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STEWARDS UPDATE

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The Steeltech Story

Contract Negotiations in a Right to Work Environment

UFCW 951's experience negotiating a contract with Steeltech illustrates the difficulties of contract bargaining in a right to work environment.

In 2013, UFCW 951 organized workers at Steeltech, a Grand Rapids metal parts fabrication plant employing approximately 30 workers. The workers resisted a fierce anti-union campaign from their employer and voted in favor of union representation.

Unfortunately, but not unexpectedly, the employer's union busting campaign continued into contract negotiations. Under the law, if a contract is not reached one year after the union representation vote, the employer can demand another union representation election. Employers intent on keeping their workplace union-free will use the year to delay contract negotiations, make substandard contract proposals and hire new employees who they know will not support the union. This is a very successful tactic for employers as only one in seven groups who vote for union representation ever achieve a first contract.

UFCW 951 had an excellent record of negotiating first contracts following a successful union organizing drive -- until Steeltech. The difference -- Steeltech negotiations took place in 2013, after Michigan became a right

to work state.

"Right to work was a game changer," John Cakmakci, UFCW 951 president, said. "The environment we negotiate in today is completely different than before right to work. The union is at a much weaker bargaining position because of the law. We are now starting from scratch when we meet an employer at the bargaining table."

Steeltech negotiators took advantage of the bargaining advantage presented by right to work. The company refused to negotiate key provisions, such as just cause for termination, into the contract.

"Steeltech wanted to remain an employment-at-will company just like every other non-union employer in the state," Cakmakci said. "They also refused to negotiate over a grievance and arbitration procedure, and would not agree to deduct union dues from their workers' paychecks, meaning the union would have to collect dues each week from the employees."

UFCW 951 filed and won failure-to-negotiate charges against Steeltech, but they weren't enough to force the company to bargain over key issues.

"The company's refusal to agree to just cause, a grievance procedure and dues deduction were deal break-

ers," Cakmakci said. "We couldn't expect workers to ratify a contract without any protections from unjust treatment at the workplace, and without dues deduction there was no feasible way to collect dues to fund our representation of these workers."

A strike was the union's only other alternative, but not a realistic one.

"It was over a year since we organized the plant. One by one most of our bargaining committee and union supporters left the plant. Some were driven out by management. Others, losing hope that they would ever have union representation, left for better jobs. After anti-union replacements were hired, there was little support for the union, let alone a strike."

In the end, UFCW 951 secured a wage increase for the Steeltech workers and withdrew any rights to serve as their bargaining representative.

"Supporters of right to work achieved their goal at Steeltech; there is no union representing the workers," Cakmakci said. "It is going to take a great deal of hard work and strong support from current members to make sure the story we tell after their contract negotiations in a right to work environment has a much different ending than the Steeltech story."

Help Spread the Word



Casino/Shopping Bus Trip
Tuesday, October 20
\$25 per Person

Buses will pick up members and their guests in Birch Run, Lansing, Grand Rapids, Madison Heights, Northville, Jackson and Kalamazoo and take them to Four Winds Casino. Participants will receive \$25 in casino cash and may also spend part of the day at the Michigan City outlet mall.

Members may bring one guest with them on the trip.

The best way to purchase tickets is via Paypal at www.ufcw951.org.

UFCW 951 Sign Me Up!

I want to receive important news and updates from my union via email.

Please print

Name _____ Last 4 digits of SS # _____

Employer & Unit # _____ Employee ID # _____

Email _____

Date _____ Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

I want to receive UFCW 951 text message updates.
(UFCW 951 does not charge for text messages, but your cell phone carrier's message and data rates apply.) Cell Phone # _____

Turn in Sign Me Up! Cards

Remember to use the return envelopes to mail in 20 completed Sign Me Up! cards, or give them to your union representative. Stewards received these cards at the April Steward Conferences in the session "Stewards: The Driving Force Behind a Successful Union."

Stewards who were unable to attend a steward conference received 20 Sign Me Up! cards from their union representative.



You've Read the Update

Now take the quiz at:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/AugustStewardQuiz>

UFCW 951 has incorporated online quizzes to its steward training program. Be sure to take this month's quiz. It's short and will let your union representative know you've read the August Steward Update.

Steward Spotlight: Steve Bartig, Kroger #793

Steve Bartig, from Kroger #793 in Okemos, has only been a steward since early 2014, however, in that time he has proven himself as a strong and active steward with a passion for helping members at his store. Bartig was nominated for Steward Spotlight by his union representative, Russell LaForte.

is exceptional.”

Bartig has worked for Kroger for almost five years. He was inspired to become a steward because of the fairness and security that he believes unions bring to the workplace. When a steward position became available at his store he was happy to step up to the role.



“What keeps me motivated is the idea that employees know that they’re not going to be treated unfairly by management and that they can come to me if they think they are and I can explain to them the reason behind what’s going on, what their options are and how we can fix something that’s a problem. Just the idea that I’m not going to give up on these people keeps me going.”

– Steve Bartig, Kroger #793

“Steve is a great advocate for members. He looks at more than just scheduling and other common concerns, he’s known to bring safety and other issues up to management and the union. Steve is not afraid to take on new projects, or ask for my advice when helping a member” LaForte said. “He is also active politically with the union, participating in Get Out The Vote events during elections as well as being a citizen lobbyist. Over a quarter of the members at his store participate in the Active Ballot Club, which

“I’m very happy to be a steward and I’m honored that Russell nominated me for this. The best part of being a steward is making people appreciate that they have a union. I think that people don’t realize how helpful the union is until they need us. Then, when the union helps them they are really thankful. They’re going to keep coming to us.” Bartig said. “It makes me happy, when I help someone with a problem and they respect the union a lot more than they did before.”

Stewards Must Inform the Union After Filing a Grievance

After filing a grievance, stewards are required to complete the following two steps. **Failure to comply with this requirement is grounds for removal from the steward position.**

- 1. Immediately notify your union representative that the grievance was filed.**
- 2. Forward the grievance to the UFCW 951 office within seven days of filing by one of the following means:**
 - Fax: 616.447.1000
 - Email: grievance@ufcwlocal951.com
 - Call the Grievance Hotline at

- 1.800.999.0951 ext. 168 and provide:
1. Your name and unit number
 2. The grievant’s full name and last four digits of his/her social security number
 3. Nature of the grievance
 4. Date of the infraction
 5. Description of facts
 6. Date the Step 1 was filed
 7. The unit manager’s name

Union Forming Membership Focus Groups in Preparation for Meijer Bargaining

UFCW 951 is recruiting interested members to participate in focus groups to discuss potential contract language changes in the upcoming Meijer contract negotiations.

“We will have different committees for retail, transportation, and distribution centers to discuss contract language issues unique to each group,” John Cakmakci, UFCW 951 president, said. “We know there is outdated and other problematic language that needs to be changed during the upcoming contract negotiations. The focus groups will help us fine tune the replacement language we will propose to the company at the bargaining table.”

Topics for the focus groups include retail scheduling, warehouse work groups and dispatch in the transportation department.

“Focus group members need to be interested in identifying what is best for the group, not just themselves,” Cakmakci said. “We are looking for members who have a strong understanding of the current language and want to help develop new language that is a realistic alternative. Remember, the company has to agree to what we propose.”

Over the next several weeks, union representatives will be recommending members to serve on the focus groups. For more information, to express your interest in serving on a focus group, or to recommend a member to serve in this capacity, contact your union representative as soon as possible.

From the President

Do Not Take the Blame for Management Decisions

Every day I take telephone calls from members that start out something like this: “I can’t believe the union let the company do _____” (fill in the blank).

As a steward, I’m sure you hear similar comments from members who mistakenly believe the union has somehow given the company permission to mismanage a situation.

I am very clear with members that in no way is the union responsible for mismanagement by the company, and you as a steward should be as well.

There are three important concepts that you should explain to members. First of all, employers typically do not seek the union’s approval on new policies or procedures. In some cases, they may give us notification of a change as a courtesy, but in no way are they asking for our approval. If a member says a manager told him or her the union agreed to the change, tell the member you are not sure if that is true and you will get back with him or her on that issue after you contact your union representative. Never take the blame for mismanagement by the company. Instead, direct members’ anger where it

belongs, with the company.

At the same time, make sure the member understands that arbitrators have consistently ruled that employers have the right to manage their business as they see fit. Members and the union may disagree with a decision, but arbitrators have made it clear that employers have the right to make decisions regarding their operations, even bad ones.

The one exception is cases where a new policy, procedure or management decision violates the union contract. The UFCW 951 contract remains in effect regardless of a company decision. If the company’s actions violate the contract, we file a grievance.

A current example of what I am describing is the new workforce management scheduling system implemented by Meijer.

Some members are upset by the new work schedules they are assigned by this system. They call me outraged that the union agreed to this new system. I inform them that despite what they may have been told by their manager, the union never agreed to this system.

Armed with this new piece of in-

formation, they typically demand the union file a grievance insisting Meijer stop using this program. This is where I have to educate them about the company’s right to run their business as they see fit, as long as it doesn’t violate their contractual rights. Meijer has the right to determine the hours they need covered and how they write the work schedule. However, when it comes to assigning schedules, they must follow the UFCW 951 contract.

This leads us to a discussion on their actual schedule and any potential contract violations. We also discuss their ideas on how we can improve the scheduling language in the next contract negotiations.

In the end, even if they don’t have a grievance and their schedule remains unchanged, the member has a better understanding of the situation and realizes the union is not to blame for company decisions.



John Cakmakci
President

Meijer 2015 Wage Schedule Becomes Effective August 30 Triggering Increases for Members at Top Rate

Stewards should remind members at top rate that their contractually mandated annual wage increase will become effective August 30 and should appear on their September 10, 2015 paycheck. All other members will remain at their current wage rate and not have their hours reset until they reach the next higher wage rate in their classification.

“Mistakes do happen, so it’s always good for members to verify they are being paid properly after a scheduled raise takes effect,” John Cakmakci, UFCW 951 president, said.

If members do notice an error in their pay, direct them to their supervisor who should be able to correct the mistake. If they refuse to make the necessary change, stewards should file a grievance. Members have 30 days to file grievances over wage issues.



Six additional \$750 scholarships will be awarded in 2015.
Encourage members to apply today!