



Holding the Line

Strike Update
Issue #15

The Wal-Martization of America

(Excerpts from The New York Times, November 15, 2003)

- The 70,000 grocery workers on strike in Southern California are the front line in a battle to prevent middle-class service jobs from turning into poverty-level ones. The supermarkets say they are forced to lower their labor costs to compete with Wal-Mart, a nonunion, low-wage employer aggressively moving into the grocery business. Everyone should be concerned about this fight. It is, at bottom, about the ability of retail workers to earn wages that keep their families out of poverty.
- Grocery stores in Southern California are bracing for the arrival, in February, of the first of 40 Wal-Mart grocery supercenters. Wal-Mart's prices are about 14 percent lower than other groceries' because the company is aggressive about squeezing costs, including labor costs. Its workers earn a third less than unionized grocery workers, and pay for much of their health insurance. Wal-Mart uses hardball tactics to ward off unions. Since 1995, the government has issued at least 60 complaints alleging illegal anti-union activities.
- This Wal-Martization of the work force, to which other low-cost, low-pay stores also contribute, threatens to push many Americans into poverty. The first step in countering it is to enforce the law. The government must act more vigorously, and more quickly, when Wal-Mart uses illegal tactics to block union organizing. And Wal-Mart must be made to pay if it exploits undocumented workers.
- Unions understand that the quickest way to win this war is to organize Wal-Mart workers. And Wal-Mart's competitors have to strive for Wal-Mart's efficiency without making workers bear the brunt. Consumers can also play a part. Wal-Mart likes to wrap itself in American values. It should be reminded that one of those is paying workers enough to give their families a decent life.



Major League Support

The leadership of the Major League Baseball Players Association is asking players and members to support the fight against corporate greed.

“We urge all players and agents living in Southern California to honor the UFCW picket lines and to support the over 70,000 workers involved in this strike, and the hundreds of thousands more who depend on them. These people are the backbone of the sport, its paying customers, and their picket lines deserve the respect of all players and their families. Please do not cross these picket lines and urge your spouses and children not to do so either.”

Worldwide Solidarity

Dear friends,

In solidarity and admiration, we have followed your fight for affordable healthcare and good wages. The unfair attack by your employers on wages and employment conditions, including their intention to deny your families affordable and good healthcare, is an attack on workers worldwide. Your fight is our fight. Retail workers in all parts of the world face the same kind of situation, but it is you who are in the frontline now.

We know that you will succeed in your fight for your rights, and then we, too, will be able to defend our rights and interests through our own trade unions. We want you to know that the great trade union family united in Union Network International UNI are with you on your picket lines, and we send you our sincere message of solidarity and support. We know that you will make it!

*—Members of
Union Network
International from
Australia, Canada,
Netherlands, Togo, and
Tunisia*

Fraternal Greetings and Solidarity:

The Executive and Members of Grenada Commercial and Industrial Workers Union wishes to extend sincere solidarity and unwavering support to all striking and locked out members of UFCW.

We are concerned that after one month the existing dispute for affordable health care and wages remains unresolved. The unfair attack by your employers against better wages and employment conditions, including their intention to deny workers and their families' affordable and good health care, is an unjust and inhumane attack on workers' rights.

CIWU condemns this show of disregard for workers rights and see this as a clear indication that Management is very insensitive towards the economic plight of the workers and their families.

Please be assured of our Union support and solidarity to all UFCW Members. Workers Unity is Workers Strength!

*Fraternally,
Barbara Frazer
General Secretary/Treasurer*