

...Organizer reinstated

(From Page 1)

to me, come up to me and tell me.”

Six weeks in, Breadsong offered to make Barragan full-time and asked her to resubmit her application. She decided to come clean about her Fred Meyer bakery experience. That didn't faze Breadsong; Barragan was a good worker.

By September, Barragan had talked with most of her co-workers, even the temps, and a majority signed union authorization cards. The campaign was completely undercover.

The union planned to wait until after Christmas to request a union election, but an enthusiastic pro-union worker slipped up and mentioned a recent union meeting in front of a manager. Barragan wasn't sure if the slip was going to blow the union's cover, but Local 114 didn't want to take any chances, and filed a petition Nov. 7 asking the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), to oversee a union election.

It took Breadsong managers completely by surprise that a union campaign was afoot.

The reaction was swift. Managers began mandatory two-on-one interviews, calling in workers one by one to a small conference room. Barragan was the last to be called, on Nov. 17.

Human resources manager Linda Sewall did the talking while plant manager Lou Flores listened.

“We've heard some employees are talking about a union,” Sewall said, in Barragan's recollection. “We'd like to ask you some questions. What have you heard, what have other employees said, and what if anything has the union promised you?”

Yes, Barragan told them, she knew about the campaign, and it was no wonder folks were interested in a union: The wages stink, and nobody can afford the insurance the company provides. Barragan stuck to her character, but didn't cop to her role.

Management was still in the dark about who the union ringleader was, and had no idea they had a union salt in their employ.

Two weeks later, looking at government records for the union that their employees were seeking to join, a Breadsong manager discovered the name of their experienced mixer — Georgene Barragan — on the previous year's list of Local 114 officers.

On Dec. 5 she was called in for another meeting with Sewall and Flores. They showed Barragan her job application. Was there any relevant part of her work history she'd failed to disclose? No, she replied. They pushed the union's government filing across the desk. What about this?

Barragan showed no emotion. She hadn't been an employee of the union, she said.

Sewall and Flores told her she was suspended without pay pending investigation.

“You can't do this,” Barragan told them. “What you are doing is an unfair labor practice. It's against the law.”

They told her they'd escort her to her locker to get her things; if she refused to leave of her own accord, they'd call the police and have her removed.

Barragan remembers it as a walk of shame, escorted by managers past her co-workers. By now her poker face was gone; she was upset. Co-workers could tell what was happening. One gave her a hug. Another shook her hand. It was an emotional moment.

Two days later, Dec. 7, Sewall called to tell Barragan she was being terminated for not revealing her union status.

With the union ringleader identified and eliminated, management now began almost daily anti-union meetings, where they showed anti-union propaganda videos and handed out fliers warning workers about the dues they'd have to pay to “union bosses.”

The union filed an unfair labor prac-

tice charge with the NLRB on Dec. 17, and sought to block the election, which had been scheduled for Dec. 19. Barragan had been terminated because she engaged in union activities, the union charged; that was meant to discourage other employees from doing the same. Management conduct had poisoned the atmosphere, the union said, making it impossible for workers to express freely whether they wanted union representation or not.

NLRB agent Mike Roche investigated the union complaint and took Barragan's testimony. Management hadn't trumped up any work-related mistake on her part — they had admitted that failing to disclose her union affiliation was the reason for her termination. That made it a pretty cut and dry case. The NLRB issued a formal complaint and scheduled a May 28 hearing before a federal administrative law judge.

In March, Breadsong gave workers wage increases of up to \$3.50 an hour. That too is illegal, in the context of a union drive, because it's well-understood as an attempt to take the steam out of support for the union by removing wage complaints. Local 114 filed another charge; the union didn't want Breadsong workers to lose the raises, but wanted to make it clear to the employees what the raise was really about.

Before the hearing took place, attorneys for Cargill decided to settle all charges. Under the terms of the settlement, Barragan will return to work at Breadsong June 24.

“We're going to have a full-time union organizer in the plant,” Lansing said.

Management agreed to post a 60-day notice in English, Spanish, and Bosnian promising not to discriminate against employees for supporting the

union and explaining that Barragan is being reinstated.

“We will not suspend you and/or fire you if you don't want to tell us on your employment application about your employment and/or activities with or for ... the Union,” the notice says.

The notice also promises in the future not to do anything that interferes with employees right to “form, join or assist a union,” and “act together with other employees for your benefit and protection.”

“We expect the company to comply with the law and respect their employees' rights to make a decision about the union,” said Lansing, who had high praise for the role the NLRB played in the settlement.

Barragan said she's looking forward to returning, and plans to stay at Breadsong until her co-workers approve their first union contract.

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