

# We need the

Employee  
**FREE**  
CHOICE **ACT**  
**NOW!**

## ‘Threats, Promises and Tears were Routine in Organizing Campaign’

**W**orkers at Books and Rattles daycare in Queens, N.Y., were used to hearing promises of raises that were never delivered. But the last straw was when their health care costs tripled — from a \$50 deduction every two weeks to nearly \$150.

Tia Milton, an administrative assistant often sent to short-staffed classrooms as a teacher for the preschool children, knew something about unions. Her mother has belonged to the Communications Workers of America “as long as I’ve been alive” and during an internship at a hotel Milton saw for herself how the union protected its workers’ rights.

Milton contacted CWA Local 1180 and with its help in early 2008 she began to organize her coworkers at Books and Rattles and four other daycare centers owned or operated by the company.

The owner and managers spun into action. “They were threatening employees, telling them they would get fired, cracking down on everybody who wore buttons or wore red shirts for solidarity on Thursdays,” Milton said.

Knowing that Milton was leading the effort, managers held captive-audience meetings when she wasn’t around.

Threats, promises and even tears were on the agenda.

Some employees were scared off and Milton and other organizers had to make the rounds of the daycare centers again and again. They were largely successful. “We’d remind them that management had lied to them, and the reasons why we were doing this,” she said. “A lot of people trust us, they know that we’re no-nonsense type of people and that we wouldn’t be doing this for selfish reasons.”

In a spring election, workers voted overwhelmingly for the union. Then things got even uglier. “The firings started,” Milton said. Dozens of workers, most of them union supporters, were fired. Milton wasn’t but said, “they’ve been harassing me and I’ve been suspended a couple of times.”

Meanwhile, the owner refused to bargain a first contract. She didn’t budge until Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.) held a late October news

conference that included CWA leaders and fired daycare workers.

“It is a fundamental right for workers to join a union to bargain for fair wages, benefits and working conditions,” Weiner said. “Books and Rattles work-

ers deserve a fair contract, not a campaign of fear and intimidation.”

Milton said parents wrote to the owner, telling her “her focus should be making the lives of the employees better so they can focus all their energy on the kids.”

Productive bargaining finally began and by early February, Milton had the draft of a tentative contract. It includes raises, benefits for employees who weren’t getting any and reduces health care costs back to \$50 every two weeks.

On Feb. 4, Milton and coworker Chris Denaro came to Washington, D.C., to help deliver to Congress some of the 1.5 million petition signatures from workers asking lawmakers to pass the Employee Free Choice Act.

“It would save a lot of jobs,” Milton said. “It would stop people from getting fired on bogus charges and it would force the employers to sit down and bargain. Our boss didn’t want to bargain at all. She just sat there and said “No. No. No.” to everything we said.”

Such an attitude from her boss and so many others makes no sense, she said. “I don’t understand why employers are so against this. It helps your company — the turnover rate for Books and Rattles was horrible. People would come in for a month and quit. If you get good benefits and people have job security and health benefits, they’ll be willing to stay. And in my job, that’s much better for the kids.”



Tia Milton