

Craig Mowery, Stagehand & Local Union Secretary (IATSE 919), 3/2/2023

Good morning, my name is Craig Mowery. I am from Randolph; VT and I am a stagehand by trade. For the past 9 years I have served as my Local union's Secretary/Treasurer and have been on their executive board since 2007. My Local is in support of the PRO Act and their request, I am here to inform this committee how captive audience meetings can and are busting new bargaining units and their attempts at a first contract.

In January 2021 the Vermont minimum wage was increased statewide to a higher more livable wage. When questioned, a local theater employer told the employees that they would not be getting that minimum wage increase so the group of employees contacted my local and together we filed a petition with the NLRB so that we could collectively negotiate to get that minimum wage increase and to solidify a contract that would ensure that wage remains in place for future workers.

From the time of the filing January 2021 and the election March 2022 the employer had two captive audience meetings.

The first meeting was called the "why is the union harmful to the employer?"

The second meeting was called the "is the union right for you?"

The employer stressed that both meetings were not required or mandatory for the employees to attend. It was also made implicitly clear that no union representation would be attending these meetings. However, these young employees who were caught up in a new bargaining drive had a lot of questions and one would think they could have their questions answered at these meetings.

ALL the employees attended these meetings. From an anonymous employee who attended the meetings "both meetings were emotional and full of misinformation about the financial burden the union would cause both the employer and employee and the examples given and prepared statements recited that were not an accurate example of what the employee unit was looking to achieve. This employer, through its young managers, repeated misinformation claiming union membership is costly, union membership will be a financial burden, and the emotional stress from the financial burden will be devastating to them and their company. One of these managers even began crying" he stated.

These stories and accounts intimidated and feared these employees from wanting to join the union. The descriptions of union conditions were from larger cities and states with higher more dense population and different unions all together. Not at all the unions conditions these employees would have been subject with my Local here in Vermont. It was misinformation and not relevant to the actual collective bargaining

action that was happening, the employer was simply trying to break up the attempt a new contract.

The anonymous employee present during the “Is the union right for you?” meeting said the employees asked a lot of questions about the union and about the petition and about how things would work moving forward together. He stated these employees receive little to no answers and were told that the union was a third party and why should the employees and the employer allow a third party to enter their “family” organization.

At that time, this so-called family employer, had three active and current contracts with three different labor unions, literally while giving these captive audience meeting to these young workers.

The new unit members questioned: “Why an employer would voluntarily negotiate AND agree with three different unions, but then fight so hard, hiring a union busting law firm and hold union busting meetings to fight another?” The answer, so that that employer may enjoy Vermont state grant money, under the guise of paying their “artists” area standard wages, while controlling those non artists, lower-level employees, keeping their wages at the lowest possible amount and off contract.

The union busting tactics of delay, distract, and intimidate this employer used worked. The unit lost the election, and the employees were told they received the wage increase retroactively, if they chose to work till the end of the season, many employees did not.

I am here today to tell you that today these captive audience meetings and union busting activities are still happening in Vermont. Even when my local was bargaining for the basic protection of State minimum wage, we were busted and made to be feared.

So what? So, what has happened? With an 85% yearly employee turnover, this employer still refuses to voluntarily negotiate a basic minimum labor contract with my local, while still enjoying large sums of grant money from this government.

As one of three remaining unit member, the anonymous employee has been demoted and will be asked to leave within two years. Next season they will also have reduced and restructured the company. From the 2021 identified unit, four or more jobs have been moved out of state and more have been eliminated completely or combined.

The PRO Act will help protect these jobs and make sure they stay in Vermont. Jobs that are recognized and protected by collective-bargaining agreements have area

standard wages allow families to live and work here. These jobs need your help, they need your support. Please pass the VT PRO Act to keep good-paying, union jobs in Vermont and make sure those jobs are still here in the future. Thank you for your time.