

Protecting Workers' Right to Organize

Steve Bender

Ten Years of Fighting for a Union

Thomasena Denny has worked as an Environmental Associate at Yale-New Haven Hospital for 18 years. For the past ten years, she has been a leader in trying to organize a union there. She says that though a majority of workers there have signed union cards several times, there is still no union.

In fall 2006 a union election was scheduled for December. At that point, the hospital management began holding mandatory meetings every week. Thomasena says that these meetings went on for months and that the "union busting consultants" lied to the workers about what would happen if



Workers march in support of EFCA.

they voted in the union. "They had people really scared," she said.

Thomasena says that the hospital workers need a union because "people do not have a voice. People are not getting paid right. There is an area in the hospital where a Yale University employee is doing the same work as me, but because he is in a union and I'm not, he is paid \$5-6 more per hour. That's not right!"

In December 2006, just before the union election, the union decided to call the election off. Thomasena says that "Yale violated every labor law in the book. People were too scared to participate in the election, so the union *had* to call it off."

Workers Need EFCA

The Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), which was introduced in the U.S. Senate in March 2009, would protect workers' right to organize. Currently, around 30,000 workers in the U.S. are fired each year for trying to organize a union.

Thomasena feels so strongly about the passage of EFCA, that in March 2009 she went to Washington DC to ask Congress to pass EFCA. She knows that if EFCA was the law, there would have been a union at her hospital long ago. She adds, "When the union finally comes in, our voices will be heard."

Steve Bender works with the 1199SEIU Training Fund.

Inequality and the Crisis

For the last few decades, the rich have been getting richer and the poor have been getting poorer. In 2006, the top 1% received almost a quarter of all income. The last time our society experienced that level of inequality was just before the Great Depression.

Discuss ways that extreme inequality might contribute to an economic crisis.

Did you know that unions lead to *less* inequality? Unions give workers a way to fight for pay, benefits, and respect. And it works! In 2007, union workers earned about \$1.50 more per hour than non-union workers. They also had better health insurance coverage, pensions, vacations, and holidays.

Find out more about EFCA. Do you support it? What protections do you think workers should have?

Source: "Why Unions Still Matter," Michael D. Yates, *Monthly Review*, February 2009