Save the date...

Labor Notes is Turning 30!

LABORnotes

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Minus Members' Power, Unions Face Mounting Bargaining Woes

by Mark Brenner, Micha Gaes, and Chris Kutalik

William Ehman got acquainted with the current direction of collective bargaining in his industry from the back of a squad car. The former president of Steelworkers Local 1537, Ehman led a group of nine retirees to a mid-September union meeting to discuss current negotiations with Latrobe Steel.

After the last contract six years ago, the local had stopped providing transcripts of negotiations with the Pennsylvania specialty steelmaker. But Ehman knew the company's current offer included a two-tier wage structure and a shift from defined benefit pensions to a 401(k) plan. Meanwhile his checkbook issue, a retiree health care allowance whose value had tumbled over the past few years, wasn't going anywhere in current talks.

The local had said retirees were excluded from the meeting, despite a provision in the bylaws that guaranteed them access. Union representatives told he retirees to leave, but Ehman stood his ground. Soon six police cars arrived, and Ehman was hauled away from his union hall in handcuffs, facing a criminal trespass complaint.

"It went beyond the pale," he said. "When you start dividing your membership against itself, it's just a recipe for disaster."

The situation of Local 1537's retirees is all too common. Indeed, if anything the story of widescale givebacks under the gun of employers, courts, and (yes, even) union officials has been told and retold throughout hundreds of workplaces in the private sector in recent years.

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Sutter RNs United

Bucking the trend away from master agreements, the California Nurses Association is fighting to forge a master contract from 13 separate agreements at hospitals in the Sutter Health chain.

'Card Check' Takes a Hit

by Kim Moody

Dana Meadow—the name is drawn from the two auto-parts plants involved—concerns a pair of factories where the United Auto Workers gained recognition through card check in 2003. In both cases, the UAW had contracts at other units with the companies and had negotiated a neutrality and card-check agreement. Also in both cases, anti-union employees filed a decertification petition within weeks of recognition.

The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) rewrote in September a 40-year-old doctrine that will undermine one of labor's more successful organizing tactics—card-check recognition. Card check allows workers to gain union recognition by a simple majority show of authorization cards.

This tactic is usually spelled out in a "neutrality" agreement in which an employer agrees not to attack the union while it recruits the majority necessary to gain recognition. Card check, neutrality, and other forms of voluntary recognition have been considered legitimate since the National Labor Relations Act was validated by the Supreme Court in 1937.

The September ruling, known as

While not outright banning card check or neutrality agreements, the NLRB may have undermined their effectiveness. As soon as a majority gains recognition by a show of cards, the board decided anti-union employees can file for decertification if 30 percent of workers petition for it.

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Two weeks before a representation election, immigration agents intervened on the employer's side.

Rail Caucus Formed. . . .3
Railroad Workers United aims to end a century of craft warfare on the rails.

LN Conference. 5

- **Celebrate** 30 years of union democracy and rank-and-file power across industries and borders.
- Help Fund a Chicago "**Troublemakers School**" in 2009!
- Discuss immigrants rights organizing with **Jorge Mujica**, the Mexican labor movement with **Dan La Botz,** plus an update from **Teamsters Local 743.**

When:

Friday, September 5th @ 7 pm

Where:

UE Western Region Hall
37 S. Ashland Ave.
Chicago, IL 60607

Refreshments and snacks will be provided

Please RSVP with Labor Notes at 313.842.6262, or paul@labornotes.org.

For directions, to donate, and more information go to:

www.labornotes.org/houseparty

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