

Workers Mobilize to

Seven Days in
June Brings Union
Members and Those
Who Want to be
Members Together
to Protest Employer
Interference with
Basic Right

“The IBEW can and does organize today, but we and all other unions continue to face fierce employer resistance in virtually every campaign,” said International President J. J. Barry. “Without the recognition by management of the basic right to organize, labor will continue to suffer, as too many workers are denied the ability to exercise their free choice to join a union.”

The labor movement in the United States is beginning the long fight to create once again a friendly climate for organizing. The battle received a rousing kickoff last June with the AFL-CIO's *7 Days in June*, a nationwide program of forums, rallies, hearings and marches designed to focus public attention on the imbalance that exists when workers seek to exercise their right to organize. The IBEW played a significant role in this effort.

Seven Days in June was part of a long term campaign by the AFL-CIO called *Voice@Work*, which will be the centerpiece of labor's efforts

to restore the ability of workers to organize without excessive management coercion and intimidation. Organized by Central Labor Councils and local unions in 38 states, *7 Days in June* saw over 15,000 people speak out about why workers want to join unions and how employers routinely block their freedom to do so. The demonstrations were meant to engage and educate community leaders, clergy and elected officials of the plight of today's workers. IBEW Local 728, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and Local 441, Santa Ana, California, played major roles in those activities.

At the hearings and marches, working men and women talked about their hopes and aspirations; their desire for better wages and benefits to care for their families. In some cases they appealed for reasonable sched-



Members of the Orange County California AFL-CIO, including members of IBEW Local 441, Santa Ana, and 47, Diamond Bar, picket Boeing Aircraft during 7 Days in June.

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ules so they can play greater roles in their communities and in still others, the hope was for a safer workplace. The week served as a strong foundation for the long-term effort toward legislation that will put workers and employers on an even playing field.

Raising Their Voices in Florida

In Florida, a “right-to-work” state, both houses of the legislature proclaimed June 21-27 “Workers Right to Organize” week. The resolutions, sponsored by State Senator Terry Meek (D-District 17) and State Representative Cynthia Moore Chestnut (D-District 23), kicked off a week of rallies and demonstrations in Broward and Palm Beach Counties as well as the cities of Gainesville, Hollywood and Orlando.

Both the Broward and Palm Beach County government centers were the gathering places for over 180 union members, who listened to speakers decrying Governor Jeb Bush’s attack on the Florida

State Safety Division. By July 1, 2000, the department will be history—despite a growing number of on-the-job deaths. In 1998, construction fatalities in the state of Florida were the highest in the nation—68 men and women died of job-related injuries. Over the last 3 years, fatalities have increased from 50 to 58 to 68. Statistics as of April 21, indicate that 41 people died on construction sites so far this year. According to OSHA statistics, 93 percent of these fatalities occurred at nonunion job sites.

Local 728 Business Manager James Weldon, a principal speaker at the rallies, said, “Without a union, workers will not complain about hazardous working conditions for fear of losing their jobs. Most often, they don’t even know what safe work practices are.” He emphasized that union workers are well-trained and receive safety training as part of their apprenticeship program.

Demonstrators called for changes in labor laws to allow workers the right to join unions without union busting consultants preventing that right. “The scales are heavily weighted toward Big Business,” Weldon said. “At the very least, they need to be more evenly balanced with labor law reform.”

Busy Week in Orange County

Seven Days in June really came alive in Orange County, California. Local 441 Business Manager/Financial Secretary Doug Chappel is also president of the Orange County Central Labor Council (OCCLC).

Local 441 members eagerly participated in the events held June 19-25.

Local 441 began the week by hosting an all-day workshop, organized by the Orange County Democratic Party. Thirty-five candidates running for public office showed up and continued to participate in *7 Days in June* by picketing and marching with union members during the week.

At a public legislative forum, workers testified about the differences between being a nonunion worker and union worker. Steve Brown, a NECA chapter manager, testified that when contractors hire union workers they know they are getting their money’s worth. Community and religious organizations testified in support of the freedom to choose a union. U.S. Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez (D), State Senator Joe Dunn (D-District 34) and Assemblyman Lou Corres (D-District 69) also attended and spoke to the 150 people attending the forum.

On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, more than 50 Local 441 supporters and unrepresented electricians picketed Helix Electric at the Boeing Space Center in Huntington Beach.

On Thursday, the OCCLC meeting became a rally in support of the UFCW in front of the Gigante North American headquarters in Santa Ana. Gigante is the largest union supermarket chain in Mexico that wants to be nonunion in the United States. The rally was so effective that Gigante closed for the remainder of the day and its management refused to speak to the media.

The week’s finale on Friday consisted of two events. Members of IBEW Local 47, which represents workers at California Edison, met Local 441 members at the south side of Edison Field, the home of the California Angels baseball team,

(Continued on page 28)



7 Days in June *(Continued from page 13)*

whose stadium naming rights were bought by the utility. Together, they carried signs and passed out flyers protesting California Edison's policy of driving down living standards by creating nonunion jobs. At the other side of the ballpark, members of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union (HERE) met to walk and picket through Tinsel Town, a dinner theater where customers become movie stars for the evening. Then they marched over to the stadium parking lot, yelling and chanting "Union Yes!" Musicians Local 7 joined in with their marching band. People on the sidelines paid more attention to the marchers than to the announcers at Tinsel Town. The demonstrators were excited to see all the affiliates supporting each other, along with the Democratic Party chair and candidates from the Saturday forum. ☒