

Vocational Instructor

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



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

Volume MMXIX Issue 1

September 2019

Building Relationships

By Ed Leavy, SVFT President

The SVFT leadership was given the opportunity to address the new teachers during Orientation this August. "New teachers" is a relative term; some of them had been teaching since October and their orientation to the system had happened live in front of a class full of students. We spoke for half an hour to a group of 65 teachers about the SVFT and the role our union plays in the work life for our teachers and the educational lives of our students.

The theme of the orientation was "Building Relationships," which is appropriate given the system's emphasis on Marzano strategies. Yet after the summer we had gone through, it was hard not to find the irony in the theme. We had been told at the end of last year that a staffing analysis showed that there were several situations in which the school had an overage in one area and a nearby school had vacancies in the same area. We were told the system would use administrative transfers to address several of these issues – the numbers we were told varied from 16 to 27. I really dislike administrative transfers, because people's professional and personal life can be disrupted without them having much recourse. It would be impossible, however, not to agree that situations like these are exactly why the system negotiated administrative transfer language. If, for example, Bullard-Havens is short a math teacher and Platt has an extra one for some reason, it makes sense to solve the problem through transfer rather than hiring someone for Bullard-Havens and then laying off the Platt teacher and begin the layoff and recall carousel. We often say that we work for a system and not a school precisely because of situations like that.

Of course, no one feels that way while teaching. Teachers buy shirts with the name of the school on them, not the system (which is good, because school names don't change but the system rebrands itself once a decade). The connection to our colleagues and our students happens at the school level; no matter how much we like people we meet on steering committees and such, those aren't the people with whom we go through our professional life. Displacing people from their school needs to be done judiciously. It's why the contract states, "Whenever an administrative transfer is necessary..."; the language recognizes that these transfers need to be done for necessity, not expediency or personality differences. Thus, while we understood and prepared for people being transferred to fill scheduling holes and eliminate surplus teachers in a department, we did not imagine that many of the transfers would not be like that, but instead be "trades," in which for example two science teachers just switched schools. It was similar to my fantasy football team last year when I traded Melvin Ingram for James Connor, except Melvin Ingram did not have to deal with childcare issues based on the longer drive and different start time, or saying goodbye to colleagues who have become a second family, or walking away from that student for whom he was a lifeline for three years. Melvin Ingram didn't know and didn't care that a fantasy manager traded him; it has nothing to do with him. That's not true for our teachers; this is their lives being disrupted.

Since becoming an officer, I have worked with four Superintendents, and each one has had a summer in which he or she decided that multiple administrative transfers would help solve a lot of problems. It never works, and it isn't tried again until the next Superintendent arrives. To his credit, Jeff Wihbey was willing to have the discussion about these transfers with us, and he rescinded some to them himself. Others were rescinded in our contractually mandated hearing. Unfortunately, other people were moved against their will and are now in new schools wondering why they should build new relationships with students and colleagues if those relationships can be broken at any point. If the system is promoting building relationships with its new teachers, if building relationships with people in the school and in the community matters, then the system is responsible to nurture and strengthen those relationships. At the very least, it should respect them and break them only when necessary. That did not happen this summer.

Labor History: The Bread and Roses Strike

By Ed Leavy

The Lawrence Mill Strike of 1912 is one of the most famous strikes in American history. It featured legendary union figures such as Big Bill Haywood and Smiling Joe Ettor, a sensational murder trial, the Wobblies, a mass children's exodus which ended when mothers and small children were imprisoned, and a memorable name for the strike. It also exposed wretched living conditions of the mill workers and opened up a battle between unions that had long-term implications on the labor movement.

Ironically, the strike began in response to a Massachusetts state law that shortened the work week from fifty-six to fifty-four hours. The mill used the law to justify a cut in wages, although their workers were already among the lowest in the city; mill workers earned between \$3 and \$6 a week, while the town garbage men earned \$12. The mill argued that the wage cuts were necessary to compete with mills from other states that did not face the new "shortened" week. The workers, mostly recent immigrants who were barely literate in English, seemed not to understand that their wages would be reduced until they received their checks with the new rate. Immediately, long-simmering anger erupted toward company owner Billy Wood, who lived in a huge mansion in a neighboring town and had imposed a series of strict rules to increase production, and the town leaders who bragged about their modern industrial city while allowing its working class to live in subhuman conditions. The tenements where the workers lived were unbearably crowded – some areas had 600 people living per acre – and the lack of sanitation led to diseases that made death among the children commonplace.

A wildcat strike began; workers refused to return to the mill and damaged company property. Billy Wood pouted, viewing the strike as a personal betrayal and refusing to discuss the workers' demands of a 15% pay increase and overtime pay. What the strike had in passion it lacked in organization, however, until Smiling Joe Ettor from the Industrial Workers of the World arrived. The IWW, better known as the Wobblies, was renowned for its political radicalism and its defense of the First Amendment as opposed to its discipline in labor action, but Ettor turned out to be perfect for Lawrence. Ettor convinced the workers to maintain a nonviolent approach; the militia had arrived to guard the mills, and many strikes during that time period were lost after violent outbreaks left workers killed or in jail. He also noted that the company had long benefited from the ethnic and language divisions among the workers, so he formed a counsel in which every group was represented to ensure the strikers and their families could eat.

Two events transformed the strike from a local event to national news. A skirmish between militiamen and workers led to two deaths, Eighteen-year-old John Rami was stabbed to death by one of the troop's bayonets; the marshal refused to arrest the killer because "you can't arrest a soldier for doing his job." The marshal had no such qualms about arresting Ettor for the murder of millworker Anna LoPizzo, who was shot to death during the battle. Although Ettor had not been in the area when the murder occurred and had consistently preached nonviolence, he was charged as an "accessory before the fact" because he had supposedly incited the demonstration.

With Ettor in jail, the most famous Wobbly, Big Bill Haywood, arrived. His presence drew even more attention to what was now being called the Bread and Roses strike ("Bread and Roses" is a poem by John Oppenheimer; how the poem got connected to the strike is not clear to me). He drew more attention to the strike by starting the "Children's Exodus." With food for strikers now in short supply, the Wobblies asked sympathizers throughout the Northeast to take in area children. The response was overwhelming, and on February 10th the press descended on Lawrence to photograph children being put on trains by their parents and sent to strangers who could better provide for them. The Wobblies then asked for more volunteers to take in an additional 1000 "strike waifs." This time, the town leaders decided they could afford no more bad press for their "model city." Police prevented the children from boarding trains at gunpoint, and mothers and children were sent to jail. The motive was ostensibly to prevent the Wobblies from manipulating the parents into giving up their children, but the hypocrisy was palatable. The establishment had no concern for the children when they died from their deplorable living conditions or had to quit school to work in the mills.

Not surprisingly, pictures of jailed mothers and children did not help the press coverage for Billy Wood and the town leaders. The company agreed to negotiate, and the workers received paid overtime, increased wages between 5%-25%, and improved working conditions. Despite Woods' original fears, rather than take advantage of the changes in Lawrence mills in other states quickly followed suit; they were afraid of similar actions among their workers. The aftermath of the strike was less successful for the labor movement. Ettor's murder trial resulted in a not guilty verdict despite the fact that the prosecution demanded that during the trial Ettor and his codefendants be locked in a cage in the courtroom to prevent further trouble; the legal costs, however, seriously hurt the already cash-strapped Wobblies. Inter-union battles also prevented the victory in the strike from spurring further growth in the labor movement. *(Continued on page 3)*

The United Textile Workers, worried that the more-radical IWW might make further inroads among mill workers, began a campaign to discredit the Wobblies. A group of anarchists with ties to the Wobblies marched in a Labor Day parade under the banner “Arise, Slaves of the world: . . . No God, No Country . . .” Both employers and the UTW used the banner to discredit the IWW, and their retreat into irrelevance began. The workers in Lawrence had moved forward, but the rest of labor did not move with them.

Information for this article is taken primarily from There is Power in a Union by Philip Dray. This article was in the newsletter several years ago, but the strike was back in the news when a current Presidential candidate announced her candidacy in Lawrence in honor of the strike. It therefore seemed relevant to run the article again. Plus, the start of the school year is busy and I didn't finish my other one in time.

Issues to Start the Year

Every year begins with new policies (or new enforcement of old policies), new initiatives, and new areas of focus. Here are some of the issues that have risen to the surface this year:

- Teacher absenteeism will be an area of focus this year. The Department of Administrative Services has policies on employee absenteeism, and the CTECS plans to follow them closely (our teacher absentee rates last year were far above state average. We will be discussing possible reasons for that at Labor-Management). Administrators have the right to discuss absences with a teacher after even three absences. They do not have the right to demand a doctor's note for every absence, which seems to be how a few of them are taking it. The contract is clear: for absences of under five days, an administrator can ask for a note only if they suspect abuse of sick time and are willing to take on “the burden of proof” for that accusation. If you are asked for a doctor's note for under five days, contact your building rep or an officer. Superintendent Wihbey was clear during his school meetings; the intention of this policy is support, not punishment.

- We were able to get a moratorium on a somewhat related policy change. The district announced a policy that PL days after weekends, days off, etc. would have to be approved by an Assistant Superintendent. First day results showed that there was far more questioning about the reason for the PL than we could accept (the contract states that PL is for “personal business that cannot be conducted outside the workday.” We have always maintained that is sufficient reason). We will be discussing this policy change at either Labor-Management or as part of more formal impact bargaining, but for now we will be operating under the policy that has existed for years. We appreciate Mr. Wihbey and the leadership team taking our concerns seriously and placing a moratorium on the change pending further discussions.

- Out of state travel for PD has always been difficult to get approved; for years, it was denied unilaterally. Now it is sometimes approved, but it is a byzantine process that requires signatures from multiple people who are always busy. Anyone who is applying for out-of-state travel for PD should submit the form at least six-eight weeks prior to the departure date.

- We've received multiple questions about the 3% contribution to retiree medical insurance. For people who were hired for the start of the year in 2009, those payments should be ceasing now; for those hired between 2005-2009, it will be very soon. On our paystub, there is now a “retiree healthcare start date.” Payments should stop ten years from that date (fifteen years if you started after July 1, 2017), unless there was unpaid leave time that must be made up. For us old-timers – people who started before 2005 – the start date was July 2013. We are vested for retiree healthcare if we take a normal or early retirement, even if the ten years of payment are not complete. Simple, isn't it? Anyone who believes the start date is wrong should contact the office.

- The SVFT has canceled our post office box, because it was unnecessarily expensive given its use. Any mail to us goes to 439 Main Street, Wallingford 06492.

- Finally, some good news: after a long three-year break, we are getting a raise this year. It's 3.5% plus a step, so everyone not on top step will make approximately 6.75% more than last year. The 2017 SEBAC agreement had a lot of concessions in it, but now we are receiving significant (though overdue) wage increases, and we were able to protect our healthcare and pensions. We watch too many of our friends and family members struggle with ballooning healthcare costs, limited coverage, and an inability to ever retire with dignity. State employees helped save the State billions of dollars without diminishing the quality of our benefits. It is a great example of how collective bargaining can work for everyone.

What's Happening in Wallingford

- We are welcoming 93(!) new members from the start of last year. Every single new hire has joined the SVFT, which is testament to the reputation of the SVFT. As importantly, it shows the tireless work Paul Angelucci has put in contacting new hires before they even start, often knocking on their doors at home, and talking to them about the system and the SVFT. No other union anywhere has had the success we have had with new members in a post-Janus environment; nobody else has Paul.
- Bob Riccitelli spent much of his summer resolving issues left over from last year, and the rest starting to address issues for this year. The SVFT and HR have traditionally waived timelines over the summer, but if he doesn't address them in real time it is like returning from school after a week of jury duty and finding 187 emails that need to be answered.
- The SVFT has several members who are running for office this year. Anyone who is running for a municipal position should let us know; we are always happy to go knock doors for our members. Joe DeLucia from Windham and Chris Mongeau from Vinal are both running for city council in their towns and were interviewed by AFT CT's LPAC; we still have time to schedule interviews for candidates who want AFT CT's endorsement.
- We have made sure at least one officer is attending every school on the Superintendent's fall tour. They have gone very well so far. The building reps are bringing up areas of concern with him. As always, the visits to the classes and trades are inspirational and impressive. Let's hope the good start to the year is a sign of a terrific school year.

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>



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 CTEC. 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