Politics matter

Regardless of political persuasion, few would argue that the last several years have been good for workers. On the federal level, tax cuts for the rich and job-killing actions have undermined working families. The economy is a mess, with 7.2 percent unemployment, 2.6 million jobs lost last year alone, home foreclosures up by 81 percent in 2008, a plunging stock market, failing banks.

Even during recent years of economic growth, workers did not share in the expansion. Instead, unions—the organizations that fight for workers’ rights, an equitable share of profits and fair wages and benefits—were attacked by the very political institutions that were created to protect and foster their growth.

Anti-labor agenda

Created in 1937, in large part to help improve the economy, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) was charged with encouraging “the practice and procedure of collective bargaining” and “protecting the exercise by workers of full freedom of association, self-organization, and designation of representatives of their own choosing, for the purpose of negotiating the terms and conditions of their employment or other mutual aid or protection.” In spite of this mandate, a former NLRB chairperson appointed by President Bush told the Senate he doesn’t believe the primary purpose of the National Labor Relations Act is to promote collective bargaining.

With President Bush appointees dominating NLRB, it undermined labor at every turn, issuing rulings that resulted in the loss of overtime pay and denied or restricted the right to organize for thousands of workers.

In the Department of Labor’s Wage and Hour Division, the number of federal investigators monitoring employers’ compliance with minimum wage, overtime and child labor laws during Bush’s tenure decreased by 23 percent.

And thousands were denied the right to organize outright, because of “national security” claims.

A new day for labor?

Will things be better now that we have a more worker-friendly administration? Those in organized labor certainly hope so. Without action, however, hope is unlikely to get us far. It is important to know what issues will be important in the near future and to get as involved as possible in turning the tide in favor of working families.

Three issues that workers would like to see passed have already received a lot of attention this year: the Employee Free Choice Act, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act and the Paycheck Fairness Act.

One important bill, the Employee Free Choice Act, would amend the National Labor Relations Act to provide for worker organization through majority sign-up, establish a mandatory mediation and arbitration process for first contracts, and strengthen penalties for employer violations during first contract negotiations and organizing campaigns. Although President Bush threatened to veto it, this bill passed by a wide margin in the House in 2007 (241-185) and received majority support in the Senate (51-48). However, 51 votes were not enough to avoid a threatened filibuster. Believing this bill could turn back years of anti-union decisions by the NLRB, organized labor supports it and has called for its reintroduction and passage within the next 100 days. Employer groups have begun an all-

Legislation continued on p. 8
CT News

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Editorial Policy: The CT News is the voice of our union. It is our vehicle for communicating, on a regular basis, the issues that confront us as workers. Through this newsletter we explain union policies, show how dues are spent, and explain the views and actions of the elected leadership for evaluation by the members.

The CT News is the voice of the membership. We welcome articles from members and stories about members.

While contributions are welcome, they should be constructive and contribute positively to the welfare of our union.

We will accept no attacks on any union leader or member. We will accept thoughtful discussion of all related issues in the letters section, and reserve the right to reply to those that seem to reflect a misunderstanding of the union and its policies.

Direct ideas, letters, questions and comments to Cheryllee Finney.

CT Classifieds

For sale:

◆ Bunnies! Bunnies! Bunnies galore! Rockin’ Horse Acres Rabbitry. Show, 4-H, breeding, and pet rabbits. We have Netherland Dwarf, Holland Lop, Dwarf Hotot, and Lionhead. Can be seen 4 miles east of Charlotte on Island Hwy. Call Carol or Kendra (@ 517-543-0561 or 517-303-0300).

◆ Wood burning stove: Bought a year and a half ago. Getting to be too much for my husband to care for it. Paid $3,500, asking $1,000 as is. To view or purchase, please call 517-980-0832.


◆ Nordic Track Elliptical: VGR910 with heart rate monitor; like new, $200.

◆ Westlo Treadmill Cadence 855: With heart rate monitor, like new, $125. Cell 517-712-3889, home 517-628-3846, email jwperry@voyager.net.

◆ Reduced prices. 1987 Fisher TV: 35”, cable ready, color console, on wheels, $50. Small dark octagon shaped pedestal table: Seats 4, $60. Antique settee: Trimmed in dark wood, photo available on request, $80. Oak table with 4 chairs: Photo available on request, $85. Word Processor: $20. Treated wood: 6x8, 4-foot lengths and 8-foot lengths, 8–10 pieces, $20 each. Late model Dell Computer: Keyboard, large monitor, works very well, $100.

Amish 2 seater outdoor bench with connected table: Photo available on request, reduced price of $75. Canary cage: $25. Parrot cage: $35. Entertainment center: White washed pine, tall with light and glass shelves, $400 or best offer. Contact millyshirae@yahoo.com or 269-823-3739 after 7 pm.


2 homes for rent with option to buy: Across from Park Lake, 15302 Rosemont, Bath, $625-675/mo. 314 Center Street, Mason, $825-875/mo. Call 517-285-3415 for more info/showing.

Services:

◆ Ride sharing: Capital Area Transportation Authority offers a ride sharing service that several CTs are using. Contact Clean Commute at their toll free number (877-921-POOL), local number (517-393-RIDE), fax number (517-394-3733), or website (www.cat.org/cleancommute/index.html).

◆ Nadiz Tailoring and Costume, LLC is a new shop opened by my spouse, Ken Darden, a tailor with many years of experience. 6810 S. Cedar, Suite B (just north of the Holiday Inn, across from Lowe’s and Speedway), Lansing, 517-694-0696. Call Janet at 487-6139 if you need more information.

Free: Advertise to your colleagues in the CT News. Contact Cheryllee Finney at ctnews@msu.edu. The CT News accepts ads from CTU members on items for sale and/or services provided by CTU members and/or their household family members.
President's corner

Where do we go from here?

By Deb Bittner

“Where do we go from here?”

Having just attended several events that looked back to honor Martin Luther King, Jr., and having watched the inauguration of our new president, it’s hard not to make some connections.

The title of this editorial came from an August 16, 1967, speech by King before the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

“We’ve come a long way in our understanding of human motivation and of the blind operation of our economic system,” King said in that speech. He said that the time had passed when economic status was considered the measure of the individual’s abilities and talents. . . . and the absence of worldly goods indicated a want of industrious habits and moral fiber. . . . Now we realize that dislocations in the market operation of our economy and the prevalence of discrimination thrust people into idleness and bind them in constant or frequent unemployment against their will.”

If we hadn’t learned that lesson at the time of King’s speech, we have certainly seen it played out recently, as industrious, talented committed workers lose their jobs and livelihoods while the financial and corporate leaders who drove enterprises into the ground and tanked our economy walk away with golden parachutes.

But we now have reason to hope for positive change. On January 20, 2009, the United States of America inaugurated our 44th president, Barack Obama. [Carry Ann Krupp]

With both King and Obama, we see an understanding that the strength of our economy, and our nation, depends on a healthy and strong labor movement. [Beatrix VanKampen]

In highlights taken from his inaugural speech, President Obama said:

Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real. They are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this, America— they will be met. . . . On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord. . . . Our workers are no less productive than when this crisis began. Our minds are no less inventive, our goods and services no less needed than they were last week or last month or last year. Our capacity remains undiminished. But our time of standing pat, of protecting narrow interests and putting off unpleasant decisions—that time has surely passed. Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America.

For everywhere we look, there is work to be done. The state of the economy calls for action, bold and swift, and we will act—not only to create new jobs, but to lay a new foundation for growth.

. . . What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility—a recognition, on the part of every American, that we have duties to ourselves, our nation, and the world, duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character, than giving our all to a difficult task. This is the price and the promise of citizenship. . . .

So let us mark this day with remembrance, of who we are and how far we have traveled.

Definitely words to on which to hang our hopes but also a call to action. Let’s vow that this year we will be active in setting the course for our future. Let’s vow to do one thing more to help someone else or take one more action to make a difference. Let’s vow to be good citizens.

On another milestone note, 2009 is CTU’s 35th birthday. We have lots in store for the coming year.
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<tr>
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<th>Department/Location</th>
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<td>1.</td>
<td>Administration Bldg, (Floors B, 1)</td>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
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<td>Int’l Ctr., Wells, Central Services</td>
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</table>
What you can do for your Union

As members of CTU, we are joined together as a union—a group of workers who know that together we can have an impact on our work life and on the University. Our unity has resulted in increased wages, a great benefit package and job security. In turn, the University reaps productivity and loyalty because we take a professional attitude toward our work responsibilities.

CTU needs you

Our Union is run by us—the members. In order for our Union to remain strong and viable, we need to take an interest and an active role in making decisions, representing coworkers, enforcing our contract and building the unity that is our strength.

To achieve this, we have organized our Union in such a way as to maximize the talents and abilities of individual members at whatever level they are able to serve. Members can participate on projects, attend rallies, write letters or articles for our newsletter, vote, wear solidarity buttons when appropriate, stop rumors at the work site, etc. A few may even consider running for an Executive Board position.

Of the many activities available, one of the most important is that of representing the Union in the workplace.

URs: the backbone of CTU

Being a UR means a commitment of time which varies from day to day and a commitment to the principles of the CTU and unionism.

A UR should provide the example of a dedicated employee willing to go the extra distance to improve the working environment for everyone.

URs are expected to relay information between members in their districts and the Executive Board in a timely manner. While this part of the job has become somewhat easier with the introduction of electronic communication, the role of the UR as the face of the Union in the workplace cannot be overstated. URs are expected to get to know as many members in their districts as possible, to engage the members in conversations about their Union and to encourage their participation. Likewise, URs who work closely with the members in their districts are in a unique position to provide feedback to the Executive Board.

The position calls on URs to offer comfort, information and support to coworkers, possibly in times of stress, fear or injury. Patience and determination in the face of setbacks are certainly qualities that make for an effective UR. It is also crucial that anyone who takes on the responsibility be able to maintain confidentiality. A UR must always remember that she or he is an advocate for the members of the Clerical-Technical Union, not for supervisors or managers.

URs don’t work alone

If it sounds a bit rough, remember that URs have the backing of the members and staff of the Union. We want our representatives knowledgeable and skilled, so we provide a great deal of training. No one is thrown into a UR position to sink or swim.

Additionally, the CTU hires Contract Administrators (CAs) who oversee the implementation of our Contract. The CAs are available to assist URs with workplace issues or problems. The CTU sets the highest standards when it comes to representing members, and the CAs work side-by-side with the URs and Board to make sure we provide it. [Linda K. Dunn]

The rewards

There’s little pay for the job. But, as many URs will tell you, the job offers a wealth of rewards:

▼ URs are usually the first to know of developments with the Union.
▼ URs are frequently asked to help the Executive Board strategize about the direction of the Union.
▼ Much of the training and experience URs receive can be applied to other areas of their lives.
▼ URs find great satisfaction in knowing they’ve helped coworkers and built a better future for themselves and all CTs.

If you are interested in being a UR, contact URCC Chairperson Colleen Drake (432-6123 x162 or drakec@msu.edu) or Vice President Nancy Gray (353-8632 or grayn@msu.edu).

UR district news

District 12 (Natural Resources, Packaging, Trout Building): Juli Kerr has petitioned for reappointment as UR. If no other members in District 12 express an interest in the position by February 13, Kerr will be appointed.

District 17 (Grounds, Physical Plant, Wilson, Holden, Case, Wonders, Duffy Daugherty Football Building): Victoria Tryban has resigned her UR position. We thank her for her many years of service and wish her the best in her future pursuits.
Board actions

July—December 2008

The following CTU Executive Board discussions took place July through December 2008. All expenditure decisions are included, but the list does not represent meetings in their entirety. CTUs can receive copies of complete minutes through the mail by contacting the CTU office at 355-1903.

July 1
Discussed the CTU Solidarity Picnic. Approximately 100 attended. Consensus to make it an annual event.
Reviewed a draft of the Membership Position Documentation Inventory Project Questionnaire.
Transferred $60,000 from operating savings to the checking account.
Agreed to send up to five individuals to AFL-CIO Community Services Training at a cost of $50 each.

Donated $100 toward a Coalition of Labor Organizations at MSU (CLO) sponsorship of Twilight in the Garden.
Discussed the need to replace several trees killed by the Emerald Ash Borer. Replacement is required by the Meridian Township Landscape Plan, which also specifies acceptable species and size of replacements.
Renewed the Union Communications Service graphics package at a cost of $222 per year.

July 15
Agreed to join “Justice for Workers Now!” an organization working to pass the Employee Free Choice Act.
Agreed to donate $100 for the local Labor Day celebration. [Ed. note: No donation made because event canceled.]
Renewed annual subscriptions to The Progressive ($38/year) and Labor Notes ($60/2 years).
Purchased a $100 annual organizational membership in the Michigan chapter of Pride at Work.
Decided to participate in the Kresge Art Museum’s Twilight in the Garden fundraiser by providing volunteers.

August 21 (conference call)
Agreed to move CTU investment accounts into a Unified Management Account, a simpler and more efficient system that will save on fees.

September 2
Agreed to the President’s selection of Liz Owen and Nora Carr as Elections Committee Cochairs.
Discussed upcoming breakfast meeting between CTU representatives and new Human Resources Assistant Vice President Brent Bowditch.
Agreed to place a $100 ad in the program of the Michigan Women’s Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony and Dinner and to purchase two tickets for the dinner at $125 each. Vickie Neiberg, instrumental in the formation of the CTU, will be one of the inductees.

September 16
Received report that the Elections Committee had extended the nominations period for the Audit Committee because no one had come forward to run for the position before the deadline. [Nancy D. Kelly]
Reviewed letter to be sent in response to a Lansing State Journal column that cast a negative light on unions.
Received report that Meridian Township has granted CTU an extension for replacing dead trees.
Donated $50 for a Fowlerville Relay for Life event on October 4 and 5.
Agreed to send a Board member to the Workers’ Compensation Law Conference on October 7 at a cost of $245. [Ed. note: Conference was canceled and money was not spent.]
Discussed the need to look for union made promotional items to be used during our 35th anniversary next year.
Authorized up to $2,500 to fix the basement leak.
Received CLO report: Wayne Cass (Operating Engineers) remains chair, Deb Bittner (CTU) is Vice Chair, Jackie Lloyd (GEU) is Treasurer, and John Van Dyken (APA) is Recording Secretary. CLO is considering renting an office in the C-T Union Hall.

Actions continued on next page
Actions
continued from previous page

October 7
Heard from a group of CTs about representation in their area.
Rescheduled the first Board meeting in November because it conflicts with Election Day. Canceled the second November meeting.
Agreed to donate CTU’s copy of the $20 documentary “One Woman One Vote” to the MSU Library and purchase another for our office.
Agreed to spend $35 for an organizational membership and newsletter subscription with the National Organization for Women.
Discussed CTU’s commitment to the upcoming Solidarity Rally to be held in Detroit and decided to find ways to participate and support the event.
Discussed CLO’s labor challenge for the MSU United Way Campaign.
Received a Fowlerville Relay for Life t-shirt with CTU listed on it as one of the sponsors.

October 21
Received CLO update about meeting with University officials: 1) New IRS rules necessitate changes in MSU’s policy for granting loans and hardship withdrawals from retirement accounts; 2) Recently publicized events have the University examining its policies related to food-borne illnesses, 3) The Enterprise Business Systems Project is proceeding with the CLO chair as contact person for the unions.

November 11
Authorized up to $2,000 to replace fire alarm and inspect elevator.
Transferred $70,000 from operating savings to the checking account.
Authorized $169.20 for an ad in a special State News supplement on Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday.
Discussed dissemination of CTU election results.

November 18 (conference call)
Authorized $10 each for up to 10 members to attend “Elections 2008: Implications for U.S. and Michigan Worker Unions,” a conference put on by MSU’s Labor Education Program.

November 20 (conference call)
Agreed to send a contract administrator to a seminar on “New Amendments to ADA and FMLA,” at a cost of $119, including mileage.

December 2
Set 2009 Membership Meetings: Tuesday, January 27; Thursday, April 30; Tuesday, July 28; Wednesday, October 28.
Agreed to a committee of Bittner, Gray, Lee and White to negotiate with Teamsters (CTU’s organized staff).
Donated $150 to the Greater Lansing Area Food Bank.
Agreed to donate $50 to MSU Student Food Bank and take up a collection from URs and Board.
Authorized up to $500 for the purchase of a wide-screen monitor to be used for desktop publishing.
Purchased a $75 ad in the Greater Lansing Area Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission 24th Annual Luncheon program.

December 16
At the request of the staff, agreed to purchase something for the C-T Union Hall rather than giving individual gifts.
To address new IRS regulations, added policies on retention of records, protection of whistleblowers and disclosure of potential conflicts of interest to the Board policies.
Purchased four tickets for individuals to attend the Greater Lansing Area Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission 24th Annual Luncheon at a cost of $25 each.
Agreed to donate $150 to Tri-County Office of Aging and $50 to Listening Ear.
Discussed CTU’s presentation in support of Project Labor Agreements to the MSU Board of Trustees.
Retirement benefits change

Because of changes in IRS regulations affecting 403(b) retirement programs, the University was forced to institute new rules and develop a plan document to oversee its retirement program.

The new regulations demand greater oversight on the part of the employer. Although employers aren’t required to offer loans from retirement accounts, University representatives explained that they did not want to eliminate them entirely. Because of limited resources, however, they did want to cut down on the number of applications.

MSU unions met with representatives from the University for input into the loan requirements of the new plan. Coalition leaders felt that this was a bad time economically to restrict members’ access to any of their assets and worked to keep the loans as accessible as possible.

The hardship withdrawal option is no longer allowed under IRS regulations. This option allowed withdrawal from retirement accounts in limited circumstances but with serious penalties.

Details, additional information, instructions and loan forms are available at the HR website (www.hr.msu.edu/HRsite/Benefits/FacStaff/Retire/).

Legislation

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out misinformation campaign to try to get it defeated.

You may have heard of Lilly Ledbetter, the Alabama Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co. plant employee who discovered she had been paid less than the lowest paid man doing the same work for nearly 20 years. In an obvious example of judicial policy making, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a lower court’s decision in her favor, saying that she was required to protest the discrepancy within 180 days after her first paycheck—even if she didn’t discover the discrimination until years later. This decision led to a legislative proposal known as the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. President Bush threatened a veto, but the bill passed in the House (225-199) and received a majority in the Senate (56-42) that was not enough to stop a threatened filibuster. It was reintroduced and passed in the House (H.R.11) on January 9 and now goes to the Senate (S.181).

The Paycheck Fairness Act would amend the Equal Pay Act to revise remedies and enforcement of prohibitions against sex discrimination. The bill passed the House in January 9 (H.R.12) and is being considered by the Senate (S.182).

Yes, the change of leadership gives us hope that we will see legislation favorable to labor, but the struggle is not over. Regardless of whether we identify as Democrat, Republican or Independent, it is important that we contact our leaders and let them know that we expect them to support workers’ interests. Throughout the year, the CTU will try to provide updates on these and other relevant pieces of legislation, along with information on how we can have an impact.