



# The Western Kentucky Worker

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Prepared by Berry Craig, AFT Local 1360 and KEA-NEA

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## Making moments into movements

By BERRY CRAIG  
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AFL-CIO President Rich Trumka thinks Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker merits a “Mobilizer of the Year award.”

“In your lifetime, have you ever seen this much solidarity? Have you ever seen this much excitement, this much activism?” a happy Trumka recently asked the group Campaign for America’s Future.

He said unions can “thank” Walker for firing up organized labor nationwide. Unions are pumped in Kentucky, where I live.

But here’s the real meat of Trumka’s message:

“As progressives it’s our job – each and every one of us, our job -- to transform the outrage and to make this moment a movement.”

Uber-conservatives like Walker are banking on “this moment” remaining only a moment.

Right now, opinion polls look bad for them.

A state judge gummed up the works for Walker by issuing a temporary restraining order blocking implementation of the governor’s union-busting bill.

At the same time, recall campaigns have begun against some of the GOP senators who steamrolled the bill -- possibly in violation of Wisconsin’s open meetings law -- while the senate Democrats were in Illinois.

Even so, Walker and his allies are counting on time, which often cools passions, and big bucks from billionaire union-haters like the Koch brothers to see them through.

In addition, Walker and his soul mates are banking on cracks in union solidarity resurfacing sooner or later.

Last November, more than a few union members voted for anti-union Republicans like Walker and Rand Paul, the Bluegrass State’s new tea party-tilting U.S. senator who is pushing a national right to work law.

Says council president Jeff Wiggins: Kentucky Area Council, AFL-CIO: “The fact that so many union members are voting for anti-union candidates all over the country tells me that we need to do a better job of educating our members.

“We’ve got to talk to them, face to face, at work – and 24-7, not just two or three months before an election like we’ve been doing. We’ve got to do it even if they don’t like what we say – even if we get cussed, tomatoed or tarred and feathered or run out of town on a rail.”

He adds: “When you talk to them, you know who they are listening to: Rush Limbaugh and Fox News. They’re getting lies. We’ve got to



give them the truth. We've got to tell them that what's happening to unions in Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, and other states is what happens when they vote for Rush Limbaugh's candidates and Fox News' candidates and not candidates endorsed by their unions."

Wiggins also says it's time for union officials to stop sidestepping criticism of the tea party in hopes of peeling away some of the faithful.

"The tea party has hated unions all along. They stood with Gov. Walker. The Koch brothers – the tea party bankrollers and puppet masters -- helped pay their way."



Bill Londrigan, Kentucky State AFL-CIO president, has never pulled punches about the tea party.

Says Londrigan: "While some people have attempted to portray the tea party as a populist uprising against the prevailing powers, it is not. The original populist movement of the 1890s supported workers' rights to organize. The tea party doesn't. The tea party is out to destroy the union movement."

He adds: "The tea party is about the law of the jungle – no government to mediate between the power of wealth and corporate influence and the rest of us. The tea party does not believe that you have the right to freely choose a union at your workplace."

According to Londrigan, the labor movement is a true people's movement. "It is the glue which binds the civil rights, progressive and interfaith justice movements."

Thus, he says, "it is the responsibility and mission of the labor movement to create and lead our fellow communities in the struggle for workers' rights and economic justice and to transform the present assault on labor rights into a broader and sustained movement of those opposed to the corporate war on workers and unions."

Echoing Trumka, Londrigan says organized labor "must capture this moment and spark a broad-based movement capable of transforming the fundamental injustices of our current economic and political systems and recreate the conditions necessary for true democratic change and fair redistribution of the wealth of this nation."

## State AFL-CIO endorses Beshear, Conway, Hollenbach and Edelen

The Kentucky State AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education has endorsed Gov. Steve Beshear and a trio of other Democrats for reelection.

"The choice for union members couldn't be clearer," said Jeff Wiggins, council president. "Gov. Beshear is against the right to work for less. He is for the prevailing wage. Every Republican running for governor is a Scott Walker wannabe and a tool of the tea party."



The federation also endorsed Attorney Gen. Jack Conway and State Treasurer Todd Hollenbach for second terms. Adam Edelen got the state AFL-CIO nod for state auditor. Labor endorsed Conway for senate last year. "We were hoping he'd be in Washington this year, but he has been an outstanding attorney general and he deserves another term," Wiggins said.

**From the Washington Post**  
**‘They couldn’t hold on any longer’**  
**By HILDA SOLDIS**  
**Secretary of Labor**

A century ago this week, [March 25, 1911] in Lower Manhattan, a young social worker named Frances Perkins was having tea at the Greenwich Village townhouse of her friend, the socialite Margaret Morgan Norrie. They were interrupted by clanging fire truck bells. Then they heard the anguished screams: “Don’t jump!”

They raced out of the townhouse and ran toward the commotion: a fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, just off Washington Square. Flames and black smoke shot from the top floors, and as they watched in shock, young girls and women, some alone, some clutching hands, inched up to the windows’ ledges — and jumped to their deaths.

Perkins would describe the scene in lectures later: “They couldn’t hold on any longer. There was no place to go. The fire was between them and any means of exit. It’s that awful choice people talk of — what kind of choice to make?” She added: “I shall never forget the frozen horror that came across as we stood with our hands on our throats watching that horrible sight, knowing that there was no help.”

The sewing factory employed more than 500 people, who worked long hours for low wages, in wretched and unsanitary conditions. They turned out “shirtwaists” — blouses with puffed sleeves and tight bodices popularized by the “Gibson Girl.” The factory owners had locked the fire-escape doors. The seamstresses were trapped when fire raced through the sweatshop just before closing on March 25, 1911.

In less than 20 minutes, 146 people, mostly Italian and Jewish immigrant women and girls, were dead. The last six victims were officially identified just a few weeks ago. Triangle outraged the public and offered a grisly example of how powerless workers were without collective bargaining, because unionized garment workers received better pay and had safer conditions. And it galvanized Frances Perkins.

Twenty-two years later, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed her secretary of labor, the first woman to serve as a Cabinet secretary. During her 12-year tenure, she directed the formulation and implementation of the Social Security Act, one of the most important pieces of social legislation in our history. Among other extraordinary accomplishments, she helped create unemployment insurance, the minimum wage, and the legislation that guarantees the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively. She also established the department’s Labor Standards Bureau, a precursor to what is now the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Perkins clearly had the Triangle victims in mind as she weaved the nation’s social safety net.

Now I have the same job she once held, with the responsibility of repairing and strengthening that net. And although our passion for workers’ rights came from different paths (she was the

daughter of privilege; I am the daughter of immigrant union members), I understand the impact that moment had on her work.

I had my own moment involving a sweatshop. Although it was not as horrifying as that afternoon was for Perkins, it fueled my beliefs. In 1995, 75 Thai immigrants were freed from a so-called factory in the city of El Monte, Calif., part of the district I represented in the state Senate. They had been forced to eat, sleep and work in a place they called home.

Their employer confiscated their passports and kept them like slaves. Threatened with violence to themselves or their families, the workers hunched over sewing machines in dimly lit garages bound by barbed wire, sewing brand-name clothing for less than \$2 an hour. Most of them were women.

I met them shortly after they were freed and heard their stories. And at that moment, the unthinkable became real for me. I had assumed that sweatshops were a thing of the past. But they had just spread — from Perkins's New York City to my Los Angeles, from the Italian and Eastern European immigrants victimized in her day to the Asian and Latino immigrants victimized in mine.

Combating garment sweatshops is, sadly, still on the labor secretary's agenda. In the past fiscal year, the department's Wage and Hour division conducted 374 investigations and collected \$2.1 million for 2,215 workers, primarily in the major U.S. garment centers of Southern California and New York. In these cases, vulnerable immigrant workers have been deprived of minimum-wage pay, overtime pay and safe working conditions — all the haunting echoes of Triangle.

We have had many improvements in the past century. Today, we have more tools to pursue violators who deny workers their pay, including issuing subpoenas and preventing companies from shipping goods produced in violation of the law.

In 1911, more than 100 workers were estimated to have died on the job each day. In 2010, 4,340 workers were killed on the job — and more than 3.3 million were seriously injured. Last April 5, in a fiery explosion at the Upper Big Branch Mine in West Virginia, 29 miners died in one day. I was at the mine the next day, while rescue efforts still were underway.

In times of crisis, one often becomes two people. In one sense, I was simply Hilda, the person I've always been, there just to be by the family members' sides as they kept vigil. In another sense, I was Labor Secretary Hilda L. Solis, trying to convey to them the depth of their government's commitment. In either case, no words can adequately express your emotion and sympathy. A grief that great can be endured only if it is shared — and then acted upon in good time.

Both Triangle and Upper Big Branch became calls to action. New York quickly implemented groundbreaking workplace safety laws and regulations, including fire exits. But nearly one year after Upper Big Branch, the Mine Safety and Health Administration, part of the Labor Department, still needs additional tools that only Congress can provide. And OSHA needs better tools, such as stricter penalties against employers who put their workers' lives at risk, and stronger protections for whistle-blowers.

In both cases, if these workers had a voice — a union — and the ability to speak up about conditions, these events probably could have been prevented, because unions play an important role in making workplaces safer. In both cases, they had tried to organize and faced virulent opposition.

Today, workers and their allies are being met with that same kind of opposition. In states nationwide, working people are protesting the actions to strip them of collective bargaining. The Triangle fire and the Upper Big Branch explosion a century later make clear to me that workers want and need that voice — about wages and benefits, yes, but about more, too. Collective bargaining still means a seat at the table to discuss issues such as working conditions, workplace safety and workplace innovation, empowering individuals to do the best job they can. And it means dignity and a chance for Americans to earn a better life, whether they work in sewing factories or mines, build tall buildings or care for our neighbors, teach our children, or run into burning buildings when others run out of them.

I'll be thinking about all of this as I make my way to New York on Friday for the 100th anniversary of the Triangle factory tragedy. The building is still there; it now houses offices for New York University. Thousands are expected to mark the occasion with a march, speeches, the reading of the victims' names and the laying of flowers in their honor at the site by schoolchildren. It will be a powerful reminder of what we've lived through, and what we still have to do.

History is an extraordinary thing. You can choose to learn from it, or you can choose to repeat it. For me, the choice is clear, as it was for Frances Perkins. We must always be a nation that catches workers before they fall.

## **Owensboro Area Central Labor Council backs HR676**

The Owensboro Area Central Labor Council has endorsed HR 676, the national single-payer bill which Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., reintroduced in the new Congress.

"We support this and I have encouraged the support to protect our members, their families, and all Americans," said Donna Haynes, council president. "If we don't offer affordable, adequate health care to all Americans, we will become worse off than the third world countries."

Haynes is vice president of IBEW Power Industry Local 1701. She works at Big Rivers Electric in Hawesville.

The Owensboro council represents AFL-CIO affiliated unions in Daviess, Hancock, Ohio and McLean counties in western Kentucky. The council approved HR 676 at its March meeting. Including Owensboro, seven of Kentucky's eight central labor councils are behind HR 676. In 2005, the Kentucky State AFL-CIO became the first state labor federation to back the measure.

Owensboro is the 137th central labor council nationwide to endorse HR 676.

The other Kentucky councils that support HR 676 are the Tri-County Council of Labor, Henderson; Greater Louisville Central Labor Council; Northern Kentucky Central Labor

Council, Covington; Western Kentucky Area Council, Paducah; Bluegrass Central Labor Council, Lexington; and the Ashland Area Labor Council.

Kay Tillow of Louisville, coordinator of Kentuckians for Single-Payer Health Care, hopes the Hopkinsville-based Pennyryle Area Labor Council will endorse HR 676, making it unanimous for the councils in her home state. "Single payer is how we remove the waste caused by corporate profiteering and assure that everyone gets the health care they need," Tillow said. "Our unions have always been the leaders in the fight for social justice. We have to build a movement to make it happen."

HR 676 would create a publicly-financed, privately-delivered single payer health care system covering all Americans. The measure has been endorsed by 583 union organizations in 49 states, according to Tillow, a veteran labor and civil rights activist.

More information about HR 676, a list of union groups that have endorsed the measure and a sample endorsement resolution are available from Tillow, who is also executive director of the Nurses Professional Organization. In addition, she serves on the board of directors of the Kentucky Labor Institute.

Her address is: Kay Tillow, c/o Nurses Professional Organization  
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Louisville, KY 40217

She can be reached by phone at (502)636-1551 and by email at [nursenpo@aol.com](mailto:nursenpo@aol.com). Her group's website is <http://unionsforsinglepayerHR676.org>.

## **Murray State students will host 'We Are One' day April 4**

The Murray State University Students for Progress and the College Democrats chapter are co-sponsoring a "We Are One -- National Day of Action and Solidarity" program on campus April 4.

The gathering will be one of hundreds of "We Are One" observances nationwide on the 43rd anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis. The civil rights leader had gone to Memphis to support striking city sanitation workers who belonged to the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees union.

"Beginning with worship services over the April 1 weekend, and continuing through the week of April 4, unions, people of faith, civil and human rights activists, students and other progressive allies will host a range of community- and workplace-focused actions," says the AFL-CIO's Internet website.

"One of our members heard about solidarity day and we decided to have a program," said Matt Hall, a senior from Mount Sterling who is president of Students for Progress. "But this is not just for students. We want the whole region to get involved, especially union members. Everybody is welcome."

Activities start at 10:30 a.m. and will continue to about 11 p.m.

"Our group and the College Democrats will set up information tables in front of the Carr Health Building," Hall said. "We will be handing out leaflets and talking with students from 10:30 to 3 p.m."

The main events will start with a 5 p.m. march across campus. "We will meet at the amphitheater next to Elizabeth College. After the march, we will gather on the steps of Lovett Auditorium, hear speakers and sing union songs. A lot of great music has come out of the labor movement."

Council President Jeff Wiggins and Trustee Wayne Chambers are scheduled to speak.

"We're glad the students at Murray State are doing this," Wiggins said. "We hope they get a big turnout, especially from union members throughout our area."

The program will continue at the Curris Student Center at 6 p.m. with a panel discussion led by Bill Schell, a history professor, and the showing of the Michael Moore film, "Capitalism: A Love Story." "We may have an informal discussion after that, depending on what people want to do," Hall said.

More information about the program is available from Hall via email at [Matt.hall2189@yahoo.com](mailto:Matt.hall2189@yahoo.com). He can be reached by phone at (276) 206-5600.

Updates can also be found on the event's Facebook page under "Labor Solidarity Day." Participants are asked to RSVP online at <http://local.we-r-1.org/weareone/events/show/143>.

"Join us in solidarity with working people in Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana and dozens of other states where well-funded, right-wing corporate politicians are trying to take away the rights Dr. King gave his life for: the freedom to bargain, to vote, to afford a college education and justice for all workers, immigrant and native-born," the AFL-CIO website also says. "It's a day to show movement. Teach-ins. Vigils. Faith events. A day to be creative, but clear: We are one."

## **Sign the petition in support of USW Local 7-669 at Honeywell**

Please help us spread the word by asking your friends and co-workers to sign the petition. You can share a link to our Experience Matters campaign on Facebook or Twitter by using the sharing icons at <http://experiencematters.usw.org>.

**The Area Council stands in solidarity with our brothers  
and sisters in Local 7-669.**



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