

...20 union supporters fired after organizing drive begins

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when a BrucePac employee who is related to a Local 296 member called Aranda and asked for help. Local 296 has about 1,000 members, including construction workers, shipyard workers, and school district and housing authority employees. Roy saw no reason the union couldn't represent BrucePac workers too.

A meeting of union supporters was called at one worker's home.

"They want job security and respect on the job, to quit being treated like dogs," Roy said.

Workers interviewed for this article described abuse and mistreatment by

supervisors, as well as rampant favoritism. Supervisors' friends and family members — and younger, more attractive female employees — get higher wages and easier work assignments, workers said. And that's not all: Some workers reportedly witnessed inappropriate touching of female employees by supervisors.

Four BrucePac employees have filed complaints of employment law violations, including sexual harassment. The Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries Civil Rights Division is investigating.

"It would be against federal and state law to discriminate or treat an em-

ployee adversely because of their gender," said BOLI spokesperson Bob Estabrook.

After the first meeting, union talk spread among employees at BrucePac. But management knew right away. The day before the second union meeting, a BrucePac supervisor was threatening an "explosion" if it kept up.

Before the month was out, the explosion came: 20 workers who had voiced support for the union, and 25 others who had stood up to supervisors in some way or were otherwise out of favor, were terminated. BrucePac did not return calls from the Labor Press about the number and reasons for the

layoffs.

In mid-July, Local 296 filed 18 separate NLRB charges protesting the firings. BrucePac retained Jackson Lewis, possibly the nation's best-known anti-union law firm.

To inform workers of their rights, and of the benefits of union membership, Local 296 staff and member volunteers began showing up with fliers outside the Silverton and Woodburn plants. Managers responded by standing outside to observe who would talk to the union contingent on the way out.

At the Woodburn plant, management called police upon the unionists' arrival. And in at least one case, Aranda said, with unionists waiting at the plant entrance, managers kept workers working three hours past their normal 3:30 p.m. quitting time.

In the workplace, anti-union meetings began, and continue. Signing a union card will put their jobs at risk, workers are told. They'll have to pay \$75 union dues out of every paycheck. The union doesn't want them to get overtime. The union wants to destroy the company.

Aranda said the union tries to counter the misinformation, but doesn't have anywhere near the access to employees that management has.

The union called a meeting for a Saturday. Management scheduled employees to work that day, and subse-

quent Saturdays.

On Nov. 3, Mid-Willamette Valley Jobs With Justice turned out a group of 40 protesters outside the Silverton plant, accompanied by a giant balloon of a fat cat strangling a worker. Management was ready for them. Banners hung from the building called on passing motorists to honk if they support local businesses. A company flier in English and Spanish appealed to workers to "tell the union to stop these senseless attacks."

"Why is the union doing this?" a flier asked. "The answer is simple: The union wants to destroy BrucePac's business and reputation so we lose customers.... While trying to harm the company, the union's actions could also harm you and all other BrucePac employees."

None of that's true, Roy said. "We want BrucePac to succeed," Roy said, "and we want the employees to share the benefits."

BrucePac didn't respond to the Labor Press' invitation to share its version of the story, but did issue a statement to the Salem Statesman-Journal, which reported on the Nov. 3 protest.

"BrucePac recognizes and respects employees' rights under federal law," the statement reads. "It has been union-free for several years in large part due to its competitive wages and benefits and employee-focused labor relations."

Laurelhurst nursing home now a union shop

Laurelhurst Village nursing home in Southeast Portland — which fired a pro-union worker in April — is now a union shop.

As a condition of joining an industry partnership with Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 503, parent company Farmington Centers agreed in September to recognize the union if a majority of workers signed union authorization cards. Local 503 spokesperson Ed Hershey attributed the company's decision to community pressure, and the union's carrot-and-stick strategy with nursing homes.

SEIU's partnership with Oregon Health Care Association, begun in 2002, commits the union to use its political clout to maintain and improve public funding, and not to publicly criticize nursing home companies. In return, companies stay neutral when employees look at joining the union, recognize the union on the basis of "card check," and bargain a contract on an expedited timetable.

On Nov. 23, by agreement with both sides, Oregon State Rep. Jules Kopel Bailey matched cards against a list provided by Laurelhurst Village, and determined that a majority of the 144 workers had signed. That brings to 26 the number of Oregon nursing

homes that are unionized, for a total of over 1,100 workers. Local 503 represents certified nursing assistants, janitors, kitchen workers, and support staff at the facilities, which rely on Medicaid reimbursements to pay for the care.

Lobbying together at the Oregon Legislature, SEIU and the nursing home industry association have been able to win funding improvements, and an almost 40 percent improvement in staff-to-patient ratios.

Hershey said the union expects to begin bargaining a contract for Lau-

relhurst Village workers in January. Thus far, union wages and benefits are only marginally above the nursing home industry average, but unionizing brings workers workplace rights like a grievance process, seniority rights, and just cause discipline.

In July, Laurelhurst Village paid back wages plus an undisclosed amount to settle an unfair labor practice charge over the firing of pro-union worker Elizabeth Lehr, in return for her agreeing to waive her right to reinstatement. She continued to volunteer in support of the union campaign.



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