



ACORN Workers Need a Union

The campaign so far...



Industrial Workers of the World

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Look for updates on our webpage: <http://bari.iww.org/alerts/Acorn1.html>

The Beginning

December 2000: Gina Giazsoni had recently moved to Philadelphia and got a job working for ACORN. The hours were grueling, and workers had little say in how their job was to be done, but because she believed in the principles of ACORN, she stuck with it. Gina attended ACORN's annual Year End/Year Beginning (YE/YB) meeting in New Orleans and found that many of the people attending were unhappy with their working conditions. So she called the IWW and a campaign was born. This is the e-mail she sent out to interested ACORN workers.

January 5, 2001

Dear Fellow ACORN Workers:

I am following up with you concerning the discussions we had at YE/YB about changing some of our working conditions. Some of the concerns mentioned by workers include transit fare to and from the field and a guaranteed lunch break in our long 10-hour day.

Some offices or individual workers may not have these concerns because they have taken the risk of standing alone or with a couple of co-workers and have asked for a lunch break. Or some head organizers may "allow" a lunch break. However, if we really want to improve things, without being at the mercy of our particular head organizer, we need to do what we tell our constituents to do every day: stand together and make it happen. Organize.

I think we should form a union with the Industrial Workers of the World, a direct-action based, democratic, independent union. For more information on the IWW, please contact me or you can look on the web at iww.org.

We need to figure out what improvements we want to see, and how we will go about doing this. We need a process by which we make decisions that is agreeable to us all.

Forming a union means standing together and making our bosses do the things that we want them to do, and stopping them from doing the things we don't want them to do. If we want a say in our workplace, we need to stand together and form an organization that gives us power in numbers.

So, if you still want to make improvements at ACORN, if you want to be guaranteed a break to eat your lunch every day, if you feel like there are other things you need in the workplace but feel that you need an organization of your co-workers to stand with you, then please contact me.

There are already eight offices which have expressed interest in doing this. If you know of good contacts in any other offices, please let me know. But for now, let's keep a dialog going amongst those of us who have already met at the YE/YB meeting so that we can decide together how we can fill out our ranks.

As a first step, please take the time to come up with a list of issues you would like to see our effort address. If you have any thoughts on the methods you would like to see us use to make decisions, please write them up also. I would like to hear back from everyone before February 1st. Whatever is sent to me by then, I will assemble into another mailing, include contact information for each person, and get it to everyone who replies.

In solidarity,
Gina Giazsoni

Who is ACORN?

The following text is from ACORN's website: http://www.acorn.org/who_are_we.html

The website also features lists of ACORN offices across the country.

Who is ACORN?

ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, is the nation's largest community organization of low- and moderate-income families, with over 100,000 member families organized into 500 neighborhood chapters in 40 cities across the country. Since 1970 ACORN has taken action and won victories on issues of concern to our members. Our priorities include: better housing for first time homebuyers and tenants, living wages for low-wage workers, more investment in our communities from banks and governments, and better public schools. We achieve these goals by building community organizations that have the power to win changes -- through direct action, negotiation, legislation, and voter participation.

ACORN stands alone in its commitment to organizing and winning power for low and moderate-income people.

As we approach the new millenium, the concerns of low and moderate-income people are not on the nation's agenda. Under attack from the right, ignored by the center and many progressives, the poor grow in numbers every day. Yet ACORN stands virtually alone in its dedication to organizing the poor and powerless - a dedication as strong today as it was in 1970 when a group of Arkansas welfare mothers formed ACORN's first membership.

ACORN is the largest low and moderate-income membership organization in the country. ACORN has grown steadily to a membership of over 125,000 African-American, white, and Latino families. They are active members, not just contributors or newsletter readers. Each belongs to one of more than 500 neighborhood chapters working on local, citywide, and national campaigns.

ACORN organizes the unorganized.

Although no stranger to coalition politics, ACORN's first priority is building organization in low-income communities. Because ACORN believes that social change comes from the bottom up, organizers are on the streets every day, knocking on doors and recruiting new members. Major campaigns, whether around housing, or jobs, or voter registration, are designed to reach the unorganized majority of low and moderate-income people - the key constituency that must be mobilized for a progressive movement for social change in this country to succeed.

ACORN campaigns address issues that are central to the lives of its members, to the viability of low and moderate-income neighborhoods, and to the future of the country.

A typical month might find ACORN neighbor-

hood groups in New York and Chicago campaigning to reform city schools, groups in New Orleans and Boston fighting to pass living wage ordinances, and groups in Detroit and Washington, D.C., demanding testing and treatment for lead poisoning.

At the same time, ACORN groups throughout the country work in unison on national issues. In recent years, ACORN has waged precedent-setting campaigns to win housing for the poor, jobs at living wages for the unemployed, and capital investment for low and moderate-income communities.

ACORN is a direct action organization.

ACORN employs the broadest possible range of tactics. It lobbies, petitions, and files lawsuits. But ACORN's long history proves that confronting decision-makers face-to-face brings the best results.

When the situation demands it, ACORN members will march, picket, sit-in, squat, and sometimes go to jail.

ACORN views political action as an essential part of its strategy for empowering poor people. When most community organizations still believed in sitting on the sidelines on election day, ACORN was leading the way in voter registration, education, and mobilization. For nearly 20 years, ACORN members have used the electoral arena to press their issues and to put responsive candidates in office. Increasingly, ACORN members are running for office themselves.

ACORN's low and moderate-income membership runs the organization.

ACORN members - not staff or lawyers or politicians - speak for and lead the organization. Many are new to community activism when they join but leadership development is at the core of ACORN's organizing process. On-the-job and in formal training programs, ACORN members develop the skill and confidence to chart the organization's course. From the neighborhood group level to the national board, ACORN leaders call the shots.

ACORN's membership pays for the organization.

Knowing that a poor people's organization can't rely on outside support, ACORN has always been committed to the principle of financial self-sufficiency. The organization is now 80% self-sufficient, deriving its funds primarily from members' dues, raffles, ad sales, dinners, and other events.

ACORN has been, and will continue to be, the most innovative community organization in the country.

From its inception, ACORN has constantly challenged the traditional notions of what a community organization is. It pioneered multi-racial and multi-issue organizing. It introduced strategies to contend with corporate targets, led the way in electoral organizing, and advanced direct action tactics like squatting. In recent years, ACORN has taken its path breaking ways in new directions:

* Union Organizing

To reach the unorganized not only in the neighborhoods but in the workplace, ACORN helped found the United Labor Unions in 1979, which succeeded in organizing low wage service workers most unions had ignored. Now affiliated with the Service Employees International Union, AFL-CIO, the Locals in Louisiana, Illinois, Arkansas, and Texas have over 20,000 members working in schools, nursing homes, hospitals, home health care agencies, and other services.

* Community Media

Understanding the power and potential of the electronic media, ACORN members are helping to build a progressive radio and television network. FM radio stations are on the air in Dallas (KNON) and Little Rock (KABF).

* Housing Development

To provide affordable housing and revitalize deteriorating neighborhoods, the ACORN Housing Corporation (AHC) offices in Arizona, Arkansas, Illinois, Louisiana, New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C. acquire and rehabilitate abandoned buildings. Low and moderate-income families who contribute sweat equity buy the houses at below market prices and the land remains in the ACORN Community Land Association to ensure that it will always be used for affordable housing. AHC is also the country's largest provider of pre-purchase loan counseling to low and moderate income people with offices in Baltimore, Baton Rouge, Boston, Bridgeport, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Des Moines, Houston, Jersey City, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Little Rock, Miami, Milwaukee, Minneapolis/St. Paul, New Orleans, New York City, Oakland, Philadelphia, Phoenix, San Jose, Seattle, Springfield, St. Louis, and Washington, DC. Each year over 10,000 low-income people come to AHC for help in purchasing a house, many of whom never dreamed homeownership was a possibility for them. By year's end some 2,500 of these people will be new homeowners. The program has produced over 25,000 new homeowners since its start in 1983.

ACORN's People's Platform

The following are sections of ACORN's own People's Platform (full text at <http://www.acorn.org/pp-content.html>) which ACORN management has violated by its treatment of its own employees.

Work and Worker's Rights

III. Provide an adequate income to every American

- Guarantee a minimum annual family income at a figure equivalent to the most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics "medium living standard," adjusted for inflation.
- Extend minimum wage coverage to all wage earners and peg increases in it to the cost of living.

IV. Establish the fundamental rights of workers, to include:

- The right to a job which does not endanger health or safety.
- The right to a job which is accessible from home.
- The right to a job which does not require overtime work as a condition of employment.
- The right to company or government financed child care for the worker's children.
- The right to a fair grievance procedure.
- Most fundamentally, the right to organize, which is to be promoted by:
 - a. Extending the National Labor Relations Act coverage to all workers.
 - b. Streamlining the union election and certification process.
 - c. Restricting the use of anti-strike injunction by courts.
 - d. Providing stiff penalties-back wages times five-for employers who fire or demote workers for their organizing activities.
- The right to company or government financed health insurance.

V. Reform the National Labor Relations Act

For workers:

- Permit
 - a. sympathy strikes
 - b. secondary boycotts
 - c. picketing to support sympathy strikes and secondary boycotts.
- Permit automatic union certification when a majority of a bargaining unit has signed authorization cards.
- Permit workers to refuse to handle "Struck work".
- Permit striking workers to receive unemployment compensation, welfare, and food stamps.

For management:

- Prohibit the hiring of temporary replacements to fund anti-union campaigns.
- Prohibit all lockouts.
- Regulate management consultation.
- Regulate management consultants:
 - a. Require consultants to file financial disclosure forms with state labor departments.
 - b. Prohibit the use of tax dollars to fund anti-union campaigns.
- Prohibit employers from forcing workers to listen to anti-union campaigns.
- Require management to negotiate over what the National Labor Relations Board now calls "permissive subjects":
Sale of the company, work schedules, pricing, choice of suppliers, organization of management, etc.
- Prohibit the use of bankruptcy as a tool to throw out valid collective bargaining agreements.

VIII. Protect All Workers

- Part-time and temporary workers should receive proportionately the same benefits as full-time workers.
- Workers in unorganized work sites should be able to join unions, and receive the benefits of union membership.
- All workers whether public or private, in small or large numbers, should have the legal right to:
 - a. Organize;
 - b. Bargain Collectively;
 - c. Strike when necessary;

and these rights should be under the full protection of the law.

Will ACORN live up to its principles?

To-Gather

To-Gather was first produced by ACORN workers in Philadelphia with the help of the IWW. It was sent to almost every ACORN office, and about a dozen IWW groups have distributed the newsletter in person to ACORN workers. It reports on what's going on in different offices and discusses the kind of workplace ACORN organizers would like to create through unionization.



TO-GATHER

WRITE: TO-GATHER C/O IWW, PO BOX 13476, PHILA., PA 19101 • CALL: 215-763-1274 BOX #5 • E-MAIL: giazsoni@usa.net

Welcome to To-Gather

We're all workers for this organization ACORN, which reforms some of the flukes in the system. As workers, we need to ask ourselves what we want from our work. We want to make other people's lives better with our good work, but what about our own lives?

This newsletter is a way for us ACORN workers to share some of the concerns that we have with OUR working conditions. We all gripe to our co-workers in our own offices and some of us have taken the step to organize our office.

If we really want to make our lives better we need to band together and do something about it. Fellow workers, let's unite by sharing our stories, art, comics and thoughts!

Philadelphia ACORN goes Wobbly

On Monday, January 29th, Philadelphia ACORN workers marched into the head organizer's office demanding recognition for their union, the Industrial Workers of the World (also known as "the Wobblies"). Workers wanted the boss to set a date by the middle of the day for negotiations on the following points:

- 8 hour work day
- 2 weekends off per month
- 2 people in the field after dark
- Procedures to deal with cultural bias
- A guaranteed lunch break

Although the boss took the union's authorization cards, but he refused to negotiate with the workers as a union. He rationalized that since ACORN is a national organization, workers should have to organize their union nationally in order to bargain. Despite plenty of case law which points to the contrary, the head organizer even claimed it would be "illegal" to recognize the Philadelphia union.

Philadelphia ACORN workers explained that if management would not negotiate, workplace actions would follow. The first step workers took was to begin working in pairs after dark. Direct action gets the goods.

On Our Demands...

An 8-Hour Day with No Cut In Pay

ACORN has been campaigning for a living wage and decent labor standards for many years. But ACORN doesn't extend these rights to its own employees.

The labor movement won the 8-hour day more than 60 years ago. Yet ACORN staff is asked to put in 54 hours a week without breaks or overtime pay. We work six days a week, never getting a full weekend off. The hours are too long and we have no time to relax or for our families and friends.

We're constantly under pressure to turn out too much work with too little staff in a perpetually disorganized office. It's little wonder that turnover is so high that very few of us last long enough to collect benefits.

This turnover isn't good for the organi-

zation, and it prevents us from doing our organizing work as effectively as we could. We don't have time to work with our members, or even get to know them. By the time we establish contacts in a community, we're out the door and a new person has been brought in.

The way ACORN treats its staff doesn't only affect us - it also undermines our ability to do the important work we came here to accomplish.

ACORN was founded on the premise that people need to organize in order to be heard, and to better their conditions. It's true for the people we organize and it's true for us too. We need a voice at work, and a say in determining the conditions under which we work.

Why we're working in pairs

I've worked at ACORN for about two months. Every afternoon I walk into the neighborhoods that I organize hoping that when darkness falls, I'll be safe as I walk through the streets - alone...in the dark.

"Be Careful! What are you doing out here by yourself at night in this neighborhood?" people would say to me. And one day a man said to me, "Don't walk the streets alone, girl. It's a few days before Christmas, you don't know who could be out here trying to get your money." He invited me into his house - safe from "those bad people" on the street. So I sat down on his couch, and began the usual rap.

"Maybe he'll join," I hoped. "Maybe if I sit here and talk to him about joining he will." My co-worker tells me he gets members to join by connecting with them. The man grabbed my head and kissed me. I pushed him away, contradicting themes dancing in my head, "Protect yourself get out of here, on the one hand." On the other hand I needed to get members to join. If I didn't get enough members to join, would I have a job? I left the house certain that I needed to protect myself but uncertain how I should do that.

A direct question looking for an honest answer

Why are there so many White People interested in what happens to Blacks and Latinos? What is in it for the white people? If Blacks and Latinos get everything they want, wouldn't that mean these same white people would be out of a job?

The above question was raised by an African American staffer during the ACORN YE/YB meeting which happened last month.

Write for To-Gather

We'd love to hear from all ACORN workers.

We hope to publish every other week. If you would like to receive *To-Gather* by e-mail (as a .pdf), by fax, or by mail, please contact us at the addresses above. We are also looking for people who can help us distribute the newsletter.



Inside: 1,000,000 former ACORN workers can't be wrong
Stories from former employees who spoke out

TO-GATHER

A NEWSLETTER FOR ACORN WORKERS • ISSUE #2 • FEBRUARY 19, 2001

WRITE: TO-GATHER C/O IWW, PO BOX 13476, PHILA., PA 19101 • **CALL:** 215-763-1274 BOX #5 • **E-MAIL:** giazsoni@usa.net

Philly ACORN workers strike for safe jobs & end to union-busting

The IWW struck the Philadelphia office of ACORN February 8 to protest a series of unfair labor practices that had made working conditions intolerable. ACORN workers asked management to recognize their union and respond to concerns about job safety and working conditions January 29. Although ACORN claims to be a progressive community group promoting rights for working people, management refused to

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In the two weeks between collecting authorization cards and the workers' decision that they had no choice but to strike, managers subjected workers to captive meetings, threatened workers for engaging in direct action on the job, threatened to terminate and later briefly suspended a member of the union organizing committee on alleged productivity grounds, threatened to discipline a worker for taking a lunch break during her 10-hour shift, blamed the union campaign for its refusal to transfer another worker to a safer job, subjected union supporters to surveillance and investigations, and fired a member of the IWW organizing committee.

A lively picket line in front of ACORN's offices drew 15 ACORN strikers and supporters, and enthusiastic support from many passersby. Several ACORN members pledged to speak to management to demand better treatment for workers. The picket line concluded with a march into the

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Why we're organizing

- **We want organizers working in pairs in the field after dark for more safety.** In the past two months one worker was molested, another robbed at gunpoint, and others have experienced harassment. When we raised the issue in Philadelphia, management responded with a memo claiming that there have been "no major incidents" in the past three years. Maybe they're waiting for someone to get killed.

- **We want an eight-hour work day, and two weekends off per month.** Fifty-four hours a week is just too much.

- **We want guaranteed lunch breaks.** Putting in eight or ten hours at a stretch, we need a chance to eat.

- **We want procedures to deal with racial bias.** We're tired of unequal pay and management insensitivity.

ACORN management can afford to meet these demands. Instead, they order us to continue unsafe work practices, and engage in union-busting. Attempts to intimidate and harass union supporters are illegal, and unworthy of an organization established to work for social justice.

from a flier distributed to Philly ACORN members during a February 8 picket

A Local 100 organizer remembers

LOUISIANA. The struggles of ACORN workers in Philadelphia for workplace democracy is not a new phenomena. Periodically workers in this "peoples' organization" have organized to challenge the undemocratic and exploitative practices of this organization and its leaders. Let me briefly tell you about my experience in one such fight. In the fall of 1986 I began working for ACORN-affiliated Local 100, SEIU, AFL-CIO, in New Orleans, as a union organizer. In the mid-1980s ACORN struck a deal with then SEIU president John Sweeney to open or take over existing SEIU union locals in a number of cities—New Orleans, Boston and Chicago. The local in New Orleans was run by self-proclaimed "chief organizer" Wade Rathke, also the chief organizer of ACORN. I came into the job with zeal similar to that of a lot of young people who are attracted to organizing and who see ACORN as an opportunity to work for progressive social change.

I started noticing that the organization had serious problems regarding democracy and exploitation of its own workers, and the consciousness-raising efforts of Local 100 organizers in North Carolina showed me that the problems were widespread. Let

me explain. One major grievance of the organizing staff was the competitive environment created by Rathke. This "organizing genius" developed a "piece rate" strategy of organizing. All the names of Local 100 organizers were placed on a chalkboard in the office along with a list of all sites where Local 100 had contracts. Scores were kept on how many new dues paying members organizers had signed up at each facility. Later, a bonus program was developed based on how many workers we were able to get on dues check-off each month. Local 100 management also promoted and provoked petty divisions among staff. Thus, management helped to create the competitive, cut throat environment we were supposed to be fighting.

Other issues, which the Philadelphia campaign reminds me of, included late checks, and wages that worked out to be below or near the minimum wage. All these issues were also expressions of the lack of democracy in the organization for both staff organizers and members. In light of these grievances and problems, and due to the efforts of the "Carolina contingent" — the name for the group of organizers from North Carolina — the Local 100 staff organizing drive began in the spring of 1987. There were about 20 organizers and staff involved, which included Local 100's offices in New

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Philadelphia strike from page 1

ACORN office to collect pay checks owed the strikers. While inside, Wobblies asked the boss a barrage of questions about ACORN's unsafe working conditions and union-busting, finding that he had almost nothing to say in response.

"We work 54 hours a week, we work every weekend, and we don't get overtime pay," says ACORN worker Gina Giazioni. ACORN workers' low salaries combined with weekly overtime means an hourly wage hovering around minimum wage. They plan to bargain for a guaranteed lunch break, eight hour work days, and at least two weekends off per month.

Another urgent concern is job safety. "Every night after dark we are sent out alone into city neighborhoods to recruit new members," Giazioni explains. "It's not safe for us. I've been grabbed and molested while out in the field by myself. Our supervisors haven't done anything except issue a vague memo saying to take appropriate precautions. We want to work in pairs, but they won't let us."

Another worker was robbed at gun point while working the streets alone after the union had demanded the right to work in pairs.

ACORN workers have also discovered disparities in pay and in work assignments which seem to be based on the race of the workers, and called for measures to address institutionalized racial biases.

ACORN is closely linked to the AFL-CIO, making its union-busting even more ironic. One of ACORN's founders, Wade Rathke, is also an international vice president of SEIU, and head of HOTROC, an AFL inter-union committee to organize hotel workers in New Orleans.

While Rathke leads a campaign for management neutrality, urging employers to stay neutral instead of fighting against their workers' organizing efforts, the Philadelphia branch of ACORN is fighting the union tooth and nail – going so far as to advance the ridiculous claim that it would be "illegal" to recognize a union for its Philadelphia staff.

From the March issue of the Industrial Worker, the IWW's newspaper. Contact To-Gather for a copy.



Write for To-Gather

We'd love to hear from you. We hope to publish twice a month. If you would like to receive *To-Gather* by e-mail (as a .pdf), by fax, or by mail, please contact us at the addresses under our masthead.

We are also looking for people who can help us distribute the newsletter.

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A little corny...

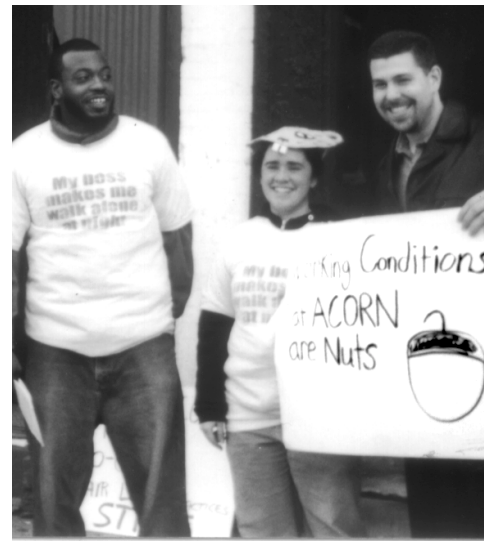
Adapted from a children's song, sung on the picket line in Philadelphia

I'm a little ACORN round
Walking through the cold dark town
My boss he always steps on me
Because I'm just one nut you see

I'm a nut crack, crack,
I'm a nut crack, crack,

But that's not OK with me
We're organizing with Wobblies
Then we'll grow up big and strong
And more acorns they will fall

On the boss crack, crack
On the boss crack, crack



ACORN workers picket on February 8

Local 100 from page 1

Orleans, Baton Rouge and Shreveport.

After a few weeks of clandestine organizing, union supporters marched into Rathke's office to demand union recognition. Rathke, well versed in labor law, refused to accept our petition demanding union recognition.

The battle then began in earnest. Rathke quickly called a meeting of ACORN's inner circle, which included his wife, Beth Butler, head organizer of Louisiana ACORN, and Rathke's brother Dale, who is the financial guru of the outfit. The troika devised a variety of tactics, such as can be expected from any union-busting corporation, to divide and destroy our solidarity. He was successful in peeling some weaker members of over to his side. A couple of them are now high-ranking officials in SEIU. (There are some rewards for breaking ranks.) He also sent some organizers out of New Orleans, the center of the organizing campaign, in order to disarticulate the movement. Other leaders of the campaign were given more onerous and unnecessary assignments. He also worked to get ACORN members to denounce us – not very successfully – as rich brats that wanted to destroy the organization.

Finally the core activists of the drive decided that Rathke would never negotiate. Thus, a good portion of the organizers decided to leave Local 100. The group, including myself, went to Jackson, Mississippi, to organize independently among public sector workers. One of the organizers, who was a Mississippi native, already had good relations with a small SEIU local at the VA hospital in Jackson, which Local 100 was supposed to be servicing, but was not doing a very good job. The union leadership asked us to take over servicing from the far-

away Local 100 in New Orleans. The support from this local would allow us to carry out more organizing. Rathke was furious when the local decided, democratically, to have our local group of organizers service it, rather than Local 100. Rathke attempted to get the international to nullify the agreement and put the local into trusteeship. He also tried to red bait a number of his former organizers. We were (and are, at least some) reds – but this "progressive" tried to use the label to run us out of the labor movement. He was unsuccessful in regaining the breakaway local in Jackson.

Our organizing efforts among state employees laid the groundwork for the still existing Mississippi Alliance of State Employees (MASE) – which was first associated with ACTWU and is now with CWA. Back in New Orleans post-organizing repression was carried out. An African-American employee who had supported the drive, but did not leave for Jackson, was later fired from her job as a part time accountant.

The experience of Local 100 activists in New Orleans, those of ACORN Philadelphia and others shows that it is important to challenge the undemocratic practices of these and other progressive organizations, whether they be labor, community or environmental ones. We should not be prevented from speaking out because it will supposedly give ammunition to the enemy. By baiting us, these outfits avoid being confronted with their own exploitative practices. Further, the ways they deal with their own employees is reflective of the manipulative way they handle their membership. The efforts of workers in these progressive organizations is part of broader struggle to establish truly democratic organizations that can lead a real fight against this racist, capitalist system.

- Jay Arena

Show me the money

ACORN member turned employee has trouble getting paid

CALIFORNIA. As a result of meeting with former ACORN workers and distributing newsletters to current staff, organizers from the San Jose IWW group have learned that poor treatment, high turnover and overall dissatisfaction is widespread among ACORN staff.

Bridgina French was passed *To-Gather* #1 by a co-worker during a training session who said, "Shhh, don't tell anyone I gave this to you, I'll probably get in trouble." Bridgina, an African-American ACORN member, quit her film-processing job to become a paid organizer in early January because she wanted to become more involved with the community.

Working at ACORN Bridgina felt that supervisors lacked basic concern for staff when she was yelled at during a role play training and when a co-worker at ACORN was sent to a street known for prostitution where a man made advances. That woman soon quit.

Less than a week later, Bridgina also quit but without receiving any pay for her work. She was never explained when or how much exactly ACORN staff were paid. When she asked the San Jose supervisor about her pay he wrote a receipt on an index card and gave her a cash advance of \$80 out of his pocket.

After many broken promises of receiving her owed wages, two weeks later Bridgina has still yet to receive her paycheck, causing her extreme economic hardship.

Also since quitting her staff position, Bridgina has stopped receiving any phone calls or notices of ACORN meetings.

She is writing a letter explaining her experience as a staff organizer at ACORN, which she wants to present to ACORN management and has agreed to publish in *To-Gather*.

Bridgina is now working with IWW members to pressure her former supervisor to pay her owed wages that she desperately needs. At presstime of this newsletter, Bridgina has still not been paid.

She is asking concerned community members to call the San Jose ACORN office at 408-729-8961 and ask Jon, the supervisor, why has Bridgina not received her check.

- Adam Welch

It's Not Anti-ACORN to be Pro-Union

NEW YORK. From June 1997 until May 1998, Scott Gorman worked 80 hours or more each week with ACORN's workfare organizing project in New York City. While he was fiercely committed to the goals of the campaign and to the members he worked with, he left after a year feeling mistreated and burned out. He watched many other committed organizers leave under similar circumstances. While he still believes in ACORN's mission, he thinks that low pay, long hours, and basic lack of respect for its workers make the organization much less effective in carrying out its mission than it would be if it treated its workers decently. "I still support ACORN—I would take

part in any of their actions in a heartbeat. I differ in philosophy with them as to how to build a stable organization and on how to be consistent with the philosophy that people deserve dignity and respect."

Scott started working at ACORN as a 3-month-long "apprentice." He was at work early in the morning six days a week, often before dawn, talking to workers at sanitation garages and parks, and waiting outside welfare offices for new workfare workers to show up for their orientations. He worked all day, and stayed at the ACORN office making phone calls until 10 every night. "You could never leave the office at 9:30pm without catching grief from your supervisor." Organizers had intense schedules, travelling to worksites all over the Bronx, going to workers' homes to talk with them at length, organizing meetings, recruiting for committees, collecting dues, and helping to organize local and city-wide actions. Supervisors tried to motivate the staff by appealing to their sense of dedication to the campaign and to their sense of guilt. The lead and head organizers constantly reminded the staff of the goals they set for the campaign. Staff were constantly asked how close they were to meeting the goals and how they planned to improve their performance. Supervisors provided almost no positive reinforcement. Scott didn't like the way he and other workers were treated, and he thought the goals they were asked to meet were nearly impossible. He felt and was encouraged to feel, however, that the campaign was more important than his own well-being.

When he moved out of the "apprenticeship" program into a permanent job, we was

promised a raise in pay from \$12,000 to \$15,000 a year. He needed the extra money in order to survive, and when his next few pay checks didn't change, he talked with his immediate supervisor about it and then with Jon Kest, the director of NY ACORN. They promised to fix the problem, but his pay remained the same. Some of Scott's co-workers were experiencing the same situation, so they decided that they should talk

While Scott still believes in ACORN's mission, he thinks that low pay, long hours, and basic lack of respect for its workers make the organization much less effective in carrying out its mission than it would be if it treated its workers decently.

with the director collectively. According to Scott, "As soon it became apparent that I wanted to speak to a higher level superior with one of my co-workers about problems we had in common, management immediately took on the characteristics of a union-busting firm." When Scott and a co-worker tried to schedule a meeting with Kest, Kest flatly refused to meet with them together saying "No, I'll talk to you now, and I'll talk to him on Friday." But their efforts did force their boss to pay the amount that had been promised. Kest also began to complement Scott on his work and to offer him encouragement.

But the encouragement only lasted a few weeks, and Kest reverted to a pattern of constant criticism. Scott began to point out in conversations and in meetings that no one was able to consistently meet the goals that management set. "I said that I thought the world of all the organizers, and that if none of us are consistently meeting the goals, perhaps they're unrealistic." He also argued that organizers needed more positive reinforcement, and less negative criticism. He was the only organizer in the campaign who spoke out about his concerns to management, and he feels that he was singled out for scrutiny because of his outspokenness. In May 1998, the director of the NY office gave him an ultimatum: this would be his last week not meeting all of the campaign's standards. Scott had just coordinated a large, successful action, without the help of any other organizers, at the Bronx Sanitation headquarters, and he'd been bringing in the required amount of dues. Despite the fact that no one on the campaign was able to meet all of the goals at the same time (including organizers who had been there longer than he had), and even though he was doing well by any reasonable standard, he was told that he would absolutely have to meet all of the goals or

continued on page 4

else leave. Scott and Kest worked out a plan for how the goals could be met, but after thinking it over, Scott decided to quit.

The director then offered him the chance to begin a new workfare campaign in New Jersey. Scott worked for two months in NJ, operating out of his mother's house because the NY office failed to give him the support he needed to get office space. The lack of support and resources became intolerable, and Scott decided to leave ACORN for good.

Scott sees the low morale and high turnover among staff in the workfare organizing campaign, the limited effectiveness of the campaign, and the more general problem that ACORN has in encouraging sustained, long-term activism among its members as being interconnected, and he believes that these problems are related closely to management's lack of regard for staff. "I feel that management's philosophy was to squeeze out as much productivity as they could get out of me for as long as I was willing to stay, and that they had no concern for my well-being as a person." Very few of the organizers who were with the campaign when Scott started were still there when he left, and the staff turnover affected the members in very negative ways. "When I left the Bronx, the membership base that I had built up became very inactive, and I believe that this is because the organizer and member develop a special relationship, and you can't just plug in a new organizer with the same membership and expect the machine to continue functioning without missing a beat. . . . It's a shame — a new organizer dealing with the same community in many ways starts from scratch. Or it can be even worse — sometimes we'd refer to a community as 'burnt turf,' because the people there had already seen organizers come and go and were less likely to believe that a new organizer can help them to effect any change."

Scott believes that management's lack of respect for workers impairs the organization in other ways as well. Tired, worn-out organizers cannot consistently do a good job; and unreasonable expectations, arbitrary discipline, and constant negative criticism drain organizers of their enthusiasm.

And if the organizers do not feel that they can talk freely with management about the goals they are asked to meet, about the priorities they should have, about the tactics and strategies that are used, they cannot use the knowledge they gain doing organizing work day to run effective campaigns.

He thinks ACORN would be different much more effective if field organizers had more of a say over what goes on in their workplace.

— Interview by M. Chanin

An Open Letter to ACORN Members

This letter, along with the first issue of To-Gather, was distributed to ACORN members in Philadelphia on February 17 outside of a New Year Kick-Off meeting.

Dear ACORN members,

I'm writing to explain to you some of the reasons why my co-workers and I are trying to form a union at ACORN. As any member who has been with ACORN for an extended period knows, the turnover rate of ACORN staff is outrageous. You are lucky if the organizer who signed you up stayed around for a month after you became a member. Our bosses will tell you that the high staff turnover rate at ACORN is due to organizing being "hard work that few are cut out to do." We've come up with solutions that will make the work a little easier and will ultimately strengthen the organization. We want an eight hour work day, two weekends off per month, a guaranteed lunch break, working in pairs after dark, and policies to deal with cultural bias. We asked management to recognize our union and to begin negotiating with us, but they haven't.

The ten hour days and work every weekend make it nearly impossible for organizers to spend quality time with family and friends. The ACORN worker with children sees them off to school in the morning and comes home from work at night to sleeping children. Weekend hours that the organizer could be spending with his or her children are also spent at work. Of course these working conditions are much easier to handle for young people fresh out of college with no family to take care of or debt to pay. While the ACORN workers with debts and families struggle to balance work life and home life, young college grads can dedicate extra hours to work, and quickly advance to a management position. This excludes many people who live in the neighborhood from working as organizers in their own neighborhood.

When the head organizer and boss at Philadelphia ACORN refused to negotiate with staff, the staff took these concerns to the elected Philadelphia ACORN Board of Directors. The boss immediately notified Philadelphia staff that we were not allowed to go to the Board with our concerns. We were told that if we discussed our concerns with Philadelphia ACORN members we would be fired. Our boss explained that the membership structure runs parallel to the staff structure. According to the ACORN by-laws, Philadelphia ACORN members have no say in how the staff is treated. Orders come down the line from chief, Wade Rathke, who lives in New Orleans, Louisiana.

If you think that the ACORN worker who knocks on your door understands how ACORN members want staff to be treated better than the chief in New Orleans, if you would like to see more of your neighbors as permanent ACORN workers, if you are disgusted with the high staff turnover rate, you can do something about it.

Join with other ACORN members who are demanding justice ACORN employees, by contacting us at 215-763-1274 box #5 or by writing to our union's office: IWW • PO Box 13476 • Phila., PA 19101

— Gina Giazioni

ACORN management freaks out

When the Philadelphia ACORN workers presented union authorization cards from a majority of the staff, their boss, Jeff Ordower, told them he would not recognize the union. He told the workers that it would be "illegal" to recognize the union unless a majority of workers in every ACORN office across the country signed authorization cards.

Ordower, who was expecting the request for recognition, fabricated a reason to not recognize the union, but strangely still asserted that he and ACORN held a "neutral" position on the matter.

As the weeks went on, and after the first issue of *To-Gather* started getting around, the following e-mail came into Gina's inbox:

There were only 4 cards signed in a unit of 9. It is illegal under the NLRB [sic] to recognize less than a majority! Or they would have been recognized. Furthermore, we told you orally and in writing

that we supported unions and would be neutral.

Now, you know this, and instead of doing the organizing of the workers, you are attacking ACORN and telling lies about the organization.

It went on to say that the union insulted ACORN members, that if they had only organized one more person they would have been recognized (her figure of 9 workers includes 2 managers), and that the union's credibility was "botched" because an organizer stood up the members (presumably referring to a sick day a worker took.) It was signed by Beth Butler, who is Wade Rathke's wife.

We beg to differ of course, but are happy to see that management will negotiate with units that present a majority of cards. Write us for a full copy of the e-mail.

— Alexis Buss



TO-GATHER

WRITE: TO-GATHER C/O IWW, PO BOX 13476, PHILA., PA 19101 • CALL: 215-763-1274 BOX #5 • E-MAIL: giazsoni@usa.net

Seattle ACORN workers on strike

**Eight hour day,
pay on time,
guaranteed lunch breaks
are demands**

SEATTLE. On Monday, all Seattle ACORN organizers along with 30 ACORN members, union members, and supporters struck the ACORN office to demand recognition for their union, the Industrial Workers of the World.

ACORN is a progressive membership-based community organization that brings low-income people together to campaign around issues such as better access to utility assistance. The organization also supports labor rights for working people. However, Seattle ACORN boss, Doug Bloch, refused to recognize his own workers' union and refused to negotiate around basic workplace issues, such as 8 hour workdays, guaranteed lunch breaks, and paychecks issued on time and in full.

"Everyday as organizers, we go out into neighborhoods and organize people to demand better living and working conditions. When we try to assert basic labor rights in our own office, these rights are denied. It's hypocrisy!" says Alexa Gilbert, ACORN organizer and striking worker.

ACORN members agree. Yesterday almost ten ACORN members joined the ACORN workers' picket line. "ACORN organizers come into our neighborhoods everyday and put their hearts and souls into helping us stand together to make improvements in our community. These same workers are fighting for very reasonable working conditions so they can continue to help us. I will stand behind these striking workers until management recognizes the union and begins to negotiate in good faith," says ACORN member Linda Moyer.

"Yesterday, we told Bloch that if he refused to recognize the union, he was abandoning the members. We asked him if he



Seattle ACORN workers and supporters picket for union recognition on February 27, 2001.

was willing to sacrifice the Washington ACORN membership for the battle over union recognition. He said he was willing to make this sacrifice," said Honey Anofian another one of the striking workers. In coming days, more ACORN members will join the striking workers' picket line, along with members of the Carpenters' Union, Boilermakers' Union, and Ironmakers' Union who also urged Bloch to recognize the union yesterday.

ACORN management broke federal labor laws two weeks ago when they fired two pro-union workers in the Philadelphia ACORN office. Given ACORN's link to labor unions and local support of the right to organize, ACORN workers nationwide are puzzled by the harassment and pressure they have experienced from management in response to their request for union recognition.

"ACORN's chief, Wade Rathke, also vice-president of the union SEIU, is leading a campaign for management neutrality in New Orleans during hotel organizing campaigns. Yet the Philadelphia ACORN branch fought the union tooth and nail. It looks like they'll be doing the same in Seattle," said Kate Freeman, a striking ACORN organizer.

"Last week, Beth Butler, Wade's wife and the boss of the Louisiana ACORN, e-mailed me saying that she didn't think we had a majority of workers supporting the union in Philadelphia. She said that if we did have majority support, which we did, ACORN management would have recognized our union. But even though 100% of the Seattle ACORN organizers want recognition for their union, ACORN management still refuses to bargain," said Gina Giazsoni, one of the fired Philadelphia ACORN organizers.

The IWW, whose members are also known as "Wobblies," was formed early in the 20th century and has a long and proud history of democratic unionism and lively support for workers' rights. For more information on the strike, contact the IWW in Seattle: 206-706-6250.

Write for *To-Gather*

We'd love to hear from all ACORN workers. If you would like to receive *To-Gather* by e-mail (as a .pdf), by fax, or by mail, please contact us at the addresses above.

We are also looking for people who can help us distribute the newsletter.



TO-GATHER

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WRITE: TO-GATHER C/O IWW, PO BOX 13476, PHILA., PA 19101 • CALL: 215-763-1274 BOX #5 • E-MAIL: acornunion@iww.org

Washington ACORN locks out workers

Despite striker's offer to return to work, management refuses to talk to union supporters

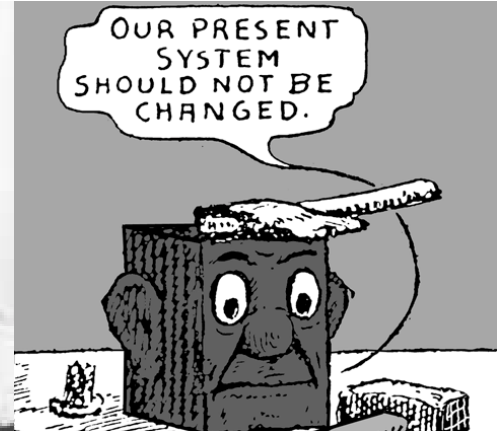
SEATTLE. On February 26th, 100% of the Washington ACORN organizers went on strike to demand a stop to unfair labor practices by ACORN management and to demand the recognition of their union. The employer refused to bargain with the union, even though nearly 100 percent of the workers had joined the union, and had presented demands, which included a 40 hour week, paychecks on time and in full, a sexual harassment policy, safety on the job, and lunch breaks. Most of these demands are asking for the employer to comply with federal and state labor law. A week later, management brought in scabs from Portland, Oregon to cross the picket line. ACORN management put on appearances of "business as usual" to the Seattle community, as if no internal labor dispute existed. As the strike went on, it became obvious to the organizers that ACORN management could withstand the strike with scab labor.

The strikers decided to change their strategy. Instead of just staying out on strike and allowing ACORN management to continue to "permanently replace" their jobs with scabs, the strikers filed for an election with the National Labor Relations Board and offered an unconditional return to work. The strikers handed a written request to return to work to Washington ACORN Head Organizer, Doug Bloch, three weeks ago. They've called several times to check up on the request and have received no response. It is obvious that the striking organizers are locked out. Management recently brought in three more scabs from Portland to replace the organizers, and they are arguing that the organizers' strike is "illegal".

The strikers are continuing to picket outside the Washington ACORN office, chanting, "They call it social justice...We form a



A striking resemblance: Seattle ACORN manager Doug Bloch (left), and historic IWW cartoon character Mr. Block (right).



union and they BUST US!" and "2,4,6,8, Sign the form, negotiate!" Scabs and management continue to silently walk across the line with no eye contact.

The strikers have followed a "three-pronged strategy", as Julia Fitz-simmons, a striking ACORN organizer, likes to call it. The first goal is to get the word out to

ACORN members. Membership support has been strong from the very beginning of the strike. Over 30 members and supporters joined the five Seattle organizers when asking their boss, Bloch, to recognize their union.

"We are just out here today doing what

Continued on next page

From the picket lines...

Why We're Striking

We're on strike to demand union recognition. On Monday, February 26, we requested that management recognize our union, the Industrial Workers of the World, and begin bargaining in good faith.

We organized a union because:

- **We want a 40 hour work week with flex time.** The fifty-four hours we work each week is just too much.
- **Our pay checks must be issued on time and be paid in full.** We can't pay our rent with IOUs and promises.
- **Health care.** Our health insurance benefit be activated on time.
- **New hires need information.** When ACORN hires new staff, they must inform them of quotas, the canvassing and fundraising schedule, and how "raising your own sal-

ary" works before the prospective worker is hired. It's not fair to keep people in the dark.

- **An end to discrimination & harassment.** There should be absolutely no tolerance of sexual harassment, and there must be a statement of employees' rights and responsibilities posted in the office.

- **No one gets fired for union organizing.** Two workers in the Philadelphia ACORN office were recently fired in retaliation for their organizing efforts. A "social justice" organization like ACORN must guarantee workers the right to organize.

- **Safety on the job.** Workers must be able to decide if they want to work in pairs, instead of alone, while in the field. We work at night, by ourselves, and are too vulnerable when we are alone and nobody knows our exact location. There must also be a clear policy of response to harassment incidents that occur in the field.

An eight-hour day, safe working conditions, and paychecks on time... Who deserves it?

As we organize our ACORN offices across the country, we hear the same objections from bosses everywhere. They say that we don't deserve safety, eight-hour days and timely paychecks because it would disrupt their movement. Whose movement is this anyway? Our boss' policies are paternalistic attempts to "organize" us into believing that we enjoy sacrificing our livelihood for a "movement" that they orchestrate.

The relationship between ACORN management and ACORN workers resembles an abusive relationship. It's like a woman abused by a boyfriend with liberal political clout being told to stay quiet and serve his needs because of the boyfriend's intention

to strengthen the woman's movement. In fact our bosses sound a lot like a hospital administrator would sound telling nurses that without short staffing and long hours the hospital can not heal patients. When nurses organize, though, hospital administrators find ways to improve conditions.

No worker likes getting late paychecks, working so much that that we can't see family and friends, or unsafe working conditions like being assaulted or robbed at gunpoint while working. As unorganized workers we have little power. Our boss can fire us if we don't obey his suggestions that he claims are in line with his movement's goals. If we were our own bosses we could assure safety, eight-hour days and timely paychecks. We can not let our bosses organize us. We need to organize ourselves to get safety, shorter hours, and timely paychecks.

— Gina Giazsoni, Philadelphia

A little corny...

(To the tune of "I've Been Workin' on the Railroad")

I've been workin' in the neighborhood
All the live long day.
I've been workin' in the neighborhood
Signin' up members each day.
Can't you hear the workers strikin'?
They're wakin' up early in the morn!
Can't you hear the workers strikin'?
Boss won't you sign the form?!

Boss won't you sign, boss won't you sign,
boss won't you sign the form?!
Boss won't you sign, boss won't you sign,
boss won't you the form?!

Someone's in the office with my boss.
Someone's in the office with my boss,
I know...

Someone's in the office with my boss.
Tryin' to bust up the union show.

Seattle lock-out

continued from cover page

these guys do for us in our neighborhoods everyday", says Nadine Baumbach, a member from the city of Kent, just south of Seattle. Another member Linda Moyer said she would do everything she could to help fight for the rights of her organizer, Kate Freeman. "Kate comes out to our neighborhood every day and works really hard to get our trailer park cleaned up and inspected. We won an inspection out here because of her. Now when I heard that she isn't getting paid for all her hard work and that she's sick and can't pay to go to the doctor because ACORN hasn't given her

"Now when I heard that [ACORN organizer Kate Freeman] isn't getting paid for all her hard work and that she's sick and can't pay to go to the doctor because ACORN hasn't given her the health insurance they promised her, then I got really mad. So when she called and asked if I'd come and support her in asking her boss to recognize their union, I was there in a second. She deserves better than she's getting at ACORN. I'm with her all the way and I'm going to help her fight in any way I can."

— ACORN Member Linda Moyer

the health insurance they promised her, then I got really mad. So when she called and asked if I'd come and support her in asking her boss to recognize their union, I was there in a second. She deserves better than she's getting at ACORN. I'm with her all the way and I'm going to help her fight in any way I can."

More than 200 members in the Seattle area either signed a letter or put their names

on a petition telling Bloch they would cancel their membership with Washington ACORN unless he recognized the union. Members called Bloch, urging him to recognize the union immediately. Over 40 members and friends showed up at a rally to support the strikers at the ACORN office, demanding that Bloch recognize the union immediately and telling him that they thought A C O R N management's use of scab labor was offensive. Thus, the first strategy of the strike — getting membership support — has proven very successful.

The second strategy of the strike has been to make it known in the Seattle community, especially the labor and social justice communities,

what Washington ACORN is doing to its own workers, and to enlist support. This strategy has also proven very successful. Not only did three papers in Seattle report on the strike, the strikers also received an endorsement and a standing ovation from the King County Labor Council at the Seattle Labor Temple. Organizers from the Boilermaker's Union, the local American Postal Worker's Union, the Ironworker's

Union, the Carpenter's Union, two Teamsters local, SPEEA, AFSCME, Jobs with Justice, and the Longshore Workers have all joined the strikers on the picket line or written strong letters to ACORN management condemning their behavior and urging them to recognize the union. Organizers from the Tenant Union (a social justice group similar to ACORN that voluntarily recognized its own staff union a year ago) and Radical Women came down to the picket line to support the strikers and had their respective presidents write a letter to Doug Bloch, Washington ACORN's head organizer.

The third, and most difficult, goal of the strikers' campaign is to put pressure on national ACORN to allow Doug Bloch to recognize his workers' union. The Seattle strikers sent copies of letters of support from unions in Seattle to Wade Rathke, chief of national ACORN. The strikers have also contacted SEIU, a union in which Rathke holds an official position, to ask for their support.

The strikers are working with Gina Giazsoni, an ACORN organizer in Philadelphia who was fired for unionizing, to plan a national week of solidarity. This will help raise awareness among ACORN organizers nationally of management's union busting tactics and of the struggle for union recognition in Philadelphia, Dallas, and Seattle.

Some good news: the *Wall Street Journal* recently put the news of ACORN's labor struggle on its front page. That will help to raise national awareness of the strike and the struggle for ACORN workers' rights.

For more information on the strike, contact the IWW in Seattle: 206-706-6250.

— Alexa Gilbert, Seattle &
Mitch Chanin, Philadelphia

Help Wanted

Immediate openings. Have you always wanted to be a martyr? ACORN is currently hiring community organizers to dedicate their lives at the expense of everything else for at least a year for a minimum of 54 hours a week. Job duties include door-knocking by yourself to sign up members (sometimes at night); developing leadership; planning meetings, protests, and rallies; running campaigns and fundraising. Working for ACORN is a position of privilege, so if you are single, young, can go for weeks without a paycheck, and you think you have what it takes, call us at 555-ACORN. Fluency in Spanish and the willingness to neglect your own well-being a plus.

I wish I could say this ad is a parody. But the truth is that as an ACORN organizer, you are expected to sacrifice your entire life for the cause. After seeing so many people come and go out of the Dallas office in the six months I was there, I understand why hiring martyrs doesn't work. The high turnover rate at ACORN does tremendous damage to the relationship between the members and the staff. The result is losing quality people before they have a chance to prove themselves, in addition to discouraging others from taking the job in the first place. The tone of the office in Dallas was that anyone not willing to make their work their life was just a wimp who couldn't cut it, or a lazy person who didn't really care enough. Any questioning of the internal structure of the organization would lump you in the wimp/lazy person category.

Don't feel comfortable door knocking alone at night? Too bad, that's the way we do it. Miss lunch and dinner? Who needs to eat? Want to do a combined action with another organizer in the office? No, that's not the way we do things. In a

slump and want to door knock with a senior staff member? Better just be a day, because that neighborhood already has an organizer. Go for a couple weeks without a paycheck? Sorry, we just don't have the money. What's that?

Corporate (whoops, I mean National) is giving away thousands of dollars to anyone who wants to open a new office but won't take care of the organizers already on staff? Every business is a growth business!!! Wait, that's the line those big nasty corporations use that don't pay their employees enough and don't listen to what they have to say! A non-profit title does not make an organization democratic. It seems as though we work to insure that other people don't have to live the way we do.

If we're really working to turn America into a democracy then the test run is how we handle our own organization. ACORN management is failing miserably. Why is an organization that is supposed to empower the low income communities have so few members taking jobs as organizers? It's a shock to come from the democratically run neighborhood group to the hierarchical world of ACORN staff! Members who were used to making decisions on the way their group ran quickly find out that they have very little decision making power when it comes down to how the office is run.

A few weeks ago I discussed the union with my head organizer. The next day she laid me off. Since then I have been asking whether our martyrdom is necessary to build strong communities for ACORN members? Certainly the communities need

people who are dedicated, passionate, caring, and who are willing to do the work. However, allowing workers who are excited about doing the work to burn out and leave is not an effective way to build power in cities or in the country. Neighborhood groups don't have the support from staff to build campaigns if there is a different organizer every few months.

You don't have to be a martyr to be a successful organizer. Giving organizers raises isn't enough. Raises don't do any good if you don't get paid half the time. Opening up more offices and expanding existing offices doesn't do any good if you can't take care of those employees. And offering

slightly higher pay is not going to make up for the fact that people have lives, and sometimes they are not in a position to give those up.

I reject the belief that the only indication of dedication is being underpaid and overworked. It is time to re-evaluate what the goals of the organization are. If the goal is to make America a democracy and empower low-income

communities, then who better to work for ACORN than the members of those communities? That so many members-turned-organizers leave ACORN is a clear indication that something is fundamentally wrong in the way management treats workers. As it stands right now, the only way to suggest changes is to go to the head organizer in your office, and then from there up the chain of command. The problem is that all the management is organized together, and all say the same thing. I see no other way to level the playing field than for the organizers to be organized as well. And if I remember correctly, this is something we tell people when we door knock them..."Companies are organized, the government is organized, and if you want to have a voice you need to be organized!"

The only way to make that happen is by forming a union. But by all means please know your rights, contact us and form a union before talking to your head organizer about it!

If you are interested or need help contact the Industrial Workers of the World General Headquarters at 215-763-1274 box #5 or email us at acornunion@iww.org.

— Sarah Stevens, Dallas

Know Your Rights

Your boss cannot legally:

- Ask you if you have signed up with a union.
- Interrogate you on what you think about the union.
- Threaten you with discharge or punishment for union activity.
- Threaten, coerce, or harass you through a supervisor or fellow employee.
- Threaten you with the loss of present or promised benefits.
- Threaten to close the facility if you form a union.
- Promise you benefits if you reject the union.
- Spy on or interfere with your union activity.

If your employer does any of the above, let us know immediately. We can help you fight the union busting and file charges with the National Labor Relations Board.

Why I quit

An open letter to members concerning the union-busting in Dallas

Dear ACORN leader,

The purpose of this letter is to make you aware of a situation within ACORN which threatens the sanctity of the people's organization. This situation began when community organizers across the country sought to organize themselves into a union to promote better working conditions, democracy and equality within the ACORN workplace.

As you know, ACORN is an organization that for 30 years has fought to bring democracy, solidarity and equality to low and moderate income neighborhoods in the United States. However, ACORN management is failing miserably in practicing these ideals which they preach. In fact, they are responding to this challenge to their authority by firing and threatening any organizer that advocates for, or is sympathetic with an organizer's union.

In Dallas, two very dedicated and hard working organizers, Sarah Stevens and Erin Howley, have had their employment terminated due to their desire for a more democratic workplace. This is a blatant violation of federal labor laws, not to



Seattle ACORN workers and supporters picket for union recognition on February 27, 2001.

ACORN striker Honey Anofian says, "Here in Seattle we are all women, women of steel. And the thing about steel is steel will bend but it will not break. And neither will we because we are all women of steel. Boss, sign the form to show you recognize the union!"

mention outrageously hypocritical. I quit as lead organizer of Dallas ACORN as soon as I became aware that organizers are being fired across the country for having union sympathies. If ACORN management has such a low opinion of their organizers, I fear that their opinion of the members is not much better.

I strongly urge you as ACORN leaders to stop ACORN management in their illegal and fratricidal campaign to crush workplace democracy. This is your organization. You have the ability and responsibility to end ACORN management's campaign against their own workers.

It is my strong belief that by confronting Dallas ACORN head organizer Kimberly Olsen, you can force her to do the right thing and end ACORN union-busting in Dallas. She is under enormous pressure by ACORN national management to engage in illegal union-busting tactics. For two years Kimberly was my boss, colleague and dear friend.

She is the most tireless champion of social justice I have ever known, and Dallas is certainly a better place to live because of the work that she has done the past five years. However, her blind obedience to national management and personal ambition are poisoning the organization. It is up to you to save her and ACORN from herself.

Also, please begin a letter writing campaign to ACORN's National Headquarters and demand that they put an end to illegal union-busting.

Write to National Head Organizer Wade Rathke at 1024 Elysian Fields Ave., New Orleans, LA 70117, Tel. 504-943-3842, fax: 504-943-3842 and National Field Organizer Helene O'Brien at 88 3rd Ave. Brooklyn, N.Y. 14217 Tel. 718-246-7900, fax: 718-246-7939.

I will end this letter by expressing what an honor it was to serve as your community organizer for two years. Although ACORN was by far the most difficult and challenging work I have ever encountered, it was also the most rewarding. However, I feel that I can no longer work for an organization that persecutes people for having the very ideals that brings them to the organization in the first place.

In solidarity,
John Rees, ACORN Organizer

Dear Wade Rathke:

I support the right of ACORN workers to organize unions to guarantee safe working conditions, reasonable hours, and timely paychecks. I demand that you:

- Allow all locked-out ACORN workers in Seattle to return to work.
- Recognize the chosen union of the workers in Seattle, the Industrial Workers of the World, and begin collective bargaining immediately.
- Rehire workers in Dallas and Philadelphia who were fired in retaliation for their union activity.

Thank you,

Please respond to my concerns by writing back to me.

Copy this postcard (four will fit on a sheet), get them signed and send them to: IWW, PO Box 13476, Phila., PA 19101 by April 5th & we'll deliver them to ACORN's Headquarters

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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TUESDAY, MARCH 27, 2001

WSJ.com

Work Week

A Special News Report About Life
On the Job—and Trends
Taking Shape There

A UNION ALLY finds itself the target of an organizing drive.

The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, a group that supports living-wage laws and curbs on predatory lending, often counts on unions for help. But a few Acorn organizers, who canvass neighborhoods on Acorn's behalf, say it opposes their attempt to unionize. Some have alleged unfair labor practices with the National Labor Relations Board.

The workers say they seek better hours and better pay, among other things. Gina Giazsoni, a former Philadelphia Acorn worker, says they also want the right to work in pairs, for better safety. The workers seek representation by the Wobblies of old, the Industrial Workers of the World. Wade Rathke, an Acorn official, says the group doesn't have anything to say about the allegations.

"We've worked with unions throughout this organization's history," he says.

Dramatic Irony

ACORN has led union campaigns across the country. Now the group's own employees claim they are being punished for organizing.

By Gwen Shaffer

A community organization whose mission is to protect the rights of low-wage workers is refusing to recognize its own employees' attempts to unionize, several field organizers with the group claim.

One employee was fired after she protested outside ACORN's Philadelphia office last week.

ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) is a national non-profit with an active chapter in Philadelphia. Most recently, ACORN has made headlines for tackling the issue of predatory lending and spearheading a "living wage" campaign, both of which prompted City Council to introduce legislation.

But several field organizers for ACORN — who earn about \$20,000 annually — claim that long hours, low pay and unsafe working conditions would be improved if they formed a collective bargaining unit.

In late January, they approached the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) union. Four of seven organizers working at ACORN as of Jan. 29 signed union cards. Since that time, at least one of them quit and one was axed.

"We work 54 hours a week, we work every weekend, and we don't get overtime pay," said Gina Giazioni, 24, who was hired by ACORN in December.

On the morning of Feb. 9, Giazioni led

about 15 people in a picket outside of the ACORN office, located at 846 N. Broad St. That evening, Jeff Ordower, the managing organizer for ACORN, delivered a letter to Giazioni's home. It notified Giazioni that she was "terminated."

Giazioni said the letter does not clearly explain why she was fired. But another source speculated that Ordower thinks Giazioni was working at the IWW office on a day she called out sick to ACORN.

Giazioni and some of her now-former colleagues believe that a collective bargaining agreement would lead to guaranteed eight-hour weekdays, lunch breaks and at least two weekends off per month.

Concerns about safety on the job are also prompting field organizers to seek help from IWW.

Each evening, they are sent out into some of Philadelphia's most dangerous neighborhoods to knock on doors and recruit new ACORN members. While working for the organization, Giazioni was in charge of signing up people who live between 31st and 48th Streets, north of Market.

After just two months on the job, Giazioni claimed she was sexually harassed twice. In December, a potential ACORN member invited Giazioni into his home, then grabbed her head and kissed her. Another evening, a man loitering on the sidewalk flashed her.

"It's not safe for us," she commented.

Other ACORN organizers agreed.

"A few days ago, I was robbed at gunpoint," asserted organizer Ozzie Sims. "Our supervisors haven't done anything except issue a vague memo saying to take appropriate precautions."

When field organizers asked to canvas in pairs, management said "no," according to IWW.

Ordower declined to comment for the record. "This is an internal matter and we are not going to work it out in the press."

But Giazioni said that when presented with signed union cards from a majority of the field organizers on Jan. 29, Ordower insisted it would be "illegal" for him to recognize a union in ACORN's Philadelphia chapter

unless field workers in about 39 other offices throughout the country also unionized.

Dorothy Moore-Duncan, regional director for the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), said there is "a presumption that a single workplace is an appropriate bargaining unit." But that assumption can be challenged, she added, "based on the interchange of employees among offices, the role of labor relations in the workplace and how the office is managed."

Wade Rathke, Ordower's supervisor and a co-founder of ACORN, is based in New Orleans. He denies knowing any details about the situation in Philadelphia.

"I'm not particularly aware that workers are trying to organize," Rathke said, noting that he did receive a fax from the field staff outlining "general issues."

When questioned about the concerns raised in that memo, Rathke responded, "Now you're asking me to have memorized it." But Rathke added that ACORN "supports everybody's legal rights."

ACORN employees filed two complaints with the NLRB earlier this month. One, dated Feb. 1, alleges that ACORN threatened "Sims with discharge because of his activities in support of the union." A second

complaint dated Feb. 7 contends that management "interfered with and coerced an employee because of the employee's union activity."

The NLRB is investigating the complaints, Moore-Duncan said.

According to ACORN's website, it is the nation's largest community organization of low and moderate families, with more than 100,000 members in 40 cities across the country. ACORN helped found the United Labor Unions in 1979, which succeeded in organizing low wage service workers most unions had ignored, the site says.

And ACORN's Ordower is currently aiding the "Justice for Janitors" campaign in its search for new union organizers.

This is why IWW organizer Alexis Buss says she finds it ironic that ACORN management is resisting unionization in its own workplace.

"Right now, Mr. Rathke is leading a campaign for management neutrality, urging employers to stay neutral instead of fighting against their workers' organizing efforts," Buss says. "Meanwhile, the Philadelphia branch of ACORN is fighting the union tooth and nail."

(shaffer@citypaper.net)

Philadelphia staff goes on Unfair Labor Practices Strike

On January 29, workers at the Philadelphia ACORN office went on a ULP strike to protest ACORN's numerous illegal threats made to union supporters and the firing of Gina Giazioni. On the following pages are copies of the ULPs filed by the IWW with the National Labor Relations Board. The charges are still pending. Similar charges have also been filed against the Dallas ACORN office, where management fired two workers the day after they learned unionization was being discussed.



'Here's Why We're Striking...

We're on strike to protest ACORN management's many unfair labor practices, which began almost immediately after we requested union recognition and have made our working conditions intolerable. Management violates our most basic labor rights, and harasses and threatens workers for organizing.



We organized a union because:

- **We want organizers working in pairs in the field after dark for more safety.** In the past two months one worker was molested, another robbed at gunpoint, and others have experienced harassment. Management responded with a memo claiming that there have been "no major incidents" in the past three years. Maybe they're waiting for someone to get killed.
- **We want an eight-hour work day, and two weekends off per month.** Fifty-four hours a week is just too much.
- **We want procedures to deal with racial bias.** We're tired of unequal pay and management insensitivity.
- **We want guaranteed lunch breaks.** Putting in eight or ten hours at a stretch, we need a chance to eat.

ACORN management can afford to meet these demands. Instead, they order us to continue unsafe work practices, threaten to fire and subsequently suspending a member of the union organizing committee, telling a worker she can't have information necessary to do her job because she's organizing the union, and denying another worker a transfer to a safer job using the union drive as an excuse. These attempts to intimidate and harass union supporters are illegal, and unworthy of an organization established to work for social justice.

If you agree that ACORN management should stop its illegal union-busting, call "Head Organizer" (and boss) Jeff Ordower at 215-765-0042. Tell him you support the ACORN strikers, and justice for ACORN staff.



Industrial Workers of the World
PO Box 13476, Philadelphia PA 19101
215-763-1274 box 5

LABOR DONATED
IWW IU 450

DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE

Case
4-CA-30096Date Filed
2-21-01

1. EMPLOYER AGAINST WHOM CHARGE IS BROUGHT

b. Number of workers employed
7e. Telephone No.
(215)765-0042
Fax No.a. Name of Employer
Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN)c. Address (Street, city, state, and ZIP code)
846 N. Broad Street, Phila., PA 19123f. Type of Establishment (factory, mine, wholesaler, etc.)
Non profit community organizationg. Identify principal product or service
community organizing

h. The above-named employer has engaged in and is engaging in unfair labor practices within the meaning of section 8(a), subsections (1) and (list subsections) (3) of the National Labor Relations Act, and these unfair labor practices are practices affecting commerce within the meaning of the Act.

2. Basis of the Charge (set forth a clear and concise statement of the facts constituting the alleged unfair labor practices)

On or about Jan. 29, 2001, the above-named Employer threatened its employee Ozzie Sims with discharge because of his activities in support of the union. On Feb. 1, 2001, the Employer suspended Ozzie Sims because of his union activity. On Feb. 10, 2001, the Employer discharged Ozzie Sims because of his union activity.

NLRB-501
(11-88)UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS BOARD
AMENDED CHARGE AGAINST EMPLOYER

INSTRUCTIONS: File an original together with four copies and a copy for each additional charged party named in item 1 with NLRB Regional Director for the region in which the alleged unfair labor practice occurred or is occurring.

a. Name of Employer
Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN)c. Address (Street, city, state, and ZIP code)
846 N. Broad Street, Phila., PA 19123f. Type of Establishment (factory, mine, wholesaler, etc.)
Non profit community organizationg. Identify principal product or service
community organizing

h. The above-named employer has engaged in and is engaging in unfair labor practices within the meaning of section 8(a), subsections (1) and (list subsections) (3) of the National Labor Relations Act, and these unfair labor practices are practices affecting commerce within the meaning of the Act.

2. Basis of the Charge (set forth a clear and concise statement of the facts constituting the alleged unfair labor practices)

On Feb. 6, 2001, the above-named Employer, by Assistant Manager Ali Kronley, interfered with and coerced Gina Giazconi because of her union activity. On Feb. 8, 2001, the Employer discharged Gina Giazconi because of her union activity.

By the above and other acts, the above-named employer has in rights guaranteed in Section 7 of the Act.

3. Full name of party filing charge (if labor organization, give full name of labor organization)
Alexis Buss, General Secretary Treasurer, Industrial Workers of the World

4a. Address (Street and number, city, state, and ZIP code)
PO Box 42777, Phila., PA 191015. Full name of national or international labor organization of which it is an affiliate or constituent unit (to be filled in when charge is filed)
Industrial Workers of the World

I declare that I have read the above charge

By (signature of representative or person making charge)
PO Box 42777

Address
WILLFUL FALSE STATEMENTS ON THIS CHARGE CAN BE PUNISHED BY FINE AND IMPRISONMENT (U.S. CODE, TITLE 18, SECTION 1001)

By the above and other acts, the above-named employer has interfered with, restrained, and coerced employees in the exercise of the rights guaranteed in Section 7 of the Act.

3. Full name of party filing charge (if labor organization, give full name, including local name and number)
Alexis Buss, General Secretary Treasurer, Industrial Workers of the World

4a. Address (Street and number, city, state, and ZIP code)
PO Box 42777, Phila., PA 191015. Full name of national or international labor organization of which it is an affiliate or constituent unit (to be filled in when charge is filed)
Industrial Workers of the World

I declare that I have read the above charge and that the statements are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

By (signature of representative or person making charge)
PO Box 42777 Phila PA 19101

Address
WILLFUL FALSE STATEMENTS ON THIS CHARGE CAN BE PUNISHED BY FINE AND IMPRISONMENT (U.S. CODE, TITLE 18, SECTION 1001)

6. DECLARATION

(Print name and title or office, if any)
Gen. Sec. Treas.

(Telephone No.)
215-763-1274

(Date)
2/20/01

(Fax)
215-763-1274

(Date)
2/20/01

(Date)
2/20/01

(Date)
2/20/01

DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE

Case 4-CA-30106

Date Filed
2-21-01

1. EMPLOYER AGAINST WHOM CHARGE IS BROUGHT

b. Number of workers employed
7e. Telephone No.
(215)765-0042
Fax No.a. Name of Employer
Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN)c. Address (Street, city, state, and ZIP code)
846 N. Broad Street, Phila., PA 19123f. Type of Establishment (factory, mine, wholesaler, etc.)
Non profit community organizationg. Identify principal product or service
community organizing

h. The above-named employer has engaged in and is engaging in unfair labor practices within the meaning of section 8(a), subsections (1) and (list subsections) (3) of the National Labor Relations Act, and these unfair labor practices are practices affecting commerce within the meaning of the Act.

2. Basis of the Charge (set forth a clear and concise statement of the facts constituting the alleged unfair labor practices)

On Feb. 6, 2001, the above-named Employer, by Assistant Manager Ali Kronley, interfered with and coerced Gina Giazconi because of her union activity. On Feb. 8, 2001, the Employer discharged Gina Giazconi because of her union activity.

By the above and other acts, the above-named employer has in rights guaranteed in Section 7 of the Act.

3. Full name of party filing charge (if labor organization, give full name of labor organization)
Alexis Buss, General Secretary Treasurer, Industrial Workers of the World4a. Address (Street and number, city, state, and ZIP code)
PO Box 42777, Phila., PA 191015. Full name of national or international labor organization of which it is an affiliate or constituent unit (to be filled in when charge is filed)
Industrial Workers of the World

I declare that I have read the above charge

By (signature of representative or person making charge)
PO Box 42777Address
WILLFUL FALSE STATEMENTS ON THIS CHARGE CAN BE PUNISHED BY FINE AND IMPRISONMENT (U.S. CODE, TITLE 18, SECTION 1001)

Seattle staff goes on union recognition strike

The entire staff of the ACORN office in Seattle demanded union recognition on February 26. When their manager, Doug Bloch, refused to recognize their union, the workers decided to go out on recognition strike in order to head off the kind of union busting that ACORN engaged in in Philadelphia, which picked off union supporters one-by-one.

The workers have made an offer to return to work, but it has so far been ignored by ACORN management.

ACORN Workers on Strike

Why We're Striking

We're on strike to demand union recognition.

On Monday, February 26, we requested that management recognize our union, the Industrial Workers of the World, and begin bargaining in good faith.

We organized a union because:

- **We want a 40 hour work week with flex time.** The fifty-four hours we work each week is just too much.
- **Our pay checks must be issued on time and be paid in full.** We can't pay our rent with IOUs and promises.
- **New hires need information.** When ACORN hires new staff, they must inform them of quotas, the canvass and fundraising schedule, and how "raising your own salary" works before the prospective worker is hired. It's not fair to keep people in the dark.
- **Health care.** Our health insurance benefit be activated on time.
- **An end to discrimination & harassment.** There should be absolutely no tolerance of sexual harassment, and there must be a statement of employees' rights and responsibilities posted in the office.
- **No one gets fired for union organizing.** Two workers in the Philadelphia ACORN office were recently fired in retaliation for their organizing efforts. A "social justice" organization like ACORN must guarantee workers the right to organize.
- **Safety on the job.** Workers must be able to decide if they want to work in pairs, instead of alone, while in the field. We work at night, by ourselves, and are too vulnerable when we are alone and nobody knows our exact location. There must also be a clear policy of response to harassment incidents that occur in the field.

ACORN management can afford to meet these demands.

To find out how you can support our effort, call the
Seattle office of the IWW: 206-706-6250



Industrial Workers of the World
5215 Ballard NW • Seattle, WA 98115

LABOR DONATED
IWW IU 450

Grants received by local ACORN offices

A report generated for ACORN's YE/YB 2000/2001 meeting

Arkansas

44,000 Pulaski County
25,000 Veatch
13,000 NCJIS (N)
20,000 CHD
37,500 Mary R. Babcock
18,000 NCJIS (N)
13,000 NCJIS (N)
170,500 Total

California Statewide

75,000 Irvine
50,000 McKay
125,000 Total

Los Angeles

35,000 CHD
20,000 Butler Family
35,000 CCC
25,000 Liberty Hill
44,000 CA Wellness
17,500 JFJ
50,000 Rosenberg
10,000 Food for All
5,000 Records
19,300 Mott Wrap (N)
1,750 anonymous
262,550 Total

Sacramento

5,000 UCC
20,000 Presiding Bishops
10,000 ?
40,833 Providian (N)
83,833 Total

San Jose

25,000 CHD
50,000 Luke B. Hancock
75,000 Total

Oakland

10,000 Bancroft
20,000 Haas Junior
30,000 CHD
10,000 PRRAC
25,000 Goldman
15,000 Freedman Family
25,000 Needmor
18,500 JFJ
20,000 San Fran Foundation
3,000 Needmor tech assistance
40,833 Providian
35,792 Oakland Fund for Children
5,000 anonymous
258,125 Total

Connecticut

8,000 UCC Hunger Action
7,500 Marianist
10,500 Total

Colorado

5,000 Anschutz
7,500 Rose Community
3,000 Dominican Sisters
10,000 Abelard West
35,000 CHD
5,000 UCC Hunger Action
28,000 Needmor
5,000 Chinook
9,400 Piton
2,500 Annie E. Casey
220,400 Total

DC

3,500 Chevy Chase
16,000 Marianist
19,500 Total

Florida

22,500 Health Services Coalition
9,000 Mott
10,000 Roblee Foundation
41,500 Total

Illinois

37,500 CHD
150,000 Annenberg
40,000 Wiebolt
45,000 Woods
15,000 JFJ
31,000 SCIU
13,000 NCJIS (N)
13,000 NCJIS (N)
15,000 NCJIS (N)
18,000 NCJIS (N)
5,000 NCJIS (N)
26,400 TCF Bank
20,000 NAACP
383,900 Total

Louisiana

52,500 HUD
8,500 Community Toolbox
5,000 Board of Ed
15,000 NCJIS (N)
81,000 Total

Michigan

20,000 CHD
20,000 N'hood Opportunity
51,000 Total (sic)

Boston

40,000 Needmor
20,000 Hymes
40,000 BPON
30,000 anonymous
20,000 JFJ
15,000 Discount
15,000 NCJIS (N)
180,000 Total

Springfield

3,000 Dominican Sisters
1,000 Lucent Tech
4,000 Total

Minnesota

5,000 UCC
37,500 CHD
12,500 Headwater
5,000 Dominican Sisters
20,000 Otto Bremer
15,000 Public Welfare
95,000 Total

Maryland

65,000 Annie E. Casey
30,000 Hazen
24,000 CHD
7,500 Poverty, Peace, Justice
9,000 Mott
15,000 JFJ
10,000 UU Just Society
8,000 Marianist
5,000 Fannie Mae
5,000 UCC Hunger
15,000 EPA
193,500 Total

Missouri

15,000 Needmor
32,000 CHD
3,000 Needmor
2,500 Veatch
52,500 Total

New Jersey

50,000 Health Care Fund
10,000 UU Just Society
2,500 Karma Foundation
62,500 Total

New Mexico

20,000 Needmor
20,000 CHD
36,000 CSIU
6,000 Revisioning MN
13,000 NCJIS (N)
15,000 NCJIS (N)
110,000 Total

Ohio

35,000 Needmor

Pennsylvania

24,000 CHD
20,000 Prudential
5,000 Allen Hillis
25,000 Hazen
2,000 Douthy
5,000 1957 Charity Trust
5,000 Bread and Roses
86,000 Total

Dallas

30,000 CHD
30,000 Hazen
40,000 Providian (N)
15,000 RKG
115,000 Total

Houston

25,000 CHD
1,000 United Way
26,000 Total

Oregon

5,000 CHD
3,000 UCC
9,000 CCC
17,500 Total

Washington

5,000 Territory Resource
8,000 UU Just Society
5,000 Dominican Sisters
3,000 UCC Hunger
500 CHD local
25,000 CHD national
7,500 Pequod Foundation
54,000 Total

TOTAL: \$2,720,808

Notes:

No report from New York
(N) = Nationally generated

In Solidarity

Letters of support for ACORN Workers

Alice Woldt - Associate Director Church Council of Greater Seattle

I'm sorry you've taken an anti-union position on not recognizing the organizing rights of your employees in the local Seattle affiliate here. As an organization that stands in solidarity with workers in the community, it is hypocritical to not give your own employees the voice they're requesting. The Church Council of Greater Seattle has a long history of working with organized labor in support of workers rights. I encourage you to reevaluate your position in light of your own stated mission. The many community groups here will continue to support the striking workers and you will do irreparable damage to the causes you seek to represent.

Jeff Leys - Senior Staff Representative -- SEIU District 1199W (March 5,2001)

Dear Brother Bloch,

I strongly encourage you to recognize the IWW as the duly selected union for the staff of Washington ACORN. Their demands are just and their rights are clear. It is appalling that ACORN, which fights mightily for the rights of the working class on a day to day basis, is using all of the tactics of the corporate bosses to deny basic rights to its own employees and the citizens of this country.

I am perplexed that ACORN is taking the position that it will only recognize workers who organize into a single national union. Clearly ACORN knows that this is a virtual impossibility for ACORN's workers given the geographical dispersion of workers. ACORN also most assuredly must know that the law permits recognition of individual bargaining units in separate shops across the country. If ACORN's interpretation of the law were to be applied to labor law, it would become virtually impossible to organize any business which operates across state lines. Woe to the nursing home workers for whom I work if ACORN's interpretation of the law were to be applied to Beverly Enterprises, Vencor, ManorCare, Genesis, Horizon and all the other union busting chains out there.

I am also quite perplexed that ACORN is not willing to take simple measures like paying its employees a fair wage; paying its employees overtime wages; establishing a just sexual harassment policy; and taking steps to ensure worker safety on the job.

Again I urge you to recognize the IWW union established by your employees; to discontinue the use of scab labor; and to negotiate in good faith with the IWW workers.

Jeff Leys, Senior Staff Representative

SEIU District 1199W / UP, Milwaukee, Wisconsin & Shop Steward -- OPEIU Local 39

Jeff Mansfield -- President -- American Postal Workers Union, Local# 28 (March 2, 2001)

Dear ACORN Management,

I am writing on behalf of the American Postal Workers Union, Local # 28 to express our Union's support of striking Seattle ACORN workers with Industrial Workers of the World. It is clear that ACORN management should recognize its workers' Union, as all of Seattle ACORN's organizers have been striking on the picket line since Monday, February 26th. Management's refusal to recognize the union and the bringing in of scab replacements is offensive to the labor movement and disgraceful for an organization that claims to fight for the rights of working people. ACORN's management should be ashamed of themselves.

As Union president, I believe that all workers deserve the working conditions that unions have fought so hard for over the past century. Seattle ACORN workers are asking for the same rights to be extended to them. They are asking for an eight-hour workday, lunch breaks, and paychecks issued on time and paid in-full. These are basic demands. The Greater Seattle Area Local of the APWU, AFL/CIO stands in solidarity with the striking workers. We urge management to recognize the union and begin contract negotiations immediately.

Jeff Mansfield

President, Greater Seattle Area Local #28 APWU, AFL-CIO