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Employee
FREE
CHOICE ACT
NOW!

‘No Worker Should Fear For Her Job Because She Wants a Union’

Wary of favoritism and unfair discipline — and shocked to learn how much more their unionized counterparts at Verizon were earning — call center workers at Fairpoint Telecom in Maine decided they wanted a union of their own.

Working with CWA in the spring of 2008, organizers collected cards from a majority of the 60 workers and Fairpoint, with little fuss, recognized the union.

In fact, says Cathy Coolidge, management’s only attempt to try to sway workers was to offer raises to those who had been there for at least a year. And when it was all said and done, the union certified, workers got the raises anyway.

Coolidge cringes when she thinks of the tens of thousands of U.S. workers every year whose attempts to form unions are met with hostility, scare tactics, threats to move plants or close

stores, and even firings.

“This was a terrific experience,” she said. “We had to play by the rules but the rules weren’t hard to follow: Don’t get up from your desk and take time away from customers to talk about the union — or anything else.”

Coolidge wants to see the Employee Free Choice Act passed so other workers who want a union can have a similar hassle-free experience. “I didn’t have any fear, and no worker should fear for their job because they want a union,” she said.

She’s also happy that the bill allows either side to request mediation and arbitration if the parties can’t reach agreement after 90 days.

Coolidge is on the bargaining team for her unit’s first contract and in February 2009, after several months of ask-



Cathy Coolidge

ing, the committee was still waiting for information from the company about wages. Because the union-management relationship is still good, Coolidge said she’s not sure her team would seek mediation — yet — if the law were in effect. “But it would be nice to have that

option,” she said.

She says unions benefit companies as well as workers, and doesn’t understand why some businesses are fighting so hard against the Employee Free Choice Act.

“Companies need good customer service,” she said. “They invest a lot in training but lots of workers don’t stay very long if they’re unhappy and don’t feel respected. If you’re switching staff every six months, that’s not good for customers and that means it’s not good for the company.”