

Letters from US workers

15 December 2001

Below we post a selection of recent letters sent by workers in the US.

To the WSWs:

Perhaps one of the reasons the UAW is no longer able to effectively represent its members is due to the corruption that permeates the system.

An example of that is right here at UAW Local 595, Linden, New Jersey. Many of our union officials are receiving big bucks in overtime pay for hours they don't actually spend at work. Management is in collusion with these crooks, as can be observed by the manual entries management regularly makes into the computerized timekeeping system to cover their hours. It is also common knowledge that these crooks also clock each others' timecards on a regular basis while management looks the other way.

It's an insult to organized labor, and basically anyone that actually works for a living, that these low-life petty-criminals are perpetrating this scam upon us workers.

Union dues paying member, UAW Local 595

26 November 2001

To those concerned,

I have been one of the many people laid off this year. I had worked for Hewlett-Packard for about 12 years. The story I read—"CEO pay soars as US stocks plummet"—is what I had been seeing happen over the years. I was born and raised in the Bay Area and worked my entire professional life at HP (hired at 21 years old) and now out of work at 33 years old. As you probably know, the Bay Area (San Francisco) is very expensive. I was proud of the fact I worked for a company that cared about its people.

During my tenure, HP's revenue went from \$10 billion to over \$40 billion (400 percent growth in 10 years). I thought we had done well. But then we hired an outsider, Carley Fiorina (CF) from Lucent. The first year's compensation was \$69 million, two jet airplanes and five bodyguards. Everything was fine at first, but then the economy started to falter. HP and CF first told

the employees to take some vacation time or a salary cut, of which 70 percent including myself complied. We thought we were all in this together to help the company. Then the layoffs came—all told about 10,000 people, including myself. It is hard to get an exact number because they did not refer to these as layoffs, they used terminology such as reinvention and getting rid of under-performers. Talk about an under-performer—since CF has taken over, profits have dropped 90 percent and HP is hardly making any profit, but she has.

SB

29 November 2001

Dear Brother:

It is not surprising that AFL-CIO President John Sweeney (who supposedly was elected to replace the old guard) sold out the Charleston shipyard workers. I am a former member of the janitors union in San Francisco, California. The local that I belonged to (Local 87) is part of the SEIU, which Sweeney was international president of before he assumed the leadership of the AFL-CIO. The local was riddled with corruption. There was (and probably still is) plenty of wrongdoing by the leadership of that local, of which Sweeney and current SEIU International President Andrew Stern were very much aware. They were indifferent to the problem. Frankly, it would not hurt if some of the labor unions would fall apart. Workers could then band together and form new ones. Great article!

WB

California

30 November 2001

Due to the lack of good organization and proper union representation, teachers are finding themselves in positions to defend their reputations, licenses and tenure in the school system after years of service. This situation is the direct result of poor administration over the years in schools with populations that suffer from

social problems that cannot be handled by “educators” alone. Teachers have taken on the role of mother, social worker, nurse and psychologist, struggling against their own poverty, in order to educate children. The role of the teacher in today’s society lacks respect from students, parents and administrators making the job increasingly difficult. Unfortunately, without a stronger union, we the teachers will become the target for politicians and administrators in the board of education.

An elementary school teacher,

LL

5 December 2001

Thank you for your article about health insurance. I need health insurance because I see the doctor regularly, and when I quit my job in the end of May I had to start paying COBRA \$350 a month (starting with May). I know private insurance will not pay for my “preexisting” condition, so that’s out of the question—I’m trying to find a part-time job that pays health insurance while I’m going back to school. I know I’m one of the lucky ones because I live with my parents and they are willing to support me as long as they are able to, but if I was on my own I’d be out of luck.

I’ve become interested in socialism because it seems to me under capitalism the worker gets screwed left and right. I left my last job because my employers were extremely abusive—and they even brought in a lawyer to give us a seminar in “harassment” to show us everything they were doing was legal. When I left the company they bilked me out of hundreds of dollars, but I am afraid to take legal action because I know if I do no one will ever hire me. It seems you have to rely on the mercy of your employer (or insurance company) or else work for yourself and fork over a lot of money. There has to be something better than that.

AB

27 November 2001



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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