

Local 369 Fights Antiunion

Officials at Jefferson State Vocational-Technical School and the Independent Electrical Contractors Association (IECA) in Louisville, Kentucky, recently used the state-supported school's auditorium to spread an antiunion message to students enrolled in the IECA-sponsored apprentice program, until IBEW Local 369 set them straight.

Local 369 Organizer Bill Finn staffed one of two union display tables inside Jefferson State Vocational-Technical School.

The IECA created and distributed to its students a deceptive antiunion hand-out, titled *Compare the Benefits*, that compares and contrasts union and non-union pay and benefits. IBEW Local 369, Louisville, learned that class hours mandated by the IECA and Jefferson State Vocational-Technical School required students to assemble for two mass meetings at the school where they were subjected to antiunion preaching outside of the normal curriculum. "In other words, the apprentices were a captive audience," said Terry Luckett, Local 369 business manager.

When Local 369 organizers Bill Finn and Jeff Seigle arrived at the school with information that refuted the IECA hand-out and highlighted the benefits of union membership, the school's director, Dr. Marvin L. Copes, threatened to withdraw funding for the union apprentice program at the school if they did not leave.

"This was an insult to Local 369 and the taxpayers of Kentucky," said Business Manager Luckett. "We thought it was ill-advised for a state-supported school to subject students to this form of coercion."

Local 369 challenged the IECA and school officials to a forum where all

From left to right are Local 369 President Scott Pulliam and Organizers Bill Finn and Jeff Seigle, who informed students in the apprentice program at Jefferson State Vocational-Technical School about the benefits of working union.

on Bias At Vo-Tech School

sides could present their cases to the workers and their families in a non-partisan atmosphere. Despite Local 369's efforts, the IECA remained adamantly opposed to union participation at the state-owned school.

Local 369 organizers began working on legal maneuvers to gain access for the next class. Brother Finn then drafted a letter to the school director demanding equal access to the students. Shortly after conversations took place between the local and attorneys representing both sides, the school agreed to place a display table inside each of the school's front entrances and allow Local 369 to staff the tables and distribute information to the apprentices. According to Business Manager Lockett, the apprentices took note of the union's actions and began to ask questions. "The information we handed out to them was in direct contrast to the *Compare the Benefits* handout," he said. "All we wanted to do was present our position and refute the deceptive information contained in the handout."

Brother Finn said that Local 369 merely wanted the apprentices to see both sides of the union issue in order to make informed decisions as to whether or not to join. "We even had an instructor who initially refused our information packet, but accepted one later. He decided to read it as well since that would be the only topic of discussion in his class that day."

Local 369 held the challenge forum at a nearby hotel on April 16th. Neither the IECA director, school officials nor any of the open shop contractors attended the forum, despite the fact that Local 369 encouraged their participation in order that the apprentices be allowed to hear both sides of the working union versus working open shop issue.

Brother Finn noted that the forum yielded increased mem-

bership for Local 369, as many apprentices who attended opted to join IBEW. "We dealt with the apprentices in a honest, straightforward manner," he said. "We were able to get our point across and within weeks we had the largest number of apprentices ever to sign up at one time."

As a testament to Local 369's successful campaign, the school has now plastered "No Solicitation" signs near its entrance as a way of discouraging future union organizing efforts. ■

