

Ratto Rising

Local workers in waste-management industry score a victory

The Bohemian
June 21, 2017

By Martin J. Bennett

Amid the mounting scandals and unraveling of the Trump administration—the most anti-labor presidency since Ronald Reagan—there was an important victory for the labor movement in Sonoma County.

On May 19, drivers, mechanics, recycling and clerical workers employed by North Bay Corporation (a subsidiary of the Ratto Group) voted to join Teamsters Local 665 by a 271–31 margin in a National Labor Relations Board election.

North Bay Corporation had won waste-management contracts for the county and most cities by delivering rock-bottom rates. However, an auditor for the city of Santa Rosa in 2016 found that the company was out of compliance with terms of the franchise agreement, including failure to rebuild an aging fleet of polluting and unsafe garbage trucks, inability to meet minimal rates of recycling and diversion from landfills, poor customer service and operating a substandard recycling facility. The union victory will lead to a substantial wage boost to family-supporting levels, job security, retirement benefits and paid sick leave and vacation.

The recycling industry is one of the nation's most dangerous, with the fifth highest fatality and injury rates. Experience in other jurisdictions suggests that unionization will result in a healthier and safer workplace.

North Bay Corporation recently entered into negotiations that will lead to the sale of the company to Recology, a San Francisco–based firm with a long history of maintaining the highest labor, environmental and customer-service standards. Recology has agreed to retain the workforce, recognize the union and begin contract bargaining after the sale is completed.

North Bay Jobs with Justice helped to build a community-labor support network for the organizing campaign. We look forward to partnering with the union and Recology to raise job quality and environmental standards in the county waste-management sector.

On June 29,, North Bay Jobs with Justice holds a public forum on these issues called "Good Jobs and Zero Waste," 6:30–8:30pm, at Christ Church United Methodist, 1717 Yulupa Ave., Santa Rosa. For more information, contact 707.293.2863 or northbayjwj@gmail.com.

Martin J. Bennett is an instructor emeritus of American history at Santa Rosa Junior College and co-chair of North Bay Jobs with Justice.

Open Mic is a weekly feature in the 'Bohemian.' We welcome your contribution. To have your topical essay of 350 words considered for publication, write openmic@bohemian.com.