



## Workers Mark May Day

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BRATTLEBORO -- Shortly before the traditional dance around the Maypole, the melodies of old folk songs could be heard across the Town Common during the 25th annual May Day ceremony.

Twenty-four volunteers gathered around the pole holding orange and purple ribbons in preparation for the yearly prance. After some initial confusion with the maneuvers involved, the participants figured out the correct steps to complete the dance in a unified manner.

The move was symbolic to the message of the labor movement during the afternoon celebration: Everything works better when everyone works together.

"The more we get used to working together, the better our lives become," said John MacLean, Burlington resident and volunteer with the Vermont Workers Center.

Several dozen residents flocked to the common for the annual event for the opportunity to peruse some of the tables set up by different organizations, including the Vermont Citizens Campaign for Health and the war tax refusal activists, and to listen to a number of the state's labor enthusiasts speak about some of the current campaigns in the movement.

Others joined in the festivities for the labor-related fliers, balloons and hot dogs and ice cream given out by the local steelworkers union.

May Day is not celebrated everywhere like it is in Brattleboro, said James Haslam, director of the worker's center. Several members of the center, based in Montpelier, attended the event and also marked their 10-year anniversary with a special announcement.

Haslam said last Sunday the center launched its statewide campaign called "Health care is a Human Right," which seeks to bring the fight to the Statehouse next May Day. The campaign wants to build an action network across Vermont strong enough to make policymakers do what is right, he said.

Colin Robinson of the Economic Justice Project also climbed onto the stage to speak in favor of the Vermont Livable Wage Campaign.

Twenty-six percent of Vermonters are not making a livable wage, said Robinson. As health care and wages continue to erode around the country, it is more important now than ever to ensure people are making enough money to pay the bills and purchase the groceries each week, he added.

Robinson, a graduate of Brattleboro Union High School, was a member of Child Labor Education and Action group while in school. Current members of the organization were also at the May Day event with a display table and providing information about their fight for the state to go "sweat free."

Also speaking at the event was Jack McKiernan, special education teacher at Oak Grove School and president of the Windham Southeast Education Association, who called for the repeal of the two-vote mandate in Act 82.

The provision, which requires school boards in districts with per-pupil spending above the statewide average to submit their proposed budgets to two votes if the proposed increase exceeds a specified amount, is opposed by several education organizations in Vermont because there is no acknowledgment of actual school cost trends and no consideration of what will be lost in the schools.

Proponents of the measure say the two-vote mandate is necessary to rein in runaway education spending, but McKiernan argued the income paid to school taxes have declined over the past decade.

"All of us in the education community who are familiar with this bill understand that it will impede our efforts to ensure the continued success of Vermont's public schools, which depends upon adequate funding, preserving local control and removing legislative hurdles that complicate the budgetary process for school boards and voters," said McKiernan.

Prior to the speeches, local activist and former vice presidential candidate for the Socialist Party USA Mary Alice Herbert of Putney spoke of the importance of May Day and the origin of the movement after the Haymarket Affair in May 1886.

Eight men were brought to trial -- with four of them hanged -- after an unknown person threw a bomb into a crowd in Chicago during a labor rally, killing one and injuring dozens of others. In the panic, police begin shooting into the crowd, killing four workers and eventually six of their own. The organizers were held responsible for the riot, said Herbert, who helped establish the ceremony for the past 25 years.

The photographs of those martyrs were placed on the walls in labor halls around the world, she said.

To conclude the ceremony, the participants joined as one for the singing of "Solidarity Forever," an old labor anthem written by Ralph Chaplin in 1915 to signify the common struggle among their movement.