

More Reasons To Join A Union

by Emmett Sheppard, Secretary/Treasurer, Texas AFL-CIO

One of our maxims at the Texas AFL-CIO is that we don't organize companies. Management does.

If a company's management gives it's workers dignity, pays well and offers good benefits, the chances that the workers will see a need to unionize diminish. On the other hand, workers know that in a company where they don't receive dignity, a union is the best, most effective tool for countering the excesses of management. (We also happen to think that unions are the best, most effective tool for building "partnerships" to which management so often pays only lip service to.)

Recent developments in the public policy area suggest that management is trying to organize more unions.

Labor News discusses a Texas Supreme Court decision that authorizes companies to seek to dominate

their employees through arbitration clauses.

Under the case involving Halliburton Corporation at a time when Dick Cheney was its CEO, the Texas Supreme Court ruled that an at-will employer may announce to employees that if they continue to work, they have agreed to submit all employment disputes to an arbitration system set up by the employer. The particular case involved a dismissed employee who alleged age discrimination.

The only option if an employee does not want to give up the constitutional right to a trial by jury is to quit.

To me, that is not a valid contractual agreement. It is coercion. Take this or you're fired. What's to stop an employer from requiring an employee to waive other constitutional rights as a

condition of employment?

The Texas Supreme Court, whose nine conservative republican members believe the employer-employee relationship can be summed up in the old phrase "master/servant," took this position unanimously. I have discussed the importance of judicial elections in this space many times. This is a case example.

We who are in the union movement know that the Supreme Court decision does not affect us directly. That is because unions sit down with management and bargain over grievance procedures. Although arbitration is not inherently bad, no union I know of would bargain away the right to sue without getting something exceptionally substantial in return. No union would allow management to impose such a system on them by fiat. In practice, the right to a last resort in court remains in union contracts.

We have seen other examples of management's organizing workers

lately. These include "dead peasant" insurance contracts in which employers take out life insurance policies on employees and even ex-employees, expecting to make a profit when they die. These include the curtailment of benefits and services in the workers' compensation system to the point where an injured worker stands little chance of achieving full compensation for injuries at the workplace. These include the tightening of eligibility for unemployment insurance to the point where Texas is near the bottom among the states in its treatment of displaced workers.

For at-will workers, unions are becoming a more and more plausible alternative to living under the thumb of employers. For unions, political action is the next step. In the coming months, I will discuss what we face in the November elections and how it relates to our concerns as working people.

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REMEMBERING OUR FALLEN FIRE FIGHTERS

by Scott Mellott, 15/A

For the month of August we acknowledge the anniversary's of the following firefighters who died in the line of duty.

August 4, 1923

Boyd, J. A. "Bob" - Assistant Fire Chief

August 6, 1941

Gassway, Horrace O. - Fire Fighter

August 19, 1926

Edmonds, Claude W. "Red" - Captain

August 21, 1938

Schutze, Alford Henry - District Chief

August 22, 1934

Rogers, Esker J. - Fire Fighter

For more information on Houston's other line of duty death visit my web site at www.houstonfirememorial.org.

In this issue I would like to call on the readers of this paper for their help. My web site contains about 1200 names of Houston's deceased firefighters dating from the beginning of the paid fire department in 1895 to the present. Most of these names are on the memorial wall in the memorial plaza located in front of the Houston Fire Fighters Pension Office, 4425 Interwood North Parkway (just south of John F. Kennedy Boulevard & North Beltway).

I am making an attempt to obtain for each name, the firefighter's date of birth, the day of entry into HFD, the date of retirement, and the day he or she died. If you have information on any of the names please contact me at scottmel@juno.com or 713-729-6536.

FUDDPUCKER!!

What recently promoted Training Chief believes he is the "King" and that the Val Jahnke Training Academy is his "Kingdom"? Call the Academy to find out.

What happened to Mr. Kitty at Station 4?
Call Sr. Captain at 4/C.

What Fire Fighters new nickname is "Meat Gazer"?
Call Station 5/C.

PITNEY BOWES 3340 FOLDER/ INSERTER

Local 341 is now accepting bids for a Pitney Bowes Model 3340 folder/insert-er.

Anyone interested should submit their sealed bid to the Union Hall by August 30th.