and dad will be there to help. With all of us locked out, it’s been hard.”

He continued: “It’s hard for many of us to ask for the help we need, whether its help paying the rent or the heating bill or getting some groceries or medicine for the kids. But one thing I’ve learned in this struggle is that we’ve got to stick together and we’ve got to help each other and accept help from others. There is no shame in standing up for what you believe in, and that’s what we’re doing. It’s our unity that will sustain us one day longer.”

Amy Phillips, representing the North Dakota Human Rights Coalition, said, “At a time when the company has enjoyed record profits and management has received record compensation, these 1,300 workers are earning nothing.” According to Phillips, the NDHRC has found that “American Crystal Sugar is violating the human rights of its workers, [based] on the standards set in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which the United States, along with 47 other countries, ratified on December 10, 1948.”

Supporters who attended the event suggested the high cost to the region would be measured in the tens of millions of dollars and in the loss of trust between Crystal Sugar workers and management that has existed for so long.

North Dakota state Rep. Eliot Glassheim said, “This lockout has divided families, friends, neighbors, completely opposite the cooperative spirit that Crystal Sugar used to stand for. And it’s part of a national movement to bust unions. There is no other explanation. We must put an end to this crippling lockout.”

Amy Masciola is a communications consultant with the Minnesota AFL-CIO. This article is reprinted from the national AFL-CIO blog.
NLRB: Locked out workers are still employees of that company

(PAL)—In an unusual situation, the National Labor Relations Board has ruled, in a case involving a Bronson, Mich., auto parts maker, that locked-out workers are still “employees” of the company and covered by labor law. The board, by a 2-1 vote in November, ordered the firm, Douglas Autotech, to bring back the 146 UAW Local 722 members Douglas said it fired via the lockout.

The case began in May 2008, through a Local 722 error: It did not file the legally required 60-day notice before the end of its prior contract, but went on strike anyway.

The union realized its mistake three days later, a mistake which also included failing to seek a mediator. The mistakes made the strike illegal, so Local 722 offered unconditionally to return to work. Douglas locked the workers out.

But bargaining continued, with Douglas repeatedly saying it would return the “employees,” and it used that word, to their jobs – and let its replacement employees go – once the two sides reached a new pact. They never did. When Douglas switched law firms, its new attorney told the firm to fire the employees, three months after the strike.

The board majority said that when unions make unconditional offers to return to work to end a strike, the workers become the firm’s employees again – and employees are covered by labor law, including its protections in such circumstances.

Quoting the agency’s administrative law judge, NLRB members Mark Pearce and Craig Becker said that “when confronted with an illegal strike, an employer is vested with the full discretion to frame its response. It may choose to discharge the strikers or it may select an alternative approach.

“If it selects such an alternative, it cannot renege on that choice. By selecting an alternative, the strike has ended and the strikers have regained the protective mantle of the” National Labor Relations Act. “Any subsequent unlawfully motivated discharge will violate the law,” Pearce and Becker said.

“The judge stated that, insofar as the above principles are concerned, he could perceive no difference between an employer’s selection of a settlement agreement or its invocation of the economic weapon represented by a lockout. In either case, the judge stated, the strike has ended and former strikers are again under the act’s protection.”

The board’s sole Republican, Brian Hayes, disagreed. He said that lockout or no lockout, they’re fired. “The lockout was not somehow transformed into an affirmative act of ‘reemployment,’” he said. Strikers are re-employed “only on their actual return.”

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Push on for unemployment extensions...from page 1

moved on the Iron Range.
“We were the Rust Belt in the early 1980s,” said Koehler. “Unemployment insurance kept me afloat as did minimum wage jobs created by the Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board, long enough until the economy turned around again.” He said he received $25 a day in unemployment insurance. He was covered under the federal Railway Labor Act, which has substantially lower UI benefits.

Mark Engebretson works for Churches United in Ministry, which has a shelter and food shelf “for those who have hit rock bottom.”

“Last week we had ten families, many with two parents, and two veterans, homeless for the first time, who can’t find work, are out of unemployment, and evicted.” Engebretson said. Those stories say a lot about our country he said and how our values don’t seem to be supporting the needy.

“CEOs’ salaries increase as they lay off people and move their industries overseas,” he said. Not taxing the rich as a way to help the economy just hasn’t been proved he said.

In Minnesota 28,100 will lose unemployment benefits without the extension. The weekly benefit average here is $346.21. The economic loss to communities a week could total $9,728,501 as families lose the ability to buy the necessities they need.

Happy Holidays
Brothers and Sisters!

USW
Local
11-63

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Season’s Greetings from all of us at Education Minnesota!

Tom Dooher    president
Paul Mueller  vice president
Denise Specht secretary-treasurer

www.educationminnesota.org
Education Minnesota is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association and AFL-CIO.

The union of 70,000 educators

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less aid at all. 
Not only are Republicans trying to cut unemployment benefits, they have gone so far as to say you can’t get them unless you are a laid off worker with a high school diploma.

Those positions have prompted events around the country, not just the D.C. camp, lobbying and rally: 
* A Dec. 7 “Make Wall Street Pay” teach-in. Topics included “How the 1% Crashed the Economy” and what we can do about it, a bologna lunch buffet: Symbolize what the 99% are getting from the 1%, and then a parade to the business lobbies’ headquarters on K Street in downtown D.C. We have to fan out to the corporate lobbying firms that have polluted the economy against the 99%,” the 99% group said on its website.
* A Dec. 8 rally on Capitol Hill, featuring union leaders, religious leaders and the jobless. In preceding days, jobless workers lobbied lawmakers. Several Wisconsin workers who visited Rep. Tom Petri, R-Wis., reported he dodged questions. Other Republicans told the jobless to take their protest to the White House, instead. The Democratic Obama administration favors the jobless benefits extension.
* A Dec. 8 rally on Dec. 8 at GOP lawmakers’ local offices in Syracuse and Utica, N.Y., Medford, Ore., West Columbia and Charleston, S.C., Santa Fe, N.M., Chicago, Ballwin, Mo., Eden Prairie, Minn., Shelby Township (Detroit), Grand Rapids, Lansing, Marquette and Jackson, Mich., Fort Lauderdale, Fla., Phoenix, Charleston, W. Va., and San Diego, among other sites. 
[Image 2x21 to 416x520]

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- **Iron Workers Local 512** ~ (218) 724-5073
- **Laborers Local 1091** ~ (218) 728-5151
- **Millwrights & Machinery Erectors Local 1348** ~ (218) 741-6314

**Operating Engineers Local 49** ~ (218) 724-3840

**Painters & Allied Trades Local 106** ~ (218) 724-6466

**Plumbers & Steamfitters Local 11** ~ (218) 727-2199

**Roofers, Waterproofers Local 96** ~ (218) 644-1096

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Solidarity Forever
Carlton County
Central Labor Body

Mike Kuitu, President (218-391-6367)

We meet the 1st Monday, each month but Sept., 7 p.m., Cloquet Labor Temple (2nd floor), 1403 Avenue C. Please join us!
At their Nov. 29 meeting the North East Area Labor Council (NEALC) hired Jamie Ebert and Jason Metsa as full time field coordinators. Both had been hired as temporary staffers in October but when Chad McKenna left for AFSCME Council 5 his job opened up. Ebert and Metsa will both work full time.

“I am pleased that the NEALC was able to hire these two young organizers,” said NEALC President Alan Netland. “While they have experiences in community and political organizing, they worked for us the last two months as temporary employees and demonstrated their ability to relate well with our affiliates and help us to be successful in our local election efforts. They are dedicated, energetic and bright people who will help us to move forward in coordinating labor’s efforts in the critical year ahead. I thank the NEALC Board for agreeing to hire these two staffers and look forward to a good year ahead with them on board. I know they will be getting around to meeting our folks and I ask everyone to give them a welcoming hand.”

He said both will work the entire region. “They are not just assigned to the Duluth area and Iron Range area, but will assist each other in helping to coordinate our work in the entire seven county area.” NEALC is the umbrella organization for unions in Lake, Cook, St. Louis, Koochiching, Itasca, Carlton, and Pine counties. There are 40,000 trade unionists that live and work in the Lake, Cook, St. Louis, Koochiching, Itasca, Carlton, and Pine county area.”

“I will do that a few times a semester wherever I’m sent,” Ebert said. “I leave on a Friday, do the camp on Saturday and come home Sunday. I love training and organizing.”

“Recently she got to Ann Arbor and the University of Michigan campus but this time as a trainer for Campus Camp for Wellstone Action.”

“Replacing Chip Cravaack, the NEALC Board hired Jason Metsa and Jamie Ebert as their new staff November 29. (Labor World file photo) local elections were over the huge 2012 presidential election year became everyone’s focus. ‘That’s where our field planning starts,’ she said. ‘Repeating Chip Cravaack, defeating the (Minnesota Constitution) marriage amendment, and being ready if a right-to-work constitutional amendment comes up.’

Ebert admits to loving planning things out and then executing the plan. “You never know what’s going to come along and things will hit you in the face and derail you, but if you planned well, you can still get back on your original task and execute.”

She would feel real good if she and Jason were able to expand participation by rank and file union members and get

Happy Holidays from our Membership, Officers, and Staff!

![](image)

Laborers Local 1091
Duluth, Minnesota / Superior, Wisconsin and Surrounding Counties

North East Area Labor Council President Alan Netland, left, and the NEALC Board hired Jason Metsa and Jamie Ebert as their new staff November 29. (Labor World file photo)

An economy that’s still in the tank has working families still taking the big hits as America continues to roll over for the richest 1%. We need to continue to pressure all elected officials so they understand the plight of the rest of us, the 99%. We are not the problem, and they need to find ways to bring us happier holidays and a better 2012.

Iron Range Labor Assembly
Tom Cvar, President
The December 8 CLB meeting was activated. Officers are, left to right, Craig Olson and Cathy Marie Pechek and Jim Gleb (Ex Board), and Trustees Scott Dulas, Todd Erickson (rear), and Steve Risacher. (Photo by Alex “The Eye” Livadaros)

Jason Metsa 218-590-7583 jason@nealc.org

Jason Metsa knows Minnesotan. Born in Duluth, a Babbitt and Mesabi Community College grad, he’s also lived in Rochester and the Twin Cities, but he says Virginia is his hometown and that’s where he lives. And just so you don’t think he isn’t well traveled at his young age like Jamie Ebert, Metsa has also lived in Alaska and worked at the World Cup in Germany.

At 31 years of age, Jason Metsa couldn’t be happier with where he’s at and his prospects for the future with his new NEALC job.

“I love it,” he said about the huge election year in 2012 that will be the number one item on his workload. “This feels so natural and so good to be working on my home turf.”

Politics has been a big part of his life already. For the past five years he’s been the go-to guy for the go-to people in the 8th Congressional District he said and electoral politics has been his bread and butter.

“I’ve just been in the Twin Cities working with the Building Trades on all the special elections down there and we retained all the DFL seats,” Metsa said.

DFL Governor Mark Dayton’s many appointments of sitting legislators to his administration required about six special elections.

Metsa also managed Rep. Carly Melin’s campaign when she won a special election for Tony Sertich’s House 5B seat after he was appointed to lead the IRRRB by Dayton. And Metsa said he really enjoyed working with Rep. Tom Rukavina on his gubernatorial campaign.

“We had 1000 people show up for a bean feed for Tom,” Metsa said. How you accomplish that is what Metsa’s all about.

“It’s all about working with data, targeting with technology, and that’s the progressive training work I want to continue to do for our labor affiliates,” Metsa said. “We’ll educate the older activists with the younger ones, cut driving times, save member’s money, increase turnout, and hit the media markets with our message.”

That’s how he went about his work as a part time NEALC staffer this fall for November’s election.

“We helped bring all our endorsed candidates home and won school levies in Virginia and Eveleth/Gilbert,” he said. Three city councilors and the mayor’s race were among the wins.

“We all worked together as the NEALC in the region and that’s what we will continue to do,” Metsa said. “We know we have to increase our work in the southern part of the 8th congressional district to defeat Cravaack.”

Metsa said numbers from the 2010 election that Congressman Jim Oberstar lost to Cravaack show that a lot of work needs to be done.

“We need to rebuild the faith of our labor and DFL communities,” he said. “There’s been too much finger-pointing over the 39,000 people we lost in that election. Labor and the DFL are the rock in our region but we found we can be brittle. We’ll restore our strength.”

On a personal level Metsa said he just wants to keep on learning as he works.

“I love this work when I go to bed, and I love it waking up,” he said. “Sure you beat your head against the wall sometime, and you herd cats sometime, but then you meet good new contacts and people and your faith is restored. We’ll get to do good things and now I’ll get to do them with a job title,” he said with a grin.

Like Ebert, his outside interests include music. He plays guitar, harmonica, and piano and has learned much from his musician uncle, Paul Metsa, who he lived with for a time.

“I also really enjoy getting into building projects and maintenance stuff at the cabin that has been in our family on Lake Vermillion since my great-grandfather built it.”

Duluth AFL-CIO Central Labor Body officers for 2012/2013 were sworn in by North East Area Labor Council President Alan Netland, left, at the Dec. 8 CLB meeting. Officers are, left to right, Craig Olson and Cathy Marie Pechek and Jim Gleb (Ex Board), and Trustees Scott Dulas, Todd Erickson (rear), and Steve Risacher. (Photo by Alex “The Eye” Livadaros)
Callie Ronstrom needs your help so Guatemala children can help themselves

Callie Ronstrom, daughter of Laborers Local 1091 retiree Brian Ronstrom, is a Peace Corps volunteer in Guatemala working in youth development. She had good training for her efforts working at the Duluth YMCA and AmeriCorps with youth. Callie graduated in 1996 from Duluth East, in 2000 from UMD, and in 2005 she received her Masters in Comparative and International Development Education from the University of Minnesota.

She has enjoyed using the education and skills she learned in Minnesota in Guatemala. She started her work there in April 2010 and she will end her Peace Corp tour next July. Callie has a great idea on how to ensure that her experience will be as good as it can be, but she needs help.

One of the ways young people get introduced to improving their communities through service and get recognized for their efforts is Global Youth Service Day (gysd.org). Callie did that for four years here and she would like to bring the program to the children she works with in poverty-stricken Guatemala but she lacks the resources.

The program she hopes to create will allow the youth she works with to overcome the serious problems they face growing up in Guatemala.

GYSD is geared to improving communities through mobilizing, supporting, and educating youth to become involved, identify needs, serve to overcome those needs, and become community leaders.

Last year 3,502 projects in 102 countries were recognized. Over 550,363 young volunteers were involved. The largest service event in the world, GYSD will be April 20-22, 2012, next year and Callie wants her Guatemalan friends involved. They will be with your help.

All donations are tax deductible and will be used to support small youth driven community projects in the most rural communities in Huehutenango, Guatemala.

Donations may be sent to: Friends of Guatemala P.O. Box 33018 Washington, D.C. 20033

Please write “Callie Ronstrom – Cat. II” in the memo/subject line of your check so Friends of Guatemala knows which project your donation is for.

Peace Corp volunteer Callie Ronstrom and some of her many Guatemalan friends.
USW files NLRB charges against Cooper Tire

The United Steelworkers on Dec. 6 filed National Labor Relations Board charges against Cooper Tire for unfair labor practices in bargaining and imposing a lockout at its profitable Findlay, Ohio plant.

Cooper locked out 1,051 members of USW Local 207L on Nov. 29, 2011, despite the union’s good faith offer to keep working while negotiations proceeded on a new contract.

The USW said the company demanded that workers ratify a contract absent the full details of an incentive plan that could possibly result in major wage cuts. Cooper insisted that its incomplete proposal would have to be accepted, ratified and implemented before necessary studies would be finalized. Workers would’ve voted on a proposal not knowing if wages were increasing or decreasing.

In total, the USW alleges some ten charges. They include refusing to bargain by conditioning continuation of talks on the union moving from its current negotiating position; falsely declaring impasse; disparaging the International union in meetings with bargaining unit members; and unilaterally changing conditions of employment by canceling scheduled work and extending the Thanksgiving holiday shutdown until the lockout began on Nov. 29.

The unfair practices also include the lockout itself and its continuation in support of a bargaining position tainted by the illegal labor practices cited in the charges.

New Hampshire beats R-T-W

CONCORD, N.H. (PAI)—Union lobbying and economic arguments that a right-to-work law would drive down New Hampshire wages swayed just enough New Hampshire House Republicans to vote on Nov. 30 to uphold Democratic Gov. John Lynch’s veto of a state right-to-work statute. The vote was 240-139, but override needed two-thirds.

The law, one of a wide range of anti-worker measures being pushed nationwide by the GOP, the Radical Right and their business backers, drew “no” votes from all 104 Democrats and 35 Republicans. The other Republicans voted to override Lynch. Workers sitting in the House gallery cheered when the results were announced.
Like GE, Verizon is another tax deadbeat

(PAI)—In the last three years, as it raked in more than $100 billion in revenues and $33 billion in U.S. profits, Verizon—which is campaigning to cut its unionized workers’ health care—has been a tax deadbeat. Unpaid Bills: How Verizon Shortchanges The Government, by Good Jobs First and Citizens for Tax Justice, reveals Verizon actually got tax rebates from the federal Treasury worth a total of $951 million, and paid only about one-third of its state taxes. With the corporate tax rate at 35%, Verizon should have paid about $11.4 billion in taxes, the report adds, rather than getting about a billion dollars back.

“Verizon doesn’t use its tax avoidance gains to keep up its copper network or extend its fiber optic technology to cities like Boston, Baltimore, Buffalo or other communities, or create quality jobs. It isn’t negotiating a fair contract with the workers who have made this company so successful,” said CWA’s George Kohl. “Instead, it is demanding nearly $1 billion in givebacks and making sure that its top executives stay in the top 1% of American earners. That’s why we say ‘the 99%’ are picking up Verizon’s tax tab.”

Verizon responded by attacking the credibility of both sponsoring groups. It also claimed many of the taxes involved were deferred and will be paid—later. But the report points out Verizon is avoiding paying taxes now, calling Verizon one of the top corporate deadbeats in the U.S.

“It has also used a tax gimmick known as a ‘Reverse Morris Trust’ to avoid more than $1.5 billion in taxes while selling off parts of its landline business,” the report points out.

“And during the past three years it has paid a nationwide state income tax rate of less than 3% and received more than $1 billion in state tax subsidies”—a figure that would have been even higher had Verizon not cancelled construction of a call center in upstate New York, for which state and local governments had promised $600 million.

“While these federal and state tax subsidies are good for Verizon, they’re bad for the rest of the taxpaying public. When the federal and state governments collect $14 billion less in tax revenues from Verizon, the result is less spending on critical services, a higher public debt load, and higher taxes for others.”

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GE's tax return was 57,000 pages

John McCormack reported in The Weekly Standard that General Electric filed a 57,000-page federal tax return this year but didn't pay taxes on $14 billion in profits. The electronic return would have been 19 feet high if printed out. But House budget committee chairman Paul Ryan (R-Wis) said GE's return was perfectly legal.

McCormack wrote, “Nine billion dollars of GE's profits came overseas, outside the jurisdiction of U.S. tax law. GE wasn't taxed on $5 billion in U.S. profits because it utilized numerous deductions and tax credits, including tax breaks for investments in low-income housing, green energy, research and development, as well as depreciation of property.”

Ryan used the data to underscore the irrationality of the corporate income tax code. He contrasted GE with UPS to show that the corporate income tax code doesn't make sense. “UPS paid a 34 percent effective tax rate,” while its biggest foreign competitor, DHL, paid a 24 percent tax rate, he said.

Press Associates, Inc. reported on a study by Berkeley, CA Greenlining Institute, that 20 of the largest U.S.-based multi-national corporations have established hundreds of foreign subsidiaries combined, which they use to successfully evade U.S. corporate taxes by on paper – shifting their profits overseas. If that was outlawed, the U.S. would reap $3 billion in taxes from the top nine. Those firms have reaped billions in federal contracts.

“The lost revenue would be more than enough to fund the entire budgets of the Environmental Protection Agency and the Departments of Energy and Labor combined,” the institute said. Eight of the top 12 companies effectively paid no federal income taxes from 2008 through 2010. The leader, of course, was GE, which forced its unionized U.S. workers into paying more for health care.

U.S. corporations avoided about $60 billion in income taxes by shifting profits to foreign subsidiaries, while Fortune 100 companies received some $89.6 billion in federal contracts, the institute said.

The U.S. corporate tax rate of 35% exists in name only as the effective rate is closer to 20%-25%, the institute said with the U.S. collecting less in corporate taxes than 24 out of 26 industrialized countries,” ahead of only Chile and Mexico, it said.

For our families and our communities, let's keep working together to keep the Christmas message of peace, love, and justice alive all year through.

Mark Rubin
Your St. Louis County Attorney

Prepared by Labor World, paid for by Mark and Nancy Rubin

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Buy American jobs push has supporters but Republicans balking

(PAI)—The Steelworkers are strongly supporting a new “Buy America” jobs push, targeted at infrastructure projects, proposed Dec. 1 by Rep. Nick Rahall, D-W.Va. The top Dem on the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, he said “Made in America... ought to be stamped on every I-beam bolted and welded into our national highway system.” Measures renewing federal

highway aid programs are caught in traffic in the committee, with Republicans, led by Chair Dan Mica, R-Fla., demanding deep cuts in federal funding to rebuild highways, bridges and mass transit. Money to do so comes from gas taxes, which have not been increased in about 20 years.

Current Buy America provisions in transportation law have “existing loopholes that have allowed some major components of transportation projects to be purchased abroad,” Rahall said as he introduced the Invest in American Jobs Act (HR3533), which he wants in long-term transportation bill.

One example of what can go wrong with foreign-made products is reconstruction of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, which included 43,000 tons of Chinese-made steel for the bridge’s rebuilt 2.2-mile east span, a $6.3 billion state (not federal) project.

“This project employed 3,000 workers in China -- jobs that should have gone to American workers,” because the reconstruction money came from taxpayers, a congressional fact sheet says.

“We all share the same goal to grow manufacturing here at home,” Steelworkers Secretary-Treasurer Stan Johnson said at the press conference with Rahall and other lawmakers. “The strong Buy America requirements of this bill make certain that taxpayer dollars are spent on iron, steel and manufactured goods made in America by American workers.” He cited an Alliance for American Manufacturing study showing every $1 billion invested in infrastructure creates or maintains 18,000 jobs. “When you add in strong Buy America requirements, the job number expands by 33%,” he said.

“We are in a job crisis and we need to use our taxpayer dollars wisely to create as many useful jobs as possible, including good manufacturing jobs that the American public will support as the best engine for economic growth. This bill introduced does just that,” Johnson said.

USW President Leo Gerard, adding a statement to support voiced at the press conference, noted Chinese-made materials for the Bay Bridge project have given California nothing but trouble: Faulty rivets, subspec cement, cost overruns, project delays and, now fraud charges against two bridge inspectors to look the other way.

“California was penny-wise and pound-foolish to not accept federal funding to avoid Buy America,” Gerard declared. “This bill introduced today encourages support of American manufacturing and promotes family supportive American jobs.”

On Oct. 20 Senate Republican opposition derailed Sen. Jeff Merkley’s (D-Ore) attempt to order federal transportation agencies to “Buy American” in “steel, iron and manufactured products” for their projects. Senators voted 55-44 for the amendment but 60 votes were needed to stop the threatened GOP filibuster.

Democrats backed Merkley 49-1, Republicans 5-42 against with two independents split.
Teamsters add 20,000 Fla. corrections officers

(PAI)—Winning more than half of the ballots cast, Teamsters were elected as bargaining representative for 20,000 correctional officers statewide in Florida, the union announced Nov. 17. The tally showed 4,097 for Teamsters, 3,015 for Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association (PBA), 116 for Independent Union of Police Associations, 154 for no union, 126 void votes and nine challenged ballots. By winning more than half the vote, the Teamsters avoided a runoff.

Key issues in the drive were respect on the job, job security, and lack of raises for six years, corrections officers Glynn Reeder and Kimberly Schultz told a press conference.

Right Wing GOP Gov. Rick Scott has floated the idea of privatizing the Sunshine State’s prisons, ceding them to a for-profit firm, and the overwhelmingly Republican legislature could go along. But Ken Wood, president of a Tampa-based local, noted several anti-worker measures went down the drain in Tallahassee in the last legislative session, thanks to labor lobbying.

“The biggest reason we voted for the Teamsters is we had no representation” either in bargaining with Corrections Department officials or at the state level, Reeder said. “We had no raises in six years and every time an officer came up for discipline, it occurred” with no acquittals or modifications, despite any contrary evidence.

Teamsters Organizing Director Jeff Farmer said the union has started building a grass-roots organization among the officers to make their voice “heard loud and clear in Tallahassee” on privatization or any other anti-worker schemes. Since a large share of Teamsters are registered Republicans, Farmer noted, the new unionists will lobby both sides of the aisle.

Farmer is from Minnesota.

Hoffa re-elected IBT president

(PAI)—Teamsters President James Hoffa was re-elected to a 4th term in results announced by an independent overseer Nov. 18. The consent decree Teamsters signed with the U.S. Justice Department more than 20 years ago requires rank-and-file 1-member 1-vote balloting, complete with independent oversight. If he serves out his new 5-year term, which starts in March, Hoffa will be the union’s second-longest-serving president, surpassing his late father.

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Season’s Greetings!

Thank you!
U.S. dead last in unionization among top developed nations. Thank politics.

By Mark Gruenberg

The United States is dead last among 21 top developed nations in both unionization rates and union coverage of the workforce, according to a new study, Politics Matter: Changes in Unionization Rates in Rich Countries, 1960-2010.

National political climates—which can expand legal rules such as who labor law covers, whom unions can bargain for and represent, and how free unions are to organize—are the determining factors in both union coverage and density.

Countries with a Social Democratic political climate had consistently high rates of both unionization and union coverage. Countries with a “Continental European” tradition, where union membership is less enshrined, but collective bargaining coverage of workers is strong, have high union coverage rates but declining union membership.

So-called “liberal market” economies like U.S. and Britain, that, at best, are neutral about organizing and union membership saw both membership and coverage crash, the Center for Economic Policy and Research study reported.

The biggest membership decline was in New Zealand, down 47.7 percentage points since 1980, the first year figures are available for all 21 nations. And while U.S. union membership dropped by 12.4 percentage points since 1980, it started from a lower base than the other 20 nations, and rested at 13.3% in 2007, dead last.

Union density rose in only one country, Finland (+0.9%), and coverage rose in five.

The study suggests that the demand for union representation has fallen and the supply of union jobs has decreased.

“Some researchers blame” union leaders for focusing on “servicing existing members rather than organizing new members. Others emphasize weak legal protections for the right to organize, in combination with heightened employer opposition beginning in the early 1980s. But, probably the most common argument, at least in the public discussion, is the idea that unions are incompatible with the emerging, increasingly globalized, high-tech, service economy.

“If the decline in unionization is the inevitable response to the twin forces of globalization and technology, we would expect unionization rates to follow a similar path in other countries subjected to roughly similar levels of globalization and technology,” the report said. But the unionization rates didn’t follow those patterns, researchers said.

“These differences across countries exposed to broadly similar levels of globalization and technological change suggest that neither factor mechanically determines national levels of unionization.”

“One simple factor, however, does appear to explain much of the observed variation in unionization trends: The broad national political environment. Countries that have been strongly identified during the postwar period with social democratic parties—Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Finland—have generally seen small increases in union coverage and only small decreases in union membership since 1980.

“Over the same period, countries identified as ‘liberal market economies’—the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Canada, and Japan—have generally seen sharp drops in union coverage and membership.”

The findings have implications for the U.S. union movement: The AFL-CIO made passage of the Employee Free Choice Act a top legislative priority, to help level the playing field in both organizing and bargaining. But both labor and the law were sidetracked by the war over President Barack Obama’s health insurance revision law. A planned Senate GOP filibuster killed EFCA when Democrats ran Congress.

One chart in the report shows that after the mid-1950s, U.S. private-sector unionization rates declined, with a steep fall starting after the Reagan administration began. But unionization among public sector workers hovered around 15% from 1948, the first year data is available, through 1962-63. It leaped 10 percentage points in one year and has risen since then to close to 40%.

While the report did not say so, public sector labor laws have generally been more neutral and less hostile to organizing than the National Labor Relations Act, as rewritten by the GOP-run Congress in the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act. Labor law covering government workers, however, also often bans strikes and orders mandatory arbitration.

In the era of National Nurses United’s Main Street Contract For America and Occupy Wall Street, we’ve never had a more dire need for progressive, courageous leaders in the positions of political power at the federal and state levels.

The Minnesota Nurses Association wants to partner with policy makers and legislators who believe in putting Main Street ahead of Wall Street, and returning the state of Minnesota—and the entire country, for that matter—to the principles of economic equality, fiscal transparency, fair taxation and social justice that this nation was founded upon.

If you share our vision and are interested in running for political office contact MNA’s Andrea Ledger at andrea.ledger@mnnurses.org or 651-414-2872 to discuss how the 20,000 members of our union can start helping you right now!
Brits go out on 1-day strike
By Mark Gruenberg, PAI Staff Writer

The National Nurses Union (NNU) led a coalition of U.S. unions that demonstrated in six cities on Nov. 30 to back British public workers, who staged a 1-day strike. The strike saw an estimated 2 million teachers, nurses, public health workers and members of 30 unions walk off the job to protest drastic cuts in workers’ and retirees’ pensions planned by the Conservative Party government in the United Kingdom.

“These actions are part of a global response to governments that are pursuing measures that shift the economic and social burden of the economic crisis further onto the shoulders of working people,” said David Cockroft of the London-based International Transport Workers Federation. “Alongside public sector workers, transport workers face demands for wage cuts, austerity and reductions in social security protection, and suffer from the impacts of free trade agreements and attacks on trade unions worldwide.

“The crisis was the result of deregulated capitalism and was not caused by workers, their unions, social programmes and public sector benefits. That’s why the ITF as part of the global labour movement backs not only today’s action but will also support broader movements such as that of the Occupy protesters,” Cockroft added.

In Washington, the NNU led around 200 protesters on an informational picket line outside the British Embassy. NNU Co-President Karen Higgins, who presented a letter at the embassy gate, made British officials aware of the U.S. solidarity – and of the impact of the pension cuts. “If they don’t have a pension, they won’t be able to retire. They’ll be working when they’re 70” she said of British nurses “and there’ll be no jobs for younger workers.”

SEIU Vice President and Organizing Director Tom Woodruff told PAI there’s another reason for the U.S. workers to aid their British brothers and sisters. “Working people are under attack all over the globe, and they’re beginning to rise up,” he said. “It’s the same forces, the giant multi-nationals that are on the attack against all of us.”

Other demonstrations occurred at British consulates in Chicago, Boston, Los Angeles, Orlando and San Francisco.
Best Wishes for the Holidays and a Happy New Year!

If your Union isn’t listed here among our affiliates, call 218-724-1413 to learn how to become a member of our Regional Labor Movement!

AFSCME Council 5
AFSCME 66 (City, County, Others)
AFSCME 695 (Minnesota DOT)
AFSCME 718 (Minnesota DNR)
AFSCME 221 (MNDOT)
AFSCME 1092 (Amalgamated MN State Human Services)
AFSCME 1123 (Two Harbors Municipal)
AFSCME 1934 (St. Louis County Jail)
AFSCME 2829 (Amalgamated Minnesota State Employees)
AFSCME 2980 (Minnesota State Agricultural Employees)
AFSCME 3142 (Minnesota Public Safety)
AFSCME 3558 (Duluth Area Non-Profits)
AFSCME 3761 (St. Louis County Attorneys/Investigators)
AFSCME 3801 (UMD Clerical/Technical)
AFSCME 3802 (Silver Bay Veterans Home)
AFSCME 3887 (N.E. MN Department of Corrections)
AFSCME 4001 (Minnesota State College & University)
American Postal Workers Union--Greater Northland Area
Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers, Grain Millers 167G
Boilermakers Lodge 647
Bricklayers & Allied Craftworkers 1
Carpenters Local 361
Cement Masons, Plasterers, Shophands 633
Communication Workers of America 7214
Duluth Federation of Teachers 692
Education Minnesota-Cloquet Teachers
Education Minnesota-Proctor Teachers
Education Minnesota-Willow River Teachers
Education Minnesota-Wrenshall Teachers
Fire Fighters 101
Hermantown Teachers Federation 1096
IBEW 31 (Utility Workers, Others)
IBEW 31 and 242 Retirees
IBEW 242 (Construction, TV, Others)
IBEW 366 (Canadian National)
Insulators 49
Ironworkers 512
Laborers 1091
Lake Superior News Guild 37008
Machinists District 165
Machinists Lodge 1575
Mailers ML-62
Minnesota News Guild/Typographical/CWA 37002
Minnesota Nurses Association
Musicians 18
National Association of Letter Carriers Branch 114
National Conference of Firemen & Oilers/SEIU 956
Office & Professional Employees 12
Office & Professional Employees 277
Operating Engineers 49
Operating Engineers 70
Painters & Allied Trades 106
Plumbers & Steamfitters 11
Roofers 96
Sheet Metal Workers 10
Stagehands 32
United Auto Workers 241
United Food & Commercial Workers 1189
University Education Association (UMD)
United Steel Workers District 11
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Member--North East Area Labor Council
By Mark Gruenberg  
PAI Staff Writer

The new owner of the Upper Big Branch coal mine in West Virginia, where 29 miners died in an April 5, 2010 explosion, agreed Dec. 6 to pay a record $210 million settlement for the disaster, including $46.5 million to the dead miners’ families. The United Mine Workers union, who represented workers during the federal probe of the blast, welcomed the largest mining disaster settlement ever but criticized lack of prosecution of Massey Coal Co., or the new owner, Alpha, for disregarding safety.

The settlement was announced as the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) released its definitive report on the explosion and fire that killed the miners — and placed all the blame on a corporate culture at Massey that ignored safety, or worse.

Massey “placed workplace production over safety,” Labor Secretary Hilda Solis said. She added the settlement should send the message to the mining industry that safety comes first.

“The 29 miners who perished at UBB died in a massive coal dust explosion that started as a methane ignition,” MSHA said. “The physical conditions that led to it were the result of a series of basic safety violations at UBB and were entirely preventable. Massey disregarded the resulting hazards. While violations of particular safety standards led to the conditions that caused the explosion, the unlawful policies and practices implemented by Massey were the root cause of this tragedy. Evidence accumulated...demonstrates Massey promoted and enforced a workplace culture that valued production over safety, including practices calculated to allow it to conduct mining operations in violation of the law.”

Massey repeatedly, systematically and intentionally avoided obeying safety standards, did everything it could to thwart investigators and intimidated miners into not disclosing hazards for fear of losing their jobs, MSHA said. There were four years’ worth of safety and health violations at Upper Big Branch before the blast, MSHA said.

The Massey blast led to revelations about a company safety culture that was clearly calculated to allow it to conduct mining operations in violation of the law. That means “neither Massey nor Alpha admit to any criminal wrongdoing, and U.S. attorney has agreed not to pursue criminal charges against them,” Solis added. “Although this agreement is significant, it in no way absolves any individuals responsible for this terrible tragedy of their criminal liability. We will continue to cooperate with the U.S. attorney’s office to ensure that the responsible parties will be brought to justice.”

MSHA issued “12 citations and orders” to Massey for actions “contributory to the cause of the accident, and nine of those violations were assessed as flagrant, which carry the highest possible penalties,” said agency administrator Joe Main, a former Mine Workers safety and health specialist. MSHA also issued 357 citations and orders to Performance Coal and Massey that did not contribute directly to the explosion, including 11 assessed as flagrant. Each violation carries a $142,684 fine.

MSHA’s report notes that 12 citations and orders were assessed as flagrant, which carry the highest possible penalties, said agency administrator Joe Main, a former Mine Workers safety and health specialist. MSHA also issued 357 citations and orders to Performance Coal and Massey that did not contribute directly to the explosion, including 11 assessed as flagrant. Each violation carries a $142,684 fine.

May you have a healthy and prosperous new year!

Left to right (top row): Sean Quinn, Stephanie Balmer, Jim Peterson, Jim Balmer  
(bottom row): Bob Falsani, Ronny Reindeer, Bill Thompson & Eric Beyer

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