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Welcome to To-Gather

We're all workers for this organization ACORN, which reforms some of the flukes in the system. As workers, we need to ask ourselves what we want from our work. We want to make other people's lives better with our good work, but what about our own lives?

This newsletter is a way for us ACORN workers to share some of the concerns that we have with OUR working conditions. We all gripe to our co-workers in our own offices and some of us have taken the step to organize our office.

If we really want to make our lives better we need to band together and do something about it. Fellow workers, let's unite by sharing our stories, art, comics and thoughts!

Philadelphia ACORN goes Wobbly

On Monday, January 29th, Philadelphia ACORN workers marched into the head organizer's office demanding recognition for their union, the Industrial Workers of the World (also known as "the Wobblies"). Workers wanted the boss to set a date by the middle of the day for negotiations on the following points:

- 8 hour work day
- 2 weekends off per month
- 2 people in the field after dark
- Procedures to deal with cultural bias
- A guaranteed lunch break

Although the boss took the union's authorization cards, but he refused to negotiate with the workers as a union. He rationalized that since ACORN is a national organization, workers should have to organize their union nationally in order to bargain. Despite plenty of case law which points to the contrary, the head organizer even claimed it would be "illegal" to recognize the Philadelphia union.

Philadelphia ACORN workers explained that if management would not negotiate, workplace actions would follow. The first step workers took was to begin working in pairs after dark. Direct action gets the goods.

On Our Demands...

An 8-Hour Day with No Cut In Pay

ACORN has been campaigning for a living wage and decent labor standards for many years. But ACORN doesn't extend these rights to its own employees.

The labor movement won the 8-hour day more than 60 years ago. Yet ACORN staff is asked to put in 54 hours a week without breaks or overtime pay. We work six days a week, never getting a full weekend off. The hours are too long and we have no time to relax or for our families and friends.

We're constantly under pressure to turn out too much work with too little staff in a perpetually disorganized office. It's little wonder that turnover is so high that very few of us last long enough to collect benefits.

This turnover isn't good for the organi-

zation, and it prevents us from doing our organizing work as effectively as we could. We don't have time to work with our members, or even get to know them. By the time we establish contacts in a community, we're out the door and a new person has been brought in.

The way ACORN treats its staff doesn't only affect us - it also undermines our ability to do the important work we came here to accomplish.

ACORN was founded on the premise that people need to organize in order to be heard, and to better their conditions. It's true for the people we organize and it's true for us too. We need a voice at work, and a say in determining the conditions under which we work.

Why we're working in pairs

I've worked at ACORN for about two months. Every afternoon I walk into the neighborhoods that I organize hoping that when darkness falls, I'll be safe as I walk through the streets - alone...in the dark.

"Be Careful! What are you doing out here by yourself at night in this neighborhood?" people would say to me. And one day a man said to me, "Don't walk the streets alone, girl. It's a few days before Christmas, you don't know who could be out here trying to get your money." He invited me into his house - safe from "those bad people" on the street. So I sat down on his couch, and began the usual rap.

"Maybe he'll join," I hoped. "Maybe if I sit here and talk to him about joining he will." My co-worker tells me he gets members to join by connecting with them. The man grabbed my head and kissed me. I pushed him away, contradicting themes dancing in my head, "Protect yourself get out of here, on the one hand." On the other hand I needed to get members to join. If I didn't get enough members to join, would I have a job? I left the house certain that I needed to protect myself but uncertain how I should do that.

A direct question looking for an honest answer

Why are there so many White People interested in what happens to Blacks and Latinos? What is in it for the white people? If Blacks and Latinos get everything they want, wouldn't that mean these same white people would be out of a job?

The above question was raised by an African American staffer during the ACORN YE/YB meeting which happened last month.

Write for To-Gather

We'd love to hear from all ACORN workers.

We hope to publish every other week. If you would like to receive *To-Gather* by e-mail (as a .pdf), by fax, or by mail, please contact us at the addresses above.

We are also looking for people who can help us distribute the newsletter.