

# From Workplace Justice to Political Mobilization

Anestine Bentick

By being an organizer in my workplace, I help bring people together. We talk everyday about what is happening on the job. We go to meetings together, and we make strategies for improving our work life. We have a voice, and we use it.

In a workplace that's not unionized, you don't have a voice. Your boss is your boss, and that's it. You do what your boss says or you find a new job. In a unionized job, the union steward sits at the table with the boss.

Recently, at my workplace, the South Boston Community Health Center, our boss called the bargaining unit together because the health center has no money. Because of changes in health care in Massachusetts, the health center is not getting reimbursements. The boss called us in and he said, "I could freeze the pension for one year or I could lay people off." The union members talked



Anestine Bentick at a ceremony honoring Rep. Harkins and Sen. Tolman for their support of the Quality Home Care bill, giving personal care attendants the right to form a union.

about it. We voted to accept the pension freeze. We didn't want anyone to get laid off.

By being in this process, we have the experience of using our power as a group. The boss is powerful because he has a lot of control, but we are powerful because we have large numbers. Some bosses don't like the idea of sitting at the same table with workers. Employ-

ers are afraid of employees having power. Bosses like to control people, and they like their power. They don't want to share it. But we don't *ask* to be heard. We don't need permission to use our voices.

When you organize at the workplace, there is a ripple effect. Politicians start to sit up and take notice because they see that we are organized and mobilized and ready to move.

Recently, at another SEIU workplace, the workers were negotiating a contract. They asked the state legislator from that area to write letters to the CEO of the hospital on their behalf. The union members appealed to him as a group, and that's how we got his attention. He listened because he saw us as an organized and powerful group. The

members at that hospital won the training fund as a result of our work. At the victory celebration, I said to this state legislator, "Thank you for your help. In 2008, we know you're up for re-election. If there's anything we can do, please let us know."

By organizing in the workplace, we not only make bosses listen, we make politicians listen too.

Anestine Bentick works as a medical assistant at the South Boston Community Health Center and is a member of 1199SEIU. She has taken ABE classes with the Worker Education Program in Boston, MA.



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