

The Union Rapport

August 2022

Volume 1, Issue 1

SOLIDARITY IS
MANDATORY



2200
Anderson Music Hall



In This Issue:

President's letter
Weingarten Rights
Augsburg Ice Cream Social
Solidarity
The Organizing Model

Dear Union Siblings,

I want to welcome you to the first of our regular issues of Local 12's Newsletter! As many of you know we are under new executive board leadership, and this new leadership has been working hard at improving our union. We are prioritizing organizing, both internally and externally; we are rewriting our constitution, which membership will soon review and vote on; we are updating our member files and records, we are getting a more involved in labor politics, and so much more!

Much of this transition comes from reflecting on labor history. When we think of the benefits we enjoy today, we should honor those union workers who fought for them. Without their struggles we wouldn't have the employer sponsored healthcare plans, FMLA, ADA, the 40-hour work week, overtime pay, mandated safety conditions, and so much more. It is our job to preserve these rights for all workers now and in the future, but it's also our job to improve them. Let's leave things better than how we found them! So please continue to be active and involved. We NEED you!

As another very important update, I wanted to touch on discrimination in the workplace. As many may know, I work for HealthPartners, a major healthcare provider here in Minnesota and parts of Wisconsin. I also serve as a steward for my colleagues. In June, I received entirely too many calls from members experiencing unjust disciplinary procedures. After further investigation, I learned the lines of questioning from the supervisors were full of racist microaggressions. Multiple complaints included absurd things like, that people used their hands when they spoke, or the *volume* of their voice (meaning, they weren't yelling, they just weren't quiet either). One write-up even insinuated a member was going to become violent—in other words, they were disciplined for behavior that existed only in the imagination of their supervisor! People of color have the right to disagree with their leaders without being accused of malicious behavior. These situations resulted from supervisors who are untrained in cultural differences and lack common human decency in their communication with members of BIPOC communities (Black, Indigenous, & People of Color).

Racism in 2022 is different than what we learned about in our history books. It's not all, separate drinking fountains, and dogs, and fire hoses. It's subtle, but it's also in your face. We need to pay attention to see it, and to do that, we need to be willing to look. Local 12 is actively fighting these issues, but we are calling on our members to step up. If you are being discriminated against for the color of your skin, your sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or anything else, we need to know. Reach out to your rep or steward or email cmontufar@opeiu12.org. If you see someone else experiencing discrimination, speak up. Don't tolerate it. Be their ally. Document every detail you can. Help your fellow member so we can help them file an EEOC and grievance. Enough is enough.

I'll close out this letter in saying, more good things are soon to come! I have a beautiful outlook for our union! We already have new units organized, new contracts ratified, and more of both coming soon. Our members are truly the best! In the words of the late John Lewis, "Make good trouble!"

In solidarity,

President Kelsie Anderson

OPEIU Local 12



Weingarten Rights

It happens. You're on your way to the restroom, or back to your desk from lunch, and your supervisor calls you over. It seems informal, but the look on their face makes you nervous. They seem unsure of how to begin. "Hey, so... yesterday, uh..." and it starts to sound like they're fishing for information. Maybe you had a belligerent client yesterday, or a disagreement with a coworker, and your supervisor is trying to slip into your confidences with soft questions. An alarm bell goes off in the back of your mind. *Am I in trouble? What do you do?*

All you need are these six words: "Can this meeting lead to discipline?"

Three things can happen from there:

- 1) If your supervisor flat out admits, "well, yes, actually, it might," then you respond by saying you don't want to continue the meeting without a union steward present (and it's the steward of *your* choice, not theirs). They might acquiesce (they know damn well that you can and should have union representation in a discipline meeting), or they might be belligerent about it. They might say any number of things trying to get you to forgo your rights. Don't fall for it. You can't simply walk away if they say you have to stay, but in a disciplinary meeting you do not have to answer any questions without representation. Just remain calm (as calm as you can, anyway), and repeat as often as necessary that you won't answer questions without a union steward present. Even if you don't care which steward represents you, you should give them a name. It's to your benefit to remind them that they don't have absolute power. They will then either wait for your steward to arrive, or, much more likely, they dismiss you and schedule a meeting.
- 2) Your supervisor says something like, "No, of course not. I'm just trying to find out what happened." Go ahead and answer their questions. If they proceed to discipline you later, based on things you said in this meeting, we file a grievance, and the discipline is nullified. This is a hard-and-fast

- 3) Your supervisor denies that discipline is a possibility, but they seem agitated or angry, and they are asking questions that make them seem hell-bent on finding something they can get you for. Just make the earlier question into a statement: "It feels like this meeting is going to lead to discipline, and I want a union steward present." This is a *right* they cannot deny you. Do your best to remain calm (sometimes it helps to remember that if they're trying to upset you, staying calm gets *them* angry), and be patient. You know you can't do your job while you're waiting for them to be reasonable, but that's a decision they are making.



When the impromptu meeting is done and you're back at your desk or workstation, take a moment to document who pulled you aside and for how long. Your best bet is to send an email to your steward and to cc yourself at your personal email address. (Administrators can and do delete relevant emails from employee's files—but they have no control over anything outside their own system). Some bosses are good people, trying to do a good job. Some bosses are just in over their heads, flailing about wildly, too overwhelmed to realize they're hurting people with their actions. And some bosses are bullies who care more about instilling fear and being obeyed than they do about whether the people working for them can do a good job in an oppressive environment. If you have the misfortune of working for either of the last two, document, document, document.



The unfortunate reality is that some people are really transformed for the worse by a little bit of power. You can

have a decent coworker who turns into a tyrant after a promotion, and often making it worse, other people in power tend to support them rather than run the risk of calling the whole structure into question.

The system in the United States (starting with schools, reinforced by the media, and supported by politicians) gives our bosses the impression

that they can do whatever they want and any resistance on our part is disrespectful. They operate on the belief that they *own* us for those eight hours (or six, or twelve, or whatever), and with emails and cell phones, they've started to invade the rest of our days too. But we have to remember that we have rights. Those rights weren't given to us; those who came before us fought for them, and it's our responsibility to keep fighting. We have to fight to maintain them, not just for ourselves, but so that those who come after us don't have to work with fewer rights than we had.

Our rights and our contract are there to protect us from the awful and the incompetent, but they can only do that if we know them and use them.



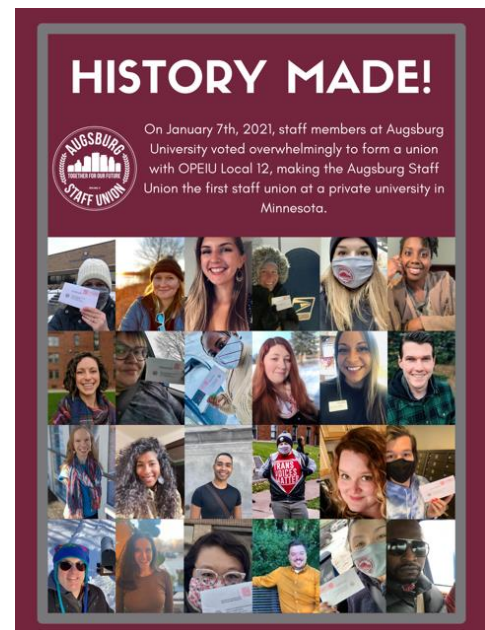
Ice Cream Social
11:30 AM August 30th
Murphy Square
801 22nd Ave,
Minneapolis

The members of the Augsburg Staff Union have planned a campaign action to be held during the opening convocation of the Fall Semester. All are welcome to join us on this occasion! We will be gathering to give out ice cream and union gear on August 30th at 11:30 am in Murphy Square, 801 22nd Avenue S, Minneapolis.

September will mark one year and six months since the Augsburg Staff Union sat down with the administration to begin bargaining their first contract. They have made major advances on internal hiring procedures, parental leave, and workplace safety, but the administration is still holding out on providing a living wage and affordable healthcare to their hardworking staff.

There is a turnover crisis at Augsburg, with an estimated 30% of staff leaving each year. Most go to neighboring higher education institutions seeking better benefits. Augsburg needs to stop the bleeding and step up to support staff in their role as the face of the university. One of the Augsburg Staff Union's rallying cries has been: "Support Our Students, Save Our Staff."

The Augsburg Staff Union is set on winning a contract that reflects their values this semester and is still keeping the fight going after a year and a half!



Solidarity is Our Greatest Strength



Like everywhere else, the bosses here in the US (even with so-called “not-for-profits” like Health Partners) maintain their power over employees primarily through divide-and-conquer. Companies like Walmart, Starbucks, and Amazon spend hundreds of millions of dollars trying to keep unions out primarily because they are terrified of the power we have when we work together. They’re terrified because they know that we can run the company without them, but they can’t run it without us.

They’re scared, but they know that if they can keep us fighting each other for crumbs, then they keep us from demanding more than crumbs. In that vein, it’s important to remember that being non-racist is not enough. We all need to make it a point of being *anti-racist*. Being anti-sexist. Bigotry only serves to divide us, and we need to *actively* oppose it. The boss never paid black workers less so he could pay white workers more—he paid black workers less so he could pay white workers less, happily pocketing the rest. And the same is true of all the other divisions the bosses try to use against us: gender, sexual orientation, religion, language, and the like.

We can disagree with each other, we can and should respectfully discuss our

differences, but we should never fall into the trap of thinking that the majority culture’s methods and practices are the *right* way to do things. They are merely *a way* of doing things. And if you happen to be from the majority culture, use the relative ease you enjoy, to make it easier for others. Defend that coworker when you see management harassing, intimidating, silencing, or belittling them. And if you feel too frightened or startled in the moment, document it afterwards and go talk to that coworker. Call in a steward. Help your coworkers stand up for themselves. Let them know that you have their back and you’re willing to stand with them.

We should deepen our understanding of each other’s cultures and learn to recognize common pressure points used against us. When we see a supervisor attack a Native American for refusing to make eye-contact, when we see women’s ideas being ignored (or worse—appropriated), when we hear management claiming an African American was trying to intimidate them, when we see supervisors trying to police the clothing of Muslim women, we should feel it as an attack upon all of us, and we should stand up in solidarity with our peers.

An injury to one is an injury to all.

And conversely, if attacking one of us means attacking all of us, then we’re all safe.

If you or anyone you know is being subjected to harassment, please contact OPEIU’s Organizer: Cesar Montufar at cmontufar@opeiu12.org

hurts—in their pocketbooks—suddenly they listen. When our primary bargaining tactic is shopfloor actions, we send the boss into negotiations desperate to settle. The bosses want *labor peace*, so they can continue to rake in profits. (And don't let people like Andrea Walsh, CEO of Health Partners, confuse us with labels like “not-for-profit.” Her \$2.4 million salary begs to differ.) Only the fear of *labor war* will make them negotiate in good faith.

What are the hallmarks of an Organizing Model union?

- Members talk about shopfloor pressure, members emphasize shopfloor pressure, and members create shopfloor pressure
- Emphasis on rank-and-file decision making
- Emphasis on job actions over grievance filing. When twenty workers pile into the boss's office to demand a coworker get their job back, it can happen today. Even with

a grievance clearly destined to win, it can take months. Of course we still file grievances, but only after we've tried direct pressure.

- Emphasis on Contract Action Teams over Bargaining Teams
- The members know they *are* the union (rather than seeing “the union” as the office or its staff)

All of which leads to significantly better contracts. With the service model, we take what we can get. With the organizing model, we get what we deserve.

So, if the Organizing model is so much better, why was anyone using the service model to begin with (much less for seventy years)? The answer to that question requires some exciting but tragic labor history involving the Reds, McCarthyism, Harry Truman, and the Mob. We'll save that for another labor 101 in a future issue of OPEIU Local 12's Newsletter.

