

Wal-Mart Member Education Kit May 2005

What Unions Are Doing about Wal-Mart

Through NEA, our Association is a participant in the Wake Up Wal-Mart Campaign (www.wakeupwalmart.com), organized by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, the AFL-CIO union with primary jurisdiction for retail stores. The NEA Executive Committee approved NEA's participation on May 2, 2005. Wake Up Wal-Mart is a major, national effort to educate the public and bring consumer pressure to bear on Wal-Mart with the objective of persuading Wal-Mart to become a more responsible corporate citizen and a better employer.

The Washington Education Association's Children's Fund, an Association-funded and -run charity, ceased reimbursements to WEA-NEA members for purchases from Wal-Mart. The Children's Fund, established by WEA in 1995, took the action in April 2005.

The Children's Fund is supported primarily by the charitable contributions of WEA members and staff and is used to reimburse members who buy coats, shoes, and school supplies to meet their students' immediate, modest needs. Last year the Children's Fund spent \$50,000 in member reimbursements.

The Board of the WEA Children's Fund took action because Wal-Mart's anti-union, low wage, low benefits policies have left Wal-Mart employees in need of government-assisted food, housing, and health care, and because the families of some K-12 students are harmed by Wal-Mart's poverty-level wages and benefits. The fund's statement said, in part, "The WEA Children's Fund is at cross purposes when members use the fund to shop at Wal-Mart."

The Delaware State Education Association's Representative Assembly voted April 9, 2005, to boycott Wal-Mart. DSEA is the first and only NEA state affiliate to do so. DSEA has just begun communicating this action to members.

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) passed a resolution at its 2004 convention, denouncing Wal-Mart's anti-union, anti-labor practices and is expected to take further action at its convention this summer.

UFCW is trying to organize Wal-Mart's 1.2 million employees. The size, strength, and locations of the company present a formidable challenge to any usual or common organizing strategies. One cannot go store to store with National Labor Relations Board-style direct certification elections. There are too many stores. This and the pervasive anti-union culture make "normal" employee organizing nearly impossible.

Efforts by unions to engage the communities with Wal-Mart stores may be the best approach and it is UFCW's new strategy. Recent positive examples of union successes are on living wages

(Chicago), store access (Hartford CT), and environmental protections (Tarpon Springs FL). A strong alliance of support in the community, acting in concert with Wal-Mart employees, may be the best approach to organizing them and forming local labor unions.

UFCW failed in its attempt to organize 20 Colorado workers at the Loveland Wal-Mart Tire & Lube Express. After a lengthy organizing campaign during which Wal-Mart hired many new workers to dilute the strength of union supporters, the employees voted 17-1 against union representation (February 25, 2005).

UFCW appealed to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to throw out the vote, citing the company's attempts to interfere with and affect the outcome of the election, as well as Wal-Mart's refusal to let a union member observe the election process. In April 2005, the Rocky Mountain representative of the NLRB upheld the vote, rejecting the union's assertion of an unfair election.

The AFL-CIO is a major participant in the Wake Up Wal-Mart Campaign, working closely with UFCW. The AFL-CIO central labor council structure will coordinate community support this spring, summer, and fall for the "Don't Buy School Supplies from Wal-Mart" campaign.