

...How much did New Seasons pay its union-busters?

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Byrd grew up loving New Seasons; it was where his family shopped. So he was thrilled to get a job at the Williams store in August 2016. Living rent-free in his parents' basement and working 15 to 25 hours a week, he could afford to attend Portland Community College. But the company lost its halo for him a year after he began. When he started, the company handbook promised a review and a raise after 12 months. On Aug. 5, 2017, his one-year anniversary, he presented himself to his manager, asking about the review, only to be told that the company had changed its policy, and now the review and raise would come after 18 months.

"That day I went around the store talking loudly and angrily,"

Byrd recalls. "And someone who was involved [with the union campaign] heard me complaining and told me I needed to start going to union meetings." [With support from the grocery union United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555, a group of New Seasons employees had been quietly gathering support.]

It was the first Byrd had heard of a union effort at New Seasons, but he already counted himself a supporter of unions. He had walked the picket line when his mother, a teacher at Reynolds School District, went on strike. And as a student at Grant High School, he'd been part of Portland Student Union, a support group that formed to support teachers as they prepared to strike.

Surely New Seasons, with its progressive reputation, would

respect its workers enough to let them determine on their own whether to form a union, he thought.

Then in late November, the anti-union consultants arrived at his store.

In an emailed statement attributed to co-presidents Kristi McFarland and Forrest Hoffmaster, New Seasons told the Labor Press that Cruz & Associates was hired "to provide staff with the unbiased information they need to make well-informed decisions."

But, of course, that's not what they did. Recordings made by workers at two of the meetings — shared with the Labor Press — show that Cruz and at least three other anti-union consultants spent the hour questioning union motives and warning of strikes, dues and less cordial workplace

relations should a union be voted in. [See "What New Seasons' union-busters said" below.]

The meetings were quite extensive. Lupe, in one of the recordings, says he personally trained then-CEO Wendy Collie and most of the company's department managers. Subsequent trainings were held for floor-level supervisors. Then meetings for frontline employees began. About three employee meetings a day for three days at each New Seasons store in the Portland metro area.

Presumably, inoculating employees against the union virus was an expensive proposition. The consultants were from California, so besides their hourly rate, New Seasons also presumably paid their travel and lodging expenses. [So much for the company's vaunted commitment to

local business.] With one or two consultants at a time meeting about 10 employees at a time, getting through 3,300 rank-and-file workers would have meant as many as 200 to 300 hour-long meetings, with New Seasons paying the consultants hourly rate — plus roughly \$50,000 in hourly wages for their own employees, who were paid to attend the meetings.

The exact amount of the consultant payments, it now seems, won't be disclosed until April 2019. Did New Seasons work out a deal to pay the consultants nothing for two months in order to delay disclosure? A spokesperson for New Seasons declined to answer that question. But the experience left Byrd wondering: "If you don't have anything to hide, why are you trying to bury this for a year?"

What New Seasons' union-busters said

New Seasons execs said repeatedly that the company brought in the labor relations consultants Cruz & Associates to "provide staff with the unbiased information they need to make well-informed decisions." But several workers recorded the sessions and shared the recordings with the Labor Press. In the recordings, some employees — taking seriously New Seasons' vaunted "speak-up" culture, made it clear they weren't buying the line that these meetings were just "informational." "Don't you specialize in union avoidance? I saw that on your web site," says an employee in one of the recordings. "My job is to help companies and employees as a whole," Cruz replies. Here's some of what Lupe Cruz and other consultants told workers in the hour-long meetings.

"New Seasons is not against unions, but ..."

When a UNION gets involved, all of a sudden the company has to deal with a whole heap of federal regulations. Managers have to watch what they say, putting a chill on what were formerly nice, casual, friendly relationships. "You might have worked with a manager for eight years, but now you guys can't talk the way you used to talk," Cruz told workers.

If there's a union vote, New Seasons will have to give the union the names, phone numbers and email addresses of all employees, whether they want that information shared or not. [Scary!!]

Members of this union organizing committee [New Seasons Workers United] can't claim to represent workers, because they haven't been elected. And the committee has very little support. Only 176 current employees were on the union petition asking the CEO to meet, and some of them later told managers they didn't know what they were signing.

The union is here because it wants your dues: At \$50 a month, that's \$1.8 million a year, \$6 million every three years "out of your pocket." And there's no guarantee of what those dues will buy. The union can't guarantee that they will increase your wages.

If a union gets in, you might have to go on strike! [Scary!!] And if you're a union member and there's a strike and you don't go on strike, the union can fine you.

When the union came into stores with fliers and balloons, it was awkward and made customers feel like they were in the middle of it.

Union campaigns can have a cleansing effect on a company, serving as a "wake-up call." [Implication: Your New Seasons managers didn't know some employees were unhappy. Now that the union reared its head, they'll surely make changes to improve things . . . so you don't need the union.]



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