

WARY ABOUT IT SPREADING, WALMART PREPARES FOR BLACK FRIDAY UNION FACE-OFF



Walmart probably feels that it has had enough and has initiated legal steps to bring to an end months of protests and rallies outside its stores. It has targeted the union, which it believes is instigating the workers into such confrontational action. The retailing giant has filed an unfair labor practice charge against the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, or UFCW with the National Labor Relations Board, alleging that the union was indulging in unlawful activities that were preventing it from conducting its business affairs without hindrance. The legal action is to preempt and obstruct the union's threat of what the union is billing as the largest organized action the world's biggest retailer has ever faced. Wal-Mart spokesman David Tovar said on Friday said that they were taking action now as they could not risk that their shoppers shopping experience is adversely impacted by the UFCW. If they still insisted upon doing it, then they will be responsible for the consequences. UFCW Communications Director Jill Cashen disdainfully decried the Walmart move, saying that it was a desperate attempt by them to try and thwart the workers intent, "There's nothing in the law that gives an employer the right to silence workers and citizens," he said. The union has orchestrated a strike outside Walmart stores across the country, pushing for higher wages, more benefits and better working conditions. However, analysts allege that the strike action is more of an attempt to unionize the Walmart workers rather than address their concerns. Harley Shaiken, a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, an expert on labor issues, said that filing a case is actually Walmart sending a message to the striking workers that we are not going to take things lying down and if you persist, things could get worse. It also means that the strike has caught the attention of the Walmart management that does not have any union-protected workers within the country and they are trying to ensure that it is nipped in the bud and does not spread. Walmart is initiating preventive measures on its own. Arkansas-based Wal-Mart said that no one who is not authorized to be in the precincts of the store will be allowed to enter, distribute leaflets or demonstrate in any manner. Walmart said that UFCW will be responsible for any injury or damage to property that their conduct could cause. Worried Black Friday shoppers who called up the company were assured that the strikers actions can at best be a minor bother. Even though a 1000 striking workers sounds like a huge figure, spread them across 4,500 Walmart stores across the country and you get an insignificant number, that shoppers can safely disregard. However, Rashad Robinson, executive director of advocacy group ColorOfChange, said that there will be a strong turnout and shoppers will notice the difference. People feel that Walmart is such a popular shopping place and its deals for Black Friday so alluring that irrespective of any protests or demonstrations, the people will still shop there in hordes. It is unlikely that Walmart's earnings will be even dented, let alone suffer a loss. The only cause for worry for the retailing giant is that it could change people perception of it and labor regulators could institute investigations into the allegations and local politicians may not allow them to open new stores in their constituencies, especially in areas where it does not have much presence. Walmart officials say that its employees are loyal to the firm and of the 5 million job applications the company received last year, 20 percent of the workers it employed were returning to the company, home, as it were. Walmart spokesperson said that there was no way that the unions could provide a better deal for the workers.