

Dumped On: Republic Service's Union-Busting Tactics Didn't Work

by Martin J. Bennett

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On April 18th workers at the county landfill and transfer stations voted to affiliate with Teamsters Local 665 in an election certified by the National Labor Relations Board.

The landfill is operated by Republic Services, the second largest company in the waste management industry with 190 landfills in forty states. The union victory is important for the workers and the entire community.

When the landfills were contracted out in 2013, Republic cut wages by \$3 an hour and workers lost their pension benefits.

After landfill workers initiated an organizing drive, Republic countered with a classic anti-union campaign directed by the nation's largest union-busting law firm, Littler Mendelson. Workers were required to attend 5:30 am anti-union meetings even on their days off. Anti-union literature was distributed at the worksite and sent to workers' homes.

Republic is a highly profitable company that reported \$10 billion in revenue last year. In Sonoma County the company has raked in substantial revenue as the landfill was opened for extended hours since last November to receive 1 million tons of debris from post-fire clean-up contractors.

Why the union busting then? The bottom line is corporate greed.

According to Human Rights Watch, violations of workers' right to organize are pervasive nationwide, and thousands of workers are illegally fired annually for supporting an organizing campaign.

In 2017 an Economic Policy Institute report demonstrated that union workers, compared to nonunion, are better paid, and more likely to receive comprehensive benefits including affordable health care, paid vacation and sick leave, and retirement. Health and safety standards are also higher in union workplaces.

Republic's anti-union campaign violated not only federal labor law, but a Memorandum of Understanding with the county and the county's "living wage law," both of which required Republic to remain neutral if employees chose to organize.

The public should be concerned. Waste management workers are the first responders for the waste hauling and disposal industry.

Union workers receive higher compensation that yields increased employee retention, training, and productivity--and a higher quality of services. Most importantly, union workers are protected against arbitrary disciplinary action and are much more likely to speak out if trash is not properly disposed of, toxic materials and dangerous chemicals are dumped or trucks and heavy equipment are not adequately maintained.

This union win is good for workers, good for the community, and good for the environment.

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