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IATSE trying to get first contract for riggers at Rhino NW

Labor steps up the pressure as company ignores NLRB orders, refuses to bargain

The International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) Local 15 in Seattle is stepping up the pressure to get a first contract for some 70 riggers employed at Rhino Northwest.

Last year, riggers at the nonunion staging, rigging and event production company located in Fife, Washington, won a National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) election and the right to be represented by IATSE Local 15. Rhino NW appealed the election, claiming the “micro unit” of riggers was inappropriate. [The company also employs several hundred stagehands and technical staff.]

The NLRB allows unions to organize small portions of the total number of employees at a company if the employees in the unit are “readily identifiable” as a group and “share a community of interest.”

The NLRB — at both the regional and national levels — found that the smaller unit was appropriate for a union certification election.

Still, the company refuses to



Photo courtesy of IATSE Local 15

SOLIDARITY FOR THE RHINO RIGGERS: Nearly 100 people rallied outside Seattle’s Safeco Field May 20 in a show of support for riggers who are trying to get a first contract at Rhino NW. About 70 riggers joined IATSE Local 15 more than a year ago. The company has refused to recognize the union.

recognize the union, and has now turned to federal court in an attempt to get the election overturned.

Rhino has cut schedules of some union-supporting employees and fired others. IATSE filed an unfair labor practice complaint with the NLRB alleging unlawful retaliation against workers’ protected activity to join a union. A hearing is scheduled for July 26.

Meanwhile, IATSE has begun to reach out to the greater labor community, as well as area politicians.

On May 23, delegates to the

Northwest Oregon Labor Council passed a resolution in support of the riggers. The resolution is identical to ones passed by labor councils in King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties in Washington.

IATSE Local 15 President Sal Ponce said the union also has written letters to Seattle city councilors.

Riggers employed at Rhino NW do backstage work at Western Washington live events and concerts at Sunlight Supply Amphitheater (formerly Sleep Country) in Clark County’s Ridgefield, Washington, at the

Tacoma Dome, The Gorge in George, Washington, at xFinity Arena in Everett, at White River Amphitheater in Auburn, at the Washington Convention Center, and occasionally at the two Seattle sports stadiums — Safeco Field and CenturyLink Field.

Last month workers held a rally outside Safeco Field. Several members of Portland-based IATSE Local 28 participated. The union said it is planning another rally in July, this one at the amphitheater in Clark County. A date has not been set.

“The concert business is a multi-billion dollar industry, and incredibly profitable as promoters utilize publicly-funded facilities and employ nonunion labor,” said Ponce.

“The employees have been attempting to collectively bargain for more than a year. At this time they have little job security, no sick leave or health insurance, lack family-friendly scheduling, and work at hourly rates well below industry standards. They need and deserve a contract,” said Ponce.

Rhino Northwest, LLC, is located in Fife, Washington. It is affiliated with Arizona-headquartered Rhino Staging.

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