



Taking A Stand

Workers Fight Sorrento's Health Care Policy

Workers at the Sorrento-Lactalis plant in Buffalo, New York have a new contract thanks to their efforts to educate the community about their struggles with the company.

A major issue for the members of Buffalo's Local 264 was health care. The members wanted a Teamsters Plan, which was well known throughout the dairy industry. Sorrento-Lactalis management continued to press workers to accept the company plan,



which contained health care options not on par with other dairy employers throughout western New York.

Fed up with poor contract offers and no respect from management, the workers devised a strategy to make their voice heard by a larger audience.

Members attended popular community events, handing out information on the company health care policies and lack of concern for workers' needs. Their noticeable presence in the community and slogan "Sorrento's Gone Bad" caught the attention of the local media.

Faced with a determined workforce, unflattering press coverage and growing negative comments in the community, the company finally produced the contract offer members had been seeking. The workers voted by a 6-to-1 margin to accept the proposal.

"We were able to get what we asked for," said Ed McDonald, a business agent at Local 264. "A four-year

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Hollow Promises

Darigold Resists Calls For Lockout Settlement

Despite promises to seek resolution of a six-month lockout, Darigold/West Farm Foods officials still refuse to negotiate in good faith with Local 66 members from its Seattle and Issaquah, Washington plants.

"Corporate management stood in front of community and church leaders and assured them they would actively pursue a resolution to this lockout," said Garnet Zimmerman, International Vice President and lead

negotiator for nearly 200 Darigold Teamsters locked out of their jobs since August 31, 2003.

"But the next day that promise was forgotten. Their latest actions show they are still not recognizing the workers concerns. They continue to call for wage and pension freezes and major health care reductions."

The community has shown support for the workers by honoring the boycott and donating to relief funds



for the families of the locked out workers.

"I need to know my job is secure and that health care won't eat up my paycheck," said Rob LaMarche, a locked out worker. "People in the community understand."

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A Message from Dairy Conference Director Fred Gegare

New Members Hold the Key to Our Future



The success of the union rests in the strength members project as a united front. There is strength in numbers—a strength that

gives us sufficient bargaining resources to protect our contracts and gain new ones.

Companies are attempting to reduce benefits and outsource jobs with little regard for the loyalty and hard work they have received from its workers through the years. New members give us additional resources and increased manpower to win the tough fights and provide security for more families. The Teamsters is committed to helping locals set organizing goals and develop strategies for the future.

As a united force, we have a chance to create working environments that are healthy, fair and provide workers with a voice in decision-making. We can improve the lives of working families in the dairy industry by demanding they get the respect and dignity they deserve. We can do it by working together.

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contract with a solid, non-changeable healthcare plan, as well as some improvements on holiday and personal leave compensation. Those were the main sticking points. The rest we can definitely live with.”

The difficulties began during the summer when workers became frustrated with the company’s entrenched position on contract issues. Matters came to a head in July as members rejected an offer from the company by an 8-to-1 margin and voted to authorize a strike.

“They were treating us with blatant disrespect. We were good enough to help make the company the world’s leading producer of ricotta cheese,” said Terry Hughes, a 15-year Sorrento worker. “But we were not good enough to have the medical insurance our families needed to survive.”

Spreading the Word

The members marshaled their energies and began to inform the public about the situation. Armed with leaflets, and dressed in t-shirts bearing the phrase “Sorrento’s Gone Bad” they descended on events such as Buffalo’s Sorrento Cheese Italian Heritage Festival and Buffalo Bisons games. Members were thrilled when their activities began appearing on local news broadcasts.

The focus of the message was that the attitude and actions by Sorrento would encourage other companies to follow suit, resulting in the downfall of healthcare standards in the New York dairy industry.

Stressing that this situation went beyond one particular contract dispute, they warned the community that underlying issues regarding respect and fairness would eventually affect all



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—Tom Dziedzic
President, Local 264

working families in the dairy industry.

“It was unconscionable for Sorrento to treat workers that way, some of whom work 70 hours a week to make the company a success,” said Tom Dziedzic, President of Local 264. “The company was basically telling Buffalo

families that they were not worth it.”

At the plant, members strengthened the campaign by forming an internal communications network to keep everyone updated on the situation.

“The company has its own machine to spread misinformation to workers,” said Mike Cannon, a shop steward. “Now we have our own Teamsters machine to make sure every member knows the issues, latest information and current strategies to help us stay strong.”

Persistence Pays Off

“The local worked hard to ensure the primary issues were clearly understood. Healthcare and other related benefits are as important to the quality of life as money,” said McDonald. “We wanted the members to stay focused on our main objectives and not get sidetracked by other issues.”

McDonald credits the membership’s knowledge and unified front with making the successful outcome possible.

“Everyone was willing to put personal goals for the contract aside and work together to get the things we all needed,” he said.



Three's A Charm

Agreements Reached With McArthur Dairy, Keebler Plants

Members of Local 769 in South Florida are feeling pretty good these days. Three new contracts were ratified, representing nearly 100 dairy and food processing workers in the region. The contracts are the first for workers at McArthur Dairy—the largest dairy company in Florida—and the Keebler Company.

Local President Mike Scott noted that the local is currently working on several more contracts with area companies.

“All of these contracts will improve the lives of workers and their families,” Scott said. “A strong contract raises standards for everyone in the community.”

Transport drivers, route salespeople and dockworkers for McArthur Dairy sites in Miami and West Palm Beach ratified their contracts by an overwhelming majority after more than six months of bargaining. The contracts provide wage increases retroactive to June 1, 2003, new grievance procedures and seniority language.

“The most important result of the bargaining process

was the unity we built as a team,” said Daisy Gonzalez, a business agent for Local 769. “Solid lines of communication allowed us to establish a united front and win a strong contract.”

Local 769 also secured a three-year contract for warehouse workers and drivers at the Keebler plant in Weston, Florida. The unanimously ratified agreement will provide wage increases each year, full union health care options and clear grievance procedures.

“All of these negotiations went very well. We have established a good relationship with the company,” said Gonzalez. “In the long run, this will prove to be the real asset for the workers.”



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Expressing Concern

After a series of failed negotiations, civic groups such as the King County Council and the Church Council of Greater Seattle spoke up, urging Darigold to end the lockout. Both groups have expressed concern

for the workers' families and the impact on the community.

Reverend Sanford Brown, Director of the Church Council, feels that Darigold's refusal to negotiate in good faith leaves the community with no option but to step up the boycott.

“Darigold is a brand we have all known and loved for years, but they are not acting fairly here,” Brown said. “The company is risking its most precious resource—its good name.”

Fred Gegare, Dairy Conference Director and International Vice President, has called for an emergency meeting with dairy council members and west coast locals representing Darigold workers to discuss increasing support for Local 66 members.

The 200 workers were locked out one month after the expiration of their contract on July 31. Immediately following the end of the contract the company eliminated 14 warehouse positions and outsourced another 60 driver positions. When the union raised serious concerns about these actions, Darigold management responded with the lockout.

A Very Special Valentine

Labor Council Holds Fund Raiser For Darigold Workers

“A smashing success” is the verdict on the fundraiser to benefit locked out Darigold workers from Local 66 in Seattle. The Pierce County Washington Labor Council, AFL-CIO sponsored the event, which took place on February 14.

A donation of five dollars bought a crab feed and spaghetti dinner at the Seafarer's Sports Bar and Grill in Tacoma. The restaurant donated all of the food in addition to hosting the event. All proceeds from the dinner will go to the Darigold families.

“The lines were out the door,” said Garnet Zimmerman, International Vice President. “The generosity of this community is amazing. It has touched us all.”

One notable attendee was Bill Baarsma, the Mayor of Tacoma. He enjoyed the dinner and he also wrote a check for \$50 to the fund.

Council members estimate the donations may reach \$10,000.



“A collective, strong voice is the best weapon to battle Big Business interests in the White House and Congress.”

We'll Continue to Fight

Our union continues to play a leading role in the fight for universal health insurance and to protect worker pensions. Over the past several months there have been significant assaults on workers' rights—

whether it be the presidential platform of the Republican National Committee or the proposals in Congress to restrict overtime pay.

Although the White House may want to distract us with other issues, we must keep the focus on programs and promises critical to working families.

The Teamsters has always attracted politically active members that are not afraid to voice their opinions, write letters or volunteer for campaigns. I urge you to join DRIVE, our political action fund. By doing so, you will increase our political clout and ensure the voice of working families is heard. To access information about DRIVE, please go to our website at www.teamster.org.

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Remember, UNITED WE WIN!

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