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The Mobilizer



Volume 4, Issue 1

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Hundreds attend Assembly hearing in Albany

PEF Division 236 members exemplify the power of mobilization

By DEBORAH A. MILES

What began as a grass-roots effort among PEF members to make changes in the current administration at the state Division of Parole has expanded to a broad and powerful movement due to the unity and courage of the members.

More than 200 parole officers from PEF Division 236 packed the Hamilton Hearing Room at the state Legislative Office Building in Albany on January 11.

As union leaders and parole officers testified before Jeffrion L. Aubrey, D-Queens, who chairs the Assembly's Committee on Correction, parole officers stood and cheered. They held bright yellow "respect" signs. Mostly, they demonstrated a unified front and support for their fellow officers who testified.

"I have given testimony scores of times during the last nine years," said PEF President Roger Benson. "Never had I seen the power of PEF, our political action and mobilizing programs all come together as they did at this legislative hearing.

"These members, who all took a day off from work and traveled to Albany, demonstrated how numbers and passion make a difference. Those who held up yellow "respect" signs, gave this hearing an electrifying dimension," Benson said.

The hearing provided a platform for officers to vent their concerns about the

negative impact Ellis' administration has on public safety.

In 2004, Albany-based parole officers stood in below-zero temperatures passing out leaflets to people about how paperwork was affecting public safety. With some training, parole officers started banning together and held demonstrations in Albany and New York

mobilization. "A few years ago, a dozen officers were passing out leaflets. This year, hundreds joined together to show support and unity and to send their message to legislators.

"Having a strong leader enhances the mobilization effort," Messer said. "PEF Division 236 Council Leader Manuelita

Clemente and other parole officers have been like a bolt of positive energy for the membership."

Benson said the large turnout at the hearing prompted major press coverage.

"Our testimony was powerful, but without the extraordinary support of our members, I do not believe it would have had the same impact on the legislators, and the press who covered it.

"The press coverage was outstanding," Benson said.

"With the word out and members united, we will continue to fight and be heard. I applaud every

member who attended the hearing."



AT THE HEARING — PEF President Roger Benson and Division 236 leader Manuelita Clemente listen to testimony regarding policies at the state Division of Parole.

— Photo by Deborah A. Miles

City.

This past August, they were all on the same page and courageously asked for the resignation of the Division of Parole Executive Director Anthony G. Ellis II, despite retaliation from parole managers, such as taking officers out-of-the-field and assigning them to desk duty.

"Our members in parole are a wonderful example of mobilization," said Margaret Messer, PEF director of

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Mobilization, communication, patience key factors to MSC pay upgrade

By DEBORAH A. MILES

For more than a decade, Medicaid Service Coordinators (MSC) felt they weren't getting their fair share of pay and respect.

Now, they are claiming victory as the state Department of Civil Service acknowledged the complexity of their work and allowed the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) to raise many of the MSCs from a pay grade 14 to a 17.

One of the main problems with the MSC position was its classification as a functional role, rather than a civil service title.

"Their responsibilities run the gamut of tending to all the needs of developmentally disabled people and their families," said Greg Case, PEF Executive Board representative for OMRDD.

The battle to change the MSC status heated up in 2003 after PEF Divisions 201, 246 and 259 from Finger Lakes DDSO gathered in Canandaigua to launch a mobilization effort.

Training essential element

The members were trained on how to mobilize and identify key elements for a multi-pronged campaign to change the MSC status. They held forums, meetings, completed surveys and wrote letters to lawmakers.

One of the keys to their success was the ability to communicate with managers and have everyone on the same page.

"We feel lucky. Our relationship with managers was built



on trust. We were able to accomplish a great deal at labor-management meetings," said John Prince, a PEF Executive Board member and Division 259 council leader at Finger Lakes DDSO.

"It was a long process, but we kept on top of the issue. It turned out to be a win/win situation," he said.

PEF's mobilization and research departments provided the foundation for their success and proved to be a vital component in organizing members.

"We can't thank PEF staff enough for their training and support. They worked with us throughout the development and implementation of this campaign," Prince said.

Finally a victory

Jeannine Dutcher, PEF Division 246 council leader, said the turning point in the campaign was when OMRDD Director Barbara Roberts received a letter from Nancy Stone, chief classification and pay analyst at Civil Service.

"We were informed in March 2005 that Civil Service would take classification actions upon request from the DDSO," Dutcher said.

"The MSC victory is a perfect example of how teamwork, effective labor-management techniques and perseverance among our members can pay off," said Pat Baker, PEF vice president and statewide labor-management chair.

"It also sets an example to other members, just as the MSC issues may be familiar to those in other agencies. We are all seeking workplace dignity, respect, caseload fairness and pay equity," Baker said.

TRAINING PAID OFF — PEF President Roger Benson speaks to members from Divisions 201, 246 and 259 about the need for statewide participation to fight pay inequity and other issues affecting many who work at the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities. The meeting was held in Canandaigua in October 2003. Now members are claiming a victory with pay increases.

— Photo by John Prince

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Other sources include organizations such as the NY Labor-Religion Coalition (www.labor-religion.org); the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (www.cbtu.org); the Coalition of Trade Union Women (www.cluw.org); Pride at Work (www.prideatwork.org); Jobs With Justice (www.jwj.org); United Students Against Sweatshops (www.usas.org) and many others.

Web sites such as www.labor.net and www.labourstart.org, www.laborbeat.org and

www.unionist.org are endless streams of information.

Encourage your activists to read magazines such as "Labor's Heritage" (www.georgemeany.org) and "Labor Notes" (www.labornotes.org), which also has a publishing house that recently released a second edition of their highly prized Troublemaker's Handbook. This book is a must. Another great way to shake your sleepers is through an activist organization such as the National Labor Committee at www.nlcnet.org, www.behindthelabel.org, and

www.sweatshopwatch.org, who have been exposing atrocities of many corporate giants; they often engage in e-mail campaigns and demonstrations. Lastly, for those great labor CDs, posters, videos, tee shirts and more, visit www.laborheritage.org.

The very act of creating such organizing tools can actually spark the council members and mobilizers. Once your activists are reinvigorated, they can set fire beneath the rest. Nothing can be done in a vacuum; it's all in the communication.



ABOUT FACE — Parole officers from PEF Division 236 stand and turn their backs after the testimony of Parole's Executive Director Anthony G. Ellis II at a state Assembly hearing on correction in January. (Below) Jeffrion L. Aubry, chairman of the Assembly Committee on Correction, listens to comments from parole officers after Ellis testified.

— Photos by Deborah A. Miles



(Continued from page 3)

to escort the parole officers out of the hearing room.

"Calling on state troopers to escort parole officers out is just another act of intimidation arranged by Mr. Ellis," Clemente said.

Many of the officers refused to comment about the hearing or give their names, in fear of retaliation. Some said the Division's internal affairs investigators took their photos as they boarded buses to attend the hearing.

Clemente said with the strong backing of PEF, parole officers would continue their fight for a new administration.

Last Minute Update

Since the hearings:

- DOP is stopping the practice of having parole officers collect supervision fees;
- The current system of flight plans will be abolished;
- Parole officers will not have to report back to their offices at the end of the day;
- The rule of consuming alcohol during off-duty time is being rescinded;
- And, a joint labor-management committee will review the redundant paperwork problem.

Waking Sleepy Divisions

Editor's Note: This is Part 2 of a two-part series. The first part was published in the December 2005 Mobilizer

By JOHN PIETARO

One way to entice people to participate in their union is by linking the membership meeting with a cultural event.

Take for example, the unions of the past and how they used various forms of culture to engage their members.

Union halls were open late and housed special events on a regular basis. Dances, formal discussions, foreign-language socials, classes in English, political activist forums, holiday-themed gatherings, concerts, theatre groups, arts seminars and studies in labor history were standard.

Often, these events helped to not only integrate members into the union, but also into the greater society. While today's unionist may be less available for such events, they can easily be reached through the Internet. Short, upbeat e-mails that provide bits of labor history can easily be tied to the time of year.

The arts were frequently an organizing vehicle in those glory days. Contemporary unions often forget this. Consider that musicians such as Joe Hill and Woody Guthrie based their careers on labor song writing and others like Pete Seeger, Phil Ochs, Joan Baez, Dave Van Ronk, Sis Cunningham and Billy Bragg have dedicated volumes to the working class.

Playing "labor music" at a union meeting brings a new dimension that people usually respond to in a positive way. If you don't have a band to

perform live, bring some CDs.

CDs by most of the artists listed above are available and would make a great "opening number" for a meeting. My own CD of labor songs, "I Dreamed I Heard Joe Hill Last Night" was recently released. (Small plug.)

Cultural events attract people and may enhance union participation.

Some unions have established art galleries, and dedicate wall space to talented members who present work-oriented paintings. Theater and poetry have also been used to represent workers' issues in an expressive context. Why not consider some aspect of this for your next general meeting? You can canvass membership beforehand to see if anyone is an active painter, musician or poet. If not, bring some "labor songs" on CD for background to serving food. Some level of this message will certainly sink in. And it's a way to begin a rekindling of "union culture."

Use events as teasers

Annual events also provide an opportunity to bolster membership. Here are just a few examples.

January is the time to celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He was not only a civil rights giant, but also a great humanist. He was involved in labor's cause and in his final days, he was in Memphis working on behalf of striking sanitation workers.

African-American History Month in February is a time filled with heritage that is easily intertwined with labor. You could hold a contest at a membership meeting, or hold a mock "Jeopardy" game with the answers



being in the category of labor and African-American history.

And in March, Women's History Month provides an opportunity to learn more about the great women activists such as Mother Jones, Lucy Parsons, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Emma Goldman and Frances Perkins, FDR's Secretary of Labor, among others.

Many ethnic holidays have a labor connection. A St. Patrick's day event could include information about James Connolly, an early Irish union leader, or Mike Quill, a founder of the NYC Transport Workers Union.

If your division has an event for Italian-Americans, it should have some mention of the labor martyrs, Sacco and Vanzetti. Latinos could celebrate Cesar Chavez, giant of the United Farm Workers. One could name several important movement people for each ethnicity, so why not be certain to include their names and stories in any meeting you have that coincides with a known ethnic holiday? And don't forget Labor History Month is in May. And May 1 is international Labor Day. The first May Day occurred in Chicago, 1886.

A click of the mouse

There are Web sites that provide general labor information.

The AFL-CIO has an informative site (www.aflcio.org), or turn to the New York State AFL-CIO (www.nysaflcio.org) for information that's closer to home. Even more specific is your own Central Labor Council or Area Labor Federation, who usually provide motivational tips.

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Retaliation, intimidation tactics continue at agency

Parole officers demonstrate unity; chief fails to provide answers at 2nd Assembly hearing

By DEBORAH A. MILES

Hundreds of parole officers jammed a state Assembly hearing for a second time to listen and react to testimony provided by Anthony G. Ellis II, executive director of the state Division of Parole.

Ellis has been under fire by officers who say his administration has crippled the effectiveness of the agency with new procedures that hamper public safety.

At an Assembly hearing on January 11, parole officers testified that new rules implemented by the Ellis administration have diminished the supervision of parolees, which has led to more street crime. Officers and union

leaders said murders and attacks by sex offenders may have been avoided, if they were out in the field instead of doing required, repetitive paperwork.

Ellis did not attend the first hearing. However, chairman of the Committee on Correction, Jeffrion L. Aubry, D-Queens, scheduled a second hearing on January 31

so Ellis could address the allegations. Aubry grilled Ellis on many of the issues such as the procedure to revoke parole.

Ellis simply replied, "They (parole officers) fill out paperwork."

Parole officers in the audience listened in silence. Instead of raising their voices, they raised yellow "respect" signs when they disagreed with Ellis' statements. This occurred

more than a dozen times during the nearly two-hour session.

Ellis unprepared

PEF President Roger Benson said Ellis's testimony demonstrated his "profound lack of knowledge of the agency."

Aubry pledged further examination of the agency after Ellis provided answers to questions in which he was unable to respond.

PEF Division 236 Council Leader Manuelita Clemente said Ellis lied about the ratio of officer caseloads and said, "he is a disgrace to the NYS Division of Parole."

"This agency is going down the drain," Clemente said. "Every time you open a newspaper, you see a story about a

parolee committing a crime. We just want to do our jobs, not unnecessary paperwork."

Officers fear retaliation

Ellis has retaliated against officers who have spoken-out in public about the Division's internal pitfalls by having them assigned to desk jobs. Officers supported by PEF, asked for Ellis' resignation last August at a press conference



RAISING SIGNS, NOT VOICES — PEF Division 236 members, parole officers, raise "respect" signs at an Assembly hearing in Albany to show their dissatisfaction at the testimony of Parole's Executive Director Anthony G. Ellis II.

— Photo by Deborah A. Miles

in Manhattan.

"He's been more concerned about retaliating against his accusers than solving the problems within the Division," Benson said.

When Ellis concluded his testimony and started up the stairs, parole officers stood, turned their backs and started booing. Some shouted "liar," and others shouted "shame."

State troopers had assembled at the hearing door, waiting

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Action Alert

STOP WORKPLACE VIOLENCE!

Getting punched, kicked or otherwise abused is not part of the job. Thousands of state employees work with society's most dangerous populations in hazardous conditions in many state institutions and social service agencies. Chronic short staffing, mandatory overtime, and stress put our members and their clients at risk. It is time to STOP Workplace Violence and improve safety. The "Stop Workplace Violence" legislative package will go a long way to identifying and correcting the dangerous conditions that put workers and their clients at risk.



**MEMBERS TAKE ACTION ON THIS IMPORTANT ISSUE
Fax a letter to the governor and your legislator today.**

Please go to the following Web site and follow the directions.

In less than a minute, a fax will be on its way!

<http://www.unionvoice.org/campaign/stopworkplaceviolence>

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