

# Building Power One Member at a Time

## Two District 1 Locals Turning Adversity into Strength

**W**hat would happen if your employer was so determined to break your union that it stopped collecting dues through payroll deduction, a procedure known as dues check-off? How would your local union respond?

Aside from any legal recourse the local may have, its leaders are responsible for collecting dues the old-fashioned way by hand – going person-to-person and manually keeping track of who pays and who doesn't pay.

The top officers from Local 7L and Local 14919 in Ohio's District 1 can speak from experience about how their employers' attempts to undermine our members' solidarity backfired.

They recently told their stories to International Secretary-Treasurer Jim English, District 1 Director Dave McCall and Assistant Director Dave Caldwell. Both Secretary-Treasurer English and Director McCall praised the local leaders for their hard work and for the solidarity the members of both local unions showed. Many members paid their dues in advance.

### Payroll deductions stopped

Bridgestone/Firestone stopped payroll deduction from last July until this April while USW members worked under the terms of an old contract and negotiations for a new contract slowly proceeded. During that time, our union fought to negotiate a fair agreement with Goodyear, a struggle that involved a three-month strike.

Since their contract expired in December 2006, workers at Sherwin-Williams' production facility in Bedford Heights, Ohio, have been fighting the company's best efforts to break their union including, once again, cutting off payroll deduction.

The USW reached a tentative agreement with Bridgestone/Firestone on April 4 that has since been ratified. At press time, we continued to fight for fairness at Sherwin-Williams, but the outlook remained bright.

Bridgestone/Firestone management made it as hard as possible to collect the dues, said Local 7L President Mike O'Connor.

"The company did its best to prevent our members from talking and refused to allow any dues collection during work hours," he said. "It didn't work."

### Most members complied

Local 7L managed to collect dues from over 98% of its 160 members, thanks to a system designed by Financial Secretary Rick Wright and implemented by

the local leadership. The grievance committee collected dues from workers in their departments with support from O'Connor and the local's Vice President, Bill Crooks.

At Sherwin-Williams, Local 14919 President Sandy Scherma developed her own methods for collecting dues and keeping records, and with Treasurer Renee Jones and the stewards' support, found that the increased contact and communication with members of her local improved morale.

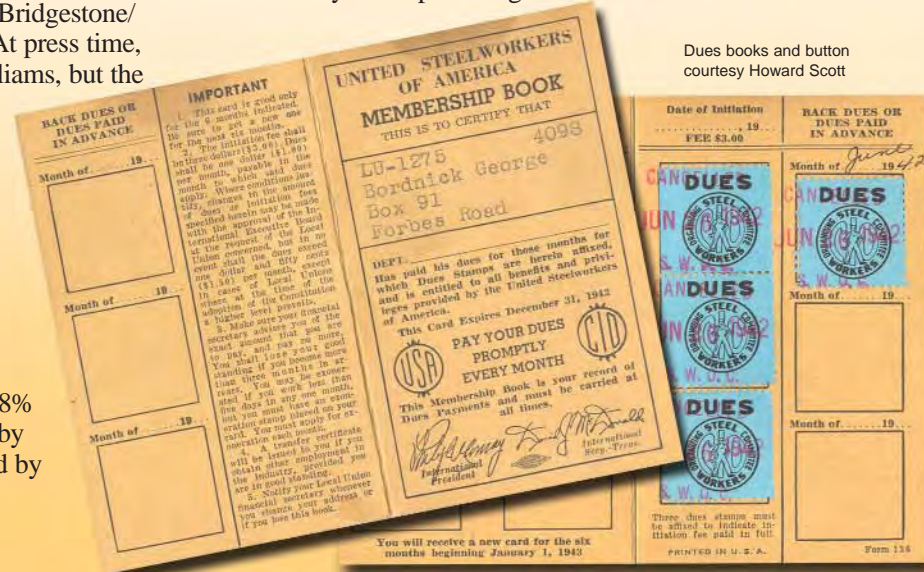
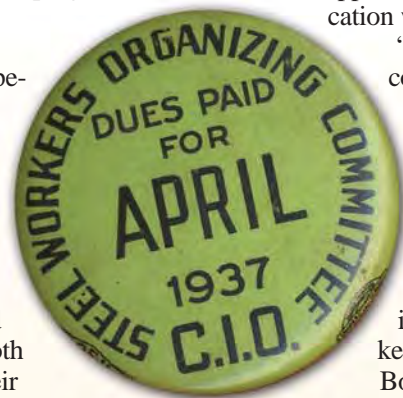
"This attempt to keep us apart backfired on the company," Scherma said. "I'm seeing people that I rarely saw before from the other side of the shop when they bring in their dues, and the increased contact gives them more confidence in our union."

Scherma publishes a monthly newsletter to keep the 115 members of Local 14919 informed about the progress of negotiations. It includes a reminder of dues payments to help keep collections at a high level.

Both companies were counting on a significant number of members failing to pay their dues voluntarily. Secretary-Treasurer English urged the locals to continue building power by engaging their memberships on a daily basis.

Toward that end, District 1 has begun visiting plants to discuss one-on-one with members the important issues they and their families face. Visits will be made by Assistant Director Caldwell, District 1 Rapid Response Coordinator Donnie Blatt and International PAC Coordinator Mike Scarver.

"Our union has tried to develop and implement programs to communicate with our members. What you have accomplished here meets an even greater challenge," English told the local unions. "Don't stop when the current crisis is over. Build on this solidarity to keep moving forward."



Dues books and button courtesy Howard Scott

# The Fight Goes On

## Remembering the Memorial Day Massacre

**S**even decades ago 10 striking Steelworkers were killed by police bullets and dozens others were brutally injured during a protest outside Republic Steel in Chicago. The cause for which they made the ultimate sacrifice lives on today.

The United Steelworkers remembered the Memorial Day Massacre of 1937 at a ceremony held at the site of the battle, Sam's Place, where Local 1033 now has its union hall.

"The Fight Goes On" event was attended by dozens of people including: International Vice President Fred Redmond, District 7 Director Jim Robinson, Director of Civil Rights Maxine Carter, President of the Chicago Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees Ed Sadlowski, District 7 Executive Board member Steve Skvara and ReUnion's Chicago coordinator, Vic Storino.

### Stirring re-enactment

Women of Steel members performed a skit about the slain workers' lives and 15-year-old Chelsea Farmer from Lincoln Park High School, Chicago, gave a stirring, one-person reenactment of the massacre.

The massacre occurred in 1937 as members of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee were protesting Republic Steel's refusal to sign a contract.

Supporters had gathered on Memorial Day at the strike headquarters and marched towards the mill. Police stopped them midway, firing into the unarmed crowd, beating people with clubs and throwing injured people into police paddy wagons.

The tragedy and the Senate investigation that followed helped to pave the way for passage of the Wagner Act, historic New Deal legislation that gave unions' rights to organize.

The rights granted by the Wagner Act have over the years deteriorated, which is one of the reasons the theme, "The Fight Goes On," remains appropriate.

Those rights could be restored by passage of the Employee Free Choice Act, said Scott Marshall, coordinator of SOAR District 7, whose Chapter 31-9 organized the event.

"Over the years big business has managed to chip away at the Wagner Act to reduce these basic rights for workers. Labor and our union today are fighting for passage of the Employee

Free Choice Act to restore those basic rights," Marshall said.

International President Leo W. Gerard wrote in a special book remembering the massacre that in the global marketplace, the assault and murder of trade unionists continues in places like Colombia.

"Here in America corporate behavior has become less violent, but no more respectful," Gerard said.

The Senate investigation of the massacre, led by Robert LaFollette Jr. of Wisconsin, found that the police had violated a federal law that guaranteed workers the right to strike and that Republic and other "Little Steel" companies were behind the violence, supplying weapons, ammunition and tear gas.

But the workers continued fighting, and the union was recognized in 1941.

"The best way to honor their sacrifice is to continue their work," Gerard said.

"As we pay tribute to those who sacrificed their lives and their security to win a measure of justice for their sisters and brothers, let us recommit ourselves to the struggle for a more just and progressive society — one in which workers' rights are honored as the cornerstone of a more humane civilization," he said.

### Honoring Those Who Died in the Republic Steel Massacre

- Hilding Anderson, 29
- Alfred Causey, 43
- Leo Francisco, 17
- Earl Handley, 37
- Otis Jones, 33
- Sam Popovich, 50
- Kenneth Reed, 23
- Joseph Rothmund, 48
- Anthony Tagliori, 26
- Lee Tisdale, 50

