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IU Local 4730

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The Award Winning Newsletter of CWA 4730

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Communications Workers of America
Poplars 331, 855-7929 or 855-8508
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IU Joins Workers Rights Consortium

by Linda Butler

A coalition organizaed by the IU student group NO SWEAT! scored a major victory for workers' rights February 18th when IU President Myles Brand announced that IU would join the Workers Rights Consortium (WRC), a national organization formed to halt the use of sweatshop labor to make university logo items. The broad-based coalition included CWA 4730 and Indiana Jobs with Justice along with other area labor groups, several student and community organizations, and members of the faith community. President Brand, in addition to agreeing to IU's membership in WRC, also convinced the presidents of the Universities of Michigan and Wisconsin to join at the same time.

Coalition members believe that participation in the WRC is the only way to assure that IU logo apparel is not made in factories where human rights abuses and sweatshop conditions exist. The WRC was a fledgling organization with only five member schools before IU, Michigan, and Wisconsin agreed to join. With three major universities signing up at the same time, it is expected that a large number of colleges and universities will join shortly.

IU joined without endorsing all of the provisions in the WRC preliminary charter. This is a matter of concern to coalition members, who fear that "conditional" might mean that IU could withdraw from the organization before it has a chance to become fully effective. NO SWEAT! continues to work with the administration to define the terms of membership.

A NO SWEAT! mailing included the following statement:

"In the past 20 years conditions in the apparel industry have disintegrated. Good jobs that support communities have been lost. The people that now produce most of our clothing are some of the poorest and most disenfranchised in modern history. In an effort to extend the standards of human and civil rights Indiana University has joined the Workers Rights Consortium."

A member of the WRC national office spoke on the IU campus on March 8.

Email nosweat@indiana.edu for information and to subscribe to the NO SWEAT! email distribution list.

Know Your Policy

by Steve Ingeman

Many staff members at IU use their personal vehicles to run work-related errands. For some, this is an occasional thing—picking up a cake for a party or going to Staples for a few supplies. For others, it's a regular, expected job duty. Some staff members, for instance, use their own vehicles to drop off and pick up computer equipment around campus every day. Either way, very few ever ask for expect reimbursement for the mileage that they put on their own vehicles. But John Harner of the IU Travel Office confirms that there are some staff members who regularly request reimbursement for use of their personal vehicles on a quarterly basis.

Those who aren't getting reimbursed may not realize that they are entitled to reimbursement by policy 6.11. The confusion may be because that policy is written for "travel expense" reimbursement, and that sounds like it is intended for trips to meetings or conferences out of town, lasting a day or longer. However, the policy states that "any employee who has incurred expenses as a result of authorized travel on behalf of the University shall be reimbursed for such expenses in accordance with the applicable reimbursement procedures."

The policy is not entirely clear on what is considered "authorized travel." It states that an employee "shall be reimbursed for...travel expenses" if they are "assigned to travel as part of [their] job duties." IU's policy in practice, however, is that "authorized travel" is travel that is approved by your department. While there appear to be no firm guidelines, it would be reasonable to suggest that a trip to Taco Bell to pick up lunch for the office would not count as authorized travel, while a trip to Staples for office supplies would be. Since IU gives the final say to departments, check with your account manager and your department head for specific details on what will and will not be considered authorized travel.

Getting reimbursement requires that you follow the normal university procedures for claiming travel expenses. These procedures are detailed on the IU Travel Management Services web page, at www.indiana.edu/~travel/reimb.html. To summarize: you need to fill out an IU In-State Travel form, which you can get from your account manager, and you need to keep a Travel Mileage Record, which can be found at www.indiana.edu/~travel/mileage.html.

A Report from a Safety Committee Member

by Jane Goldsmith

One of the points in the first agreement between the IU Administration and CWA Local 4730 was that "the Administration and the Union agree to create a Safety Committee." There were no clear instructions given in the agreement about what direction the committee would take—just that it would be established and would determine on its own what to do. The last six years have been a time of learning what the needs are on the campus, how to address them, and how to adjust when they change.

The committee is currently made up of three representatives from the Administration—Maurice Smith from University Human Resources, Brent Brewer of Environmental Health and Safety, and Jim Dawson of Risk Management; and two CWA representatives, Beth Plew and myself. The chair and secretary positions alternate between both sides on a semi-annual basis. We meet on a monthly basis.

In the course of its existence, the Safety Committee has helped staff find the correct person to contact about safety-related matters (no mean feat in this complex organization) and has interceded to help resolve several issues which have arisen. For instance, when we heard that Wells Quad was to be without water for 4 days in May, 1998, while work was being done on a water main, the committee contacted the appropriate people on campus to see if an alternative plan could be implemented. It was—to the satisfaction of all concerned. We helped widely distribute the guidelines for reviewing cumulative trauma that were developed by Risk Management in 1997. For three years, the Safety Committee sponsored a day-long Safety Fair, and we were one of the sponsors of the 1998 IU Employees Occupational Safety and Health Fair. We also developed a program of ergonomic training sessions, presented by Josh Reilly (the previous representative from Environmental Health and Safety) last fall.

Since we rely on campus staff employees to be our eyes and ears for most safety complaint reporting, we developed the Safety Suggestion Report and the Unsafe Working Condition Report for support staff to use to relay information to the committee. The Safety Suggestion Report is to be used to notify us of situations on campus that do not pose an immediate threat, but that should be addressed. The Unsafe Working Condition Report was developed for support staff to use when they believe they are being asked to perform hazardous work, which should be investigated immediately. When we receive a report, all Safety Commitee members are notified, and we follow up on the complaints until they are resolved.

The committee is currently working on several projects. One of these projects is to develop a list of the safety training programs now being offered by departments on campus, determine what training programs are lacking, and try to implement the needed programs—either through a department or by some other means. We are also discussing several buildings on campus that have "sick building" problems. We are trying to do what we can to find out what tests have been done, the results of the tests, what further testing should be done, and what the next steps are to eliminate some of the causative factors for the complaints. We are aware that many campus buildings are developing emergency evacuation plans, and we are monitoring the completion rate on those plans.

Between monthly meetings, members of the committee are always available for you to contact about your safety-related concerns. We have been notified about many situations that need immediate attention—such as mold growing in an air conditioning vent, fumes from a leaking sewer line in a basement, and slippery sidewalks by Sample Gates.

If you need to get in touch with a CWA representative on the IU/CWA Safety Committee about a complaint or to obtain one of the forms, please contact Jane Goldsmith (5-1627 or "goldsmi") or Beth Plew (5-2310 or "bplew").

Since You Asked

by Linda Harl

Question: I just realized that I now have to pay twice as much for brand name drugs ordered by mail as I did last year. Why is the hike so steep, and why weren't we given better warning?

Answer: Susan Brewer, Manager of Health Care Plans, University Benefits Office All changes were first published in the May, 1999, Benefits Program Bulletin that was mailed to all employees. Similar information was again published in the October Bulletin and was also part of the "open enrollment" information sent out to each employee.

Drug costs for the University's self-funded health plans (IU PPO and IU Precision POS) rose by 21.5% this past year - an increase of over $2 million. Prescription drug costs now surpass the cost of inpatient hospital care. This is a national trend. The reasons for the increase are an increase in the number of prescriptions being filled and an increase in the cost of new drugs coming onto the market. The leading contributor in rising costs are brand name drugs from a single manufacturer.

Other IU-sponsored health plans, for example M-Plan HMO and Partners HMO, changed to different brand and generic copays some time ago. The brand mail order copay this year in the IU PPO and IU Precision POS plans refects prescription benefit levels in these other plans.

Editor's note: It may be worth checking with the local drug store before mailing in any prescription. The mail-in people will charge you $15 or $30 EVEN IF THE TRUE PRICE IS LESS.

Solidarity Now! **is the official newsletter of CWA Local 4730 and is made possible by the dues paying members of that local.**

We encourage all CWA members to submit or suggest items for publication. If you have any questions about the newsletter, or would like to serve on the committee, contact Linda Harl, Sycamore 026, 5-9503, email: LHARL.

Traffic and Library Parking update

by Steve Ingeman

The Bloomington City Engineering office has completed a traffic study of Jordan Avenue between 7th Street and 10th Street. They are concerned about traffic backing up to 10th Street during heavy periods, particularly the rush hour period from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m., when much of the library staff is exiting the lot. At present, the only way to exit is to take a right turn onto Jordan Ave. There is adequate traffic, according to the report, for some kind of change in the traffic pattern, but any change would have to be put before the Bloomington Traffic Commission.

According to Sam Dean in the Engineering Office, traffic studies done to date do not warrant a three-way stop sign at the library parking lot exit. Although traffic is heavy there, a three way stop is warranted only when traffic going north-south and traffic going east are at least a 60-40 ratio. As it is, the traffic has been measured at a 72-28 ratio, which is still too small to warrant changing the traffic pattern. Nevertheless, the Engineering Office has produced a report on the traffic flow, containing specific recommendations, which needs to be presented to the city Traffic Commission. One such recommendation is that the exit from the library lot onto 7th Street should be reopened, although it is still unclear whether this fits with IU's plans for the area around the auditorium. It is IU's responsibility to bring the report before the commisssion, but to date no action has been taken.

Some staff members have questioned whether IUPD has the right to give traffic tickets for violations committed on city streets. If not, this would keep IUPD from enforcing the "right turn only" traffic controls at the library parking lot exit. However, state law gives IUPD the right to ticket on city streets. As a compromise, for illegal left turns out of the lot, IUPD has decided not to issue a city violation, which would count as "disobeying a traffic control device" and which would send the violator to traffic court with a fine of $82.50—or more than that, if the violator wanted to pay an extra charge for pre-trial diversion to avoid the six points that would be assessed on their license. Instead, IUPD will be issuing tickets through Parking Services, which will not count against the offender's license.

Open Records Law and What it Means at IU

by Jane Goldsmith

Have you ever wondered what information, if any, you have access to after you have applied for a job here at the University? Some of the information accumulated by the University is open to the public under the Indiana Open Records Law (Indiana Code 5-14-3). IU Personnel Policy 2.17 defines an defines an employee's file as "items or collection of information stored by the University under personal name or identification, whether maintained within the departments or Human Resources Management." The Open Records law excludes diaries, journals or other personal notes.

The law specifies that the public has access to the following information from a public employee's personnel file: name, compensation, job title, business address, business telephone, job description, education and training background, previous work experience, dates of first and last employment, information related to the status of formal charges against the employee, and information concerning disciplinary actions in which final action has been taken and that resulted in the employee being disciplined or discharged.

That means that you can find out if the person who got the job (if you didn't) is indeed more qualified than you.

However, the Indiana Open Records Law does not give you any right to answers given by references when you are applying for a new position. You can find out who was contacted as a reference (and that is not restricted to who you list as a reference) and what questions were asked, but you cannot find out what the answers to those questions were. At this point in time, the only way to obtain those answers is to sue for defamation of character and obtain the information through the discovery process.

The website for Indiana Code is http://www.state.in.us/legislative/ic/code/.

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Send in the card below!

LOCAL 4730
Communications Workers of America, AFL-

I hereby request and authorize the deduction of dues from my pay as established by Communications Workers of America (C.W.A.) of which I am a member. These will be paid to the Treasurer of C.W.A.

NAME (print)

Department

Work Address

Work Phone

Home Address

City/ST/Zip

Home Phone

Soc. Sec. #

Signature

Received by:

Date:

A Rising Tide Lifts all Yachts

(reprinted from "Dollars and Sense Magazine")

In 1980 a CEO in the US earned on average 42 times more than an average worker in one of his factories. By 1998, that disparity had ballooned ten-fold, and the top exec's paycheck was 419 times the size of the worker's. Yet few Americans seem to care, according to The Wall Street Journal.

Reporting on the latest executive pay study by United for a Fair Economy, the Journal noted that the current disparity between salaries of top execs and employees "approaches that of the gilded age," but claimed that in our high-employment U.S. economy, discussion of old-fashioned topics like wealth distribution is "virtually nonexistent." Supposedly when jobs are plentiful, most Americans are willing to tolerate the filthy rich if they feel their own chances to move up the income ladder have improved.

The story acknowledges, however, that it's conceivable that enormous inequity in wealth distribution could hurt "the less well off," as the rich bid up prices for items such as housing, cars and college tuition. Bloated executive pay also hurts worker morale and productivity, says the study.

Now Hiring in Cell Block #9

(reprinted from "Dollars and Sense Magazine")

Want a Job? Go to jail! That should be the motto of the Justice Department's Federal Prison Industries (FPI) arm, which runs jailhouse sweatshops employing almost 20,000 prisoners.

According to the Wall Street Journal, prisoners are taking employment away from workers in the apparel industry and the service sector. The apparel industry alone is claiming 8,000 jobs lost to the FPI factories.

Two features of this workforce that give it an edge in the labor market are FPI's right of first refusal on numerous government contracts, and the fact that convicts can be paid much lower than minimum wage. To make things worse, FPI administrators say they now intend to look beyond government contracts to the private sector to find gainful employment for an exploding prison population.

Prisons are bursting at the seams, and the threat of inmate violence is constantly on the minds of prison officials. Seems one way to diffuse this powder keg is jobs, lots of jobs.

So American prisoners are now competing against Filipino workers for very low paying jobs. The "sweatshop" labor problem may not be solved; just moved to a new front.

Membership Meeting

March 23, 2000
5:15 p.m.

Indiana Memorial Union
Redbud Room

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