



Tennessee Commercial Warehouse Layoffs Eliminate Union Supporters

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Anti-union Company Targets Pro-Union Workers in Effort to Quash Organizing Effort

KINGSPORT, Tenn., Jan. 7 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- In a vicious attack on human and worker rights, 33 employees were permanently laid off by Tennessee Commercial Warehouse (TCW) in retaliation to the workers exercising their legal right to join a union. The overwhelming majority of the workers had signed authorization cards with Teamsters Local 549 in Blountville, Tennessee to retain the union as their bargaining representative.

Drivers from TCW approached Local 549 in October 2007 looking for help in addressing issues they encountered in the workplace. The company was constantly making payroll errors and altering the wage structure with little or no notice to the workers. Additionally, TCW only offered expensive, insufficient health insurance that continued to rise in cost.

"TCW staged an aggressive anti-union campaign against these workers, but the drivers stood strong," said Scott Armstrong, President of Teamsters Local 549. "Nearly 80 percent of the drivers had signed authorization cards, so the company permanently laid off the entire unit rather than bargain for fair pay and benefits."

Armstrong filed for recognition for the unit on December 19, 2007 with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). The board scheduled a recognition hearing for January 4, 2008, but cancelled the hearing due to TCW's layoffs. The company claimed the layoffs were due to a lack in work; however TCW's actions were inconsistent with its position. Armstrong has filed unfair labor practice charges against TCW with the NLRB.

"Before we got laid off, the company had us working six days a week and was giving us job applications to pass along to other commercial drivers we knew because they couldn't keep up with the volume," said Tony Davenport, a former driver who had worked at TCW for three and a half years. "Now they have hired independent contractors and shifted work to another trucking company to make up for the layoffs."

TCW handles warehouse and distribution services for a variety of companies. The 33 former drivers ran loads from the Kingsport, Tennessee location to Columbia, South Carolina and back under a contract with Eastman Chemical Company.

"I grew up in a union household and I know what it means to have a union in your corner," said Jeff Lane, a former TCW driver. "I wanted to try to make things better at this company by bringing in the Teamsters."

Despite being subjected to captive audience meetings and intimidation by TCW management, the drivers remained determined to do their jobs to the best of their abilities. Despite only receiving pay for a 15 minute "pre-trip" period before taking the trucks on the road, the drivers would inspect each truck to make sure it was safe and rectify any issues that they could.

"We had a great bunch of drivers who were very careful about maintaining their trucks to make sure they were safe," Davenport said. "We were looking out for the company, but they weren't looking out for us."

"TCW's actions are sickening," said General President Jim Hoffa. "This is yet another example of how the deck is stacked against workers seeking union representation in this country. The laws are heavily weighted in the employers' favor, giving anti-union companies the ability to coerce, intimidate, and in extreme cases like this, eliminate anyone who wants to form a union. We must pass legislation like the Employee Free Choice Act to put the power to organize where it belongs - in the hands of the worker."

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters represents more than 1.4 million hard-working men and women in the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico.

SOURCE International Brotherhood of Teamsters
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