

Vocational Instructor

Local 4200A ~ AFT, AFTCT, & AFL-CIO



**"It Pays
To Be Taught
By a Vo-Tech
Teacher"**

Volume MMXVIII Issue 4

April 2017

The Ways We Engage *By Ed Leavy, SVFT President*

Samuel Gompers, founder of the AFL, famously said, "If it isn't in the union book it doesn't exist." This perspective is why in the past unions traditionally focus on policing the contract, defending members facing discipline, and negotiating contracts; all those issues are within "the union book." Of course, those issues are important and we pay a great deal of attention to them. However, the reason I dislike Gompers' quote is we have a great number of members who work hard every day, never experience the discipline process, and rarely have a cause to review the contract. Hence, the union's role cannot be based on the contract alone; there must be more to a union. Everyone has social and work-related issues they feel strongly about, and thankfully, members are looking to the union as a vehicle through which these issues get addressed.

We are seeing this most clearly in the legislative and election realm. We have had at least a dozen members at each of the AFT CT Legislative Breakfasts so far. There, they discuss with legislators the issues that affect their lives and their careers: CTHSS budget cuts, the threat of school closings, and pending anti-worker legislation. The SVFT had over 100 canvassers during the election season, many of whom had never worked on an election before, and we clearly made a difference in a couple of very close races. A picture of Mike Furey from Prince door-knocking with his daughters was shared nationally by AFT. On March 24th, we were everywhere at the Legislative Office Building. Jamie Lamitie, John Pascone, Leslie Schleipman, and Tom Viola joined Paul Angelucci in providing testimony to the Appropriations Committee; none had ever given testimony before, but all said they would do it again. Approximately 100 SVFT members, including a bus from Bullard-Havens, showed up to support their colleagues and attend a rally protesting 96 (!) anti-worker bills. They saw the legislators ask questions and discuss topics during the public hearing. They saw the level of attack we face on our health care, our pension, and our rights. They left wanting to do more.

Engaging in issues cannot only be about politics. We must also engage members by addressing issues that affect their work. For example, last month, four Guidance Coordinators came to the SVFT office to discuss concerns about the implementation of the admissions policy. After hearing about the policy at the recent labor-management meeting, we decided to meet with some veteran coordinators to hear their concerns directly. That same day, another group of teachers were in the office discussing scheduling problems created by the ALEKS math program. Many of these members had not been to the SVFT office before. It was a great day. The best way for leadership to help find solutions is it to involve members in conversations about the issues that are important to them.

The union cannot be just an insurance policy and a bargaining agent. It must be a voice in the classroom, a voice in the principal's office, a voice in Central Office, a voice in the legislature, and a voice in our communities. We are involved in educational issues because we are educators, political issues because we are State workers, and labor issues because we are union members. As more people step forward with concerns and want to work with other teachers throughout the system, the greater the range of issues we address. We rarely ask in the office anymore, "Is this a union issue?" The SVFT is your union, so you should have a voice and decide which issues should be address.

Labor History: The Chicago Unemployed Rebellion

By Ed Leavy

It is counterintuitive to consider a movement of unemployed people as labor history, but during the Great Depression of the 1930s' unemployment reached such staggering levels that the term "working people" had to cover even people who were not working. With over a quarter of all people out of work and the specter of joblessness hanging over everyone's head, unemployment was a motivating factor for everyone.

At the time, few cities had any formal assistance for the unemployed. More than today, unemployment was considered shameful; not having a job was considered synonymous with not wanting to work. Even as the Depression hit and unemployment spiked, President Herbert Hoover stated unemployment figures should be discounted because they "had to list the shiftless citizen, who had no intention of living by work, as unemployed." By denying the extent and the cause of the problem, President Hoover could maintain there was no need to address it (Hoover handled the early stages of the Depression so badly his Republican party didn't win the Presidency again for two decades). The few relief agencies that did exist treated the unemployed with contempt, often making them wait for weeks before giving them even the most meager assistance; their role seemed to be to make asking for relief so shameful that no one would ask for it.

The widespread unemployment, and the hunger that went with it, changed the dynamic. With so many of their neighbors also unemployed, people began blaming the system – not themselves – for their situation. Chicago, which had 40% unemployment, is a microcosm for what happened throughout the country. Public demonstrations became common; on March 6, 1930, the Communist Party called for a nationwide rally of unemployed people, and 4000 Chicagoans marched through downtown to demand a meeting with the mayor. Relief agencies, often used to dealing capriciously with servile people asking for aid, found themselves thrust in an entirely new situation. One contemporary account described it: "Hearing that some family had been refused relief or that some particularly needy case was being denied immediate attention, groups would gather and march on the relief stations, demanding action. Social workers in many of the offices, having intimate knowledge of the misery behind such demands, hesitated to call the police. . . . Hence at first the relief offices met the demands of the demonstrators, giving Mrs. Jones the food basket which she should have had a week earlier. With success, demonstrations of this sort increased in number and size." In 1932, Chicago had 566 demonstrations of the unemployed.

Demonstrations also became more organized. On January 11, 1932 demonstrations were held at every relief station in the city. Later, 5000 men who had been forced into homeless shelters marched on relief headquarters with a list of demands, including three meals a day and free healthcare. Their demands were granted. These and other protests caused city officials to greatly increase the aid they provided. Newspapers, which had previously blamed the protest on Communist agitators (and in truth, the Communists were the primary organizing force in the early years), began covering the demonstrations more sympathetically as public opinion began siding with the protestors. Even businessmen and politicians, concerned where these disruptions would lead, began organizing charity efforts.

Of course, with cities like Chicago taking on more of the financial responsibility and their tax base already shrunk from the Depression, municipalities and states neared bankruptcy. The election of Franklin Roosevelt and New Deal Democrats in 1932 brought the federal government into the process of trying to solve the problems of unemployment. Public works programs put people back to work; the Merritt Parkway was largely built through these programs. The government created structures to alleviate the hardships of the depression – these programs are largely under attack today – but it was the refusal of the unemployed individuals to continue blaming themselves and accepting their situation that impelled change. They stood up, they stood together, they organized, and they refused to accept the status quo. It is the only way change ever happens

Information for this article came primarily from Poor People's Movements by Frances Fox Pivens and Richard Cloward. Thanks to AFT Connecticut's Director of Organizing Eric Borlaug, my great friend and radical conscience, for providing me the book. I strongly recommend it.



Rally Day

Friday, March 24 was a big day at the Legislative Office Building as the Appropriations Committee held public hearings on 96 anti-worker, anti-union bills. These bills ranged from reducing the cost of living adjustment in retirement to capping arbitration awards at 2% to removing pension and healthcare from collective bargaining. Five SVFT members provided testimony against these bills, including Leslie Schleipman and Jamie Lamitie. A 5:00 rally drew well over 1000 people despite the rainy weather; the SVFT had an estimated 100 people there, the biggest turnout of any AFT CT local. It was a long day, but an enjoyable and productive one; it is now considered unlikely any of these bills will get out of committee. Thanks to everyone who took part!



Three Ways to Save

CAR RENTAL

Up to 25% discount on car rental deals with Avis, Budget, Hertz, Dollar, Thrifty & Payless.

CREDIT CARD

Several credit card choices, all with competitive rates and U.S.-based customer service, designed to meet the needs of union members.

MORTGAGE

The Union Plus mortgage program makes buying or refinancing a home easy for you and your children.

*Certain restrictions, limitations, and qualifications apply to these grants. Additional information and eligibility criteria can be obtained at UnionPlus.org/Assistance. Credit approval required. Terms and conditions apply. The Union Plus Credit Cards are issued by Capital One, N.A., pursuant to a license from MasterCard International Incorporated. Capital One N.A. is not responsible for the contents of this message and/or any other third party products/services mentioned. The MasterCard Brand Mark is a registered trademark of MasterCard International Incorporated.

UnionPlus.org/aftbenefits



Mea Culpa

Last month we published the annual Years of Service recognition. The process of updating and correcting that list is quite labor-intensive, and we make an occasional mistake. We apologize to Cecelia Shepard, the General Education Department Head who has been with us for 36 years, and Mike Daigle, the Ellis Masonry Department Head for 29 years. We thank them both for their outstanding years of service in the CTHSS.

Thank you!

Vocational Instructor

*is the monthly newsletter of the
State Vocational Federation of Teachers*

President.....Ed Leavy
Vice President.....Paul Angelucci
Executive Union Rep.....Bob Riccitelli.
Treasurer.....Emily Lozinak
Secretary.....Greg Beyer
**Newsletter Editor and
Office Manager.....Lindsay Hochadel**

439 Main Street
Yalesville, CT 06492
(203) 793-7996
800-378-8020
Fax# 203-793-7943
<http://svft.ct.aft.org>

Happy Easter!



SVFT Mission Statement

The SVFT is an organization of professional educators that promotes excellence through the mutual adherence to policies, documents, and procedures negotiated with the CTHSS. We work to guarantee that the contract is followed and positive working conditions are maintained. This organization shall be to provide a safe and positive teaching environment for all by:

1. Maintaining the integrity of the contract, the Vocational Technical High School System, and the solidarity of the union
2. Ensuring all members are protected by the contract and equipped with the tools and knowledge necessary to make them successful
3. Protecting the jobs of our members and strengthening our system
4. Providing members opportunities to further their education and receive quality professional development
5. Responding quickly to the emerging changes to the workplace and technological challenges
6. Handling all interactions with fairness and integrity
7. Striving for productive, open communication between the SVFT leadership and our membership
8. Building and improving relationships with our union affiliates and local labor councils