



Union Tools



This column offers practical advice for dealing with a variety of workplace problems—from organizing a union to refusing unsafe work. It is aimed at workers who are presently not in a union as well as union members. We encourage readers to send us their comments and suggestions about the column and ideas or questions for future topics.

and for the unions at the *Daily News*.

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Historic Pico Trial in Binghamton Court

by C. Kates, UAW # 2300

A lawsuit with international implications for the labor movement will be heard by the U.S. District Court for Northern New York in Binghamton, probably in early August.

Pico Products, Inc. is being sued by Korean workers for failing to honor a collective bargaining agreement signed in 1989 by Pico Korea and a newly formed union. The mostly female workforce had organized to improve their pay (\$6 per day), and to demand basic health and safety protections. After living under the contract for two months, Pico headquarters in Liverpool, New York closed the Korean factory and refused to pay about 300 workers \$350,000 in severance pay, back pay, and suspension pay required by the contract.

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The workers responded by raising money in Korea, where their case has wide popular support, to come to the U.S. and demand payment from the company. This is the first time foreign workers have pursued a U.S. multinational here to demand justice.

The Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) has filed suit in federal court charging Pico with a breach of contract under New York State law, and asking for about \$900,000, including punitive damages. Frank Deale, CCR legal director, says he expects to win the suit. The fact that a federal court is hearing the case sets a precedent

that a foreign labor union can sue a U.S. multi-national in the U.S. for shutting down a foreign operation and not honoring a labor contract. Deale expects the trial to last 7-10 days. The Korean workers will give what he called

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So they decided their first job as a negotiating team was to recruit ten more people to serve on a Contract Action Team (CAT).

At Lakeside Nursing Home, the process of activating the members began when the union leadership recruited six new people for the negotiating committee who had had very little involvement in the union. They joined six officers to form a twelve member committee.

They were committed to getting the members involved in a campaign for a new contract, but they knew they would soon be busy with negotiations. They needed people who could get everyone wearing buttons, pass out literature, talk to people about the negotiations, make sure that people had their say and were kept constantly informed of what was happening at the table. So they decided their first job as a negotiating team was

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Once the CAT was in place, their work became more systematic. They wanted to speak to every member, to get people well-informed and to hear their views. The result "was like a wave effect," as Kris described it. "You never used to hear any union talk on the floor. During negotiations it was all you heard. It must have gotten back to management."

The negotiating team felt it too. "Walking down the halls you would get words of encouragement, pats on the back."

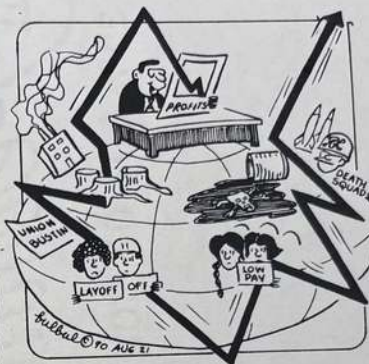
The Lakeside Nursing Home workers got decent raises, and a pension and a step system for the first time.

But there's more. People are still wearing buttons, watching the bulletin boards; they are more active in grievances, some team members became new stewards,

and Kris has become vice-chair. "It was fun. I was sorry when it was over!"

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The Global Economy!

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They will also be working with local labor activists to publicize their case. For more information or to offer support call CCR, 212-614-6464, or Lee Conrad 607-797-6911.

Safety and Health in the Workplace

This course is specifically targeted for trade unions members and non-unionized workers interested in getting a practical introduction to the health and safety hazards that workers face, and to the tools workers and unions can use to better working conditions. Discussions of health and safety committees, governmental regulations and protection, contract language, and strategies for getting action on workplace health and safety problems will be included.

Instructors will be Carl Feuer and Robin Whittlesey, Health/Safety Trainers, Tompkins/Cortland Labor Coalition. For more information, call 277-5670.

Fall Semester 1991

Wednesdays, 6:30-9:30 pm

Tompkins-Cortland Community College