

...Prison bread

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pact the private sector. Prison-made baked goods have been displacing goods made by law-abiding workers on the outside, such as the unionized workers at Franz Bakery, which has operations in Oregon and Washington.

That rankles Terry Lansing, secretary-treasurer of 1,160-member Bakers Local 114. Lansing says in the competition for school district business, Correctional Industries is undercutting family-owned Franz, a union employer since 1910.

Inmates at the Airway Heights bakery don't pay taxes. They can't unionize. And they're paid 55 cents to \$1.75 an hour for their work. [The state takes up to 90 percent of that for crime victim restitution, legal obligations, costs of incarceration, and savings for when they're released.]

At Franz, by contrast, workers earn \$19 to \$24 an hour, with fully-paid medical and pension benefits, a guaranteed work week, and overtime pay after seven hours in a day.

"These are jobs we want to preserve," Lansing said. "[Our members] are taxpayers, and our taxes support the school districts."

In a 2010 interview with the Labor Press, Franz Spokane-area general manager Tim Harper wouldn't disclose the dollar amount or volume of busi-

ness lost, but said it's significant.

"We definitely had to make cutbacks because of it," Harper said.

Harper said 2009 was the first school year that Franz didn't have the contract for Central Valley School District in Spokane. Employees at the Franz bakery in Spokane had children in the district, and were outraged about the switch to prison-made bread, Harper said. They spoke out at PTA meetings but got nowhere.

Franz competes with the prison bakery for school district contracts, but the company has been reluctant to go public criticizing the prison bakery. One

Who's eating prison-made baked goods?

The following school districts serve baked goods produced at Airway Heights Correctional Facility:

Auburn School District
Highline School District
Federal Way School District
South Kitsap School District
Blaine School District
Spokane School District #81
Mead School District
Central Valley School District
Mt. View School District

reason is that Food Services of America, which distributes the prison-made bread to schools, is an important Franz customer. Also, Franz doesn't want to publicly criticize the school districts for buying prison bread, since the company hopes to win back their business.

But Lansing, at the Bakers union, is free to speak his mind. He has one question for the districts: "Do the parents know you're feeding their kids prison bread?"

For over a year, Lansing has campaigned against serving prison-made baked goods in schools.

"I am positive that most parents would not allow a time-serving convict into their kitchen to prepare their child's meals, yet I believe that is what your School District is doing," Lansing wrote in a letter to the Clatskanie School District.

In letters to the districts, Lansing raises concerns about safety and the ethics of forced labor.

Wiles, at Correctional Industries, has answers to some of those charges. The labor is not forced, she says. Inmates must take part in some kind of rehabilitative program, but they don't have to work specifically at Correctional Industries. They can take classes or take part in treatment instead. Inmates can receive prison discipline for refusing some prison jobs, like cleaning, but they can't be disciplined for refusing to work in the bakery or other Correctional Industries enterprises.

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ATU #757 voices race concerns at TriMet

A report commissioned by the union finds minority employees more likely to be disciplined.

Amalgamated Transit Union Local (ATU) 757 is publicly calling out its biggest employer, TriMet, over how the transit agency treats minority employees.

About a year and a half ago, the union contracted with Stephen Johnson, a sociologist and statistician, to analyze TriMet disciplinary data to see if there was evidence of disparate treatment. Johnson and fellow researcher Christine McCaslin looked at TriMet data from 2000 to 2009. They found that minority employees made up about 17 percent of the TriMet workforce, but accounted for 24 percent of the disciplinary actions over that time. In nine of the 10 years, minority employees were more likely to be disciplined than their numbers would have suggested.

"We don't know why," Local 757 attorney Susan Stoner told the Labor Press. "We just noticed there seemed to be a disproportionate amount of discipline of minority employees." That led Local 757 to commission the report, Stoner said.

According to Johnson's report, over the 10 year-period, of the 226 employees terminated for cause, 62 were minorities; and of the 1,585 who received some form of discipline, 381 were minorities. In the termination cases, the most common reasons cited were poor job attendance and time lost at work. The report acknowledges that discrimination is notoriously difficult to document. But it concluded that some form of further investigation might be war-

ranted.

Earlier this year, Local 757 made the report available to several lawyers representing clients in discrimination lawsuits against TriMet. TriMet was given a copy in late spring. Now the union is publishing it on its web site, atu757.org.

TriMet spokesperson Mary Fetsch said she hadn't seen the report, but said the agency would welcome a dialogue with the union about it.

Fetsch also disputed the notion that TriMet would treat employees differently based on race.

"We're an equal opportunity employer, and we make no race-based distinctions in employment decisions," Fetsch told the Labor Press.



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