

News from the International Longshore & Warehouse Union



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500 workers win 5-year campaign to form union and improve conditions at giant Rite Aid drugstore distribution center

LANCASTER, CA – Rite Aid workers at the company’s massive Southwest Distribution Center in Lancaster declared victory on Sunday, May 1 in their five-year effort to form a union and improve working conditions. Workers signed a 3-year tentative agreement with management – subject to a May 12 ratification vote – that will improve conditions at the million-square-foot facility in California’s high desert by guaranteeing:

- Health insurance rates that are fair for both individual workers and their families,
- Job security provisions to prevent work from being sub-contracted,
- A worker voice in production standards and ability to challenge unfair standards,
- Protection against intense summer heat and winter cold, using innovative indoor-temperature standards,
- A fair and impartial process for resolving disputes,
- Wage increases in each of the next 3 years.

“We’re excited about winning this victory, even if it took longer than it should have,” said Carlos “Chico” Rubio, a 10-year warehouse worker who helped negotiate the union contract with eight of his co-workers. Employees decided to form their union in March of 2006 after contacting the ILWU. Within months, Local 26 President Luisa Gratz was helping workers address problems with indoor heat and production standards.

Unfortunately, Rite Aid began aggressively interfering with the workers’ freedom to organize:

- Rite Aid management retained an expensive team of notorious union-busting consultants,
- Rite Aid threatened and fired workers for supporting the union,
- Illegal layoffs were imposed without consulting workers and their new union,
- The company engaged in “surface bargaining” that delayed meaningful negotiations for a year.

Responding to these challenges, workers stayed united in Lancaster and helped lead a sophisticated campaign:

- Opening a direct line of communication with company shareholders and board members,
- Actively participating in the company’s annual shareholder meetings in New York City and Harrisburg, PA,
- Forming a nationwide network of Rite Aid workers and unions that including UFCW, SEIU, and Teamsters, who shared information and coordinated actions,
- Building a powerful national coalition with *United Students Against Sweatshops* and *Jobs with Justice*,
- Launching a “pinpoint” boycott campaign at two Rite Aid stores in San Pedro, CA on April 1, 2011.

"Rite Aid made this process much more difficult on workers and families than it needed to," said ILWU International Vice President Ray Familathe, who helped workers reach their May 1 settlement. Familathe invited Rite Aid Vice President Traci Burch to become personally involved in the negotiations which helped resolve the dispute.

A detailed campaign chronology and a summary of the proposed contract are also available upon request.

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