



# The Workers' Edge

Voice of the Tompkins County Workers' Center

## Organizing for Social Change and Fundraising Go Hand-in-Hand By Pete Meyers

I remember that four or so years ago the Board of the Tompkins County Workers' Center (affectionately called the Leadership Team) worked closely with a local fundraising consultant, Dara Silverman, to help us better figure out our fundraising, especially from local supporters.

One thing that Dara stressed was how important it is for grassroots-led community organizations, of necessity, to find ways to put our fundraising on par with organizing for social and economic justice. She believed that raising funds for our work must go hand-in-hand with our organizing.

I don't know about you, but I, along with many of my comrades and friends are notoriously afraid of asking people for money to support the change we are creating in the world. In a way this is a funny logic because the right-wing and corporate interests don't have the same conundrum. They are able to raise money, hire lobbyists, and create the change that they want and with little or no embarrassment!

**“We, after all, are the ones that we've been waiting for”  
-Pete Meyers**

Embarrassment notwithstanding I am very proud to report that our First Annual Giving Campaign last year (2013) was such a tremendous success! A \$35,000/year grant that we were eligible to receive from a large funder for six years (Catholic Campaign for Human Development) has run its course which meant that we needed to get serious in talking to you, our local supporters, about our need to diversify our funding sources. And you understood; you did not disappoint us. But there were a lot of lessons learned from you on the way to our raising \$58,000 from our local supporters (\$31,000 over our 10

year average local supporter collection!) Those lessons include:

- ◆ we have a loyal base of grassroots supporters in Tompkins County and beyond who we can count on to help us grow our work for economic justice;
- ◆ that foundation funding can only last so long, and that a base of supporters from within our local community is really what it's all about--we, after all, *are the ones that we've been waiting for*; and
- ◆ we only have the right to exist if there is a base of community support that is a part of who we are.

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As we head into our Second Annual Giving Campaign (2014), once again led by our Chair, Carolyn Peterson (former two-term Mayor of the City of Ithaca), I ask you to give some thought to our upcoming campaign and consider ways you could be of support to our work:

- ⇒ becoming a monthly TCWC Sustainer, which helps us to know, month-by-month, what sources we can rely upon.
- ⇒ donating for the first time
- ⇒ increasing your usual gift to us beyond what you've historically done;

In the weeks ahead, please consider how you will respond to our 2014 Annual Giving Campaign. We are counting on you. Our source of funds from our local individual supporter base (approximately 45%) is practically unprecedented in the Workers' Center movement nationally. I believe that statistic shows that the people of our County are seriously committed to supporting local social change work.



# Workers Memorial Day

**A**pril 28 is Workers Memorial Day, when we remember those who have suffered and died on the job from workplace injuries and diseases. Nearly 5,000 workers die on the job in the U.S. every year. This year's event is in memory of Francisco Ortiz, a Mexican dairy farmworker who was killed on an Ithaca area farm February 5, 2013. Francisco was pulled into a moving auger, a preventable tragedy. How can we stop these tragedies?

There will be a display at the Tompkins County Public Library April 21-28. Materials will be provided by the United Support Memorial for Workplace Fatalities, the group who supports the families of workplace fatalities.

Please join us April 28th from 6:30-8:30 Speakers and Community Response, featuring Jose Canas and Christopher Adams.

Jose Cañas, a 48 years old, New York dairy farmworker from El Salvado, has a dream: empowerment and social justice for New York's immigrant dairy farm workforce. His vision stems from three years of exposure to physical and emotional abuses as a New York dairy farmworker. He has experienced or witnessed wage theft, accidents and injuries due to employer negligence, nightly fevers due to indecent housing, and depression from social isolation. In solidarity with Jose, and the thousands of immigrant workers in the New York dairy industry, we are helping to organize the NYS Justice for Dairy Farmworkers campaign. The purpose of this campaign is to advocate for and support dairy farmworkers in their struggle for basic labor and human rights.

Says Canas: "The goals are to denounce the social injustice that is happening to us. The oppression we feel at work, the racism, is something that exists towards Latinos on all farms. To eradicate all of that. ... the key to success is to make ourselves more powerful, the labor force, us Latinos ... We have identified three levels of labor organization: local, micro-regional and regional ... We are dreamers .... My ambition is the whole state of New York."

Christopher Adams is the Area Director of the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA). He will explain the Local Emphasis Program, which is to educate New York dairy farm owners about their responsibilities under OSHA and begin selected farm inspections in July 2014.

Sponsored by Midstate COSH (Council for Occupational Safety & Health), Tompkins County Workers' Center, Cornell Farmworker Program, Workers' Center of Central NY, Worker Center Justice of NY  
For more information call (607) 277-5670 or 269-0409

## Go Paperless!

**D**oes your address keep changing? Are you sick of dealing with paper clutter during Spring cleaning? When you have the choice do you prefer to go paperless?

Well guess what!?

You can now sign up to receive **The Workers' Edge** via email!

In order to receive our next newsletter electronically, please email [Courtney@teworkerscenter.org](mailto:Courtney@teworkerscenter.org). Be sure to email from the account where you wish to receive our newsletter, with the heading "PAPERLESS".

We are also in the process of adding a newsletter archive to our website. Making all the back issues of The Workers' Edge available will provide both new and long-time members with a better sense of all our community has accomplished in partnership with the Workers' Center.



**DAIRY FARMWORKERS  
HEALTH & SAFETY**

**Now Is The Time To Stop The Killing  
And Injury**

**Monday, April 28, 2014 6:30-8:30pm**  
**Tompkins County Public Library,**  
**101 E. Green St. at Cayuga, Ithaca**

**Please Join Us!**

# United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 2300 Moves Its Offices to Community Corners & a Brief History

**T**he local labor union that we at the Tompkins County Workers' Center works most closely with is easily the UAW Local 2300. The UAW recently relocated its offices to 840 Hanshaw Road (Village Green Plaza) at Community Corners from its previous location on Geneva Street in downtown Ithaca.

For those of you who don't know, the UAW's storied history locally began with a dramatic union victory in the early 1980s when an overwhelming amount of service workers at Cornell University decided that they had had enough of minimum wage jobs and mistreatment in the workplace and decided to organize a union. (In fact, TCWC Board Member, Cathy Valentino--also the present-day Chair of the UAW Trustee Committee--played a key and significant role in the service workers organizing a union some 30 years ago).

The significance of this is that service workers at Cornell working in food service or housekeeping at the Statler, to take one instance, have starting wages at \$14.51/hour, as of 7/1/14! Anyone who has been at Cornell for two years as of July 1, 2014 would be up to a minimum of \$15.42. (This is as contrasted to many such workers earning a present-day minimum wage of \$8.00/hour in the rest of the County).

In the words of Cathy Valentino, speaking of the early days of the union: "In the 1970s and early 1980s, before we unionized, our pay raises

*were all given out by what management called "merit." That meant some workers got a raise, but others got zero, and the ones who got the raise were often chosen not by merit but by the boss's favoritism. It was terrible and heartbreaking for good, hard workers to watch this happen.*

*We also had a health benefit that cost us workers so much that with our low wages many could not afford to carry the insurance. The pension plan was also bad. People found themselves retiring with only about \$60 per month. And we had nowhere to go with our grievances and no place to talk together about our many work problems.*

*Confronted by all of this, in 1979 I organized with a few co-workers to form a group called Active Concerned Employees (ACE). Our first meeting had over 75 workers there. We kept growing in numbers and finally got a meeting with one of Cornell's Vice-Presidents. A small group of 4 or 5 of us made it to Day Hall and sat around a coffee table without, by the way, being offered any coffee. At the end of the meeting, the VP told us we needed to understand that "there are some at the top and some that will always be at the bottom." That was it - Cornell's answer to us. Our answer to Cornell was to go back to ACE and begin to organize a Union.*

*We picked the UAW to help us. They were great, providing professional organizers, money to print flyers and everything we needed to win and get*

*our Union in 1981. This is why today we have good wages and good benefits and a contract that requires just cause for any termination.*

*(Before we had a Union you could be fired for a good reason, a bad reason or for no reason at all.) Our Union movement has done much for American workers over the years.*

*Unions got us the 40-hour work-week, paid overtime, collective bargaining rights, family leave. We can stand up for our rights without fear. Brave men and women fought hard many years ago for these things we take for granted today. Some were killed; many more badly beaten in the struggle for these rights.*



**Cathy Valentino**

# The Future of Work

"It is fundamental to any conception of democracy that workers have freedom at work and a voice in the democratic process. Too many of today's workers lack both. The result: rising inequality, plummeting wages and working conditions, and a national anxiety that defines our generation."

-National Guestworker Alliance

Several weeks ago, TCWC staffers Carlos Gutierrez and Pete Meyers traveled to the Ford Foundation in NYC for a three-day conference on The Future of Work, looking at issues facing an ever-increasing swath of workers whom could be broadly defined as 'contingent workers'. It was one of those conferences that was both exciting and tremendously depressing. Exciting because of the players, nationally, that are beginning to organize a new response to where we are going as a society, work-wise. Depressing because we, as a society, are entering into an era of work that threatens to seriously undermine workers rights and any ability to live in dignity.

Spurred on initially by the National Guestworker Alliance (NGA), and now joined by Jobs with Justice, and the National People's Action Network, the Future of Work campaign (under which the TCWC is one of 14 Workers' Center's to be participating) endeavors to create a national and international campaign. The proposed campaign addresses the employment issues that are ultimately all interrelated and connected to, as Saket Soni, Executive Director of the NGA says: the "corporate power that is driving this change in employment, which shifts the cost and responsibility to the shoulders of workers."

We estimate that roughly 50% of the people who contact our Workers' Rights Hotline are contingent workers in one form or another, and we have built campaigns around some of these cases in the past. Some examples of contingent work, broadly defined, include:

subcontracted workers; temp workers; part time workers; supply chain workers; unemployed and underemployed workers; adjunct instructors; freelancers; contract lawyers; technology workers ; guest workers; farm workers and day laborers.

At the core of this growing exclusion of workers from democracy is the changing nature of work in the U.S.

Three shifts are underway that will define the economy and labor market over the next 40 years:

1) **The rise of contingent work.** Millions of workers no longer work for the ultimate beneficiary of their labor, but for subcontractors and suppliers. More than 42.6 million U.S. workers are contingent: temporary or part time, or self-employed. In 1989, contingent workers made up only 9 percent of the U.S. workforce; today they're more than 33 percent.

These include people such as Stanley McPherson and Milton Webb--who work/ed at the Tompkins County recycling facility--and played an incredible role in helping the TCWC to spearhead a campaign this year and last to ensure that all County-contracted workers are paid a Living Wage. Making poverty wages while doing County business at the County's recycling facility they don't even know who their boss is! Is their boss the County, which pays a subcontractor, ReCommunity Recycling? Is their boss ReCommunity Recycling who subcontracts out with Kelly Temp Services? Or is their boss now Casella Waste Management, who at the beginning of 2014 took over from ReCommunity. Many workers have no real idea of who their ultimate boss is!

2) **The linking of local and global labor markets.**

Employers can now source low-wage workers from any labor market in the world to any labor market in the U.S., effectively erasing the distinction between the local and global labor markets. For example, there are more than 600,000 guestworkers in the U.S.

In Tompkins County we have a ton of farm workers, especially from Mexico and Central America, working all around us on dairy farms. These workers do not have the protections of labor law. Did you know that, as you read this article, that there are 13 university students from Thailand and the Philippines working as J-1 visa students at Hotel Ithaca (formerly the Holiday Inn) in downtown Ithaca? Ironically, these students

come to America through a program called Cultural Homestays in what Hotel Ithaca calls a 'work-study' experience for these students to work full time as Housekeepers! (To read more about our experience three years ago with this issue at the Holiday Inn and the Marietta Corporation in Cortland, go to <http://bit.ly/1kvzyLQ>.)

**3) The rise of long-term and structural unemployment.** Workers used to be employed for long periods of time, and faced intermittent, circumstantial unemployment. Today 37% of the unemployed have been unemployed for 27 weeks or more. And we know that the long-term unemployed are being discriminated against when applying for jobs. As well, in the growing phenomenon of guestworkers, such as in Ithaca, we find corporate interests exploiting workers from around the world, while at the same time leaving increasing amounts of local people unemployed.

The above shifts will only accelerate in coming years. Temp staffing is projected to be among the fastest growing industries in America over the next 10 years, adding 637,000 jobs and growing at twice the rate of the economy as a whole. And while 2/3 of the jobs lost during the recession were mid-wage jobs, the majority of the gains during the recovery have been low-wage jobs.

These shifts have profound implications for our organizing:

We need to re-invent bargaining to respond to the rise of contingent work, rethinking who we bargain with, what for, and who bargains. We need to think beyond workplace bargaining with direct employers, to experiment with bargaining across industry and labor markets.

An example of how we at TCWC are doing this is by our work to ensure that County-contracted workers are paid a Living Wage. And, in a sense, our Living Wage Employer Certification Program is about the community bargaining with employers.

We need to re-imagine the safety net. We need to win a vastly expanded role for the state in protecting workers. Because contingent workers

and the long-term unemployed cannot access the social safety net, we will need to win a new safety net that addresses their needs.

This is a big one, not one that the TCWC has yet to be engaged with. Our experience at the TCWC is that low-wage workers are cycling in and out of low-wage jobs and the welfare system. We have a social safety net in place now, nationwide, but it is woefully inadequate. We have envisioned, with appropriate funding, organizing with people who receive social services and income supports through a similar sort of Hotline, but this one for recipients of various forms of public assistance.

We need to guarantee full and fair employment. We need to overturn the economic instability that families experience through the rise contingent work and unemployment. Because work is the means to a secure and a dignified life, we will need to win a guaranteed right to fair, fulfilling work.

We need to broaden the scope of our organizing to respond to the collapse of the walls between labor markets. Because labor migration will always be a reality, we will need to organize across multiple linked labor markets to build worker organization and power.

The TCWC is working tirelessly to figure out how we fit into the Future of Work campaign. We have an incredibly rich tapestry of people who are contacting our Workers' Rights Hotline and telling us stories of how their experiences clearly fit into The Future of Work.

**If you have any ideas of how TCWC might engage more strongly with the issues of contingent work in Tompkins County please contact us at [tcwrh@tcworkerscenter.org](mailto:tcwrh@tcworkerscenter.org)**





# Support our 94 Certified Living Wage Businesses!

**Together these businesses employ over 3030 workers.  
Thank you, local businesses, for taking a stand!**

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| Advocacy Center   | First Congregational Church of Ithaca, United Church of Christ | PPM Homes, LLC   |
| Aigen Financial Group, LLC                              | First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca                            | Red Feet Wine Market and Spirit Provisions               |
| Alcohol & Drug Council of Tompkins County, Inc.         | First Unitarian Society of Ithaca                              | Renovus Energy, Inc.                                     |
| Alternatives Federal Credit Union                       | Friendship Donations Network, Inc.                             | Segal and Sorensen                                       |
| Ancient Wisdom Productions (Web Designer)               | Gadabout Transportation Services                               | Shade Tree Auto, Inc.                                    |
| ASI Renovations   | GreenStar Cooperative Market                                   | Shaw & Murphy Law Firm                                   |
| Autumn Leaves Used Books                                | Home Green Home  | Significant Elements, A Program of Historic Ithaca, Inc. |
| Black Box Computer Consulting                           | Hospicare and Palliative Care                                  | Silk Oak/Ithacamide                                      |
| Blue Spruce Painting and Decorating                     | Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County                    | Singlebrook Technology, Inc.                             |
| The Bookery   | International Food Network, Inc.                               | Snug Planet LLC (Home Performance Contractor)            |
| Boyce Thompson Institute                                | Ithaca Carshare  | Sparks Electric  |
| Bridges Cornell Heights                                 | Ithaca Cayuga Optical Service                                  | Sprague & Janowsky (Accountancy)                         |
| Buffalo Street Books                                    | Ithaca Health Alliance   | St. Catherine of Siena Church                            |
| Catholic Charities of Tompkins/Tioga                    | Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services                           | St. John's Church  |
| CFCU Community Credit Union                             | Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency                                    | St. Luke Lutheran Church                                 |
| City of Ithaca  | IthacaMed  | Stone Quarry House (Bed and Breakfast)                   |
| Colonial Veterinary Hospital                            | Ithaca Teachers Association                                    | Sunbeam Candles  |
| Community Dispute Resolution Center                     | Jewel Box  | Sunny Brook Builders                                     |
| Community Foundation of Tompkins County                 | Jillian's Drawers  | Sustainable Tompkins                                     |
| Community Nursery School                                | Julia E. Dean Pottery  | Taitem Engineering                                       |
| Community Science Institute                             | Loaves and Fishes  | Taughannock Aviation Corporation                         |
| Contemporary Trends, Inc.                               | McNeil Music of Ithaca   | Temple Beth El   |
| Cornell Child Care Center                               | Mama Goose/Mimi's Attic  | The Frame Shop   |
| Crown Construction, Inc.                                | Michael May Construction, Inc.                                 | The Strebel Planning Group                               |
| Day Care & Child Development Council of Tompkins County | Multicultural Resource Center                                  | Three Tier Consulting, Inc.                              |
| Downtown Ithaca Alliance                                | New Roots Charter School                                       | Tompkins Community Action Tompkins County                |
| Energy Tec  | Northeast Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine                   | Tompkins County Public Library                           |
| Family and Children's Service of Ithaca                 | Nutritional Wellness Center                                    | Town of Ithaca   |
| Finger Lakes Naturals                                   | OAR - Opportunities, Alternatives and Resources                | TRC Energy Services (Ithaca)                             |
| Finger Lakes ReUse                                      | One World Market   | United Auto Workers Local 2300                           |
| First Baptist Church of Ithaca                          | Ongweoweh Corporation (Pallet Mgmt)                            | Upscale Remodeling Corporation                           |

# Are You a Member of the Tompkins County Workers' Center?

**I want to Get Involved in the Fight for Workers Rights!**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Individual Annual Membership  
Due= One Hour's Wage or \$8 if not working

During the next year, I'LL BE THERE at least five times for someone else's fight, as well as my own. Contact me for Rapid Response Alerts.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name (Please Print):

Home Address

City/State/ZIP

Phone

Email

Mail to: TC Workers Center

**115 The Commons/ E MLK St. Ithaca, NY 14850**

You'll receive a laminated card in the mail. Great to have you with us!

Is a member of the  
Tompkins County Workers' Center

During the year, I'LL BE THERE at least five times for someone else's struggle as well as my own. If enough of us are there, we'll start winning.

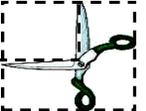
I'LL BE THERE...

...standing up for our rights as working people to a decent standard of living

...organizing working families to take strong action to secure better economic future for all of us

...fighting for secure family-wage jobs in the face of corporate attacks on working people and communities

...supporting the right of all workers to organize and bargain collectively in the workplace



**Has your job made you sick?**

## **Occupational Health Clinical Center Can Help!**

- **Are your symptoms work-related?**
- **Have you been exposed to substances on the job that might make a person sick?**
- **Have you recently left a job (through retirement, lay-off, termination, etc.) that caused your symptoms?**

**Call to find out how we can help you.... Occupational Clinical Health Centers are staffed by a team of health professionals actively working to support worker health and safety in 26 counties in New York. Occupational illnesses and diseases are highly preventable, and we can help.**

As a medical practice, we focus on Medical Services including medical and occupational history; physical exam and diagnostic testing, referral and social work services.

Prevention of Occupational Illness and Disease, including screening and monitoring; education and workplace safety assessment; data collection; public policy advocacy; worker/patient empowerment, including risk mapping, workers' rights to health and safety at the workplace; navigating the Workers' Compensation system, support groups and popular education related to the impact of worker health on public health.

Convenient locations in Binghamton, Syracuse and Canton

**Call OHCC at 315-432-8899 or toll-free at 1-800-432-9590**



# SAVE THE DATE -- Wednesday, APRIL 30, 8am-10am

The Labor-Religion Coalition of the Finger Lakes--a joint project of Catholic Charities of Tompkins Tioga and the Tompkins County Workers' Center INVITE YOU to the 16th Religious and Community Leaders' Breakfast Briefing:

**“WORKING and STILL POOR: What's Going on in America and What We Can Do about It”**

featuring KIM BOBO, Executive Director of Interfaith Worker Justice

**Wednesday, APRIL 30, 2014**

**Breakfast at 8:00am, Program at 8:30am  
TEMPLE BETH EL, 402 N. Tioga St, Ithaca**

Kim Bobo is the author of Wage Theft in America and co-author of Organizing for Social Change. She is also the Founder/Executive Director of Interfaith Worker Justice (iwj.org), a national labor rights organization supported by many national labor unions and faith-affiliated organizations. Her work has greatly raised awareness of the prevalence of wage theft in America, particularly among low income workers. Bobo has also been working closely with the TCWC and Just Economics in Asheville, NC to take our Living Wage Employer Certification Program nationally. The TCWC is also an affiliate of Interfaith Worker Justice's Workers' Center Network.




**Tompkins County  
WORKERS' CENTER**  
115 The Commons  
Ithaca, NY 14850  
TCWorkersCenter.org



**Return Service Requested**

