



Teamsters Local 117

# Teamster Talk



*Fighting for Workers' Rights Since 1936*

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## UNFI STRIKE ENDS WITH SURGE OF COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Community Stands with Workers in their Fight for Dignity and Respect



UNFI workers take a stand for fair treatment, dignity, and respect.

It was the perfect storm – a powerful convergence of voices from all across the country, expressing their outrage and calling for justice. Union members joined forces with small grocers; community co-op activists petitioned their organizations for support.

All stood together – over 10,000 strong – in solidarity with 160 brave men and women who had put their livelihoods on the line to fight their employer, United Natural Foods, Inc. (UNFI), for fair treatment, dignity, and respect.

The strike by warehouse workers and drivers at UNFI started on December 10, 2012, and it stretched over two months, spanning some of the worst weather the Pacific Northwest can muster. Members held the picket line in the driving rain. They huddled around burn barrels in sub-freezing temperatures. And when an icy fog descended, they endured a burn ban that extinguished their fires.

The strike dragged on over Christmas and into the New Year. Members were served eviction notices, and families were on the brink of homelessness.

Working people had taken a stand.

They were tired of having their rights trampled on. They were tired of the unfair labor practices – over 40 in all – that the company had committed during contract negotiations.

### OVER 40 ULPS DURING BARGAINING

For over nine months, the largest organic foods distributor in the country waged a ruthless campaign, intent on breaking the Union. They reassigned bargaining unit work from the workers' facility in Auburn to a non-union facility in Ridgefield, WA; they cut workers' hours; they erected fences around the warehouse; they hired security guards; they held a job fair at the facility; they hired on a replacement workforce; and they sent letters home to workers' families instructing them on how to resign from their Union.

"I've never seen a company like UNFI that treats their employees the way they treat us. They treat us wrong," said James Dial,

a warehouse worker.

Local 117's legal department filed an astounding 45 unfair labor practices charges with the NLRB against the company during negotiations.

The final straw occurred on December 13, when UNFI permanently replaced 72 warehouse workers – nearly half of the workforce at the Auburn facility.

The company had initially agreed to the Union's unconditional offer to return to work after a three-day strike, but then rescinded its commitment.

"We agreed to take down the picket lines and UNFI pledged to accept our offer to return to work. The next day they told us that 72 of us were out of a job," said Robert Jurey, a 13-year warehouse worker and Shop Steward.

### SOLIDARITY IS THE LANGUAGE THAT WE SPEAK

But instead of dividing the workers, the company's ploy had the opposite effect: Jurey and his co-workers rallied together. They vowed to continue the strike until all of the workers were brought back. No one would be left behind.

Their courage had a galvanizing effect. People across the country recognized the righteousness of their fight and the deep hypocrisy of a company peddling a social conscience while at the same time treat-

## A message from your Secretary-Treasurer



Brothers and Sisters:

Late last month the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) released its report on Union membership for 2012. Sadly, the percent of workers who were members of a Union fell to 11.3 from 11.8 percent. Shockingly, Union membership fell despite the fact that **union workers in 2012 earned \$200 per week more in median wages than non-union workers.**

Not surprisingly to me, Union membership was highest among workers aged 55 to 64 (14.9 percent belong to Unions) and lowest among workers aged 16 to 24 (only 4.2 percent belong to Unions). We really have done a poor job of educating our young people about the value of Unions.

As the War on Workers continues to rage, Union-represented workers have had to become ever more vigilant in asserting our legal rights. In 2012 there were 19 major strikes or lockouts (the BLS defines a major strike or lockout as one that involves more than 1,000 workers) that resulted in 148,000 workers withholding their labor. As a comparison, major strikes in 2011 involved 113,000 workers. Do these statistics show that more and more Union members are standing up for their rights? You bet they do.

To most of America, the BLS statistics are just a bunch of numbers. Teamsters Local 117 members understand that what's happening with Unions across our Country is more than just a math equation. We know that Union density matters. We know that more Union members translate into more leverage at the bargaining table. We know that the Union difference matters. We know that Union wages and benefits mean that we can take care of our families. We know that without a Union contract, employers will change our wages, hours and working conditions whenever they want.

An employer representative recently accused me of being "radicalized". I owned that characterization. I have been radicalized by opportunistic employers who are making money off the backs of their workers, but refuse to compensate those workers for their efforts. I have been radicalized by the inequities in our society. I have been radicalized by the incredible strength and determination of so many of our members who have taken on the fight at Coca Cola, DOC, Waste Management, SCS, Davis Wire, and UNFI.

Here's what employers need to know about Teamsters Local 117. We're not looking for a fight. But we will fight for workers' rights. And when we fight, we win.

In Solidarity,

Tracey A. Thompson  
Secretary-Treasurer

# FIGHTING FOR CHANGE IN OLYMPIA

Dozens of Teamsters Participate in Year's Second Local 117 Lobby Day



Teamsters at the Local 117 Lobby Day on January 31.

Over 30 members from all across our Union - public sector, private sector and the DOC - teamed up on January 31 to fight on behalf of working families on the second of four planned Local 117 lobby days this legislative session in Olympia.

Correctional workers joined forces with warehouse workers on strike at United Natural Foods, Inc. (UNFI); there were members from Safeway, King County, and Seafreeze.

### DIVERSITY = POWER

"Our power at Local 117 is in our diversity," said Sidney Clark, a Classification Counselor at the Larch Correctional Center near Vancouver, WA.

"When a legislator sees someone from Safeway lobbying on issues that concern me, they take note," he said.

Clark, a veteran lobbyist who was instrumental in helping to pass a bill that will provide more professional uniforms for our State's correctional workers, gave the group some advice in an orientation before members headed out to their legislative appointments.

"Tell your story, speak from the heart,

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## LOBBY DAY

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and don't be intimidated," he said. "These legislators work for you."

Members spoke with legislators on a wide range of issues, including the importance of preserving our collective bargaining rights, preserving our State's workers' compensation system, obtaining the right to paid sick leave, defending the rights of taxi drivers, and promoting a bill that would guarantee interest arbitration rights for Local 117 correctional employees.

"It's important that the legislators hear from labor so that we can get bills passed that support family-wage jobs and all of the issues that help create a healthy, viable life here in Washington State," said Azziem Underwood, a Local 117 Shop Steward at King County.

### IN THE FIGHT TOGETHER

"I came down to support everything about 117," said Mathew Komperda of Safeway.

Komperda, who said he has friends that work at the Department of Corrections, planned to talk with legislators about the interest arbitration bills in the House and the Senate.

Officer Shane Zey of the Monroe Correctional Complex had come for the same reason.

"We're working hard to get interest arbitration passed. It's the key to unlocking our future. If we can get it, it's a whole new ballgame of respect and dignity and being treated fairly," Zey said.

**Thank you to Local 117 Political Action Coordinator Lily Wilson-Codega and Lobbyist Teresita Torres for making the event possible. There will be three more Lobby Days during this year's legislative session: February 21, March 21, and April 18. If you are interested in participating, contact Lily at 206-794-6673. ●**

# DOC MEMBERS LEAD MARCH ON THE STATE CAPITOL

## State Correctional Employees Demand Interest Arbitration Legislation



DOC Teamsters - Day of Action 2013

**H**undreds of Teamster correctional employees, their families, community allies, and other Teamster members, rallied on the steps of the State Capitol in Olympia on January 10 to demand safer working conditions and interest arbitration legislation that will ensure that the State's 6,000 correctional employees be given the same rights as their counterparts at other public safety agencies.

### INTEREST ARBITRATION NOW!

Waving signs reading, "Interest Arbitration Now!" and chanting, "Teamster Power!", prison workers from 12 Washington State institutions, many of whom traveled on buses from cities as far away as Monroe, Walla Walla, Spokane, the Tri-Cities, and Clallam Bay to attend the event, marched around the State Capitol before assembling on the Capitol steps.

"We are here to tell our State government that we are tired of their inaction on safety issues," said Eric Smith, a Correctional Sergeant at the Washington Corrections Center in Shelton.

In addressing the crowd, correctional employees, State Legislators, and Teamsters leaders emphasized the dangerous nature of corrections' work and the essential role that correctional employees play in keeping our

communities safe.

"Correctional employees perform one of the most stressful, dangerous jobs in the United States," said Tracey A. Thompson, Secretary-Treasurer of Teamsters Local 117. "They deserve a safer working environment and the same rights as other public safety professionals."

Thompson called on the Washington State Legislature to pass legislation that she said would improve working conditions for correctional employees. "Interest arbitration would force the State to acknowledge the uniquely dangerous nature of corrections' work and to bargain fairly."

Over a dozen State Legislators attended the rally and many spoke at the event. "These legislators are leading the fight to ensure that we are granted the same rights as other public safety groups including the Washington State Patrol, firefighters, and county corrections," said Michelle Woodrow, Local 117 Director of Corrections & Law Enforcement.

Throughout the day, Local 117 members met with legislators in their offices to educate them on the challenges of corrections' work and to urge them to support interest arbitration legislation.

### SIGN THE ONLINE PETITION!

**Already over 1000 correctional employees and their supporters have signed an online petition calling on the State Legislature to pass the legislation. For more information, visit [www.DOCProtectsWA.org](http://www.DOCProtectsWA.org). ●**

# HONORING THE LEGACY OF DR. MLK, JR.

## Justice for sanitation workers!



Local 117 marches on MLK, Jr. Day 2013

Members of Local 117 and 174 in Joint Council 28's Black Teamsters United (BTU) caucus teamed up to organize the Union's participation in this year's annual Martin Luther King Jr. march and rally on January 21 in Seattle. In all, over 50 Teamsters participated in the event.

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) also played an active role in the march as a part of the Union's effort to pressure Republic Services/Allied Waste to stop discriminating against workers across the country in the solid waste industry.

In some cities, Republic workers are cheated out of a day's pay when they work overtime. In others, the company is trying to destroy workers' retirement security, and to force workers to give up their right to a trial under the Civil Rights Act if the company discriminates against them.

Locally, Teamsters lined the route of the march with signs calling for justice for the workers. Members also urged Bill Gates to denounce Republic's anti-worker practices. As the primary shareholder of Republic stock, Gates owns approximately \$2.4 billion worth of stock, or 25 percent of the total worth of the company. ●

## UNFI

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ing its workers with contempt.

There was a groundswell of support. Union members, co-op members, co-op owners, organic food activists, and concerned consumers denounced UNFI for its unfair treatment of its workers and Whole Foods for its failure to hold its supplier accountable.

### SIGN OUR PETITION!

Over 10,000 signed an online petition calling on the companies to stop putting profits over workers and to commit to an ethical food supply chain. Hundreds sent

emails to UNFI CEO Steven Spinner calling on UNFI to stop its illegal treatment of workers. Steve Vairma, the IBT's International Vice President and Director of the Teamsters Warehouse Division, was instrumental in helping organize leafletting actions at Whole Foods stores in New York, Los Angeles, Denver, Seattle and all across the Puget Sound region. An article exposing UNFI and Whole Foods, written by Ronnie Cummins of the Organic Consumers Association and David Murphy of Food Democracy Now!, was circulated on several prominent websites.

On Internet discussion boards, people voiced their support: "As a dedicated consumer of organic products, I will not shop at Whole Foods and can be counted on to tell everyone I can about their dismal

labor practices," commented one petition signer. "I will boycott UNFI until they sign a union contract!" exclaimed another.

Buoyed by community support, the workers held strong as public pressure began to mount on the company.

Finally, on February 7, nearly a year after negotiations began and six months after the workers' contract had expired, the union bargaining committee presented the group with a fully-recommended proposal that provided for the reinstatement of all workers, including

the 72 who had been permanently replaced, health and welfare protections, and meaningful wage increases.

By a vote of 122-11, the group ratified the 5-year agreement.

"Workers at UNFI stood together courageously to

fight for dignity and respect," said

Tracey A. Thompson, Secretary-Treasurer of Teamsters Local 117. "They showed determination, solidarity, and fortitude. In the end, their spirit could not be broken."

### THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

"Local 117 is deeply grateful to all of the individuals, unions, co-ops, small grocers, and other community organizations that took actions in solidarity with the striking workers and to those who donated to the hardship fund set up to provide workers with financial relief. Your generosity has made a tremendous difference in the lives of the 160 workers and their families who have been impacted by the strike," she said. ●



### LOCAL 117 EVENTS - MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

March 15, 2013 - DOC Shop Stewards' Meeting

March 16, 2013 - Local 117 Shop Steward Seminar

March 21, 2013 - Local 117 Lobby Day

March 21, 2013 - General Membership Meeting

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