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...Columbia Sportswear ripe for a union

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were raised: Who would pay for it? What if employees steal band-aids? Neither Williams nor anyone else would take action.

After months of trying to get first-aid kits restocked, Gatto stopped trying. But he knew something was wrong. How could a company where a cloud-based warehouse management system tracks every article of clothing be unable to keep band-aids in stock for injured employees? Why would a company that thanked workers for record productivity every quarter be unwilling to attend to something so small?

The failed band-aid crusade opened Gatto's eyes, and he started talking with co-workers about what he was seeing.

What it's like to work there

None of them had any problem with the work itself. But beyond that, there were many complaints. With little or no climate control or insulation, the 182,860-square-foot metal box they work in is like a refrigerator in winter, and parts can be stiflingly hot in the summer. Frequent last-minute schedule changes wreak havoc on employees' personal lives. Workers



Unable to get Columbia Sportswear managers to keep first aid kits stocked, Rory Gatto started talking with co-workers, and a union campaign began.

also have no say over major changes: Managers recently eliminated the top of a pay scale, and changed the workweek from four 10-hour shifts to five eight-hour shifts. Workers are subject to computer-tracked performance goals, contributing to a high-pressure environment — for some pretty low wages. Wages that range from the legal minimum wage to just under \$20 an hour aren't enough in the Portland metro area, where median rent on a one-bedroom apartment is now \$1,234 a month.

Clearly, Columbia Sportswear knows wages are too low: Signs in the break room direct workers to a phone number where they

can access the Oregon Food Bank. And the company sponsors employee donation drives several times a year in which workers donate to help co-workers who can't afford school supplies and Christmas presents for their families.

By the summer of 2019, Gatto and some of his co-workers were ready to act. Gatto called Teamsters Local 162, one of several Portland-area Teamsters locals that represents warehouse workers, asking for help.

It wasn't the first time the union had heard from workers there, says Local 162 President Mark Davison. Pay, benefits, and working conditions at the Columbia Sportswear distribution

center are far below local union standards for the thousands of warehouse workers represented by the locals that make up Teamsters Joint Council 37. But a union isn't something outsiders can win for you; workers themselves must become active, form an organizing committee, and mount a campaign in the workplace. Columbia warehouse workers never seemed ready for that before, Davison said. This time, things were different.

A group of workers formed, began to meet, and created a community via Discord, a text chat channel originally developed for gamers. They got to know each other, and started spreading the word. Seeing that readiness, Local 162 asked the international union for support. Experienced union organizers arrived in Portland to support the campaign.

The union-busters arrive

On Oct. 1, Alonzo Plater, Columbia Sportswear vice president of global distribution, called an all-employee meeting for each shift.

"We've started to hear some rumors about conversations with the Teamsters Union," Plater told the assembled workers, in one of several recordings made by workers who attended.

"One of the things I love about our culture is that we're so open

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