



■ WALKING WAGE-FREEZE BLUES

City workers hit the picket lines, seeking sympathy for their cause

About 400 of the city's unionized workers marched in circles on Irving Place in Allentown on Tuesday evening, briefly blocking Allen Street traffic, to protest the freeze on wage increases for city workers that has been in place for 28 months. The picketers gathered in front of the house of Dorothy Johnson, executive director of the city's control board, which has said that the wage freeze will only be lifted if unions agree to concessions that save the city more money than the pay raises will cost.

It was a cheerful event, in all—plenty of laughter, back-slapping and see-you-next-week's, the sort of camaraderie that can make a picket line fun and inspiring, at least toward the beginning of a prolonged campaign, which is what the city's union leaders are promising. They seek to counteract what the Police Benevolent Association's Robert Meegan describes as a propaganda campaign that aims to demonize the city's working men and women.

The central talking point seemed to be this: The control board is made up of wealthy business people like Bob Wilmers of M&T Bank and Brian Lipke of Gibraltar Steel, both companies that, while generous benefactors to the city's cultural community, enjoy tremendous public subsidies. Meegan claims that tax breaks to businesses have cost the city \$67 million over the life of the wage freeze—a tricky figure to prove, to be sure, but attention-getting—and that those dollars “come out of the pockets of working men and women in this city.”

That's a good message. Most Buffalonians cast a jealous eye on the wages and benefits that accrue to municipal employees, particularly teachers, police and firefighters. But they tend to be even more suspicious of big business and the perception that it milks taxpayer money from compliant local governments.

There are miscues in any PR campaign, of course: When Larry Panaro, secretary and treasurer for AFSCME Local 246, dropped the word “genocide” into conversation—as in the wage freeze is “nothing less than the economic genocide of the working class here in Buffalo”—the PBA's Meegan took one subtle step away from him, wearing a smile that was at once cringing and bemused. Solidarity, certainly, Meegan's expression seemed to say, but let's keep the message tight and sympathetic.

Leaving aside the inflammatory rhetoric, Panaro and Meegan agreed that many in the region have the wrong idea about city workers, courtesy of talking points disseminated by the control board and the Brown administration, and disseminated by the popular media—especially the *Buffalo News*, of which Meegan said, “They're very pro-business. They twist everything.”

Asked for an example of a statistic that misinforms the debate over the wage freeze, Panaro cited the average yearly pay of a city worker: \$50,000. He said that number doesn't reflect his constituency at all.

“I don't represent anyone who makes \$50,000,” Panaro said. “I don't have one single salary in that range in the unit I represent, the City of Buffalo blue collar unit, AFSCME Local 264.”

Buffalo Public School Teachers enjoy an average wage of about \$54,000, but it takes 11 to 15 years to reach that level of compensation, according to Phil Rumore of the Buffalo Teachers Federation, who also spoke at the demonstration. The maximum teacher contract is about \$77,000, and it takes 28 years to hit that mark.

Some of the city's employees have it better than others and none are quite so cushy as the public imagines. But, for PR purposes, they are all lumped together, giving the public the impression that, across the board, city workers make a more-than-comfortable wage, especially in a city where the median household income is around \$34,000. Couple that with better retirement and healthcare packages than most

working-class Buffalonians enjoy and it becomes difficult to generate much sympathy for the municipal worker. (The public relations tactic on the healthcare front has been to embarrass city police, firefighter and teachers with the arcane fact that their health plan covers plastic surgery, prompting Dorothy Johnson to mock city employees as “a lovely workforce.”)

And so, while the control board lumps them together, the city's unions have promised that they will stand together—even the food service workers, who are being asked to make contract concessions in exchange

City workers stop traffic on Allen Street Tuesday evening, August 22. More pickets are in the offing, according to union leaders.

for an hourly wage increase of 25 cents.

“We want to stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are the food service workers, who have been asked to give a pound of flesh for a lousy quarter,” Rumore shouted to the crowd. “Are we going to let them do that to us?”

“No!” the crowd shouted back.

More pickets to come—if you live near a control board member, you might want to stay late at the office next week.

—*geoff kelly*

■ THE GHOSTS OF BREWING PAST

Once upon a time, Buffalo's cup runneth over with local beer

“In 1908, Buffalo's brewers alone made so much beer that if Niagara Falls flowed with beer instead of water, it would take over one minute and 18 seconds to flow over. In that same year Buffalonians drank almost all of the 31 million gallons of beer produced here. What that boils down to is 22 gallons of beer for every man, woman and child in the area. All this beer came out of 25 local breweries scattered across the city.”

The excerpt from *Rushing the Growler: The History of Brewing in Buffalo* by local author Stephen R. Powell recalls an era when the streets of Buffalo flowed with beer. A time when Buffalo was known to have a bar or tavern on every street corner.

The Queen City has a deep and rich history of brewing, both pre- and post-Prohibition. However, walking in the city today, you might never be able to tell. Long gone are the days of family-owned taverns and the hometown brewery. No longer does the air smell sweet with rich malts in the morning and bitter with hops in the evening. What was once a bustling industry has all but vanished from the city, though all around there are subtle signs of what once was.

You've probably seen one of the Buffalo's former breweries before, but you might not have known it. They're all over the city, but their outer appearances can be deceiving; there is little left to identify these portals into Buffalo's brewing past. Many have also been knocked down and turned into residential areas, commercial developments and parking lots. Others remain

empty and abandoned, while others have been gutted and renovated into offices and concert venues.

Once considered Buffalo's beer-brewing epicenter, Brewing Hill—between present-day Roswell Park and the old Trico building—was home to many of Buffalo's early breweries, though only a part of one of those buildings remains standing today. The rest were all torn down. One of these was the German-American Beer Co. Built in 1896, the brewery was an addition to the main brewery located on the corner of Main and High Streets. The German-American Brewing Co. was one of the largest breweries in Buffalo in its day, and the building featured a beer garden on the roof, making it a hot spot for the city's populous German-American community.

If you were to try to go find the building today, you'd be just a little late. The last remnants of the German-American Brewing Co. were torn down last year, and all that remains is an empty lot filled with bricks and rubble. Walking around the lot, however, one can imagine the brewery's large copper kettles and floors covered in dried hop husks. In its final years, the building was used as a restaurant and a hotel—but that was only part of the brewery, much of which was demolished earlier. The German-American Brewing Co. was the last remaining piece of brewing history in the High Street area.

Another among many possible examples is Ziegler Brewing Co.'s Phoenix Brewery.

When Albert Ziegler arrived in the city of Buffalo in 1849, he was a brewing journeyman who had worked in both Chicago and Milwaukee. Ziegler settled in Buffalo because the area's speedy development as an industrial center translated into great profit-making opportunities. Ziegler was right about Buffalo, and he hit it big. He built his brewery at the intersection of what are now Washington and Virginia Streets, and the building still stands today right behind the legendary Ulrich's tavern. A goliath of a structure, the brewery's red bricks are as dark as Irish red ale, and many of the original smokestacks are still present. But what remains today is just one wing of the Ziegler's massive operation; the rest was torn down years ago.

There is a long list of long-lost breweries, and of efforts to reclaim Buffalo's brewing legacy. Opened in 1991, the Buffalo Brewing Co. was once the region's premier microbrewery company. It was widely known both locally and nationally, and was even featured at Super Bowl XXVI in Minneapolis, Minnesota and was written up in the *New York Times*. It produced a wide array of beers including lagers, Irish reds and bocks at the impressive rate of 150,000 cases per year. Like many of the breweries before it, the Buffalo Brewing Co. stayed true to the area's German roots.

“We brought in the equipment from Northern Bavaria, all copper brew kettles,” said Kevin Townsell, founder of the Buffalo Brewing Co. and currently owner of Shannon Pub in Tonawanda. “We brought a brewmaster over from Munich who had just graduated from the Vin Schlepin school of brewing, which is a very serious brewing institution. And then we would bring all of our barley malt in from Shwinfer in Germany as well. The hops were also German and even the yeast was from a German strain. Everything we used was German except for the water. All together



The former Phoenix Brewery at Virginia and Washington.

it produced a very authentic German beer, and it was really good.”

But the Buffalo Brewing Co. shut its doors in the mid 1990s. “After a while we started having troubles with the City of Lackawanna,” said Townsell. “We never pasteurized the product, so we might ship it down to Atlanta refrigerated, but a distributor might not handle it properly by not being [keeping it] in constant refrigeration. So we would get entire cases of beer back because it had gone bad. That really was our demise—there was not much of a shelf life on the product.”

The original Buffalo Brewing Co. building still stands on Abbott Road in Lackawanna; it is now a small concert venue.

But what caused the first mass extinction of Buffalo breweries?

After Prohibition, many of the breweries had lost too much money to re-open; they were too small. Even the mainstream breweries of the time, like Ziegle’s Phoenix Brewery, fell victim to Prohibition.

According to Townsell, it was big business and a lack of technology that brought down many of the breweries after Prohibition. “Things started happening, like television and regional pasteurization in the beer. Regional advertising and distribution as well,” said Townsell. “These guys would only deliver as far as the truck or the horse-drawn tram would be able to go. They would go out three hours, and then it would take three hours to get back, so that was as far as they could distribute. Budweiser and Miller were coming in with their distribution machines, and [the local breweries] just couldn’t keep up and compete.”

Many of the big business breweries dumped cheap product into the Buffalo market, making it next to impossible for the local and regional breweries to stay afloat.

“All of the big breweries in the Midwest, like Miller and Busch, were selling their beer in the markets cheaper than the local guys could make it. So they were selling it at a lower price than it costs to manufacture it,” said Powell. “Beer dumping—an unfair trade practice. That kills the local breweries.”

National competition was the only problem. World Wars I and II caused anything

that was associated with Germany, including the German-American breweries, to leave a bad taste in consumers’ mouths.

“The world wars pretty much ruined the German-American community,” said Powell. “Our German culture has pretty much been destroyed after two world wars.”

In addition, many breweries tried to grow too quickly, spreading themselves too thin as a result. Instead of concentrating primarily on producing their draft beers for the local market, some started to bottle their brews and put a lot of their finances into it. When those breweries realized that they could not distribute as much beer as quickly as the bigger breweries, they were already too far in and were unable to dig themselves out. Those few that survived were those that stayed local, continuing to inebriate the local market until they too were choked out by the national brands.

A very few breweries remain in Buffalo. Flying Bison Brewery, located at 491 Ontario Street, is perhaps the best known. Started by long-time home brewers Phil Internicola and Tim Herzog, Flying Bison Brewery is starting to garner national attention for their award-winning beers. The brewery supplies many local restaurants, bars and pubs in the city. Then there are the small pub brewers, such as Buffalo Brew Pub and the Pearl Street Grill and Brewery, both of which have been going concerns for some time, thanks in large part to brisk restaurant business. The Buffalo Brew Pub is New York State’s oldest brew pub and continues to brew their own beers right on the premises, as does the Pearl Street Grill and Brewery. These establishments are reminders to what used to be.

There has been a huge boom in the microbrewing industry in the last 25 years. In 1981, there were about 60 microbreweries in the entire country. Today there are more than 1,400 nationwide, with more and more popping up everyday.

“Buffalo would be a good place for more breweries to grow. It is a good owner-operated business,” said Townsell. “That is the neat part about this town. This town still sells a lot of draft beer and a lot of good, loyal bar owners a willing to take on the local products. It is a good town for specialty beer.”

—brian w. wright

av

is proof that God loves us and wants us to be happy.” —Benjamin Franklin

Incredible!



SOLE

SUN INSPIRED COCKTAILS & CUISINE

NOW OPEN

Walker Center 5110 Main Street, Williamsville NY 14221 716.362.0356