



TO-GATHER

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Seattle ACORN workers on strike

**Eight hour day,
pay on time,
guaranteed lunch breaks
are demands**

SEATTLE. On Monday, all Seattle ACORN organizers along with 30 ACORN members, union members, and supporters struck the ACORN office to demand recognition for their union, the Industrial Workers of the World.

ACORN is a progressive membership-based community organization that brings low-income people together to campaign around issues such as better access to utility assistance. The organization also supports labor rights for working people. However, Seattle ACORN boss, Doug Bloch, refused to recognize his own workers' union and refused to negotiate around basic workplace issues, such as 8 hour workdays, guaranteed lunch breaks, and paychecks issued on time and in full.

"Everyday as organizers, we go out into neighborhoods and organize people to demand better living and working conditions. When we try to assert basic labor rights in our own office, these rights are denied. It's hypocrisy!" says Alexa Gilbert, ACORN organizer and striking worker.

ACORN members agree. Yesterday almost ten ACORN members joined the ACORN workers' picket line. "ACORN organizers come into our neighborhoods everyday and put their hearts and souls into helping us stand together to make improvements in our community. These same workers are fighting for very reasonable working conditions so they can continue to help us. I will stand behind these striking workers until management recognizes the union and begins to negotiate in good faith," says ACORN member Linda Moyer.

"Yesterday, we told Bloch that if he refused to recognize the union, he was abandoning the members. We asked him if he



Seattle ACORN workers and supporters picket for union recognition on February 27, 2001.

was willing to sacrifice the Washington ACORN membership for the battle over union recognition. He said he was willing to make this sacrifice," said Honey Anofian another one of the striking workers. In coming days, more ACORN members will join the striking workers' picket line, along with members of the Carpenters' Union, Boilermakers' Union, and Ironmakers' Union who also urged Bloch to recognize the union yesterday.

ACORN management broke federal labor laws two weeks ago when they fired two pro-union workers in the Philadelphia ACORN office. Given ACORN's link to labor unions and local support of the right to organize, ACORN workers nationwide are puzzled by the harassment and pressure they have experienced from management in response to their request for union recognition.

"ACORN's chief, Wade Rathke, also vice-president of the union SEIU, is leading a campaign for management neutrality in New Orleans during hotel organizing campaigns. Yet the Philadelphia ACORN branch fought the union tooth and nail. It looks like they'll be doing the same in Seattle," said Kate Freeman, a striking ACORN organizer.

"Last week, Beth Butler, Wade's wife and the boss of the Louisiana ACORN, e-mailed me saying that she didn't think we had a majority of workers supporting the union in Philadelphia. She said that if we did have majority support, which we did, ACORN management would have recognized our union. But even though 100% of the Seattle ACORN organizers want recognition for their union, ACORN management still refuses to bargain," said Gina Giazconi, one of the fired Philadelphia ACORN organizers.

The IWW, whose members are also known as "Wobblies," was formed early in the 20th century and has a long and proud history of democratic unionism and lively support for workers' rights. For more information on the strike, contact the IWW in Seattle: 206-706-6250.

Write for *To-Gather*

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