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Teamster Magazine

June 2000

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Sending a Message

Teamsters Rally in Washington D.C. to Say NO to PNTR

Local 473 steward Joylyn Billy understands the effect bad trade deals have on American workers.

Billy and 300 coworkers are embroiled in a fight for their livelihoods at an Ohio Mr. Coffee plant. Mr. Coffee recently announced it was moving its assembly operation to Mexico in its search for low wages.

"NAFTA has caused Mr. Coffee to dump its loyal workforce. I don't want to see that happen to anyone else," Billy said. "That's why we have to fight PNTR. It's a bad deal for American workers, and it's a bad deal for Chinese workers."

Billy, her family and co-workers joined 5,000 other Teamsters at a Teamster rally in Washington, D.C. to tell Congress to vote no on granting Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) status to communist China.



"The only American export this deal will increase will be American jobs. We all know the score. If PNTR is passed, big business will continue the race to the bottom. American workers will lose their jobs and Chinese workers will lose any hope of getting out from underneath the repression of their communist government," Teamsters General President James P. Hoffa told the crowd. "We must keep China on probation if we expect to improve the lives of both Chinese and American workers."

Gathering in front of Teamster headquarters, the 5,000 Teamsters listened to speakers protest the PNTR bill. Chinese



dissident Harry Wu (see story page 12) joined the crowd and told of his terrifying experiences under the communist Chinese regime.

Following the Teamster rally, the crowd marched on the U.S. Capitol and joined 5,000 other unionists at an AFL-CIO rally. As the Teamster went to print, Congress was debating and voting on PNTR. A full update of the vote will appear in the next edition.

Convincing Congress

With hundreds of Teamsters filling the halls of Congress meeting with their legislators, Teamsters General President James P. Hoffa met with Rep. Robert Wexler (D-FL) to discuss his position on Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) status for China.

Wexler, who was uncommitted on his China vote, had just met with Teamster members from his district. He listened carefully to the Teamster arguments.

The following day, Wexler officially committed to voting against PNTR status for China citing the "lack of suitable protections for American workers, China's abysmal environmental and human rights record and China's glaring trade surplus with the United States."

"Rep. Wexler is an example of a representative who listens to the American people," Hoffa said. "We must stand up on issues like PNTR and be heard."

PNTR Facts

What is PNTR?

PNTR (Permanent Normal Trade Relations) status is a designation given to countries seeking special access to U.S. domestic trade markets. Once permanent trade status is awarded, trading partners benefit from numerous concessions such as lower tariffs on goods and reduced domestic import barriers on items like clothing and steel.

Why the Teamsters Say NO to PNTR

Giving China PNTR status means:

- Surrendering our negotiating leverage with China
- Giving tacit approval to China's atrocious record on human and worker rights
- American jobs will be lost as companies move production to China where labor costs are roughly 13 cents an hour
- Further rewarding a communist government that has never honored any of the trade agreements it has negotiated with the Clinton Administration

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The Human Face of Trade

An Interview with Harry Wu



How did you become involved in the fight against Communist China's exploitation of its labor and abuse of its citizens?

In 1957, I was a sophomore at Beijing University studying geology and playing shortstop on the baseball team. I was a normal student like anyone else. I was invited to a party thrown by Communists and they asked for comments. I did not want to speak but I was pressured to do so. In my comments I said the Soviet Red Army's crackdown in Budapest may have been a



violation of international law.

My fate was sealed. I was picked up and arrested, it wasn't until I had actually been delivered to the prison that the warden told me I had been sentenced to life. I was forced to serve 19 years in a Chinese labor camp living like a beast just to survive. It is against atrocities like

these that I fight to free my people.

Why should China not receive PNTR status?

Perhaps the most ludicrous aspect of this deal is that trade relations with China can be 'normal.' China is not a normal country in any sense, so why are we giving them normal trade status? I wish the United States would ask the 80 million people who have been persecuted in China over the last 50 years if PNTR should be granted. The same leaders who negotiated this deal will not allow Chinese Catholics, Christians or Tibetan Monks the freedom to worship. There is no freedom of press, religion, association, or the right to assemble. I ask you, is this normal?

Many citizens are speaking out against PNTR for China. If they lived in China, what would happen to them?

You would be put in jail and beaten. It's as simple as that. No charges, no arraignment, no hearing...nothing. Later, months perhaps, the police would notify your family and tell them where you are. But even that is not guaranteed.

The business community argues that Chinese citizens make so little money, it is our duty as Americans to help them gain a higher standard of living. How do you respond to this?

This deal is not about raising the standards for Chinese people. It's about greed. Chinese laborers cannot organize or fight for better wages. If a worker tries to organize or speaks out against the party, they are arrested and disappear. Is this part of normal trade relations? The Chinese government has guaranteed these greedy corporations a workforce that has no voice, cannot organize and has little choice over their conditions. This is morally outrageous.

Is it true that most goods made by Chinese laborers are confined to low-wage industries such as shoes, fabrics etc.?

The type of products is not the point. It doesn't matter whether lost jobs will be low-skilled or highly skilled jobs. Some say it is about jobs for the poor or increasing opportunity. It's not. China has cheap labor. That's why IBM pays a computer programmer in China about \$10,000 a year and pays a US programmer \$80,000 a year. That's a \$70,000 difference! Where is this extra money going? It's going into the pockets of the Communist Party and the corporations. If this deal is about money don't lie to me and say it's about jobs. Tell us the truth. It's not about better lifestyles for Chinese people. Just admit it!

Does China have free trade unions?

No. China does not have free trade unions and granting PNTR will not do anything to change that. China has government-controlled unions that are essentially bureaucratic frauds. Under Communism, China will never have free trade unions.

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AFL-CIO Working Women's Conference

Teamster women gathered with their sisters from across the labor movement at the AFL-CIO's Working Women 2000 Conference in Chicago.

The AFL-CIO based the conference on its Ask A Working Woman survey. More than five million women union members responded to the survey. Not surprisingly, the survey found that although times are good, working women's lives are not getting easier. Among the top legislative priorities listed are equal pay, paid family leave, health care and retirement security.

The Teamsters Women's Committee was on hand to listen and learn in preparation for the Teamsters Women's Conference to be held in May in Las Vegas.

"This was an opportunity to gather, listen and learn from our sisters about how to come together and use our collective voice to change how women are treated on the job and in their union," said Cheryl Johnson, chair of the Women's Committee and Human Rights Commission Director. "I look forward to our conference, so that we can develop our own Teamster programs to raise the voice of women and to celebrate the enormous contributions women have made to the success of the Teamsters."

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Blazing the Trail

Canadian Firefighters Secure First Contract

Pete Durand had been a Teamster driver for 22 years. At Centennial Concrete in Tecumseh, Ontario he was covered by a contract. He was pleased with the way the union represented him -- at the bargaining table, in benefits and in the grievance process.

But whenever he was called to work as a "volunteer" firefighter his Teamster protections disappeared. When two fellow firefighters were given 30-day suspensions after criticizing a fire department decision at a Town Council meeting, Durand knew it was time to organize.

"The guys had worried about losing positions because of municipal mergers and about inadequate health and disability coverage before, but those suspensions were really the last nail in the coffin," Durand said.

Durand alerted Gary Kitchen, Local 880's organizing director. Before long, cards had been collected and a certification election had been requested.

Long Road to a Contract

Tecumseh's firefighters' first challenge was to defeat the town's contention that their status as "volunteers" barred them from organizing. The firefighters were paid a yearly honorarium and an hourly wage for fire calls, but were "volunteer" because they had a choice of whether to respond to any given fire call.

Fortunately, the Ontario Labour Relations Board rejected the town's legalistic classification and issued a historic ruling authorizing Teamster representation of Ontario's volunteer firefighters. The firefighters were actually certified twice, initially in 1997 and again in 1999 when the Ontario government forced a merger of the municipal governments of Tecumseh and Sandwich South, which more than doubled the size of the bargaining unit.

"Security for our families"

After more than a year of contentious bargaining, Durand and his fellow volunteers in Tecumseh secured a Teamster contract.

The final agreement features wage increases that will amount to a 48 percent increase for Sandwich South firefighters by the time it expires in 2003. Tecumseh firefighters, who had seen only one raise in the past seven years, are equally happy with the contract's wage provisions, but even more so with its benefits in case of injury or death on a fire call.

The contract also makes them pioneers. Their three-year labor accord is the first of its kind in all of Canada.

"This provides security for our families, and takes a huge burden off our minds," said Durand, who also served on the contract negotiating committee. "The politics are gone now. We can now get back to serving our neighbors and fighting fires, the reason we joined the department in the first place."

The Next Challenges

Local 880 Organizing Director Gary Kitchen already has the next fire department in his sights. News of the Tecumseh contract victory has prompted firefighters in the neighboring town of Essex to seek out Teamster clout. As the Teamster went to press, Kitchen had in hand nearly enough signed cards to request a certification vote from the OLRB.

Despite Canada's well-deserved reputation for civility, the behavior of bosses is maddeningly consistent the world over. As soon as the town of Essex heard about their firefighters' effort to organize, four who management deemed ringleaders were fired. Both a certification vote and an unfair labor practices complaint now loom in the town's future.

Nor are things going entirely smoothly in Tecumseh. Just as the Teamster went to press, the town laid off 16 firefighters, nearly a third of the total bargaining unit. Consultations with lawyers have begun and the filing of unfair labor practice charges seems likely.

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A Call to Action Teamster Volunteers and Overnite

Roadway driver Chester Witchett is embroiled in a battle of parent against parent. It pits him as the father of three children against Union Pacific, the billion-dollar parent of the delinquent Overnite Transportation.

"When I told my 14-year-old that [the Overnite workers] had voted for a union in 1995, he asked why didn't they have it," said Witchett, a member of Atlanta's Local 728. "So, I told him that Overnite is showing just how little respect they have for people and



the laws of the land. And that's had an effect on my kid's view on how society is supposed to work."

That's why Witchett and hundreds of other volunteers back up Overnite strikers on the picket lines. Witchett hits the Moreland Avenue picket line three or four times a week. It's doubtful that when the truck line forced the Teamsters out on an unfair labor practice strike last October, it ever expected such concerted support from rank-and-file Teamsters from other companies.

"This company may have deep pockets, but we have the heart and we have people dedicated to the principles of justice," said Tom Keegel, Teamsters General Secretary-Treasurer. "It's why so many Teamsters are joining the Overnite strike line. We have a century of experience that tells us that if we stay united we will gain a contract at Overnite."

Witchett also beats the drum with his coworkers about the importance of supporting the Overnite strike. Co-worker Roosevelt Burton stops by the Overnite line each morning just to bring an update to the Roadway barn.

Impact: Far and Wide

Up in Detroit, Mike McElmury has been rallying a Northern volunteer army. McElmury, a Consolidated Freight (CF) worker who recently became a Teamster project organizer, solicits pledge cards from his CF co-workers and other union members. Workers sign the pledge cards and commit to spending time on the picket line.

"We're not asking somebody to come out everyday, but I do point out that a couple hours a week could mean a hell of a lot to their future," McElmury said. "Our futures depend on this. Every single trucking company is out there watching this. And if we don't win, we're going to feel it when contract time comes."

Alvan's Dave Hyder and CF's Gary Harvey are two of the drivers who have answered the call.

"We have to be out there to show them that we're with them and we're not going to leave," said Hyder a Local 299 Teamster. "That's what being in a union is all about."

Union to Union

Donations Give Boost to Strike Fund

Tom Rebman, Secretary-Treasurer of the International Union of Electronic, Electrical, Salaried Machine and Furniture Workers (IUE) presented the Teamsters with a second \$25,000 check in support of the Overnite strike.

"When battling enormous corporations that have deep, deep pockets, we must stand together if we expect to win," Rebman said. "We are proud to stand in unity with our brothers and sisters at the Teamsters."

Many other international unions have donated to the fund including the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union, the United Food and Commercial Workers, the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees and the Office and Professional Employees Union.

Hundreds of individuals have also donated to the strike fund. If you are interested in donating, send your check to: Overnite Strike Fund, 25 Louisiana Avenue NW, Washington DC 20001.

Dedicated Local 120 Members

Members of Minnesota's Local 120 overwhelmingly passed a dues assessment to support Overnite strikers. When the assessment is added to the International's strike benefit, Local 120 Overnite strikers will receive \$550 per week.

Members voted 84 percent to assess the membership \$3 to \$5 per month depending on the members' current dues.

"Local 120 members have always been committed to doing whatever it takes to win this strike," said Tom Keegel, Local 120 President and Teamsters General Secretary-Treasurer. "We need to win this war. And I'm proud that our people have said they're in this battle for the long haul."

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A Grocer's Greed

Locals 245 and 455 Battle Associated Wholesale Grocer

Although the April 1 deadline for a new contract had come and gone, Jim Cheek of Teamsters Local 245 in Springfield, MO still showed up for work at Associated Wholesale Grocers (AWG). He hoped that negotiations could continue for a few days and that a new contract could be hammered out. What Cheek found was that he and all of the other AWG Teamsters had been locked out of work.

"I've put in 29 years with this company and now they do this," Cheek said. "Management planned to outsource my job the entire time."

The lockout came after weeks of intense negotiations. As the Teamsters sought a new contract, AWG sought to maximize its profits on the backs of its employees. Although the company's profits soared from \$220 million in 1998 to \$271 million in 1999, management whined about the need to "stay competitive."

Now that the contract has expired, AWG has outsourced all of its warehouse and

trucking operations and put more than 1,000 Teamsters in Springfield, Oklahoma City and Kansas City out of work.

"We have been back to the bargaining table time after time," said Jim Kabell, Secretary-Treasurer of Local 245. "AWG has not considered even one of our proposals. If the company was really in trouble, we'd be more than willing to do our part to keep it afloat. This is just corporate greed at its worst."

Kabell and his fellow Teamsters are not giving up though. They have built an impressive community coalition with civil rights groups, politicians, religious groups, students, and other unions to stand against AWG's corporate greed.

Several weeks before the lockout, the coalition massed an impressive rally attended by General President James P. Hoffa on the campus of Southwest Missouri State University. More than 7,000 Teamsters, their families and supporters gathered to support the AWG workers. Hoffa urged the crowd to stay united.

"Do not underestimate the strength of the Teamsters," Hoffa said. "We know how to fight and will do whatever it takes to win."

"Having the General President attend our rally was a huge boost for our morale," said Cheek. "When he started speaking and the crowd started cheering, I was so excited that a cold chill went right up my spine."

"Hopefully, AWG will come to their senses and see what these jobs mean to our community," Kabell said. "If they don't, we will make them feel our power through the boycott of AWG stores. Once those fat corporate wallets start to get thinner and thinner, AWG will have no choice but to negotiate."

Bringing the Grocery Strike Online

As the wife of a 22-year Associated Wholesale Grocers (AWG) truck driver, Jeannie Taylor has seen most of the Teamsters usual strike and organizing tactics. With AWG management choosing to outsource her husband's job instead of agreeing to a new contract, Jeannie knew that it was time to bring the fight into cyberspace.

"We've started an e-mail network of more than 125 families throughout Missouri, Kansas and Oklahoma, and we are adding new people every day," said Taylor. "All of the families on our e-mail list receive and share daily updates on the progress of leafleting and picketing efforts against Associated. Between myself and another person, we keep the updates going 18 hours a day."

AWG management locked out their employees on April 2 and chose to outsource their entire warehouse operation rather than agree to a new contract. Negotiations went on for weeks and management rejected every Teamster proposal. Management tried to claim that any new contract must offer significant cost savings so that the company would "remain competitive". Those words rang hollow when it came to light that AWG's gross profits increased by more than \$50 million last year.

A boycott of AWG stores has been crucial to ending the lockout and getting a new contract.

"If AWG will not respect our power at the bargaining table, then they can feel our power as their store profits grow smaller and smaller," said Jim Kabell, Secretary-Treasurer of Local 245 in Springfield, Missouri.

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Twinkie Withdrawal

Bakery Drivers Force Bosses' Hands

Twinkie the Kid provoked a high stakes showdown with the Teamster's New England Bakery Drivers Council. The showdown got more coverage than a WWF Smackdown. But after days of trash-talking bravado, The Kid folded like a limp biscuit.

IBC Disrespects Arbitrator

The dispute started after Interstate Bakeries Corporation (IBC), which distributes such brands as Hostess, Nissen, Drake's and Sunbeam, decided it was above the law. IBC's contract with the Drivers Council requires arbitration of grievance disputes. IBC lost several arbitrations arising at and around its Biddeford, Maine plant. So IBC decided to defy the decisions.

The arbitrators had punished IBC for wrongfully discharging an employee, manipulating the seniority list, transferring out bargaining unit work and co-mingling products on the trucks. All these actions violated contract work rules.

"The arbitrators were biased," whined IBC senior marketing vice-president Mark Dirkes to the national media. He insisted the company could ignore the rulings because IBC felt "shut out of the process."

Teamsters Step Up the Pressure

IBC soon found it would have to eat its words before its customers could eat any more Hostess pastries.

"Strikes must always be the last resort," said Richard Volpe, Teamster Bakery Conference Director. "But in this case the company is being totally unyielding on a point where it is clearly wrong. We hope IBC comes to its senses before kids all over the northeast start to miss their Twinkies, Ho-Hos and peanut butter sandwiches."

The Great Twinkie Shortage of 2000

But children turned out to be less aggrieved than adults. Grown-ups by the thousands came out of closets to admit their addiction and demand a solution. They besieged convenience store clerks, unburdened themselves to radio gabfest hosts and, in at least one case, wrote to Congress seeking federal intervention.

Once the 1,400 New England Bakery Drivers went on strike (joined by 160 Pittsburgh bakery drivers whose contract renewal IBC was stonewalling) an epic battle was joined. The Great Twinkie Shortage of 2000 had begun.

Picket lines extended from Biddeford to Wayne, NJ, Jamaica, Queens, Buffalo, NY and Philadelphia, PA. From Pittsburgh they extended to Akron, OH. At its height, the job action idled 5000 workers (Teamsters and the Bakers) who refused to cross their lines.

This led to a Twinkie frenzy that even organizers hadn't fully expected. Store shelves lay barren. Coverage popped up in major newspapers. Office workers suffering the painful symptoms of Twinkie withdrawal were featured on noontime news broadcasts. NBC's Today show interviewed suffering convenience store owners and junk food addicts alike. Before IBC finally caved, boxes of Twinkies could be found at the popular Ebay.com online auction site, offered for upwards of \$10.00/box.

Within a week's time IBC threw in the towel.

Sweet Victory

"Right now it sounds like everyone is going to get their Twinkies," said Robert Piccone, Local 340 President, which represents the Biddeford plant, announcing the strike's tentative settlement.

Local 340's Bill Turkewitz expressed relief, both for his New England brothers and sisters and for the 160 in Pittsburgh who receive the decent contract they'd sought for months.

"We'd much rather be working than not," said Turkewitz. "It was just a matter of standing firm with bosses who'll try anything if you don't watch 'em. We only win these things by fighting together. It's another great day to be a Teamster."

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A Rocky Road

Teamster Unity Secures Good Contract

When Fieldbrook Farms bought the Dunkirk Ice Cream plant in Cheektowaga, New York three years ago, Local 264's Tom Nasca understood there would be transition pains.

He and his fellow Local 264 members agreed to a three-year extension of the contract they had with Dunkirk as a way of easing the transition. But instead of appreciating the workers commitment, Dunkirk took advantage of it. Over the course of the three years, working conditions at the plant went from bad to worse.

"Items in the contract that we had agreed upon with Dunkirk, were interpreted differently by Fieldbrook," said Ed McDonald of Local 264. "Not only did management freeze our wages, they also brought in more seasonal employees that were not part of the contract."

Forced to Strike

With all other measures to agree upon a new contract failing, Fieldbrook employees were left with no choice but to strike.

"The community was totally behind us," said Nasca. "I knew with the unity and intensity our workers had, that we could strike as long as it took."

"As long as it took" ended up being only five days. Fieldbrook management agreed to a new contract and the members then ratified the contract by a vote of 192-81. The contract includes:

- Wage increases
- A five percent increase in Fieldbrook's 401(k) matching contribution.
- The doubling of life insurance coverage
- 100 percent employee medical coverage, paid by Fieldbrook
- A dental plan

"This victory shows the power of Teamster unity," said McDonald. "The employees felt powerless individually, but they really galvanized as a group to show the company that they deserved a fair contract."

With the new contract, Nasca has begun reaping the contract's benefits of in the form of his new 401(k) account.

"The raises and the increased company match will definitely help me start saving for retirement," Nasca said. "It's nice to know that I will have some income to retire on."

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Pickin'and Deliverin'

UPS Teamster Delivers a Best-Selling Bluegrass Album

It's lunchtime. Normally the time UPS driver Johnny Staats pulls off the road and gets in some mandolin practice.

But lately, lunch has been like playing a series of impromptu concerts. Since the release of Wires and Wood, Staats' debut album on Giant Records, he has performed truck-side concerts for reporters from the New York Times, People, NBC's Today Show and CNN. His already jammed schedule -- 10 hours of package delivery, practice, raccoon hunting, family life -- has become even more packed.

"I figure I'll have plenty of time to rest after they throw a little dirt on me. But until then I'll just keep pushing," said Staats, a member of Local 175. "I don't know if that's good, but it's what I keep doing."

Vital Staats

Staats, a life-long resident of Jackson County, West Virginia, grew up playing music. He played gospel at home, gospel at church. His parents got him started at the age of seven; by nine he joined his first band.

Music was everything to him. There was no football or basketball. There was mandolin practice, practice and more practice. Staats was so obsessed, he'd fall asleep and let his eight track tapes of Bill Monroe and the Country Gentlemen loop all night long and soak up sound by osmosis.

"It's kind of a habit, like snuff or cigarettes. You just gotta keep doing it," Staats said.

After high school, Staats headed to Nashville where he hooked up with John Rich of Tanya Tucker's band. But there just wasn't enough music to make a living.

So, in 1988 he back-burnered his music career and returned to Jackson County. He took a job with UPS and married his sweetheart Lori.

Over the next 10 years Staats continued playing bluegrass at regional contests and two years ago he started recording Wires and Wood.

"I'd kind of given up on making a living with music when this all happened," he said.

Record Contracts and Union Contracts

Still, the successful record hasn't turned him into a Rhinestone Cowboy. The days are gone when a record contract meant a Nashville mansion with a fleet of Cadillacs. The lean and mean economy met the Grand Ole Opry with the same ferocity it has met every other industry. And Staats' early experience in Nashville makes him extra cautious.

"The music business is shaky," Staats told the New York Times. "One minute you're living on steak, the next minute you're living on beans."

That's why Staats' union contract is so important to him. He's sticking to his job as a driver -- he just became full-time last year-- because Teamster negotiated wages and benefits have provided for his family.

Staats even remembers the exact day he signed his union card like he remembers the notes he picks on his mandolin.

"6/15/1988, that was the day," Staats said with pride. "I'm a big union man. The union got me what we have today. And that's not just wages. Being union means someone's there standing up, fighting for you. It's good knowing you got that."

He might even write a song about it.

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