Don't Let Lipton Turn Your Head Around

by Concerned Lipton Employees

In October, something called the “Lipton Employee Survey Team” came out from back east to “hear our gripes” about conditions at the Santa Cruz plant. We were asked to speak freely and assured that our opinions would be taken seriously. Many of us took the opportunity to have a real conversation with top management in great earnest. We talked to the survey team quite honestly—about our inadequate wages and benefits; bad conditions; our feelings about supervision. We laid it on the line.

In November the survey team returned and held another round of meetings to inform us of the company’s decisions. Some of the changes were small things, like better restroom facilities, tinted glass, a microwave oven, better service in the canteen, and new uniforms. We were also encouraged to attend quarterly plant-wide grievance meetings. Although the results of this system remain to be seen, most of us would have preferred a real grievance procedure, which would allow us to take care of whatever problems arose right on the spot, in an orderly way.

Our requests for a wage increase, or for a cost of living adjustment were ignored. Instead, the only improvement that was granted was that shift differentials would be raised. This was to satisfy the state. But we all know it doesn’t go very far.

SHIFT ASSIGNMENT FIASCIO

The major “improvement” was that the company allowed us to vote on whether we preferred rotating or straight shifts. We voted overwhelmingly for straight shifts, on the understanding that shift assignments would be given out fairly, on the basis of plant-wide seniority.

We feel we were misled. The straight shifts were set up on a basis of department seniority. Many people who had worked in the plant for 6-7 years and had recently changed departments, couldn’t get the shifts they wanted. The result has been great hardship and disillusionment.

Many of us feel as if we were “had.” We cooperated with the company’s procedures. We spoke openly about our feelings, and were picked off with a few minor improvements. We feel that the company acted in bad faith on the issue of shift assignments. Collective bargaining doesn’t work. The only way we can have any real control over the conditions under which we work is if we can get together in a union and negotiate a legally-binding contract.

The ILWU is a union of working people. It was established to offer workers an opportunity to gain some control over their work and their employers. The ILWU doesn’t guarantee you a bigger paycheck or lifetime job security. It won’t make your boss into a nice guy overnight.

But membership in a democratic union like the ILWU gives you a fighting chance. It gives you a chance to win the salary increases you and your family need. It gives you a chance to win improved medical and pension coverage. It gives you security while you are on the job, and an effective voice in dealing with your employer.

After an election is held, and if a majority of Lipton employees vote for ILWU representation, a negotiating committee elected by the employees will sit down with management and attempt to negotiate a reasonable contract.

There’s nothing that says that Lipton has to offer you another dime. But our experience shows that negotiations pay off—the fact is that workers who belong to the ILWU earn more money, have better benefits and more security than non-union workers. In many industries, ILWU contracts set the pace.

None of these improvements are yours just because you join up, or vote in the union. But getting together, getting organized, is a necessary first step. Otherwise, you must simply depend on what your employer wants to give you.

WHO IS THE ILWU?

While the ILWU is best known for its representation of West Coast longshoremen, our interest in bettering the conditions of workers doesn’t stop at the docks. Found within our diverse membership are tourist industry and agricultural workers, warehouse and manufacturing workers, chemical workers, office and credit union workers, x-ray technicians and many others. Many of our members in the San Francisco Bay Area work for companies like MJF, Best Foods, Folgers and Golden Grain, on jobs very similar to work performed at Lipton.

The ILWU is totally run by its members, from the shop floor or office up to international headquarters in San Francisco. All contracts must be ratified by the members they cover. All officers are elected by secret ballot. All policy decisions, constitutional amendments and nominations to International office are made by elected delegates to the International Convention which meets every two years, and then voted upon by the entire membership.

Membership in the ILWU offers working people an opportunity to gain some control over some very important matters. That’s why we think that joining the ILWU is among the best decisions you’ll ever make.

What’s behind the sudden appearance of the Lipton Survey Team?

Why the new interest in our ‘gripes’?

For one possible answer, see page 2.

Lipton’s Wages, Benefits Have Fallen Behind

SANTA CRUZ — When Lipton Tea first opened up shop here in 1917 many area residents went to work gladly for between $5 and $5.81 per hour. The money wasn’t as great, but the idea of steady work for a national company with a solid reputation looked pretty good.

But in the seven years which have passed by, something’s gone wrong. Prices have skyrocketed. Taxes have run amuck. Medical costs are completely out of line. But Lipton wages have improved only marginally.

Since 1971 gas prices in this area have gone up 89.5%; rental costs have gone up 112%; the purchase price of homes has gone up between 166% and 290%; property taxes have gone up between 66% and 257%, and the cost of food has shot up by 89%.

What’s happened to Lipton’s wages? With the exception of a very small number of skilled workers, most of us are making between $5 and $5.81 per hour. That’s an increase of about 40% to 50% in seven years. In normal times, that would be sufficient. But these aren’t normal times.

Of course Santa Cruz isn’t the only place that has experienced such drastic inflation, and Lipton workers aren’t the only group that has fallen behind. It’s happening all over. But the fact is that union members, people who stick together and negotiate their own contracts, do better.

In San Francisco Bay Area for example, where the cost of living is not a whole lot higher than it is in Santa Cruz — ILWU members perform much the same work for companies like Alliance and Best Foods as you do for Lipton. For workers who are classified as “freight handlers,” the base rate is $7.40 per hour, with adjustments for those in higher classifications. This goes up to $8.10 on June 1, 1978.

Add to that, of course a good program of fringe benefits — pensions, medical, hospital, dental, prescription drug, vision care — plus the knowledge that our members have that their union will stand behind them if they’re being pushed around and you’ll get the full picture of what you can do to help yourself.

The first step in winning these benefits and conditions is to sign the card below, and mail it to the ILWU. Once we have a solid majority, we can file for an election, giving Lipton employees the chance to decide by secret ballot if they want the ILWU to represent them.

I designate the International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union as my bargaining agent with the company on wages, hours and working conditions.

Name (print)__________________________

Address _____________________________

Phone ________________________________

Employed by __________________________

City _________________________________

Date _________________________________

Dept. _________________________________

Shift _________________________________

(Signature) ___________________________

Mail to George Martin, Vice-President, ILWU, 1188 Franklin Street, San Francisco, CA 94109.
Today's Union Busters Wear Three-Piece Suits

By Phyllis Payne

Courtest Mail Handlers Division

Labor's International Union

Since the passage of the Wagner Act and the establishment of a legal framework within which workers may seek union representation, the labor relations consultant has stepped to the forefront as a potent weapon in the anti-union armory. Almost gone are the days of the Pinker-ton, the blacklist and the yellow-dog contract. In their place stands a man in a three-piece suit, sporting a briefcase and perhaps a Ph.D. in industrial psychology or a law degree. He is the labor relations consultant.

The labor consultants come in all sizes and shapes. But for those whose clientele is comprised of the anti-union employer, a city each month.

"MODERN PSYCHOLOGY"

An employer may also contract for AMR's "Face to Face, How to Make Unions Unnecessary," For $650, a company might select the industrial psychologist, Dr. Charles L. Hughes, and a labor attorney to present the employer AMR proudly advertises that Hughes is "one of the best known applied behavioral scientists working with industry today. He has pioneered in the area of preventive employee relations with one of the largest non-union employers in the US. He knows the anatomy of the unionization process inside-out ... from years of real-life experience in helping companies develop policies which make them virtually immune to unions."

One of AMR's major competitors is Executive Enterprises, Inc. Also of New York, Executive Enterprises, Inc. is the one in the country presenting seminars which teach the anti-union strategies to the masses. Other "gimmicks" for gaining information about employees are available to the consultant. He or she can "teach" management the values of an anti-union campaign. Other consultants believe the name of the company is manipulation of the National Labor Relations Act and whatever may be the tried-and-true union busting tactics.

"EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS"

This philosophy has both a long-term and a short-term phase. First is the creation of an effective communications system which will enable management to detect the earliest warning signs of union activity. The groundwork for communication of information from employers to management must be carefully laid and the key to its success will be the development of effective techniques which make them virtually immune to unions."

Once a union files a representation petition, the consultant's job shifts into an intensive, short-term phase. He must help the employer through the complexities of pre-election procedures so as to maximize delay and in "election day" strategies which will come right to the line of conduct which could set aside the election but never go over that line.

Ex-Lipton Workers Doing OK

S AN FRANCISCO — Two San Francisco women now employed at Best Foods recalled recently that Lipton was a pretty good employer back in the 50's when it was under contract to the West Coast Store, Local 6.

"We had a strong solid unit here, and we had good relations with the employer," said Josie Nelson. "We never had any problems we couldn't settle with the supervisors, right on the job. We got along just fine."

Ammie Thornton and Josie Nelson worked for Lipton in San Francisco.

The two women were both left behind when the union went out of a search of cheaper labor. But they made out OK. They went back to the Local 6 Hiring Hall and got new jobs with the same union benefits and working conditions. Neither of them is making $7.40 an hour at Best Foods, and Mrs. Nelson is looking forward to retiring this year on a solid ILWU pension which will allow her to enjoy her family in dignity.

Obstructionist tactics are based on the premise that support for the union can be "chilled" the longer the employer postpones an election. The key is the possibility for delay under the National Labor Relations Act. This rule of thumb was stated by one consultant as "One delay is regarded as an employer weapon; the longer the period between initiation of an organization attempt and an election, the more discouraged supporters become."

"DELAY AS A WEAPON"

Employers are instructed to refuse to stipulate as to their impact on interstate commerce, the judicial interpretation of the NLRA a contested issue at the representation hearing. Likewise, a refusal to stipulate that the union is a "labor organization" will add another issue to the hearing, requiring added time before resolution of the case.

In addition, the employer is told never to put the union on the appropriate bargaining unit. The determination of the unit is a time-consuming process, and the employer may use the process to create units where union support is the weakest.

It is no wonder that one consultant finds his AMR seminar presentation with: "The name of the game is to prevent the election and chill the union off."

FACE TO FACE

Most consultants advise employers that the most effective method of campaigning is face-to-face. Through exploitation of the situation, the consultant is able to "teach" the workers, electioneering is geared to individual, small group, personal and face-to-face presentation speeches. Again, the consultant guides the employer through the complexities of pre-election procedures so as to maximize delay and in "election day" strategies which will come right to the line of conduct which could set aside the election but never go over that line.

BAD FAITH BARGAINING

Once an election is held, the consultant is equally skilled in teaching employers the pitfalls to be avoided in post-election negotiations and challenges. After all this, the union prevail and become the certified representative of the employees, the delays are not over because of ineffective NLRA remedies for the "bad faith" bargainer. The goal of the consultant at this stage is to "clear out the negative issues to the point that the decertification petition will be filed."

For the employer, labor-contracting can be a profitable one. The tactics used range from "chilling" to "secrecy" to "hiring" to "non-committee," and the firing of union supporters. Many are new as the use of the "attitudinal surveys to ferret out union adherents. But all have the same purpose: to destroy human hopes and nullify human rights."