

## **Metro Atlanta DSA – Minutes: March 31, 2007**

The meeting was called to order at the Friends Meeting House in Decatur, with introductions; 15 in attendance.

Isaac Gobern, secretary-treasurer of the North Georgia Labor Council and a representative for the bakery workers' union, spoke on the Employee Free Choice Act.

He opened by commenting that labor organizing is always a struggle. GA has led the nation in the reduction of income levels over the past 10 years, and corporations are contributing less of the taxes. We are in a race to the bottom. This bill is one of the greatest opportunities for labor in the past 20 years.

Three parts to the act: 1) Union certification through majority sign-up (card check); 2) first-contract mediation and arbitration mandatory if no agreement is reached within 90 days; and 3) stronger penalties for violations while employees are trying to form a union or obtain a contract.

Card check: At least 65% of Americans say they would join a union if they had a choice, but employers have many ways of discouraging people from voting for a union, including firing supporters. The card check provision says if the majority of workers sign authorization cards the company must recognize the union. The companies claim the unions can strong-arm workers to sign, but if that happens the workers can petition for an election. A survey documented widespread coercion by employers, such as firings or threatening closings, leading up to elections. Workers were 3-5 times as likely to feel intimidated by the employer as by the union. The employers have much more power over the workers than the union organizers do. In this country a worker is fired every 23 minutes for trying to organize. Milt later explained that it takes on average three years to get a judgment on an illegal firing, and even then the employer can deduct from back pay awarded to the worker any income he earned from any source before reinstatement.

Gobern read examples of employer violations of worker rights by the Nabisco company as an example. However, despite successful litigation in Ohio against Nabisco, three years later the company has not complied with the judge's rulings. The third part of the act would increase penalties for the employers.

The House of Representatives passed the Act 241-185; it is now before the Senate, where passage is not at all assured, and the President probably will veto it if it passes.

Kempton asked what we could do to help. See [employeeefreechoice.org](http://employeeefreechoice.org). Also the Labor Council sends email announcements of actions. Milt can tell you how to get these.

Paul S. asked what it means that Georgia is a "right to work" state. Answer: You don't have to join a union even if your shop is under contract and you are represented by the union and get all the benefits; they don't get your dues unless you join. Carol C. asked which other states are the worst; which are key battleground states where we should lobby? Answer: All of them are worth lobbying; SE states are worst, e.g. NC, MS,

Austin suggested that we make pro-union work a priority. Milt pointed out that this is an important issue for DSA; several chapters are working to push this legislation. The AFL-CIO will be holding a workshop on the act at the US Social Forum in June.

With regard to the provision for contract mediation, Milt mentioned that even after certification of a union, contracts are signed only half the time because employers use many techniques to make the bargaining process ineffective.

We discussed various cultural and political forces contributing to anti-union prejudice and misinformation, and the need to organize internationally.

Milt announced that one of our members said there is a job opening for a union organizer with the SEIU. Contact Milt if you are interested.

Austin gave the treasurer's report. The newsletter cost about \$300 to print and mail. Our other main expense is snacks at meetings (we took up a collection). About \$700 left.

Next meeting: April 28, will be "Vision, strategies and the disinherited: Responses to Atlanta's poor," with a panel of faith-based leaders: Bill Boling of the Atlanta Food Bank; Ed Loring and Murphy Davis of the Open Door; and Leonard Tate, Trinity Community Ministries (helps homeless men who have drug issues). This will take up the whole meeting; no business meeting in April.

May meeting: Barbara has been promised speakers from one or more of the three lead organizations intervening in the proposed expansion of nuclear power at Plant Vogtle and spent fuel reprocessing and bomb building at the Savannah River Plant. The organizations are WAND, Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, and Eco-Action. Considering that the last Saturday: May 26 is Memorial Day weekend, we voted to change the meeting to May 19 if the room is available. Barbara will check availability of speakers on that date (they seemed flexible).

Milt reviewed the importance of the US Social Forum, which has already registered 10,000 of the more than 20,000 attendees expected, and the need to help as a volunteer or by donating money, equipment or free housing (see [ussf2007.org](http://ussf2007.org)). You can register at the website, or be one of the four free admissions that comes with our organizational registration (see Milt). The next planning meeting is April 27 (location TBA). The next issue of the national DSA newsletter will have an article about this and DSA will be holding at least one workshop. We will host a party for the out-of-town DSA members and their friends. Barbara volunteered her modest-size house with deck in L5P unless a larger space is identified. DSA will hold a discussion at the forum of a proposed economic justice position paper, which will be circulated to DSA members in advance.

The DSA National Convention: Nov. 9-11, 2007, in Atlanta, will include an awards dinner that Saturday evening at the IBEW Hall. Bernie Sanders is invited to speak, but no response yet. Cost will be \$25/person so we will charge \$35 and have an ad book as an

additional source of revenue. Honorees under consideration: Charlie Fleming and one other person. Steering committee will announce the final choices, but other suggestions are welcome; please communicate them before the next steering committee meeting (see below). That Friday the convention will open with a public forum, and another of our responsibilities is to help with publicity.

Members are welcome to attend the next steering committee meeting on April 21, 11:30 am at Norm's condo in Decatur (respond to these minutes to ask for directions).

Carol volunteered to place announcements of upcoming meetings in local weeklies and newsletters.

Kempton announced that there will be a vigil about global warming in front of Glenn Memorial Chapel in Emory Village on Sunday, April 14 at 12:15.