



WAL-MART: SAVE MONEY, BUST UNIONS

A recent story in the Montreal Gazette reported that Wal-Mart was verging on closing a garage that was trying to unionize in Canada. Wal-Mart has pulled this same move twice before with the meat-cutters department at a Texas store and with another Canadian store in Jonquière. However, Wal-Mart is currently signing collective bargaining agreements with unions in China for its retail stores. So why are unions acceptable in China but not in the U.S. or Canada?

WAL-MART'S ANTI-UNION REPUTATION

Human Rights Watch Releases Report On Wal-Mart And Unionbusting. In 2007, the respected human rights watchdog group, Human Rights Watch, released a report which lambasted Wal-Mart's unionbusting policies and practices in the United States. According to the report, "while many American companies use weak U.S. laws to stop workers from organizing, the retail giant stands out for the sheer magnitude and aggressiveness of its anti-union apparatus." [Human Rights Watch "Discounting Rights, May 2007]

Wall Street Journal Reports Wal-Mart Warns Of Democratic Win. More recently, it was revealed that Wal-Mart has been summoning up its hourly supervisors to warn them about the unionization that might happen if Democrats won the November election. One supervisor said, "I am not a stupid person. They were telling me how to vote." Workers say, they used intimidation by stating all the downside effects of unionization and warning them if the Employee Free Choice Act passed, it would speed up the union process. [Wall Street Journal, 8/1/08]

SHUTTING DOWN SHOP IN TEXAS

Butchers Cut Out Of Wal-Mart Stores. In February 2000, ten employees of the Wal-Mart meat department in a Jacksonville, Texas store elected United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) as their union. Wal-Mart immediately scrapped their entire network of in-store butcher departments. The company refused to recognize and negotiate with the meat cutters union, and traded skilled employees for the more convenient, non-unionized, pre-cut and pre-packaged meats. [Occupational Health & Safety, 3/16/08]

Expired Meat. After taking the case to the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, UFCW was faced with a test they simply could not pass. The legally appropriate 'community-of-interest test' allowed a unanimous three-judge appellate panel to uphold Wal-Mart's right to eliminate butcher departments since they had no particularly special skills; citing the incident as analogous to a typical closing, effectively cutting butchers out of the picture for good. [Occupational Health & Safety, 3/16/08]

THE CANADIAN CRACKDOWN

Nine Months Later In Canada. After the birth of a certified UFCW Local 503 at a Wal-Mart store in Jonquière, Quebec, Wal-Mart employees were out of a job. In August 2004, the union gained certification and attempted to bargain with Wal-Mart but was unable to reach a settlement. On February 1, 2005, the same day that the Minister of Labor granted the union's request for contract arbitration, Wal-Mart announced that it would close the Jonquière store. The store was finally closed on April 29, 2005. [Human Rights Watch "Discounting Rights, May 2007]

Wal-Mart Forced To Change Its Anti-Union Ways. Three years later, another Canadian shop was at risk for trying to unionize. UFCW officials said that due to union efforts at a Wal-Mart garage in Gatineau, the company is considering shutting it down. The garage has been unionized since 2005, and the workers recently turned in

their first collective bargaining agreement. "The contract will be a first in North America and is expected to have an impact on Wal-Mart unionization efforts across Canada," said the president of the local union. [The Gazette, 8/6/08] As of August 2008, a Quebec arbitrator decided to impose a collective bargaining agreement on Wal-Mart, which is the first of its kind in the history of the company's history. A UFCW Canada representative said that the deal would give workers raises of 35 to 50 percent and more vacation. [CBC Canada 8/15/08]

Local UFCW Stands By Wal-Mart Workers As Union Effort Paves Way. The president of Local 486 UFCW Canada stated that if Wal-Mart closes the garage, they will find workers other job opportunities. On average, the workers at the Gatineau Wal-Mart garage earn about \$9.25 an hour, and the collective agreement heavily deals with wages and benefits. [The Gazette, 8/6/08]

A DIFFERENT TUNE IN CHINA

Catering To China. In late July, Chinese media outlets announced that Wal-Mart planned to sign collective bargaining contracts with all of its employees in China. This was right after the company signed its first agreement in Shenyang which resulted in an 8% pay increase for all of the workers. [China Labor Bulletin, 8/4/08]

ACFTU- Yes; UFCW- No. In China, Wal-Mart operates more than 100 stores and employs 48,589 people. The company also sources millions of dollars worth of goods from the country, and hence is keen to play by their rules. According to Dave Orlins, president of the National Committee of U.S. China Relations, it is important to negotiate with ACFTU for any foreign company to prosper. "To expand in China, one needs government support," he says. "This is what you should be doing in China." [Forbes, 7/25/08]

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Wal-Mart Watch International: <http://walmartwatch.com/international>

Human Rights Watch Report: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhRKepklrPE&feature=related>