

WORKER

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tivity. Keith Crawford, one of the fired employees, said he had talked up the union and distributed pro-union literature to co-workers.

"We were gaining headway in support with other workers in the plant, and (management) saw that," he said.

However, Gates said the workers were fired for violations of the company's time-clock policy, such as leaving their shifts earlier than they were supposed to do. According to an NLRB document UNITE HERE provided to the *Catholic Courier*, the NLRB has scheduled an Oct. 4 hearing in Buffalo on alleged unfair labor practices by Cintas in Rochester. Crawford said he planned to be at the hearing.

In late August, meanwhile, the labor-religion coalition planned to eventually submit a "Pledge of Support for Sweat-Free Uniforms and Laundry Services" to the Rochester Diocese's Public Policy Committee, according to Marvin Mich, coalition co-chairman and director of social policy and research at Rochester's Catholic Family Center. The coalition wants the diocese to consider not initiating or renewing any contracts with Cintas until the company honors such principles as recognizing its workers' right to organize,

Mich said. According to diocesan spokesman Doug Mandelaro, the Public Policy Committee can make recommendations to the diocese, but does not have final say over any contracts.

Crawford said pro-union Cintas employees welcomed the work of the labor-religion coalition.

"They were very beneficial in showing their support," he said.

CHURCH AND LABOR

Like Father Tracy, Mich noted that the church is not anti-management; it simply believes that its role is to uphold the rights of workers, who are often placed in situations that compromise their dignity. A national expert on the church's social-justice teachings, Mich said that papal encyclicals over the last 113 years have emphasized the church's support for workers' rights.

Roberts, an American Baptist minister-in-information, noted that the Catholic Church has a much more extensive tradition of support for workers than do other Christian denominations.

"Workers have less power," Mich said, adding that the coalition seeks to be a voice for workers. "The coalition can be the conscience of the community," he said.

The Rochester coalition is affiliated with the Albany-based New York State Labor-Religion Coalition and is



Mike Crup/Catholic Courier

On Aug. 19, the Rev. Tom LeBeau, pastor of Seneca United Methodist Church, gives a Cintas truck driver a statement supporting the right of workers to organize. Looking on are Father Laurence Tracy (far left) and Mike Roberts, a UNITE HERE union organizer and co-chairman of the Rochester Labor-Religion Coalition.

one of two such local coalitions in the Diocese of Rochester. The other one, based in Elmira, is called the Southern Tier Labor-Religion Coalition and is co-chaired by Kathleen Dubel, justice-and-peace coordinator of Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier.

Both the Rochester and Southern Tier coalitions have been active on a number of labor issues in recent years. Both groups have supported living-wage campaigns in their areas, calling on local governments to contract only with employers that pay wages sufficient for employees to support their families. Both coalitions have supported the rights of migrant farm workers and have educated people on conditions faced by workers in other nations. And, like the state coalition, both diocesan

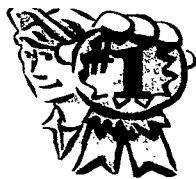
coalitions have supported anti-sweatshop campaigns.

The Southern Tier coalition has slated a "Solidarity Supper" for Saturday, Sept. 11, at St. Mary's Church in Elmira. The event will feature music, speakers and information tables, and will bring together members of area faith communities and local labor unions.

Explaining church involvement in labor issues, Father Tracy said the church must be concerned about labor because workers are vulnerable throughout the world, not just in the United States. In China, for example, where many American jobs have gone, citizens don't have the right to organize unions, he noted.

"The problem is partial globalization," he said. "We have an imbalance because capital has been globalized and labor has not."

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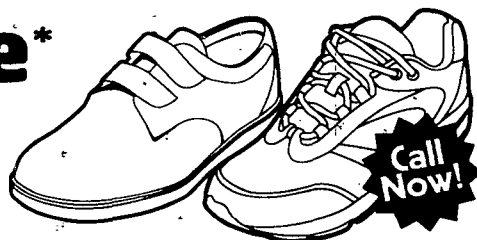
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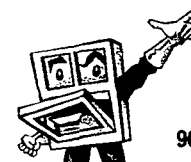
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