

# UNION ORGANIZER

AFSCME LOCAL 3800 NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2008

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## MESSAGE FROM THE UNION PRESIDENT

### Our union depends on your involvement

by Phyllis Walker, Local 3800 President

The main reason our union exists is to improve the lives of workers at the U of M. We do that by negotiating a contract every two years to try to get the best wages, benefits and work rules that we can. We also have stewards in the workplace that make sure the contract is followed, and that defend us when management violates the contract.

But none of this happens on its own – we can only accomplish our goals by being well organized and having as many members as possible involved in the union. The union is only as strong as the support it has in the workplace.

#### A Livable Wage

Our union has done a great job in our basic mission. In the year 2000 we waged our campaign for a *livable wage*. Our campaign was successful. We won a minimum wage for all union workers at the U of \$12.00 an hour. Before that some of our job classes started at \$7 or \$8 an hour. This was a huge accomplishment that immediately improved the financial situation of hundreds of workers, and has benefitted the thousands of workers who started working at the U since then. We won the \$12.00 an hour minimum through waging a public pressure campaign, through organizing ourselves to go to regents meetings as a visible group, and through making demands on the U administration. If we wouldn't have done that, we would not have won a \$12 minimum for workers at the U. There is still work to do. So since then we have continued the campaign to "stand up for our standard of living" to try to get wage increases that keep up with the rate of inflation. This work continues.

#### Defending Our Rights in the Workplace

Our stewards make sure that supervisors don't vio-

late the contract or the law in disciplining union members. Stewards also work to proactively solve problems in the workplace, so situations get resolved before they get to discipline. I encourage you to read Cherrene Horazuk's article on pages 2 and 3 of this newsletter that explain many of our fundamental rights in the workplace and explain what you can do if you think your rights may have been violated.

#### Our Union Depends on You

Our union has accomplished a lot, and we will continue to do so. But this is only possible if you are informed and involved. We have to be organized. There is constant turnover in our jobs at the U, so there's always work to do in talking with new people about the union. If you haven't yet signed a union membership card, please contact me at 612-251-9987 and we'll come talk with you about what the union is and why it's important to be a member.★

### Why be a CAT? What is a CAT?

by Linda Kingman

I have been asked to write a few words on being a "CAT" in the workplace. What is that you say? A CAT, a feline? No, CAT = Campus Action Team member.

Being a CAT isn't a lifelong commitment. You don't have to give up nights and weekends, just a few minutes a week or maybe even a month. Many of you are already CATs without knowing it. Do fellow workers come to you with questions about the union or problems in their jobs? Do you steer them to a steward or union officer? Do you keep up on union activities? Pass along information to members when you see them? Do you make it a point to seek out new folks and say 'hi, I'm (insert name) and

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# Knowing your basic rights in the

By Cherrene Horazuk, Chief Steward

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself as the new Chief Steward of AFSCME 3800. I have worked at the U for four years in the dean's office at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs. For the past year and a half, I have been the Vice-President of our local. I'm excited about being Chief Steward and I am looking forward to working with all of our stewards in fighting for respect for our co-workers in the workplace, and for respect for our contract by the Administration.

We've heard recently from a number of co-workers who have questions about basic rights in the workplace. We've also heard from workers who've been called into meetings with their supervisors or others and then been disciplined. When management begins to ask you questions that could lead to your being disciplined, you don't have to face it alone. There is help out there in the form of a *shop steward*. Many of our workers volunteer to assist their fellow employees. Here is some info about your right to representation in certain situations at work.

## **Prepare Yourself...Protect yourself...Call a steward!**

### ***When called into an investigatory meeting...***

- ★ You are entitled to a fair and objective investigation.
- ★ You have the right to have a steward with you at the meeting(s).
- ★ You are entitled to privately talk with a steward before making any statements or answering any question in the meeting.
- ★ You have the right to question any of management's evidence or proof of misconduct, including witnesses.
- ★ You are entitled to present your side of the situation.

## **Basic employee rights at the U of M**

The contract between AFSCME and the U of M is a written agreement spelling out wages, hours, and working conditions that must be followed both by the union and the employer. A union contract helps ensure equal treatment on the job. In addition to salary and benefits we have contract language that sets out certain aspects of the terms and conditions of our employment. Some of those aspects include representation and an established grievance procedure in the case of disciplinary action. More importantly our union gives us access to a community of coworkers that have experience we can draw on for support. This support is provided in part by trained union stewards.

Under a union contract the employer has to respect process and cannot change the rules on a whim or play favorites in the workplace.

### **Progressive discipline**

Our contract outlines a procedure for due process in cases involving discipline and dismissal. These rights are further guaranteed by the Supreme Court.

An important concept related to due process is the principle of progressive discipline. Progressive discipline means that an employer attempts to correct an employee's problem with a process of notification, education, and discipline, if necessary, that starts less severe, moving to more severe if the problem is not corrected. When an employee is dismissed the employer must show that the discipline reflected the principle of progressive discipline. For example, if an employee is late he/she cannot be fired the first time this happens. The employee must be notified of the problem with discipline resulting if the lateness continues. The discipline must at first be of a type that is less severe, with additional warnings, using dismissal as a last resort. Cases of severe misconduct are exempt from this rule.

All employees are entitled to prior notice of what constitutes misconduct. There must be substantial evidence or proof of misconduct to justify any discipline. Work rules must be fair, reasonable, and work-related. Rules, orders, and penalties must be

# workplace

equally applied to all employees in the unit. The progressive disciplinary steps outlined in the contract must be followed. Employees may challenge contractual violations, including discipline-related ones, through the grievance process.

## **Do you know your Weingarten Rights?**

Your right to be represented in a meeting with management is not only part of our contract, it is also a legal right based on the Weingarten decision issued by the United States Supreme Court in 1975. The Weingarten decision says that an employee may be represented by the union at an investigatory interview with the employer when the employee believes that the interview may lead to disciplinary action. The employee must request that a union representative be called into the meeting with management, and there must be a reasonable belief that discipline may result from the meeting. The right to representation exists even in cases where no discipline results from the meeting, but the employee has reasonable belief that it may happen.

## **Things to remember when you are called into an investigatory meeting**

Our contract states that supervisors are supposed to give 24 hours notice of an investigatory meeting, and that employees have the right to have a union representative present. However, supervisors are often not aware of the contract's rules, and will call you in for an investigatory meeting without notice and without letting you know about your right to representation. When called into a meeting that turns into something that is disciplinary, ask, "Could this discussion lead to discipline? If so, it is my right to have a union steward / representative present." If they insist on continuing, don't say anything, but instead listen and take notes. Try your best to stay calm, don't show how upset you may be and don't answer any questions or make any comments. Just politely tell them that you will be happy to respond to their questions, accusations or whatever, when your union rep is present.

Request that you would like to continue the meeting another time after you had an opportunity to contact your AFSCME steward.★

## **I need help! Whom do I call?**

First call me, the Chief Steward, at **(612) 940-0660**. I'll put you in touch with one of our shop stewards.

## **What is a steward?**

A steward is a co-worker and union member who has been trained to assist employees in solving workplace problems and to enforce and protect the contract. Our stewards provide representation when employees need assistance. When your co-workers are acting on behalf of the union in a steward capacity, they have special recognition provided by our contract. They are on equal footing with management.

## **Use your steward as a resource**

If you have questions about work rules, a workplace situation or union activities, consult with your union steward. If she/he doesn't know the answer, they will find it for you. The strength of any union depends on having a large, active, and educated membership. Stewards play a key role in achieving all these goals. As the number of educated members grows, so does the amount of influence we can exert on the University in order to effect positive change.

## **Stewards:**

**Chief Steward** – Cherrene Horazuk

**West Bank** – Phyllis Walker, Polly Peterson, Andy Carhart, Kem Tae Lynch

**East Bank** – Kelly Alghamdi Zimmerscheid, Marie Milsten Fiedler, Melanie Steinman

**Off-Campus** – Kelly Ryan, Mary Brandl

**Med Area** – Cindy Prange, Tammy Thompson, Jeff Pilacinski, Steff Yorek, Rick Castillo, Doug Sembla

**Morris** – Jacki Anderson, Pat Hein, Jane Kill, Ginger Nohl, Laura Thielke, Bonnie Tipcke, Rebecca Webb

**Crookston** – Anne Burke, Angelika Huglen, Meloni Rasmussen

*If you are interested in becoming a steward, call Cherrene Horazuk at **(612) 940-0660**.*

## U of M AFSCME joins Day on the Hill



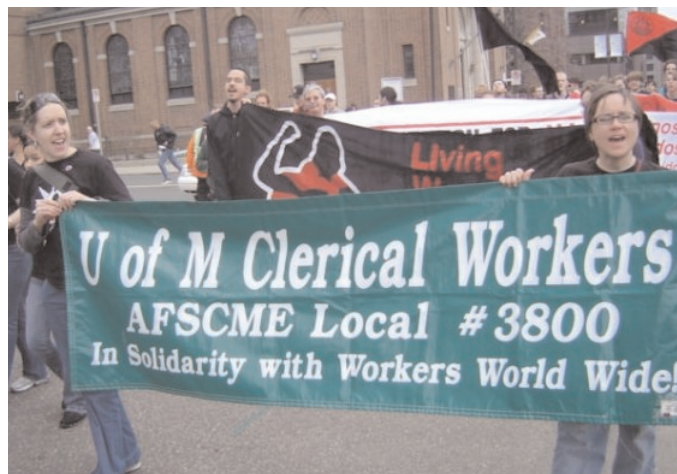
These are some of the U of M AFSCME members who participated in AFSCME Day on the Hill this year, together with hundreds of other AFSCME workers from around the state. Members met with their legislators to talk about the issues important to AFSCME members in our workplaces. There was also motivating a rally in the capitol rotunda. These photos were taken on the steps of the state capitol.★



*Be a CAT, continued from page 1*

would like to welcome you to the U and let you know I am a member of Local 3800?" If so, you are already a CAT!

There is an old saying, "many hands make light work." This is especially true for CATs. Our goal is to get one CAT for every 10 union members. The reason to be a CAT is simple – in order to get the respect and what we deserve from this employer we need to be a union that is active in the workplace all the time, not just before a contract vote or other major issue. I have been a CAT



## U clericals march on May Day

Members of AFSCME Local 3800 participated in the march for immigrant and workers rights on May 1st in St. Paul. May 1st is celebrated as International Workers Day around the world. The march in St. Paul was one of many marches in cities across the U.S. focusing on immigrant and workers rights.★

### UPCOMING UNION ACTIVITIES

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|----------------|--|
| <b>JUNE 4</b>  | <b>U of M STAFF DAY</b><br>Stop by the AFSCME 3800 table!  |
| <b>JUNE 26</b> | <b>MONTHLY MEMBERSHIP MTG 5:15 PM</b><br>see <a href="http://afscme3800.org/calendar">afscme3800.org/calendar</a> for location |
| <b>JULY 19</b> | <b>U OF M AFSCME PICNIC 11 - 4 pm</b><br>Columbia Park, NE Mpls, see web for info  |
- CHECK [WWW.AFSCME3800.ORG](http://WWW.AFSCME3800.ORG) TO VERIFY ALL INFORMATION & FOR MORE ACTIVITIES**

for almost 8 years now. It is impossible for me to get to everyone in this building (Moos Tower), and unless someone tells me about a new employee as soon as they are hired it may be months before I get to talk to them. So, please think about this important role in the union. It usually only takes a few minutes out of your time to do the job. It is an extremely important role in our union, especially if we are going to be a viable force in the workplace now and in the future.

If you are interested in being a CAT, contact Erika Zurawski at [organizer@afscme3800.org](mailto:organizer@afscme3800.org).★

### AFSCME Local 3800

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