



UNION ORGANIZING

Union campaign at Columbia Sportswear

Billionaire CEO Tim Boyle visits the shop floor to talk \$16-an-hour workers out of a union

By Don McIntosh

For Rory Gatto, the road to the Teamsters started with a splinter. Gatto works swing shift at the colossal Columbia Sportswear warehouse in industrial North Portland, one of about 400 workers who process Columbia's foreign-made apparel for shipping throughout the Western United States.

In the summer of 2015, just months into the job, he was handling a stack of pallets when a wood splinter pierced his shirt and punctured the skin on his abdomen. Gatto went to the first-

aid kit near his work station, and found it empty. Downstairs in another work area, the first-aid kit there was empty too. So, afraid of being gone too long from his station, he dabbed the wound with a wet paper towel and got back to work.

Within days, the puncture was red, swollen, and painful. Not yet enrolled in company insurance, he visited a free clinic in Vancouver, where a doctor diagnosed a staph infection, drained the wound, and prescribed oral antibiotics.

Returning to work, Gatto decided to take a look at first-aid kits around the warehouse.

"Most were either completely empty or had a few pieces of something here or there," he re-

members. He talked to his supervisor about it and was told to take it up with the safety committee. Attending safety committee meetings, he asked that first-aid kits be resupplied.

"They kept pooh-poohing it, and pushing it off, and saying, 'whose cost center is it?'"

When no one would take responsibility for it, Gatto offered to be the one to refill band-aids. Nothing happened. For a safety meeting attended by Jeanette Williams, then Columbia Sportswear operations manager, he developed and put forward a Powerpoint presentation proposing a schedule for checking and restocking the kits. Objections

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NATIONAL

House passes NAFTA re-write

On Dec. 19, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the first major change to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) since the three-nation trade agreement first took effect 25 years ago.

The new agreement, dubbed USMCA by President Trump, was also the first to be endorsed by the national AFL-CIO in decades, largely because it contains enforceable commitments by Mexico to guarantee workers right to

choose their unions, and contains measures likely to boost U.S. auto and steel manufacturing. The Machinists union still opposed the deal, saying it doesn't stop the continued outsourcing of jobs to Mexico.

The vote in the House was 385-41. In Oregon and Washington, only U.S. representatives Peter DeFazio and Pramila Jayapal voted against it.

The Republican-majority Senate is set to vote on the deal early this year.

Congress repeals Cadillac tax

Two features of Obamacare that were opposed by organized labor were eliminated in a bill President Donald Trump signed into law Dec. 20.

One was the Affordable Care Act's so-called "Cadillac tax"—a 40% excise tax on employer-sponsored insurance premiums that exceed \$10,200 for individual and \$27,500 for family coverage. That would have led to benefit cuts for union-negotiated plans in some industries and parts of the country. The tax was originally supposed to begin in 2018, but Congress repeatedly stepped in to delay it; it was most recently set to take effect in 2022.

The other was an annual fee on health insurers, which raised

the cost of many union-negotiated health insurance benefits.

Both fees—and a medical device tax which was also repealed—were meant to help pay to expand Medicaid and subsidize lower-income individuals who buy insurance on state-managed exchanges. With the taxes repealed, those costs will come out of the government's general revenues.

In the House, 218 Democrats voted for the bill to repeal the Obamacare taxes, 7 against, while 112 Republicans voted against and 79 for. All five Oregon representatives, plus Southwest Washington's Jamie Herrera Beutler (R) voted for it, as did all four Oregon and Washington senators.

Is Grand Central Baking getting ready to fire union supporters?

A wholesale bakery manager quit after being told to target union supporters for discipline

When higher-ups learned Nov. 22 that workers at Grand Central Baking's Northwest Portland wholesale bakery wanted a union, it took them completely by surprise. They didn't take it well. In anti-union meetings workers were directed to attend on the clock, CEO Claire Randall and other managers tried to talk them out of it. They failed: On Dec. 12, the workers voted 29-to-9 to join Bakers Local 114.

Four days later, Pete Uding—swing-shift production manager there—gave two weeks' notice of resignation. Uding, 31, had been promoted four times in the less than four years he'd worked for Grand Central, and spent the last two years as a bakery manager. As a manager, he wasn't part of the union drive. But Uding tells the *Labor Press* that immediately after a Dec. 6 anti-union meeting at which workers were invited to speak without fear of retaliation, he was called into a meeting with his boss and an executive two levels above him, Grand Central product director Laura Ohm.

Ohm allegedly fumed over what pro-union workers said, and discussed plans to write up specific individuals who were outspoken union supporters—to lay the ground for terminating them.

"It honestly made me sick to my stomach," Uding said.

Ohm wasn't just blowing off steam: At subsequent meetings Uding says he was again directed to find things to write those specific employees up for. The phrase "document to term" was used, as in, document in order to terminate. Uding says these weren't employees who'd had any kind of performance issues.

On Dec. 16, Uding met with CEO Randall and told her what he was being asked to do. When she denied that was happening, and didn't back him up in any way, he gave notice, which she asked him to put in writing then and there. Uding had no other job lined up, and his wife still works for the company.

"I do not feel comfortable working for them any more, doing the things that they're directing me to do," Uding said.

Reached by phone, National Labor Relations Board regional director Ron Hooks wasn't sure if ordering managers to retaliate

against union supporters is itself a violation of federal labor law, but for a manager to act on it—and retaliate against workers for union support—most certainly is.

The day after Uding gave notice, his manager told him in a voicemail not to come back to work; his final check would be issued Dec. 30. In the weeks since, he says more than a dozen of his employees have called or texted sympathy and thanks.

Grand Central did not return calls seeking comment by press time. Bargaining a first union contract has not yet begun.

—Don McIntosh