



# JOBS WITH JUSTICE OF EAST TENNESSEE

Annual Review of Coalition Activities

November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014

Jobs with Justice of East Tennessee has continued its work this in supporting social and economic justice by supporting teacher activists in Knoxville, both that of our members in KCEA and outside, as well as by partnering with United Campus Workers and others in the statewide Put the People First campaign.

## **Jobs with Justice of East Tennessee Coalition Partners**

### **Labor Unions**

Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1164

American Postal Workers Union Local 26

Communication Workers of America Local 33076 (Knoxville Newspaper Guild)

Communication Workers of America Local 3865 (United Campus Workers)

Ironworkers Local 384

Knoxville/Oak Ridge Central Labor Council

Knox County Education Association

Laborers Local 818

Service Employees International Union Local 205

United Food & Commercial Workers Local 1995

Workers United Southern Region

Workers United Local 906

United Steelworkers Local 90

United Steelworkers Local 795

### **Faith Communities**

Church of the Savior (UCC)

Episcopal Peace Fellowship (St. James Episcopal Church)

Interfaith Worker Justice of East Tennessee

Knoxville Ministerial Association

### **Grassroots Social Justice Organizations**

Highlander Education and Research Center

Progressive Student Alliance (University of Tennessee, Knoxville)

Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment (SOCM)

Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC)

Tennesseans for Fair Taxation (TFT)

### **Events and Campaigns**

#### **Put the People First Campaign**

Jobs with Justice of East Tennessee is a proud member of the Put the People First campaign. This campaign, initiated by coalition member United Campus Workers-Communications Workers of America Local 3865, is uniting organizations and individuals with demands on Governor Haslam for fully-funded public schools, living wage jobs, and our democratic rights to vote and to organize. It came out of two meetings held by SEIU 205 of unions and labor groups working with low wage workers in Tennessee. The campaign partners include the Tennessee NAACP, Fight for Fifteen, Workers Interfaith Network, and others. This campaign emerged after Service Employees International Union Local 205 called a state-wide meeting of unions representing low-wage workers. While this initial formation did not move anywhere, it did allow for Put the People First to emerge.

Put the People First started strong with a 300+ rally on the steps of the Capitol building in Nashville in March of this year, with speakers from UCW, SEIU 205, NAACP, the glorious Rep. Gloria Johnson, and others. This was followed up by May 1<sup>st</sup> (International Workers' Day) actions in Knoxville, Memphis, and Chattanooga. The campaign has moved forward, with a Juneteenth celebration in Memphis, a Peoples' Assembly here in Knoxville in August, a major solidarity turnout for an action by the wonderful Freedomside at the National Governor's Association meeting in Nashville, and other actions since.

## **POWER Campaign and Immigration Reform**

During the past year JWJET continued our involvement in issues of justice for immigrant workers. Like national JWW, our local coalition has defined its role within the larger push for immigration reform as one that concentrates on dynamics in the workplace. We see many of the problems in our broken immigration system as rooted in the unfair exploitation and abuse of immigrant workers. In all our work, we try to bring home the point that the present system falls hardest and most unjustly on immigrants, while it also undermines fundamental labor rights for all workers, immigrant and non-immigrant alike.

A primary goal of our effort to date has been making sure that strong worker protections are included in whatever version of immigration reform the larger movement eventually succeeds in winning from Congress or from the executive branch. We want provisions that will cut back on the ability of employers to silence complaints and to cripple organizing. A number of such protections are featured in a bill called the POWER Act (“Protecting Our Workers from Exploitation and Retaliation”). This bill was introduced in past Congressional sessions, and many of its provisions were also woven into the immigration reform bill passed by the Senate in the last Congress. A national POWER Campaign has mobilized to press for these worker protections within immigration reform, and national JWW is part of that effort. Our own work on immigration reform here in Knoxville and the area is a local manifestation. Highlights of that local work over the past year appear below.

Julio Fernandez continued with us, extending his original summer contract with JWJET through the end of 2013. He helped us build stronger relationships among local labor, immigration-rights, faith, and community groups. Throughout the summer these forces had joined in an array of rallies, vigils, educational events, delegations to elected officials, letter-

writing parties and phone banks, etc., and the work continued into the fall and beyond. Julio's work consistently featured the voices of immigrants themselves and he often managed to bring cultural expression into the work in joyful and effective ways.

We devoted our 2013 annual meeting in October to a community forum on "Winning Immigration Reform and Protecting Workers' Rights: Two Sides of the Same Important Coin." Scheduled to coincide with a national day of action on immigration reform, the forum featured immigrant workers from Knoxville and beyond who told of abuses at the workplace, dangers on TDOT bridge projects across the state, and the pain of losing a family member to a workplace fatality. This forum dramatically showed the intersection of JWJET's work with Bridges to Justice, Knox Area Workers' Memorial Day, and the POWER campaign.

In the fall, with the blessing of national JWW, our coalition responded to an emerging situation in Shelbyville, in Middle Tennessee, where a group of immigrant workers had walked out in protest over mistreatment at a mattress factory. The case was one that clearly demonstrated the need for POWER-type reforms, so it was decided that Julio would shift his base of operation to Shelbyville. There he helped worker leaders to form an organization of their own called Trabajadores Unidos de Corsicana en Shelbyville (or TUCS). They soon joined with the United Food and Commercial Workers union and other allies from Shelbyville and across the state to support the workers' efforts to gain union representation at the plant. That campaign was the primary focus of Julio's work through the end of the year, and people from JWJET worked in various ways through the fall and winter to support TUCS and the union drive.

The union election in Shelbyville took place in January 2014. Despite an energetic and innovative coalition and courageous leadership from worker leaders, the union forces lost the vote. Nevertheless, the campaign built relationships, developed skills, taught lessons, and

established a foundation that we believe can be built upon in the future. It also represented a rare victory in another important respect. Thanks to sophisticated immigration-conscious support on both the legal side and the organizing side, no workers were fired or put into deportation proceedings as a result of their participation in the campaign, even though there was outspoken leadership from workers at the plant. This is a serious accomplishment. TUCS -- now rechristened as Workers United for the Community in Shelbyville -- remains to fight another day, and its members are now connected with various kinds of supporters who have said they stand ready to help if needed.

Since Julio's departure and the end of his contract, JWJET has continued to work for worker-friendly immigration reform. Times have been challenging, with a stalemate in Congress, continued high rates of deportation, and on-going delay of promised executive action, but we know the need for reform is as acute as ever, so we have looked for openings. For instance, we have continued to lift up issues of immigration justice in our work with Bridges to Justice, and this year's Report by the Knox Area Workers' Memorial Day Committee (shared broadly with federal and state legislators and other officials), again highlighted the need for immigration reform as a necessary component if we hope to improve safety and health in the state's workplaces.

A local group called Allies of Knoxville's Immigrant Neighbors (AKIN) joined our coalition as one of its newest organizational members as a result of our work for immigration reform. We are also working to maintain other relationships that Julio strengthened while he was here, especially with a local immigrant-led grassroots group, Comité Popular de Knoxville, many of whose members know first-hand the problems of workplace exploitation and abuse. For instance, we helped members of the Comité attend a worker-rights session at the annual

gathering of the South East Immigrants' Rights Network, we stood with Comité members as they brought an immigrant-justice resolution to the People's Assembly last summer, and we helped welcome a strong delegation from the Comité to the Labor Day 2014 "picket and picnic" organized by Put the People First.

As readers of this annual report can see, the kind of work we are talking about in this section has its ups and downs. Certainly it is not for the faint-hearted. Nevertheless, we are convinced more than ever that justice for immigrants is key to the future of the labor movement and to the well-being of all working people in our country. Next year we look forward to continued work with local, regional and national allies bringing these POWER issues and POWER strategies forward.

### **Farewell to the UNITE! Building**

At the end of September, activists and organizers gathered to tell stories, eat, drink, and bid farewell to the home of the labor movement in East Tennessee for some years. Workers United Local 906 was forced to sell the building due to financial constraints. JWJET sponsored the potluck, as the UNITE! Building has been our home for many years. Those walls have witnessed the ebb and flow in the struggle for economic and social justice and it will be missed.

### **Solidarity with Teachers**

In the past year, JWJET has strengthened the bond with member group, Knox County Education Association (KCEA). Most months a JWJET member has attended KCEA monthly representative assembly meetings. KECA has also established a liaison who attends most JWJET monthly meetings.

Last fall, a group of parents and teachers formed themselves into Students, Parents and Educators Across Knox County (SPEAK). SPEAK is organized to resist corporate takeover of Knox County public schools, over testing students and de-professionalizing teachers. In January, JWJET's Working Women's Leadership Council gave basic organizing training to SPEAK and KCEA members to support their efforts.

JWJET has helped KCEA and SPEAK build bridges between each other and build effective connections with like-minded community organizations. As a result of these efforts, both SPEAK and KCEA have participated in Put the People First campaign events.

### **Bridges to Justice and Knox Area Workers' Memorial Day Committee**

Bridges to Justice, a campaign begun by Jobs with Justice of East Tennessee, Interfaith Worker Justice of East Tennessee, the Ironworkers Union and the Laborers Union has continued to hold accountable Britton Bridge and its sister companies, Mountain States, HMR and Jones Brothers for the four workers killed on their bridge projects in Tennessee, and for their poor and unfair treatment of their employees. The campaign continues to push Tennessee Department of Transportation to put in place a "culture of workplace safety" on its projects.

- We claim as accomplishments TDOT's following changes communicated in October 2013:
  - requiring Contractors to have an Employee Safety and Health program developed by an OSHA trained individual;--contract language that voids bonuses if a contractor has a fatality on a project;--requiring contractors to provide safety & fatality data and insurance information with their prequalification applications and requests. We appreciate these changes and continue to press their enforcement.

- We held a vigil and media event when TDOT opened two lanes on the Henley Street Bridge to remind TDOT and the public that two workers died on that site.
- We translated the white paper, “Safety Before Schedule” into Spanish so the worker outreach team could share it with immigrant workers employed by Britton Bridge.
- We held an action when TDOT Commissioner Schroer spoke to the Farragut Chamber of Commerce at Fox Den Country Club. The action included a huge sign to Schroer held by the two strikers Carlos Guzman and Dwayne Sweat, handing a flyer about the worker safety issues to each participant, and two JWJET leaders challenging Schroer during the question and answer session. We got media coverage in the News-Sentinel and the Farragut Shopper as well as a great photo of the strikers holding the sign.
- The strikers continued delegations to customers of Jones Brothers companies and to member companies of the Tennessee Road Builders Association including the Executive Director. They also asked questions at TDOT public meetings across the state. When possible they were joined by community supporters.
- The worker outreach team broadened its base of support among current and former Britton Bridge workers, some of whom shared more stories of hazardous working conditions and poor treatment.
- A third striker, Mario Perez, joined the campaign. He and Dwayne presented a demand on worker safety at the “Put the People First” platform rally. The three strikers and a JwJET leader participated in the annual meeting of TIRRC.

- Worker Interfaith Network held a vigil on the banks of the Mississippi River to honor a worker killed on a TDOT project on a bridge near Memphis.

Bridges to Justice steadfastly continues to hold these companies and TDOT accountable and is increasing the pressure on them to put an end to worker fatalities and serious injuries on their projects and to treat workers with respect, dignity and fairness.

Bridges to Justice joins with the Knoxville-Oak Ridge Area AFL-CIO and its member unions in carrying out the work of this committee. The CLC has observed Workers Memorial Day for over 20 years.

- We held the annual Workers Memorial Day observance in Knoxville that honors fallen workers, welcomes their families, and calls for reform. Over 100 participants joined several families of workers killed on the job in East Tennessee in calling for an end to worker fatalities.
- We held meetings with TN Department of Labor Commissioner Burns Phillips and the Administrator of TOSHA Steve Hawkins to discuss worker safety issues.
- We received funding from the Neighbors in Need program of the United Church of Christ for outreach to families of fallen workers and for distributing the report.
- We sent two members to attend the annual conference of the National Council on Occupational Safety and Health.
- We supported labor councils in Nashville and Chattanooga as they held their own Workers Memorial Day events.
- We released a second annual report about occupational fatalities in the state and widely distributed it to public officials and others.

- We worked with Rep. Mike Stewart on legislation to assure greater worker safety on publicly funded construction projects and organized a well-covered media event in Nashville at the General Assembly when Rep. Stewart introduced the bill in committee.

### **Solidarity**

Jobs with Justice of East Tennessee strives to show solidarity by lending our people power, our voice, and resources to events and organizations, both those of our members and others.

- We sent a donation to Teamsters Local 519 in support of their striking workers here in Knoxville.
- Additionally we sent a donation to Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco, and Grain Millers Local 252G in Memphis, TN. BCTGM Local 252G represents workers at the Kellogs plant in Memphis, and experienced a lockout during a contract dispute. JWJET contributed a donation to the relief fund for the workers in the name of Dave McIlwaine, who passed away earlier this year. We also made a contribution to the Knoxville United Way.
- We bought ads in the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary program, in the Tennessee Health Care Campaign anniversary program, and in the Blount County MLK event program.
- We co-sponsored a 24-hour vigil with the Comite Popular and AKIN protesting the deportations that continue to destroy lives and families in this country.

- We also donated our feet by participating in two parades this year. JWWJeters marched in the annual Pride parade here in Knoxville as well as in a parade sponsored by the city of Knoxville celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
- We co-sponsored, with UCW-CWA Local 3865, their annual MLK Jr. Day Banquet featuring long-time labor luminary Stewart Acuff. This annual event celebrates the important connection between the labor movement and the struggle for civil rights in this country.

### **Training**

Jobs with Justice of East TN sent two members to the DC Jobs with Justice (JWWJ) leadership and organizing training. We joined activists from DC JWWJ member groups, in addition to JWWJ local leaders from Orlando and Dallas! It was great to learn from and alongside members of JWWJ coalitions across the country.

The training was a three day intensive where we really got to dig in to the National JWWJ organizational framework that they work with local coalitions to implement. One of the goals that they set out for us was to develop a shared understanding of what some basic organizing concepts--so that nationally we have a collective way of thinking about how to implement campaigns in our local areas. We were successful in meeting that goal!

In addition to coming away with a shared understanding of some foundational organizing concepts, we also left with concrete tools to use to build campaigns based on our shared values. The values triangle is the most important tool we came away with, as we learned to apply it in all stages of a campaign to guide our strategy. For instance, it helped us ask and answers questions about who to target, what demands we should raise, how certain tactics can be used to mobilize

our base, and others to activate our allies, etc. After we had a thorough understanding of the tool, we used it throughout the training by applying it to real-life campaign examples. We got a lot of practice!

We are excited to bring what we learned back home to help us think about what we can do to build power for working people as East TN Jobs with Justice