Attack on unions—many fronts

We’re seeing some vicious union and worker bashing lately.

A viewpoint appeared in the Lansing State Journal, Thursday, December 4, that accused MSU of discrimination, squandering money and causing higher tuition. The same views were aired in a full-page ad in the State News. Later in the day, six people who shared the sentiment demonstrated outside the MSU Administration Building.

The contractors who sponsored these activities are a group of employers who have a problem with MSU project labor agreements that require wage, benefit, and hiring standards for certain work that is contracted out. They say that such requirements discriminate against non-unionized companies.

The CTU Executive Board was quick to see the need to counter such anti-

Workers continued on p. 4

Shopping with a conscience

Look for the union label

Even in these rough economic times, American consumers are expected to spend more than $90 billion on holiday gifts. At least 10 percent, or $9 billion of that spending, comes from union households, according to a

Shopping continued on p. 7

Come in out of the cold

Join us for the Winter Membership Meeting

The agenda includes an update and discussion on union activities, a financial update, member issues and door prizes.

Tuesday, January 27
252 Erickson
5:20 p.m.

Doors open at 5 p.m. Come early to socialize—light, warm refreshments provided. We hold four regular membership meetings a year to provide an opportunity for members to make decisions about the union, receive updates about Union activities, meet with coworkers from across campus and discuss issues of concern.
For sale:

◆ Accordion: United Artists Vivona Accordion Company; “Model #3502, Super Special”; made in Italy; classic diatonic with red pearl & white with classic double “V” on bellows; minor keys are gold; original red leather strap & case with blue velvet lining; highly collectible “United Artists” metal plaque inlaid; excellent condition, must play to appreciate; photo available; $800 (or trade).

Marimba: JC Deagan Co., Chicago; #3688-335; Mercury, 1940-42; famous Deagan nagaed wood bars; octaves and range 3 F-F; double row original resonators; great novelty instrument; durable and transportable with the famous Deagan floor rack of seamless steel tubing & slip joint with no screws, especially designed for traveling; photo available; $2,000 and/or trade. anishinaabegamig@yahoo.com.

◆ King-sized mattress set with box spring and frame: Sealy Posturepedic Classic Luxury, firm, heavy fabric, gently used, clean and excellent condition. Deluxe interlocking king bed frame. $50 or best offer. Okemos. You pick up. Email prvc@comcast.net (or call 517-349-1980).

Wanted:

◆ Live in Care Giver: For 83-year-old paraplegic man. Needs 24-hour care and companion (some help from VA and from Hospice). Room and board provided with some income (amount to be discussed). Must be able to cook, clean and assist with all aspects of caring. This is pretty much a 24-hour job. Family willing to assist with care as much as possible. Our father lost his wife (our mother) of 60 years just three years ago and is in need of assistance. He is wheelchair ridden (has permanent catheter) and needs assistance with using the restroom and with eating. He is very much in need of a friend and companion. He owns his own home and does not want to give that up. Please contact Sally Carl at 517-676-3852 (after 6 pm) or sally.carl@police.msu.edu or contact Jackie Bennett at 517-676-1472 (after 6 pm) or at benne42@msu.edu for further information. Our father was recently diagnosed with cancer, so the length of time needed for this job is undetermined. [Debra Polley]

Winter 2009 Membership Meeting
Tuesday, January 27
252 Erickson
5:20 p.m.

General Membership Meetings are for making decisions about the Union, asking questions and receiving updates about Union activities. Light refreshments and childcare are provided. Additional meetings in 2009 will be held on Thursday, April 30; Tuesday, July 28; and Wednesday, October 28. Locations will be announced as available.

Executive Board Meetings
1st & 3rd Tuesdays at 5:15
CTU Office
All members welcome.
Defending union jobs

By Deb Bittner

The CTU Executive Board could not let the anti-union campaign waged by Associated Builders and Contractors go unchecked. The following is from my speech to the MSU Board of Trustees on Friday, December 5.

The Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) of Michigan recently launched a campaign of misinformation about a Project Labor Agreement (PLA) being considered by Michigan State University. They did so for one simple reason: they don’t want to pay their workers family wages! There is no other explanation for the myths, half-truths, and outright lies put forward in the viewpoint of ABC in yesterday’s Lansing State Journal and the ad in the State News.

The CTU supports MSU’s consideration of entering into a PLA on the Brody project. The CTU also commends President Simon and the Board of Trustees for their adoption of the Responsible Contractor Policy and its amendments, especially the use of project labor agreements. We, too, believe it is a good balance for MSU’s institutional interests and its social responsibility.

PLAs are agreements negotiated for complex public-works projects that guarantee that all the work will be performed using one set of wage, benefit, and hiring standards responsible to the local community. PLAs ensure quality work by skilled craftspeople. They guarantee no work stoppages will occur due to labor disputes. And, they create family-wage job opportunities.

Lower wages can cause problems farther down the line. Lower wages mean lower productivity and high accident rates, both of which lead to cost overruns. Lower wages also mean you’re going to see all kinds of hidden costs popping up—good headache and poor PR material!

There are no hidden costs with a PLA. Everything is settled before construction begins, right up front for the life of the project—including any wage increases.

Contrary to ABC claims, PLAs do NOT exclude non-union contractors from bidding on the work.

Contrary to ABC claims, PLAs are NOT discriminatory. In fact, union apprenticeship programs have a proud, documented track record of actively recruiting women and minorities to on-the-job paid training and certification. No comparable programs exist among non-union contractors who are likely to let their workers “train” themselves at their own (or the projects’) expenses.

And, contrary to ABC claims, MSU’s use of a PLA for the Brody project will NOT lead to increased tuition. The CTU does care—very much—about the rising cost of attending college. We are not only union employees here; we are also the parents and spouses of students or alumni ourselves.

This is also true of the employees of the contractors who are hired to complete projects at MSU. However, without decent family wages, these employees will not be able to afford higher education for themselves and their families. They will not be able to contribute to the tax base in a way that supports higher education.

PLAs might not be appropriate for every project for this or any other university, but the one slated for the Brody project is appropriate, fair, just, and nondiscriminatory. It will assist both the University and the workers who are hired for the project. The University will know exactly what its costs will be and that the best-trained employees are working on the project. The workers will know that they have guaranteed employment for the life of the project at a wage and benefit level which will let them provide for their families.

The use of a PLA on the Brody project is a win-win situation for everyone concerned. We have to stop the “race to the bottom” by supporting good, safe jobs with wages that will strengthen our communities and our state. Pitting workers against their unions hurts everyone, and it weakens the tax base of the State of Michigan from which MSU gets its tuition money. THIS leads directly to the necessity of raising taxes.

ABC and others opposed to PLAs have taken a VERY wrong position that seems directly related to profits. Please don’t let their myths, half-truths, and outright lies deter you from doing the correct thing for MSU, its workers, and its students.

Note: These kinds of campaigns Union continued on p. 4
Workers

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worker bias. The next day, CTU President Deb Bittner gave a speech supporting MSU’s actions. A copy of the speech is reprinted on page 3.

And this is just one of the many attacks on unions and workers lately.

For example, unions are suddenly to blame for the auto industry’s troubles and a lot of other economic problems.

In the discussion leading up to the Wall Street bailout, we heard nothing about cutting employees or CEO pay. No one questioned the type of transportation the bankers used to get to the hearings. And this was for a giveaway of our tax dollars, not a loan like the auto industry is requesting.

Also, there isn’t much being said about the tremendous concessions in wages and benefits already made by workers in the auto industry.

In fact, some individuals against the loans have made it clear that they are opposed because the workers are unionized. This, in spite (or because?) of the fact that our country’s middle class was created and is being defended by unionized workers. Many politicians clearly wish to punish Michigan for its political leanings and/or to insure that the non-unionized, foreign auto plants in their states will have less competition.

As union members, it is part of our civic duty to try to stop the “race to the bottom” by supporting good, safe jobs with wages that strengthen our communities and our economy. To give up on the American manufacturing sector of our economy would be incredibly short sighted. Supporting the American auto industry is the right thing to do. [Kristine Mulder]

Union

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against unions are unwarranted. Good working relationships with management and worker advocates—or unions—are not the villains in the workplace. Union contracts are mutually agreed upon by both sides and are good for business, just like a PLA does for its jobs. We need to be vigilant and stand up to these attacks. We need to be proud of what we do to take care of our families and support the union ideals that make it possible.

Happy holidays to you and your family. Remember to buy union and U.S.-made and shop locally. Your community and your job depend on it!

Bad boss stories

The results of the AFL-CIO’s Bad Boss Contest are in.

The winner describes a first job. Although hired as a dispatcher for a private ambulance company, the new employee was frequently sent on runs with coworkers who were just as untrained. To make matters worse, the ambulances were in disrepair.

Another employee recounts being demoted when it rained on the day she had picked for the company picnic.

Other stories tell of repercussions workers experienced for taking time for family illnesses and deaths. One employee was fired for leaving the job because his house was on fire.

Read these tales, and any of the 1,368 submissions received this year, at www.workingamerica.org/badboss.
Threats of violence

By John Klusinske
Contract Administrator

How does an employer violate the Contract, decrease our safety and undermine our job security all at once?

Michigan State University has the answer: Rather than dealing with possible threats of violence in a fair and effective manner, simply terminate employees and dump potential blame on a labor arbitrator.

In several recent cases, MSU has terminated employees from a number of different unions for making off-the-cuff remarks that MSU labeled as threats. In these cases, the employees did not intend, nor did they have the means, to actually harm anyone.

It is obvious that the University is following a “zero tolerance policy.” Rather than doing their jobs, University personnel are willing to spend resources fighting the unions and paying a third-party arbitrator to investigate the details and correct their errors.

When MSU simply terminates employees based upon alleged threats and alleged perceptions of threats without making thorough and effective efforts to determine if there is a real danger, both our jobs and our safety become less secure.

A non-dangerous employee should not be treated as a risk and fired to address a danger that does not exist. Someone who is misheard or simply says something unfortunate should not be accountable for more than that.

Every employee has a right to be safe and to feel safe at work. The CTU demands nothing less. However, injustice decreases safety, which is what knee jerk termination and passing the buck to a labor arbitrator does. [Charleen Rogers]

Under the Contract, MSU has two responsibilities relevant to this issue. One is “just cause,” meaning that employees are not supposed to be terminated unless there is a fair basis to do so. This is the standard that makes our jobs secure. The second is that “the University shall make reasonable provisions for the safety and health of employees during their hours of employment.”

There is a right way for both the unions and MSU to meet their responsibility for the job security and the safety of employees when a question of threat of violence arises.

1. Together, the Union and the University should take the necessary steps to determine if there is a real danger. Tools like the MSU Police MOSAIC propensity for violence test can be used to help make this determination. If appropriate based upon the results, the employee can be referred to the MSU Employee Assistance Program.

2. If there is a real danger, make it a police matter as to whether or not an arrest should be made or a police order should be issued that would prohibit the person from being on campus.

3. If any employees feel unsafe, provide assurance that the danger has been forestalled and that a determination is being made as to whether the threat was credible. This addresses employee needs to feel both job security and personal safety.

4. For those situations where psychiatric problems are an issue, reach agreements requiring treatment and medical releases as a condition for return to work. This last item may be the most important to safety. It increases the likelihood of treatment and makes return a matter to be determined by a psychiatrist rather than a labor arbitrator ruling on contractual technicalities. That is safety and justice working together.

We have had reports from MSU employees in recent months who are sorry they repeated what they took to be an innocent comment by a coworker who was joking or letting off steam, only to see it blown out of proportion and used for termination or serious discipline.

No one should feel threatened at work. In the case of an immediate threat of physical violence, employees should, of course, call law enforcement. In other situations, however, CTUs should contact the Union to discuss future actions before going to management. MSU has shown that we need Union advocacy to try to get the right thing done and to protect ourselves.
Union Made Gifts for the Entire Family

Our space is limited, so these entries represent just a sampling of gift ideas from the many fine union-made-in-the-USA offerings you can find on the Union Label Website (www.unionlabel.org). Some products and services that carry manufacturers' trade marks may also be produced in non-union and offshore plants. We encourage you to read the label to verify the origin of all goods when you shop.

BOOKS
- Powell’s Bookstore (www.powellsbooks.com) — with seven brick and mortar stores in Portland, OR and its highly successful online store. (ILWU)
- Union Communications Services (www.unionist.com) offers an extensive collection of general interest books and union-oriented offerings. (TNG)
- Golden Books Family Entertainment — books, toys. (UAW & GCC-IBT)

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS
- Selmer Bach Bundy Bluescher — wind and brass instruments. (UAW)
- Yamaha Corp. (UAW)

TOYS, GAMES, SPORTING GOODS — FOR KIDS AND ADULTS
- Radio Flyer Red Wagons (www.redwagons.com) (UAW)
- Remington Arms — clay pigeons. (UAW)
- Colt (UAW)
- Hillerich & Bradsby — bats and other Louisville Slugger products. (www.slugger.com) (USW & UAW)
- Leister Games, Novelties and Hobby Supplies — golf novelties and more. (UAW)

HOME DECOR & FURNISHING
- Anchor Hocking Glass Co. (www.anchorhocking.com) (USW)
- Cathedral Candles (www.cathedralcandles.com) (UNITE-HERE)
- Crawford Furniture (IUE-CWA)
- Homer Laughlin Fiesta Ware (www.homerlaughlin.com) (USW)
- Lenox Manufacturing (GMP)
- Libby Glass Co. (www.libby.com) (USW)
- Muench-Krueger Candles (www.emkaycandle.com)
- Pillowtex Bedding (www.pillowtex.com) (UAW)
- Princeton Upholstery Metal Household Furniture (IUE-CWA)

SWEETS & TREATS
- Godiva Chocolate (Div. of Seagram) (UFCW)
- Russell Stover (www.russellstover.com) (BCTGM)
- See’s Candy (www.sees.com) (BCTGM)

INFANT PRODUCTS
- Graco, Century Products (a Div. of Gerber) (www.gracobaby.com) (USW)

KITCHEN
- All-Clad Metalcrafts (www.allclad.com) (USW)
- Cutco Cutlery (www.cutco.com) (USW)
- Electrolux Home Products (www.frigidaire.com) (UAW)
- GE Appliances (IUE-CWA)
- Gorham Kirk Stieff Cutlery (GMP)
- Rival Co. (www.rivalproducts.com) (USW)
- White-Westinghouse Household Cooking Utensils (IUE-CWA)

TOOLS & HOME MAINTENANCE
- Enders Tool Co. (www.enders.com) (USW)
- John Deere Tractors, Mowers and Gear (UAW & IAM)
- Rubbermaid Products (www.rubbermaid.com) (USW)
- Snapper—Mowers and Snow Throwers (www.snapper.com) (USW)
- Toro Co. (IAM)
- Union Fork and Hoe Co. — hand tools. (IBBB)

OFFICE FURNITURE
Taylor union-made office furniture offers rich, functional desks, chairs, occasional tables, bookshelves and more, such as these items in the office of President John J. Flynn at the new headquarters offices of the Bricklayers and Allied Crafts in Washington, D.C.
Other union office furniture suppliers include Marvel Office Furniture (www.marvelunionshowcase.com) and Union Office Solutions (www.unionofficesolutions.com).
As union workers, we know that buying union means supporting jobs where workers have the ability to fight for dignity at work and fair and decent treatment and wages. [Linda Dunn]

As important as it is to buy union, however, it’s not always easy to find which products and services are union made. Seldom does an item or worker actually display a “union label.” To assist in our search, the UL&STD provides a searchable database of union goods and services at www.unionlabel.org.

We can also choose to shop in local stores that are unionized, such as Meijer’s and Kroger’s.

Made in America
Our current economic crisis provides a pretty graphic argument for buying American products. When we buy American, we help keep Americans working, hold the money in our own economy and we avoid supporting the kinds of abuses that occur in areas of the world that have little or no protection for the environment or workers, including child workers.

A letter to the editor in last month’s CT News reported that if every American were to switch the purchase of just $30 a year from imported to U.S. made apparel and home fashions, more than 100,000 American jobs could be saved without spending any additional money (Union Label in Service Trades Council of Wayne, Oakland and Macomb Counties).

Again, it can seem impossible to find “Made in the USA” on some items. For example, rack after rack of clothing and shoes bear labels from China. Even our basic canned goods are increasingly imported. However, with a little effort it is still possible to find items made in the U.S. The following sites can help in your search:


Bringing it all back home
First appearing in Detroit’s November 2007 Hour Magazine, the idea that “if we all spent $10 a week on Michigan products, we could put $36 million every week back into the state’s economy” was confirmed by the Michigan Agritourist Department and soon made the internet rounds.

In these scary economic times, buying Michigan and/or local products is a simple and powerful action we can all take to help. Several websites exist to assist us in locating Michigan products. Try starting with:


Although websites are available to help us find union, American, or locally made products, we can’t stop there. Online shopping may be convenient in some instances, but we must make sure to also support our local retailers—the ones owned by our neighbors, who hire our family members and contribute to our tax base.

Locally made items can be unique and cherished gifts. We have a lot to choose from in this area. Check out some of the locally owned bakeries, candy shops, wineries, breweries and stores that feature Michigan artists. Michigania, a store on the corner of Michigan and Washington in Lansing, sells an impressive variety of gift items made in Michigan.

Always a hectic time, this year’s pressures are compounded by worries about the economy and the future. A little conscientious spending that works to improve the situation can only help bring peace of mind.

Coffee breaks
The Union that brought you work breaks now brings the coffee and doughnuts right to your office.

Recent winners of the Solidarity Committee’s coffee and doughnuts drawing are:
▼ Suzanne Good, Medicine, July Membership Meeting
▼ Heather Dover, Animal Science, August
▼ Hope Wolcott, Advancement Services, September
▼ Deb Pizzo, Child Health Care, October
▼ Marie Hensley, Natural Science, October Membership Meeting
▼ Monica Nestale, Vet Teaching Hospital, November

Submit your name to win a union coffee break with doughnuts from the Solidarity Committee. Contact Chairperson Lois Siefring at 353-4911 or lois.siefring@hc.msu.edu.
MLK Day events

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is Monday, January 19, and several local opportunities exist for us to participate in the commemoration of his legacy.

The following events are offered at MSU on or near January 19. For a complete and frequently updated list, visit www.inclusion.msu.edu/mlk/events.

Showtyme @ MSU
This free, “family-friendly” event showcasing MSU student talent takes place Saturday, January 17, at 9 p.m. in the International Center Food Court.

Jazz
“The Best Is Yet to Come,” a concert featuring music by Herbie Hancock and Stevie Wonder will be offered twice, at 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. on Sunday, January 18, at the Pasant Theatre. The events are free but you must get a ticket from the Wharton Center Box Office.

Community Celebration Dinner
This event brings staff members, who often don’t get the opportunity to attend MLK programs held during the day, and students together to share in the celebration of the legacy of Dr. King. Faculty and community members are welcome to attend. It is held the evening of MLK Day, Monday, January 19, in the Akers Hall Dining Cafe, from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Guests must preregister at msuinclusion.wufoo.com/forms/z7p8a3/. One “free” ticket is available to MSU staff, students and faculty. Additional tickets can be purchased for $9.50. All reserved tickets will be at the door.

In Lansing, the Greater Area Holiday Commission hosts its 24th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Luncheon, January 19, 11 a.m., at the Lansing Center. This year’s theme: “A Dream Comes Closer.” Tickets are $25 per person online at www.lansingmi.gov/Lansing/mayor/mlk/MLK_Order_Form_2009 or by calling 517-483-7637.

CT participation in MLK Day events

Although classes are canceled on Monday, January 19, MLK Day is not a paid holiday for CTs at MSU.

However, a letter of agreement in our Contract encourages departments to be flexible in permitting employees to participate in events associated with commemorating Martin Luther King, Jr. The letter also reiterates the Union’s and the University’s continued commitment to diversity and inclusion.

If you feel you are being denied a reasonable request to participate in an event associated with MLK Day, contact the CTU for support in working out a mutually agreeable arrangement.

Quote: “The labor movement was the principal force that transformed misery and despair into hope and progress.” —Martin Luther King, Jr.