

...Union vote at Precision Castpart falls short for IAM

(From Page 1)

gave union representatives no equivalent access, and when union volunteers and staff visited workers at home, anti-union fliers called that “privacy violation” while displaying a picture of a man trying to get in a door as a frightened-looking woman, and her dog, try to close it.

Precision Castparts also publicized Boeing layoffs of Machinists members in Washington, and contrasted that with Boeing’s expansion of its non-union operations in South Carolina. PCC had purchased land in Idaho, it was said. The suggestion was veiled, but clear enough: Unionize, and the company might just shut down and move elsewhere.

But in the next breath, managers would make elaborate apologies, and plead for another chance.

“We failed to listen enough and we failed to communicate enough with our employees,” said PCC Structural president Kevin Stein in a personal letter to employees. “We have learned a valuable lesson during the past couple months, and I commit to you that we will work hard to make sure it doesn’t happen again.”

“We have heard you!” said a flier signed by all company managers. “We

are sorry we put you in this position!”

Other fliers described fat union staff salaries, low strike benefits, and fines against union members who crossed picket lines during a strike.

The union is only after your dues money, said PCC — a company that cut off its pension for new hires at a time of record-breaking profits. PCC’s stock is at its all-time high on the New York Stock Exchange, and the com-

pany reported \$1.2 billion profit on \$7.2 billion in sales its most recent fiscal year.

It’s that kind of contrast that drove the interest in unionization, Larkin said: “Given the financial success that the company is currently enjoying, what excuse is there, really, for taking away defined benefit pensions or aggressive forced overtime? If this is how they behave when they’re making

money, what’s going to happen when they’re not doing so well?”

In spite of allegations of company labor law violations, IAM has no plans to file charges with the National Labor Relations Board.

“However, if there is any evidence of retaliation or harassment or discrimination among organizers or supporters, we would file charges immediately,” Larkin said.

Going forward, IAM plans to maintain contact with PCC workers. By law, workers can try again in a year’s time.

“It was a hard campaign, and a hard one to lose, but I feel we’re closer to where we’re trying to get,” Larkin said. “It’s not unusual for a successful campaign to have two or even three elections before they get to the bargaining table.”

Secret Pacific Rim trade deal on track to completion

A NAFTA-style trade agreement with 11 Pacific Rim nations is en route to completion. Talks on the agreement known as the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) were initiated by President George W. Bush in 2008 and have progressed, largely in secret, under the Obama administration.

At the end of a May 15-24 session in Peru, trade negotiators said they expect the treaty to be concluded in October. The next meeting will take place July 15-25 in Malaysia, with a final meeting slated for September somewhere in North America.

The participating countries are Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore,

the United States, and Vietnam. About half the countries already have trade agreements with the United States.

Some of the countries are advanced industrial democracies with high wages and established workers rights protections. Others, like Vietnam and Brunei, are low-wage platforms where workers lack independent unions. Lowering barriers to trade and investment in such cases can lead to a race to the bottom.

“Broadly speaking, it’s a corporate power grab,” said Arthur Stamoulis, executive director of the Citizens Trade Campaign — a national coalition of labor, environmental, consumer, family farm, religious, and other civil society groups.

Stamoulis said the United States has made some effort to include enforceable workers rights standards in the agreement. But workers rights haven’t been a priority for U.S. negotiators on par with “investor rights” and “intellectual property rights.”

Trade negotiators haven’t released details of the agreement to the public. Nor are the U.S. negotiating positions being released, though as many as 600 corporate lobbyists and other stakeholders have access to them. One of those stakeholders is the national AFL-CIO. AFL-CIO trade policy expert Thea Lee says she knows what the U.S. is proposing, but isn’t allowed to divulge it.

But what has been made public about the negotiations so far is grounds for deep concern, the AFL-CIO executive council declared in February, because it relies on NAFTA as a template.

“The NAFTA-based model promotes a race to the bottom in workers’ rights, wages, pensions and working conditions; resource conservation; food safety; and consumer protections,” said the executive council in an official statement. “It actively undercuts the public policies that helped bring about the rise of the middle class in the first place. ... The United States cannot afford another trade agreement that hollows out our industrial base and adds to our substantial trade deficit.”

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