On March 20, I joined the Houston Interfaith Worker Justice Center (HIWJC) at the Houston City Council speaking in favor of a proposed wage theft ordinance. Later, I joined a crowd of more than 100 supporters, speaking, marching, chanting (and occasionally dancing), outside City Hall at a “Down with Wage Theft” rally.

A growing number of city council members expressed support of the proposed ordinance. HIWJC’s efforts demonstrate three things I love about our work.

First, we move concrete change. The ordinance that HIWJC introduced is modeled on the successful ordinance in Miami-Dade County. The bill would create a local wage theft administrative process that would help low-wage workers get money back and bar companies guilty of wage theft from city contracts and city-issued licenses and permits.

Second, we engage diverse supporters. Speaking in support of the ordinance, I joined HIWJC’s Director Laura Perez-Boston, Stan Marek, an ethical businessman in the community, two low-wage workers, one Caucasian and one African American. Outside were young students, immigrant workers, older religious leaders, diverse community leaders and union activists, including Richard Shaw from the Central Labor Council.

Third, young people play significant leadership roles. Laura Perez-Boston and her team are mostly young. They are smart, creative, committed and talented. Around the country, young people are driving the work forward. It is an honor and privilege to know so many of them.

What a blessing it is to be a part of the work. To learn more about the ordinance and campaign, visit downwithwagetheft.org.
Network Celebrates Victory in Florida

When South Florida Interfaith Worker Justice called for help from allies in the network to protect Miami-Dade County’s wage theft ordinance, the network stood up in support.

South Florida IWJ worked hard to urge Miami-Dade County to pass the county-wide wage theft ordinance in 2010. The ordinance is a model for other local wage theft campaigns. But in early 2012, the Florida Retail Federation tried to preempt the young ordinance by telling counties they couldn’t pass such wage theft bills.

South Florida IWJ responded by targeting state lawmakers and Macy’s, whose Vice President chairs the Florida Retail Federation (FRF). The Madison Workers’ Rights Center in Wisconsin, The Southern Maine Worker Center and El Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en la Lucha in Minneapolis organized solidarity actions. In Madison, the worker center picketed a Macy’s. Affiliates circulated an online petition opposing the law that stops local government from protecting its workers from wage theft, and telling Macy’s to withdraw support.

In part, because of the efforts of South Florida IWJ and its allies in the Network, the Florida state legislature did not roll back Miami-Dade’s wage theft ordinance. And as a bonus, the publicity the campaign generated also inspired other Florida counties to consider developing and introducing their own anti-wage theft ordinances. What’s happening in Florida is just the beginning. Get involved with IWJ and support local campaigns against wage theft.

Make Labor Day 2012 Count

Charles Dickens said it best: “it’s the best of times; it’s the worst of times.”

Over the last few years, our nation’s workers have been battered left and right with unemployment, underemployment, wage theft and on-the-job injuries. At the same time though, people from all walks of life are coming together and rallying behind worker issues like never before.

This Labor Day, join hundreds of congregations and community groups around the country in honoring workers and lifting up the struggle for worker and economic justice.

Resources for organizing a Labor in the Pulpit/on the Bimah/in the Minbar, including a planning toolkit, are available on www.iwj.org. Also available for download and distribution are prayers, litanies and bulletin inserts on the intersection of faith and worker issues.

Let’s make Labor Day 2012 count for the backbone of our nation’s economy! For more information and additional questions, please email info@iwj.org.

Strong Start for New Interfaith Groups

Newly affiliated interfaith groups hit the ground running: building power and scoring victories for workers in their communities.

Last fall, IWJ-Atlanta worked with Unite HERE on a campaign to renew contracts for union-friendly concessionaire HMS Host with the Hartfield-Jackson International Airport. People of faith and religious leaders joined IWJ-Atlanta in prayer before the City Council session. Atlanta’s City Council awarded HMS Hosts even more contracts than previously awarded.

In March, IWJ-Atlanta also helped organize people of faith against a bill that would have crippled first amendment rights to assemble.

In Tennessee, workers, students, faculty, alumni and community members formed Organized and United for Respect at Vanderbilt University after several successful wage increase campaigns on campus. The group officially formed as an IWJ affiliate in February. OUR Vanderbilt is currently working on a Justice for Dining workers campaigns.

We’re happy to welcome these new, amazing affiliated interfaith groups. Read more about the work of our affiliates on our blog, www.iwj.org/blog
In this season of renewal, we invite you to join IWJ and our affiliates in efforts to push for the creation of just jobs, safer working conditions, respect for workers’ right to organize, and an end to the immoral stealing of workers’ wages.

This is a critical moment for workers. This is also a great chance for us to come together to make worker justice a priority. We invite you to join the IWJ Faithful Givers Club by making a monthly pledge to support worker justice.

Your monthly gift of $15, $25, $35, $50, $100 or any amount significant to you will help provide IWJ a base of financial support that allows the organization to help workers and promote a faithful vision where all workers lead dignified lives as a result of their labor.

Donate online at www.iwj.org or complete and mail the form below:

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I want to support the work of IWJ with:

_____ a Monthly Pledge of:

☐ $10  ☐ $15  ☐ $25  ☐ other $________

_____ a Single Gift of:

☐ $35  ☐ $50  ☐ $100  ☐ $250  ☐ other $________

Please send my receipt by:

☐ Postal Mail

☐ E-Mail:__________________________________________

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Payment Information (You can also donate online at www.iwj.org)

☐ A check made out to Interfaith Worker Justice is enclosed.

☐ Please charge my:  ☐ VISA  ☐ Master Card  ☐ AMEX

Name on Card:__________________________________________

Account Number:_____________________________________

Exp. Date:________________________________________ 3-digit Sec. Code________________

Signature:__________________________________________

Mail to: IWJ, 1020 W. Bryn Mawr Ave., Chicago, IL 60660
Have you Seen us Lately?

After 15 years, we decided it was time for a new look, a makeover. And so began a redesign process that brought us a new, dynamic website, an updated logo, and (in case you haven’t noticed) a more vibrant Faith Works.

Our goal is to provide friends and allies like you with resources and tools that are accessible, applicable and appealing. How are we doing so far? (email feedback to info@iwj.org)

If you haven’t already, explore www.iwj.org. We hope you like what you see. The new site is designed to give you lots of opportunities to get involved in worker justice. Check out the shelves of materials in our resource center, our regularly updated blog and action alerts to current campaigns.

Join the IWJ Community

Facebook: /interfaithworkerjustice
Twitter: @iwjnational

Doorstep or Inbox?

Want to cut back on paper mail but still receive vital information on worker issues? Scan the QR code below with your smartphone to start receiving Faith Works electronically or visit http://bit.ly/IWJGreen.