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Activists demand that InkStop pay its workers' overdue wages

By Janet Cho, The Plain Dealer

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Peggy Turbett, The Plain Dealer

Members of Cleveland Jobs With Justice and the Bread and Puppet Theater of Vermont protested InkStop outside the company's Lakewood store. They taped a puppet representing corporate greed to the front of the store and drew a chalk outline of a figure representing "jobs" on the sidewalk.

LAKWOOD, Ohio -- Nearly a month after retailer InkStop Inc. laid off all of its workers, a consortium of labor, faith-based and community social justice groups held a protest to demand that InkStop give their 500-some workers their overdue paychecks.

"We are here to demand that (InkStop) CEO Dirk Kettlewell do the right thing and pay his employees now," said Debbie Kline of [Cleveland Jobs with Justice](#), which organized Wednesday morning's demonstration in front of the closed InkStop store at Lakewood City Center.

The Lakewood store is among 152 the Warrensville Heights company operated in 14 states in its heyday before abruptly shutting down on Oct. 1. The company notified employees via fax, e-mail and phone call that they had lost their jobs and were not getting their final paychecks.

"A crime has been committed in my city," said Lakewood City Councilwoman Nickie Antonio. She said company officials stole their workers' wages by not giving them their final paycheck and that they should be "found, arrested,



Oct. 27: InkStop investor suing CEO, officers and directors for misrepresenting retailer as financially healthy

Oct. 8: Inkstop's board of directors looking for money to repay workers

Oct. 7: Inkstop pays employees employees benefit premiums

Oct. 6: Inkstop insurance letter to employees

Oct. 5: Inkstop employees file suit against company for unpaid wages, benefits

Oct. 2: InkStop closes all stores

Oct. 2: Inkstop letter to employees (PDF)

convicted and thrown in jail."

She recalled how excited the city was when InkStop moved into the Lakewood shopping center because it was a locally owned company that seemed to be doing so well. Regardless of economic pressures, she said InkStop had no reason to treat its workers so outrageously.

"I am so disappointed," she said.

As the **Bread and Puppet Theater Group** from Vermont performed songs and skits ridiculing the company's officers and board of directors, Jobs With Justice activists chanted: "Pay up! Pay up!"

"We've come out here to demand that these employees not be treated like cash registers, to be abandoned when things go wrong," said the Rev. Bob Strommen, a retired clergyman from the Western Reserve Association of the United Church of Christ.

"This is wage theft. We see this kind of thing every single day, unfortunately," said Jason Bristol, a lawyer with **Cohen Rosenthal & Kramer LLP** who has filed a federal lawsuit against InkStop and its co-founders, Dirk and Dawn Kettlewell.

Bristol and Anthony Lazzaro of the **Lazzaro Law Firm LLC** are representing more than 200 former InkStop employees.

Later, everyone marched over to the store, taped an "X" over the front windows with yellow caution tape, and drew a chalk outline on the sidewalk of a figure it labeled "Jobs."

Bystander Alice Bocchicchio of AB Plumbing Services LLC, who used to buy all her office supplies from Inkstop, said: "I'm just appalled to have given my business to someone who would do that."