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Strikes have been in the news a lot lately, but it’s not just a local phenomenon.

Despite low unemployment, steady growth, number of striking workers hits 35-year high

By Michael Moore
Union Advocate editor

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(Continued on Page 5)

Unions cheer U.S. House vote to restore worker voice on the job

By Michael Moore
Union Advocate editor

The U.S. House of Representatives last month passed a bill to strengthen protections for workers trying to join together in a union.

The Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act would create new penalties for employers who illegally intimidate or fire workers for organizing a union. It would repeal state right-to-work laws, protect the right to strike and give workers new tools for bargaining a first contract swiftly.

A top legislative priority for organized labor since Democrats took control of the House a year ago, the PRO Act would be the most consequential labor-law reform in 80 years – if it weren’t dead on arrival in the Republican-controlled Senate.

Still, the House vote affirms that labor-law reform remains a key piece of Democrats’ election-year agenda.

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka called the PRO Act “the most significant piece of legislation that will come before Congress this year,” and said the nation’s largest labor federation would use the vote to draw a line in the sand.

(Continued on Page 10)

In This Issue


PRO Act

Both members of Congress from the east metro, Reps. Betty McCollum (L) and Angie Craig, voted for the PRO Act.
Go Figure

25,300
American workers who joined major strikes – those involving 1,000 or more people – or work stoppages in 2017

425,500
American workers who joined major strikes in 2019, down from 485,200 the previous year

237,400
Teachers who joined strikes in North Carolina, West Virginia, Los Angeles, Chicago, Kentucky and Oregon last year.

Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics, epi.org

After 37 years of syndicated solidarity, labor cartoonists draw their service to a close

By Michael Moore
Union Advocate editor

Since 1983, Gary Huck and Mike Konopacki have been supplying labor publications from coast to coast, including The Union Advocate, with cartoons drawn specifically for union members. But faced with dwindling subscription rates, the cartoonists are folding their syndication service, effective this month.

Huck and Konopacki won't stop drawing. Fans will be able to view new work online at huckkonopacki-cartoons.com. Still, losing the cartoon syndicate is a sobering sign of the times for both the labor movement and print media.

Huck and Konopacki share Wisconsin roots. In the late 70s, Huck was working as the cartoonist for a labor weekly in Racine. Konopacki, fresh out of the University of Wisconsin, was drawing for a syndication service based on the East Coast, as well as a publication put out by striking newspaper workers in Madison.

Certain he wanted to make a career of cartooning but uncertain how to go about it, Konopacki drafted letters seeking advice from editorial cartoonists at several major newspapers. He got one response, from Tom Curtis of the Milwaukee Sentinel.

"He was a very conservative Nixonite," Konopacki laughed. "But he was a very sweet guy. Maybe talking to a lefty cartoonist doing anti-war cartoons for the student newspaper was his Christian charity or something, but he became kind of a mentor."

Huck, it turned out, had befriended Curtis, too, and in 1979 he introduced the two rabble-rousers at a cartoonists' convention in Phoenix. "I remember it was about 300 degrees, and we were walking to the final dinner," Huck said. "Mike didn't have a sport coat on, and Tom Curtis got very upset, so Mike had to go back to his room to get one."

Four years later, the two hatched a plan to syndicate their work together, launching Huck-Konopacki Cartoons with about 30 subscribers from the labor press.

Subscriptions grew steadily, peaking at about 120 publications, until the early 2000s. By then, Konopacki said, "not only was print dying out, but you had unions themselves merging or just dying out."

Before closing this year, the syndication service counted five subscribing publications, including two from Minnesota. Of course, much has changed since 1983, when union members made up more than 20% of the U.S. workforce and newspapers employed hundreds of editorial cartoonists. Today, union members make up about 10% of the workforce, and about 25 editorial cartoonists remain at daily publications.

"It was a double whammy," Konopacki said.

In some respects, it’s impressive the two cartoonists made a go of it as long as they did. Their cartoons are prickly and often political. Their wit comes with a healthy dose of righteous anger. And they haven't shied away from making organized labor, its leaders or its friends in public office the target of their work.

"There’s a risk to using political cartoons in your union’s publication," Huck said. "There’s a risk of blowback, and a lot of people in the labor movement prefer not to be confronted. Mike and I would hear it a lot: ‘We don’t need criticism from within, we get enough criticism from without.’"

Attacks from without have labor on the ropes now, but renewed interest in unions, particularly among younger Americans, offers hope for a revival of the movement’s fortunes. Will a vibrant labor press, whether in print or online, be reborn too?

"We’re certainly capable of doing the job," Huck said. "There’s just no place for the job to be done. But I don’t doubt for a second that art will be part of whatever the labor movement becomes."

Humor will, too, Konopacki added.

"You have to make fun of bosses," he said. "They hate it, and it’s legally protected by the First Amendment. You have to use humor to try to take away some of their power."

"You can’t build a movement being grim all the time."
The annual Nellie Stone Johnson Scholarship Dinner is in its 33rd year of supporting educational opportunities for minority union members and their families.

The dinner will take place March 19, beginning at 5:30 p.m., at the DoubleTree by Hilton in Bloomington. The event brings together higher education supporters, union activists, legislators and students to celebrate both the recipients of the scholarship and its namesake, a groundbreaking civil rights activist and labor leader.

The deadline to purchase tickets to the event is March 13. Learn more about the event and the scholarship at www.nelliestone.org.

**Pancakes to build worker power**

CTUL will hold its Annual Pancake Brunch Fundraiser on Saturday, March 28. Proceeds will help the Twin Cities worker center sustain its organizing efforts among low-wage workers in the Twin Cities.

The event will take place from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, 2730 E. 31st St., Minneapolis. CTUL will collect donations on a sliding scale – from $5 to $15 – at the door.

Families and children are welcome.

Worker centers give people the tools they need to fight back against wage theft, unsafe conditions and other employer abuses in sectors of the economy that are difficult for unions to organize. CTUL is among the most successful worker centers in the country, leading campaigns to recoup lost wages and, most recently, expose labor trafficking in the nonunion construction industry. Learn more at ctul.net.

**Work construction? Yes She Can!**

The North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters will host a one-day introduction to carpentry for women ages 17 and up at the union’s St. Paul training center April 4.

“*Yes She Can*” is an opportunity to get hands-on training with carpentry tools, talk with contractors about career opportunities and network with tradeswomen who are earning family-sustaining wages and benefits in the industry.

Participants must register for the event in advance. To learn more, contact Barb Pecks at bpecks@ncsrrc.org, or view the event on the union's Facebook page, facebook.com/NCSSRCC.

**Union-led campaign to stop hospital cuts gets support from council**

Standing alongside nurses from Bethesda and St. Joseph’s at a City Hall press conference, three St. Paul City Council members called on Fairview to reconsider steep cuts at the downtown hospitals and, instead, partner with the community in preserving care for St. Paul’s urban core.

“The services, the jobs and what it means for our community – we cannot do without them in downtown,” said Rebecca Noecker, whose second ward includes St. Joseph’s.

Fairview confirmed in December it is weighing several proposals to cut costs, and permanently closing St. Joe’s, the state’s oldest hospital, is among them. At nearby Bethesda, Fairview already has moved to cut the facility’s admissions capacity from 90 to 50 beds.

Together, the proposed cuts amount to an “abandonment of the central city,” Council Member Jane Prince said, adding that Fairview executives “have to answer” for “a very serious decision that they are making to walk away from downtown St. Paul.”

To that end, Prince, Noecker and Dai Thao, whose first ward includes Bethesda, introduced a resolution to the full council opposing the hospital cuts, and demanding Fairview be more transparent and inclusive of community leaders in whatever service reductions play out at the facilities.

Council members did not mask their frustration with Fairview’s failure to engage community leaders before announcing the proposed cuts. Thao said he learned what was happening from media reports in December.

“This is not acceptable,” Thao said. “When health care corporations make decisions without the community being a part of it, we know it’s not about delivering care. We know it’s about delivering profits.”

Noecker acknowledged “systemic issues” facing Fairview, like limited access to quality health insurance and mental-health treatment, but said Fairview executives have so far ignored offers to work collaboratively toward solutions that benefit the provider and the community.

“We are all standing around holding this safety net together, and we cannot have one of our critical partners unilaterally drop their side of the safety net and walk away from that conversation,” Noecker said. “We all need to stay in it together to solve these issues.”

The Minnesota Nurses Association, which represents nurses at both Bethesda and St. Joseph’s, has begun negotiations with Fairview to ensure layoffs are handled according to the union contract, MNA President Mary Turner said.

But Turner warned the cuts at Bethesda, one of only two long-term rehabilitation hospitals in Minnesota, won’t just be felt by hospital staff. Closing St. Joseph’s, which devotes 100 of its beds to inpatient mental-health care and serves the city’s high-poverty neighborhoods, would expand the ripple effect even further.

“There is no way we can do without Bethesda and no way we can do without those 100 psychiatric beds in St. Joe’s,” Turner said.

Nurses questioned Fairview’s decision to put care for the most vulnerable members of the community on the chopping block when the nonprofit health system sits on hundreds of millions of dollars in hedge fund and other financial investments – and recently raised CEO James Hereford’s pay to $913 an hour.

“Health care is not about if you have income or not,” Bethesda nurse Antoinette Fiagbedzi said. “When you care about people, you don’t think about their income. You don’t think of whether they have insurance or not. You do it out of love.”

**Let’s get together, union members!**

The St. Paul Regional Labor Federation’s local labor assemblies bring working people and retirees together to exchange ideas and take action on issues that matter most in their communities. Assembly meetings are open to all union members who live or work in our four-county area.
THE TREASURE IS REAL!

Over the past four years St. Paul Federal members have won more than $47,500 through our WINcentive® savings program.

Plus, our WINcentive® savings account features a rate FIVE TIMES higher than our already high, standard savings account rates.

### 2020 PRIZE DRAWINGS

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WINcentive® Savings (offered through the Minnesota Credit Union Network) is available exclusively to Credit Union members. As of 02/22/2020, the Annual Percentage Yield of the WINcentive® savings account is 0.50%. Minimum balance and deposit account requirements apply. Penalties may apply for early withdrawals. Earn an entry into the drawing for each $25 month-over-month increase in your balance, limited to 4 entries per month. Age restrictions apply. Winning one prize category (monthly, quarterly, or annual) does not disqualify a participant from winning a different prize category within the same year. Drawings will occur on or about the 10th of each month, or the next business day, for the previous month and/or quarter end. Prize amounts and number of winners are subject to change. Actual odds of winning vary depending on the number of accounts participating in the program. Membership eligibility restrictions apply. See St. Paul Federal Credit Union for full terms and conditions.
Members of the St. Paul Federation of Educators last month voted overwhelmingly in favor of authorizing a strike.

The vote means 3,600 teachers, educational assistants, licensed professionals and other staff at 65-plus St. Paul Public School facilities could put up picket lines as early as this month, unless the district agrees to SPFE’s student-centered proposals.

“Nobody wants to go on strike,” the union’s executive board wrote in an e-mail to members announcing the Feb. 20 vote results. “That is why we’ve spent nearly a year engaging with the district on our student-centered proposals and on wages and benefits for our members.

“However, we refuse to accept the district’s position that our students and educators already have access to all of the supports they need to thrive.”

Talks between SPS and SPFE began last May. Educators offered 31 proposals to address their students’ needs, with priorities like increasing mental-health supports for their students, reducing special-ed caseloads and expanding family access to multilingual services.

The district refused even to respond to most proposals, and the sides entered mediation in December.

Rank-and-file union members signaled strong support for their bargaining team in voting Feb. 20. About two-thirds of all members voted, according to SPFE, and 82% voted to authorize a strike.

Meanwhile, SPFE held an information session for parents to discuss what its bargaining proposals are—and why educators are willing to strike for them.

“SPFE is dedicated to building the schools that St. Paul students deserve, and the profession that St. Paul educators deserve, and we will continue to fight for those principles,” union leaders said in the e-mail. “We hope that you’ll stand with us.”

SPFE, Local 28 of the American Federation of Teachers, organized the nation’s first teacher strike in 1946. Union members successfully fought not only for pay increases, but a more equitable allocation of school resources and new investments in school facilities.

Supporters called the 1946 campaign a “Strike for Better Schools,” and although St. Paul teachers haven’t gone on strike since then, they have carried on their predecessors’ “common-good” approach to bargaining.

In its last round of negotiations two years ago, SPFE nearly went on strike over its demands for more school nurses, librarians and social workers, smaller class sizes and expanded preschool and family-engagement programs.

— Michael Moore, UA editor

TAs reach deal with St. Paul schools, win new access to training

About 750 members of Teamsters Local 320 who work as teaching assistants in the St. Paul Public Schools are voting on a proposed two-year contract with the district. The sides finalized terms of a tentative agreement last month.

TAs targeted more access to professional development as their No. 1 priority in negotiations, and they refused to give in demand as bargaining dragged on for more than eight months.

Finally, the district agreed to language making professional development available to TAs whenever it closes schools to offer trainings for its teachers.

The current school calendar includes seven such days, Local 320 representative Josh Loahr said.

“That’s a win not just for TAs, who assist early-education teachers and work individually with students who need extra help. It’s also a win for St. Paul students and the district as a whole.

“We want to learn how to serve our students better,” Dallas Robertson, a TA and member of Local 320’s bargaining team, said.

Previously, TAs had to seek out training opportunities on their own time, Robertson added, “even though we work with students all day, every school day.”

The district’s negotiations with Local 320 took place as the district also negotiated contracts with the St. Paul Federation of Educators, covering about 3,600 district employees.

Although Local 320’s last contract with the district raised the minimum wage for TAs to $15 an hour, they remain among the district’s lowest-paid employees. But the new contract, Loahr said, would give more TAs access to the trainings they need to climb into higher pay lanes.

“The real meat of our wage scale is based on career advancement,” Loahr said. “If TAs take professional-development courses, they can earn a lane advancement, which means more money. But because TAs have never been offered those courses, 46% of our (bargaining unit) is still at the first lane.”

The proposed contract would make it possible for a TA who takes advantage of every training day on the calendar to advance a full lane in just one year. That could translate into a wage premium of $1.50 to $3 per hour.

The proposed contract also includes wage increases of 1.5% retroactive to July 2019 and 2% in November 2020.

After a meeting Feb. 26 to review the contract, Local 320 members will take a ratification vote by mail. Ballots will be counted March 6.

— Michael Moore, UA editor

School psychologists Desiree McReynolds (L) and Letitia Olson, both members of SPFE, put their concerns onto picket signs in preparation for a strike.

Local 320 members celebrated their tentative agreement.

Statistics show strike surge in large workplaces nationwide

(Continued from Page 1)

According to labor market statistics released by the federal government last month, the number of U.S. workers who participated in major strikes surged in 2018 and 2019.

On average over those two years, 455,500 workers joined major strikes or work stoppages involving 1,000 or more people. That’s the highest two-year average in 35 years, and more than the total number of striking workers in the previous six years combined.

The numbers suggest that, despite low unemployment and steady economic growth, the U.S. economy isn’t as great as some would claim, particularly not for working people.

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, the nation’s highest-ranking labor leader, said the strike surge reflects a “sea change” taking place nationwide.

“Working people, completely fed up with an economic and political system that does not work for us, are turning to each other and using every tool at our disposal to win a better deal,” Trumka said. “Because of the courage of every worker who said enough is enough, we all stand on a stronger foundation today. Solidarity works. And we’re just getting started.”

Despite healthy corporate profits, wage growth has been slow since the economy emerged from the Great Recession. The 2017 tax cut, which President Trump promised would raise average household wages by $4,000, has overwhelmingly benefited corporations and the wealthy instead.

Executive pay, meanwhile, continues to outpace the wages of average working people. In 2018, CEOs at the largest publicly traded companies earned, on average, 287 times more than the median employee.

Historically, worker frustration has boiled over onto the picket line when working people feel they have leverage, historian Peter Rachleff said.

The low unemployment rate likely has emboldened people to stand up for themselves and risk employer retaliation, knowing they can easily find another job. Frustration, meanwhile, has been building for decades, as gains in productivity have failed to trickle down into workers’ paychecks.

Many of this productivity growth has also emanated from a growing intensification of work, which has made life on the job harder and more stressful,” Rachleff said. “So workers are not only generating more wealth, which is being captured by their employers, but they are also just plain working harder.”

Statistics show strike surge in large workplaces nationwide
Solidarity Spotlight

By Michael Moore
Union Advocate editor

About 1,800 health care workers at 30 HealthPartners clinics in the Twin Cities were ready to strike last month to keep quality, affordable health benefits in their union contract.

Another 1,200 administrative employees at the clinics – members of a separate union – were prepared to honor the picket line.

The solidarity sent a strong message to HealthPartners, which settled a tentative agreement with health care workers, represented by SEIU Healthcare Minnesota, in the early morning hours Feb. 18, one day before the strike was set to begin.

SEIU members were scheduled to vote on the proposed contract after this issue went to press. The union's bargaining team recommended members vote “yes” on the tentative agreement.

According to the union, the deal would protect workers' high-quality health benefits and raise wages by 7.5% over three years, and it prevents certain changes to workers’ overtime pay sought by management.

"As in any negotiation, we didn’t get everything we wanted," said Nancy Wickoren, a 31-year LPN and member of the bargaining team. "But we are very proud of how our membership stood up together and fought back huge cuts and cost-shifts to health care and overtime pay that management had insisted on for months."

The SEIU bargaining unit includes registered nurses, dental hygienists, licensed practical nurses, midwives, lab techs, physicians assistants – "nearly all caregivers other than doctors," according to the union. In balloting Feb. 6, a whopping 95% of voting members OK’d a strike.

At a press conference the following day outside HealthPartners’ neuroscience facility in St. Paul, SEIU members said the contract fight was difficult but necessary to retain and attract the skilled caregivers their patients deserve.

"We’re here for our patients," said Clara Boykin, a lab tech with over 30 years of experience working at HealthPartners. "We’re here for each other."

HealthPartners demanded SEIU members absorb a greater share of their health care costs despite published reports that the health care provider brought in a record $7 billion in revenue last year and raised CEO Andrea Walsh’s pay to $2 million.

"If Andrea Walsh can give herself a $600,000 pay increase, I don’t think we’re in that much trouble," Kate Lynch, a licensed practical nurse and member of the bargaining team, said.

Kelsie Anderson, who works as an administrative secretary at a HealthPartners clinic, said her union, Office and Professional Employees Local 12, intended to file notice of members’ intent to honor the picket line.

The reason? SEIU’s fight is her fight – both now and when Local 12 begins contract negotiations later this year.

"One of the core benefits of working at HealthPartners is our health care," Anderson, Local 12’s vice president, said. "If this is happening to SEIU, we’re expecting them to do the same thing to us. If they’re slapping SEIU members in the face, they’re going to slap us in the face.

“We need to stand united.

The support of fellow union members – and the community as a whole – did not go unnoticed, SEIU member Christina Bolk, a registered nurse and member of the bargaining team, said.

“It has been truly inspiring seeing how the whole community has come together to show support to HealthPartners caregivers.”
JANITORS PLANNED STRIKE

Workers who clean corporate office space across the Twin Cities planned to begin a 24-hour strike Feb. 27, escalating their campaign for higher wages, paid sick days and a green training program.

“The cost of everything – food, gas, rent – keeps going up, but our employers are offering us an even smaller raise than our last contract and won’t move on other important issues,” veteran janitor George Mullins said. “We are united and ready to win what our families deserve.”

The strike would have put as many as 4,000 commercial janitors on picket lines outside some of the metro’s highest-profile buildings, including the IDS Tower, Capella Tower, EcoLab campus, United Health headquarters and more. Youth climate strikers and other environmental allies planned to support janitors on the picket lines.

The janitors who were poised to strike are members of Local 26 of the Service Employees International Union, which represents 8,000 workers employed by subcontractors to clean and protect buildings in the Twin Cities.

The union has been negotiating seven contracts for over three months, but progress on workers’ key demands has been elusive. Members voted Feb. 8 to authorize a strike to protest unfair labor practices by the employers, who, workers say, are stalling in negotiations and refusing to give information to workers’ bargaining team.

“We’ve been pushing for four months for fair wages, paid sick days and a green training program that will help both us as janitors and address climate change that is harming our whole planet, but all they say is ‘no’,” Local 26 member Elsa Guaman, who cleans United Health Group’s headquarters, said. “As we see corporations do better and better … we are ready to stand together in the fight for good jobs for our families … and for solutions to protect our planet for our children’s future.”

SECURITY GUARDS WIN RAISES

As their union siblings who clean Twin Cities buildings planned to strike, SEIU Local 26 members who protect many of the same buildings celebrated a tentative agreement on a new union contract, reached during late-night talks Feb. 18.

According to the union, the contract would raise wages by 14% over the next four years.

“We’re excited that we came to an agreement that helps 2,000 security officers see big raises and other gains that will help our families,” bargaining team member Dan Scoggins said, adding the security guards intend “to support the commercial janitors who have decided to strike to win what they deserve because we are all in this together.”

REFUGEES WELCOME HERE

Members of the Minnesota AFL-CIO’s executive board passed a resolution in January reaffirming the state labor federation’s support for welcoming refugees and immigrants to the state. The resolution came as states and counties were deciding whether to allow refugee resettlement, as required by a presidential executive order.

The resolution’s text affirms that, “as a labor movement, we represent tens of thousands of refugee members, as well as the front-line service providers who ensure that refugees are properly screened and have their basic human needs addressed.” It calls on elected officials to “provide support to those fleeing oppression and violence to build a better life among us.”

“This resolution is a statement of the labor movement’s long-held values,” Minnesota AFL-CIO President Bill McCarthy said. “We won’t stand by while those in power try to divide working people based on where we come from, what we look like or how we pray.”

The state federation unites more than 1,000 local unions who collectively represent more than 300,000 working Minnesotans.

(Continued on Page 8)

KEEPING SKY CHEFS CAMPAIGN ON THE FRONT BURNER

After nearly two years of negotiations with LSG Sky Chefs, members of UNITE HERE are still fighting for a nationwide union contract with the airline caterer that includes higher wages and health insurance they can afford. Members of Twin Cities-based Local 17 held a Valentine’s-Day demonstration at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, calling on airlines like Delta to show workers some love by putting pressure on Sky Chefs to get a deal done.

Abraham Habtetsion, one of 450 MSP-based Sky Chefs workers, said family health insurance under the current contract would cost him nearly $800 per month. “How can I afford that?” he asked.

Union Advocate photo

FARE FOR ALL

Food that makes cents
Save 40 percent on groceries!

The St. Paul Regional Labor Federation is pleased to encourage union members and their families to participate in Fare For All Express. Stretch your budget by picking up a package of fresh fruits, vegetables and frozen meats at the sites below each month. Fare For All is open to anyone who eats! There are no questions asked, no forms to fill out. And the more people who take advantage of the program, the better the discounts get – and the more neighborhood it can serve.

Give it a try!

East Metro Locations – March 2020

- Burnsville: Diamondhead Ctr. March 25, 3 to 5 p.m.
- Cottage Grove: All Saints March 5, 4 to 6 p.m.
- Eagan: Easter Lutheran Church by the Lake March 10, 3:30 to 5:30 p.m.
- Forest Lake: VPW March 25, 4 to 6 p.m.
- Maplewood: Redeeming Love March 16, 3:30 to 5:30 p.m.
- North Branch: Trinity Lutheran March 11, 2 to 4 p.m.
- Northfield: St. Dominic March 12, 3:30 to 5:30 p.m.
- Oakdale: Grace of God Lutheran March 23, 3:30 to 5:30 p.m.
- Roseville: Real Life Church March 17, 3 to 5 p.m.
- St. Paul: Hallie Q. Brown Ctr. March 19, 4 to 6 p.m.
- St. Paul: Hazel Park UCC March 4, 4 to 6 p.m.
- St. Paul: West 7th Community Ctr. March 6, 10 a.m. to noon
- South St. Paul: Central Square March 24, 4 to 6 p.m.
- Stillwater: Community Thread March 17, 4 to 6 p.m.
- White Bear Lake Community of Grace Lutheran March 13, 1 to 3 p.m.

Questions? Please go to www.fareforall.org or call 763-450-3880.
HOUSE PASSES POSTAL REFORM

In a major win for the public Postal Service and its employees, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the USPS Fairness Act last month, with support from two-thirds of voting members. The bipartisan measure would rescind a mandate passed in 2006 that forces the federal agency to pre-fund its retirees’ benefits as far as 75 years into the future.

No other employer – public or private – is subject to such an onerous pre-funding requirement, and it creates a false public impression that the post office is going broke. (Of course, that’s exactly what privatization lawmakers intended the mandate to do 14 years ago.)

Postal unions, including the American Postal Workers Union and the National Association of Letter Carriers, urged members of the Senate to pass a companion bill and give the USPS the breathing room it needs to balance its books.

“Letter carriers should be proud of their hard work to educate members of Congress and gain their support on this very important issue,” NALC President Fred Rolando said. “House passage is a major victory in the battle to end this disastrous mandate, but our work is not done. We must now turn our attention to the Senate.”

Unions urged supporters to call 833-924-0085 to be connected to their senators, and ask them to cosponsor the USPS Fairness Act.

PEGLOW RETIRES FROM BCTGM

After 30 years in the retail baking industry, Bruce Peglow has retired as president of Local 22 of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers’ International Union. His last day was Jan. 31.

Peglow, 62, served as Local 22 president for the past four years, previously serving four years as vice president, and before that as an executive board member, shop steward and bargaining committee member.

Walter Borgan, who ran unopposed, was elected Local 22’s new president.

“I worked over 30 years in the retail baking industry,” Peglow said. “I’ve worked every shift you can imagine, days, nights, weekends, even Christmas Day. It seemed like I never had the same day off twice. I loved the work I did back when I was in the shop, and believe it or not I miss it today.”


THREE AFSCME LOCALS SETTLE

Members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees from three local bargaining units reached contract agreements in recent weeks. All three units mounted member-led contract campaigns to achieve progress on their demands.

On Jan. 31, members of AFSCME Local 2474 lined the streets outside Hennepin County Medical Center, marching against hospital management’s proposed concessions, including a provision that would phase out the employer-sponsored dental plan for new employees in 2021.

By mid-February, management had given up that demand, and union members secured a tentative agreement on a contract that would provide 2.25% raises in 2020 and 2021.

Negotiations between AFSCME Local 3481 and the Greater Minneapolis Crisis Nursery, meanwhile, dragged on for months, prompting caregivers to circulate a public petition, signed by fellow union members and community allies, calling on their employer to get serious about negotiations.

At the opening of talks, management proposed cuts to paid time off and bereavement leave, and offered employees “next to nothing in wage adjustments,” according to the union. After entering mediation, union members finally won a proposed contract that includes a 2% retroactive raise, additional raises in future years and language increasing worker safety and securing PTO.

Finally, clerical workers at the University of Minnesota, members of AFSCME Local 3800, voted overwhelmingly in January to approve a new two-year contract that provides across-the-board pay increases of 2.5 percent each year, and holds the line on members’ health care premiums and out-of-pocket costs.

“We also were able to reduce the number of steps for all of our classifications,” Cherrene Horazuk, AFSCME Local 3800 president, told the Minneapolis Labor Review. That change, she added, means “some of our lowest-paid workers will be getting 24 percent increases.”

“From the beginning, we said we needed to make real economic progress in this round of negotiations,” Horazuk said. “We rallied, we circulated petitions, we had people calling in, we gave testimony, we crushed the [University president’s] inauguration. All of those actions coming together, it wouldn’t have happened otherwise.”

BLEYHL TAKES HELM AT COUNCIL 5

AFSCME Council 5, representing 43,000 public service workers in Minnesota, has named Julie Bleyhl as its executive director, a position she has held on an interim basis since Sept. 25, 2019. Bleyhl previously served as the council’s legislative director, and she brings over 35 years of experience fighting at the Capitol and in the workplace on behalf of working families.

“Our union is diverse, strong, and well-positioned to fight against corporate greed and to fight for the rights of working people to collectively bargain over their wages, hours, working conditions and benefits,” Bleyhl said. “In order to do this effectively, we as a union must remain on the cutting edge of technology, organizing tactics and strategies and truly represent all members of our union.”

DESPITE TAX CUTS, LAYOFFS

CenturyLink last month announced plans to lay off 150 workers in Minnesota, members of the Communications Workers of America, as part of payrol cuts nationwide. The layoffs come despite the massive windfall CenturyLink received from President Trump’s 2017 tax cut, and despite being the biggest beneficiary of a federal program to expand broadband services.

Brenda Roberts, CWA District 7 vice president, blasted the layoffs as a betrayal of CenturyLink’s workforce – and the public trust.

“Let’s call the commitments to creating jobs that Trump and his Republican allies made what they really are: empty promises to American workers – lies peddled in an effort to get their massive tax breaks to corporate interests like CenturyLink passed,” she said.

Strib Guild offers to take readers ‘Behind the Headlines’

How is the front page of the Minneapolis Star Tribune decided each day? How is startribune.com updated every few minutes? How do reporters, editors and photographers do their jobs and find stories in our communities?

Go behind the scenes at the Star Tribune and learn how journalists work, the ethical guidelines they follow and how to be a wise consumer in an era of increasing online disinformation.

Two journalists, members of the Minnesota Newspaper and Communications Guild TNG-CWA Local 37002, present this free and highly interactive hour-long presentation for union meetings, retiree clubs or other gatherings.

Go to tinyurl.com/StribSpeaker or contact janet.moore@startribune.com for more info.

New Brookwood celebrates

One year ago, union activists and academics launched the New Brookwood Labor College in St. Paul, pursuing a mission to “advance the working class and build an inclusive labor movement for a more just world.” To celebrate a successful first year of classes, the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation and the East Side Freedom Library will co-host a fundraiser March 5, from 6 to 8 p.m., at the St. Paul Labor Center, 353 West 7th St.

The event is open to all supporters. RSVP with an email to solidarity@newbrookwood.org.

Registration open for union women’s retreat

Rank-and-file members, labor activists, union officers and staff will gather at Rutger’s Bay Lake Lodge April 8 to 10 for the 2020 Minnesota Union Women and Femme’s Retreat. This year’s theme: “Too Woke to Be Tired: Moving Forward with Radical Persistence.”

The retreat is sponsored by the University of Minnesota’s Labor Education Service to foster greater participation by women and femmes in their workplaces, unions and communities. To learn more, call 612-624-5020.

Job Openings

The Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, is seeking to fill two full-time job openings on its professional staff:

- Political organizer
- AFL-CIO Community Services liaison

Job descriptions and details about the RLF’s hiring process will be posted online: www.stpaulunions.org/jobs

Events & Opportunities

Strib Guild offers to take readers ‘Behind the Headlines’

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Fifth Annual

UNION JOB & RESOURCE FAIR

THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 2020

On-site Hiring Event | 3:00-6:00 pm

THE ELECTRICAL INDUSTRY BUILDING
1330 CONWAY ST, ST PAUL 55106
Bus route 63K, 3rd St E and Clarence St

DISCOVER YOUR PATH TO A UNION CAREER!
Earn while you learn ★ Rise above minimum wage
YOU ARE WORTH IT!

Learn about the advantages of a union job! Information about record expungement and community resources will be available. A list of participating employers will be posted March 23, 2020 at eastsidefreedomlibrary.org | For more information, contact Peter Rachleff at 651-230-3294.
Conference kicks off labor’s 2020 push
By Steve Share
Minneapolis Labor Review editor

MINNEAPOLIS – Rank and file union members and leaders from across the state gathered February 6-7 for the Minnesota AFL-CIO’s 2020 Campaigns Conference. The theme was “Stand Up. Fight Back.”

“As union members, it’s a familiar motto, but it’s also an apt description of what our labor movement is all about,” said Bill McCarthy, the state labor federation’s president, addressing some 250 union activists at the conference, held at the Delta Hotel.

The conference featured panel discussions on union organizing, previews of state legislation, and workshops teaching social media skills, among other topics.

But the 2020 U.S. presidential race loomed large.

“We are just nine short months away from the most important election of our lifetimes,” McCarthy said. “I know that we seem to be saying that every two years, but these are the times in which we live.”

“If this administration is allowed another four years to continue its assault on workers’ rights, civil rights, and the very fabric of our democracy, it might take a generation to undo the damage,” McCarthy warned.

The conference also focused on campaigns taking place closer to home. Labor will prioritize retaining a pro-worker majority in the Minnesota House and winning one in the Senate, McCarthy said, to “finally act on key labor priorities” at the Capitol.

The gathering included Building Trades workers, public employees, teachers, nurses, service employees and others.

“The fights were fighting, they’re all tied together,” said Bethany Winkels, the Minnesota AFL-CIO’s executive director.

It’s the issues that drive labor’s involvement in politics, Winkels added. “We’re not out to elect anybody; we’re out to change the lives of working people,” she said.

Workshops, panels and guest speakers covered a variety of topics, including how to increase activism among union members, best practices for running campaigns and the many attacks on unions.

Laura Askelin, political organizer for AFSCME Council 5, stressed the importance of broadening the base of active members. “We’re not growing the labor movement if we’re relying on the same small group of folks,” she said.

In reaching out to members, “you have to be a good listener, you have to stay engaged,” said Octavio Chung Bustamante, organizer for the Laborers.

Several speakers pointed to the importance of pushing back against the “divide-and-conquer” tactics used by labor’s opponents.

“They’re really, really good at making sure we all don’t get on the same page,” said Stephen Cousins, the AFL-CIO’s central region field director. “The Trump Department of Labor is actively trying to play us against each other. It’s really important we are one united labor movement, especially this year,” Askelin said.

House vote confirms labor reforms remain part of Dems’ election-year agenda

(Continued from Page 1)

“Those who would oppose, derail or delay this important legislation, do not ask us for a dollar or a door-knock. We won’t be coming,” Trumka said during a Capitol press conference. “But stand with us today, and we’ll stand with you tomorrow.”

Trumka’s message echoed loud and clear with federal lawmakers from Minnesota, who received calls from over 100 union members and retirees gathered for a conference in Minneapolis the day of the vote.

“Our outdated labor laws are no longer effective to make sure working people have their voices heard,” the Minnesota AFL-CIO’s Melissa Hysing told activists attending the federation’s two-day campaigns conference. “The PRO Act restores fairness to the economy and ensures working people share in the massive wealth we have helped create.”


McCollum, who represents Minnesota’s 4th Congressional District, said the PRO Act would restore fairness to the economy and help curb rising income inequality.

“The PRO Act strengthens workers’ power to stand together and negotiate for higher pay and better benefits,” she said. “For women who are part of a union, the gender pay gap is nearly eliminated, and union members of color have nearly five times the median wealth of their non-union counterparts.

“Anti-union and anti-worker attacks have led to the decline of the middle class. It’s time we pass the PRO Act and restore the constitutional right to organize, putting power back into the hands of American workers.”

Despite polls showing historically high public support for unions last year, the percentage of U.S. workers who belong to unions continued a four-decade decline. An MIT survey from 2018 found about half of private-sector workers, or 60 million people, wanted a union. Only 6.4% actually have one.

The disconnect, union organizers say, stems from bosses’ increasing disregard for laws meant to protect workers during union organizing drives. Employers broke the law in 41.5% of union elections overseen by the National Labor Relations Board in 2016 and 2017.

“They just view it as a cost of doing business,” Jeff Lachler, a Minneapolis-based organizer with the Communications Workers of America, said. “There’s every incentive in the world to break the law, and there’s no real downside as long as you succeed in keeping the union out.”

While federal law prohibits employers from harassing, threatening or firing workers for supporting a union drive, the penalties for breaking those laws lack teeth.

In many cases, employers found guilty of breaking the law must post a notice acknowledging their misdeeds or making workers aware of their rights. In the case of workers fired for union activity, employers have to reinstate them with back pay, if they haven’t already moved on to another job.

But the process, which includes board filings, hearings and appeals, is lengthy, and that works to employers’ benefit, Lachler said.

“Even if they have to bring the worker back, there are no punitive damages,” he said. “In the meantime, they’ve succeeded in scaring everybody else from going through with an organizing drive.”

In addition to giving the NLRB authority to fine employers who break labor law, the PRO Act would allow workers to seek justice in court. That would be key for workers who can’t afford to wait for the lengthy NLRB process to run its course.

Other provisions of the bill would prohibit employers from permanently replacing workers who strike, and make so-called “secondary strikes” legal, allowing workers to picket in solidarity with their co-workers.

The PRO Act would make mediation and arbitration mandatory to settle lengthy disputes over first contracts. Nearly half of newly formed unions fail to reach a contract with the employers.

The bill also includes provisions to stop employers from misclassifying workers as “independent contractors” in order to avoid workers’ comp and other liabilities. It would make fast-food companies and other franchising corporations more responsible for labor practices throughout their chains.

And it would require employers to disclose whether they are paying an outside firm to help defeat a union organizing campaign. A recent analysis found employers pay about $340 million annually to outside firms for “union avoidance.”
Minutes of the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation

FEBRUARY 12, 2020

The Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation met in regular session on the above date and was called to order with the Pledge of Allegiance by President Peterson at 6 p.m. Board members in attendance were Beedle B., Beisell, Dreyer, Edwards, Faber, Gibbons, Guertin, Madden, Markham-Kocurek, McNamara, Meyer, Peterson, Robbins, Ryan, Schmidt, Seath, St. Aoro, Terry, Vandassor and Varco. Excused were Engelold, Haugen, and Mali-Green. Absent were Beedle B., Froemie, Gorman, Hoppe, Luneburg, McCarthy, Mullin, Sansom and Weed.

PRESENT

• President David Langley, Outreach Coordinator, Prepare + Prosper, appeared before the delegation to give a presentation about Free Tax Prep, getting your refund faster and taking steps towards your financial goals.

GUESTS

• David Wabeley, Assistant Director of Census Operations and Engagement, spoke to the delegation regarding the 2020 census, redistricting and allocation of financial education to help you with home/buyer advice, reverse mortgage assistance with reading and understanding your credit report.

CREDENTIALS

CREDENTIALS were received from IA-TSE Local 13. President Peterson administered the Oath of Obligation to those new delegates and alternates present.

MINUTES

M/S/C TO APPROVE MINUTES OF DECEMBER 11, 2019 AND JANUARY 8, 2020 AS PUBLISHED IN THE UNION ADVOCATE NEWSPAPER AFTER THE SECRETARY NOTES THERE ARE NO ADDITIONS OR CHANGES CALLED FOR.

COMMITTEE ON POLITICAL EDUCATION (COPE) MINUTES

FEBRUARY 12, 2020

COPE met in regular session on the above date and was called to order by President Peterson at 5 p.m. Board members in attendance were Angstrom, Beedle J, Beisell, Dreyer, Edwards, Faber, Gibbons, Guertin, Hoerth, Krey, Lohmann, Madden, Markham-Kocurek, Mayer, McNamara, Meyer, Nashet, Peterson, Robbins, Ryan, Schmidt, Seath, St. Aoro, Terry, Vandassor, Varco and Wise. Excused were Delfoy, Engelold, Haugen, and Mali-Green. Absent were Beedle B., Froemie, Gorman, Hoppe, Luneburg, McCarthy, Mullin, Qaly, Sansom and Weed.

Items to come before this board included:

• President Peterson announced Rep. Angie Craig, CD-2, and Rep. Betty McCollum, CD-4, candidate screenings will be held Monday, Feb. 17, 2020, at 5:00 p.m. at the Labor Center, and pro-rated information about the Minnesota AFL-CIO friendly endorsement process.

• The RLF will host a Precinct Caucus and Convention Training on Tuesday, February 18, 2020 from 6:00 – 9:00 p.m. here at the Labor Center. Please RSVP so we know how much food to order.

• Requests:
  - M/S/C TO MAKE A $1,000 CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIFTH ANNUAL CD-2 DFL MARCH GRAND FUNDRAISER ON MARCH 1 AT ROYAL CLIFF IN EAGAN FROM 4:30 – 8:30 P.M.
  - There being no further business to come before this committee the meeting adjourned.

EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES FEBRUARY 12, 2020

The Executive Board met upon conclusion of COPE with those same members present who are duly elected to this board.

Items to come before this board included:

- President Peterson announced:
  - Receiving and accepting resignation of Deb Haugen, Minnesota Nurses Association, from the RLF Board and as the RLF Geographical Representative to the Minnesota AFL-CIO Board.
  - 2020 Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation Operating Budget
  - Nomination of Vice President Schmidt as the second RLF representative for the National AFL-CIO Code of Conduct.

St. Paul Regional Labor Federation hosted a training last month on navigating the political party that was held on Saturday, Jan. 25, 2020 at the Labor Center.

REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

• Theresa St. Aoro reported on behalf of the Ramsey County Labor Assembly. They met on Jan. 27, 2020, and discussed screening CD-2 and CD-4 candidates on Monday, Feb. 17, 2020. The Saint Paul RLF will be hosting a precinct caucus and endorsing convention training on Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2020. Local elections for 2020; Ramsey County Board districts 1, 2 and 7, Maplewood Mayor and Maplewood City Council; Roseville City Council; and North St. Paul Maplewood-Oakdale School Board. Organizing efforts related to proposed closures and budget reductions at St. Joe’s and Bethesda Hospitals are ongoing. Our next meeting will be on Monday, Feb. 24, 2020 at 6:00 p.m.

M/S/C TO GRANT STRIKE SANCTIONS TO SEIU HEALTHCARE MINNESOTA AND SAINT PAUL BUILDING HOSPITALS ARE ONGOING. OUR NEXT MEETING WILL BE ON MONDAY, FEB. 24, 2020 AT 6:00 P.M.

Preparing for caucus night

The St. Paul Regional Labor Federation hosted a training last month on navigating the political parties’ precinct-caucus-and-convention system. Led by AFSCME Local 2508 member and RLF Sergeant At Arms Jen Guertin, the training prepared over a dozen union members for precinct caucuses held across the state Feb. 25.

Endorsement notice

At the March 11 delegate meeting, the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation may consider recommendations to the Minnesota AFL-CIO regarding labor endorsements in the state’s 2nd and 4th Congressional Districts, and in state legislative districts.

For more information, call 651–222–3787.

NEW BUSINESS

• President Peterson called for a floor vote to grant strike sanctions to SEIU Healthcare Minnesota and Saint Paul Federation of Educators Local 28.

M/S/C TO GRANT STRIKE SANCTIONS TO SEIU HEALTHCARE MINNESOTA AND SAINT PAUL FEDERATION OF EDUCATORS LOCAL 28.

There being no further business to come before this delegate the meeting adjourned.

Submitted by:

PERRY SCHMIDT
Acting Secretary-Treasurer

The Union Advocate photo
Working to build a clean economy ‘on the high road’

Exit Interview: Jason Walsh

When the U.S. House of Representatives passed the PRO Act last month, the labor movement celebrated – and for good reason. The measure would give working people a fairer shot at organizing unions, bargaining better wages and fighting back against rising income inequality.

But the PRO Act would be a win for the planet, too. That’s according to the BlueGreen Alliance (BGA), which lobbied for the PRO Act on behalf of 13 labor and environmental organizations.

Why? To address the climate crisis, the U.S. and other countries will need to replace fossil fuels with clean energy, and they will need to do it quickly. Mustered political support for that kind of massive political effort won’t happen, BGA Executive Director Jason Walsh said, unless there’s something in it for working people.

“We have to rebuild our infrastructure, we have to retool our manufacturing and we have to repower our grid with clean sources,” Walsh said in an interview with The Union Advocate. “That’s daunting, but it’s also an opportunity. And if we do it right, if we build this clean-energy economy on the high road, we have the ability to make this a more just and equal country.

Labor partners and our environmental partners understand the interconnectedness of the fight for workers’ rights and environmental protection.

The PRO Act is an example of that. It’s obvious why our labor partners would support the PRO Act. Our environmental partners understand workers who are organized and empowered fight not only for their wages and benefits and job security, they also fight for things like making sure their plants don’t blow up, making sure that industries are not egregious polluters. Unions like the Steelworkers were some of the most important supporters of our bedrock environmental laws, like the Clean Air Act, because their members lived it and worked it.

What does the clean-energy economy look like, and how do those jobs need to change?

Not enough of the jobs created or promised are family-sustaining jobs. In 2019 only 4% of workers in solar electric power generation were union members, and only 5% of workers in wind power generation were union members. Obviously, the clean economy is much bigger than that, but those are the two fastest-growing sectors within it.

Companies within the clean-energy economy have just flat-out violated their employees’ rights to unionize. There’s Tesla, of course. There was also a solar company, Bright Power, in New York City, where workers were trying to join IBEW and were fired. And last year we saw at a company called Geostamp Wind in Texas, the company unlawfully firing and suspending employees, making threats, engaging in surveillance. It was so egregious that the National Labor Relations Board under the Trump administration ordered them to bargain with (Plumbers and Pipefitters) Local 404.

Why do those companies do that? They do it because they can, because our existing labor laws are completely toothless. That is why the PRO Act is so important as we make this monumental shift to a clean-energy economy.

What’s the scope of this change our economy will need to go through?

We’ve barely scratched the surface. We’ve seen a shift in the last 10 years within the power sector to renewable sources, but zero-emission power is still below 20% of the total. We have a transportation sector that is now the biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the country. And we’ve got an industrial sector that is the fastest-growing source of emissions.

We’re going to have to shift all of them to zero-emissions sources by 2050, and we’ve never done anything at that scale before in this country.

What potential is there for working people?

To give a taste, just take the offshore wind industry, which is potentially enormous. There is, at this point, one offshore wind facility in this country, off of Block Island, Rhode Island, and it was built with union labor. This was just five turbines, but it created 300 jobs – electricians, welders, ironworkers, pile drivers, backhoe operators. That wind farm is now producing enough clean, local electricity to power 17,000 homes. We’ve got to do that by orders of magnitude more across the country.

There is a ton of work here, but we’re at this inflection point as to whether we’re going to continue what we’ve seen – mostly low-road, often low-quality jobs, almost exclusively nonunion – or build this economy along the high road.