

AMERICAN CRYSTAL SUGAR LEAVES BITTER TASTE FOR WORKERS DESPERATE FOR IMPASSE TO END



Eight months ago, on August 1, more than 1,300 workers were locked out of their factories by American Crystal Sugar. All attempts to bring them to the negotiating table are coming to naught. Representatives of the Company and the Union had met informally, in January, with both sides playing the blame game and pointing fingers at each other. The Unions representing the workers says that “the workers are committed to a contract agreement that benefits the company, farmers, workers and the community. We want to work. Our families need us to work. We continue to call on the management and the growers who own this company to end the lockout, restore the company’s integrity and get back to the negotiating table.” Meanwhile, the Company has hired replacement workers and is adamant not to return to the bargaining table. The impasse continues and with the company taking on a rigid stance a resolution does not seem to be on the cards. Union members believe that the company has been unfair and are determine not to be covered down. But most admit that the long standoff has affected them and “led some members to find work at other companies or in other locales, or retire, or even put off major life decisions.” Renae and Lynn Fredrickson, a husband-and-wife team has spent a combined 70 years working at American Crystal’s plant in Drayton. The lockout has made them put their retirement plans on hold, “We were just to the point where we thought we were going to see the light and now it feels like I’ve taken 10 steps back.” Some workers have been forced to sign for fuel assistance and food stamps. Renae Fredrickson said she became sick, just by the mere indignity of asking for assistance to feed her family, “I went to the food pantry the first time and it was just ... oh,” she said. “I’ve always donated. I’ve never had to go there.” The company said it stands by its original offer in July wherein they had agreed to pay increases of 17 percent over the 5-year contract and increased pension, leave and vacation benefits. The union continues to protest provisions detrimental to seniority and job security. As the impasse continues, like a lone sentinel, stands a poster, nailed to a wooden stand. On one side it says, “ Labor Built This Company, Greed Will Destroy It,” the other side speaks of their plight and invokes support from other workers saying, “An Injury To One Is An Injury To All.”

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