

Seeking Justice@Quebecor:

Findings of the Kentucky Workers' Rights Board



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The Kentucky Workers' Rights Board

In response to workers' complaints at the Quebecor World printing factory in Versailles, Kentucky, the Kentucky Workers' Rights Board conducted a public hearing on July 1, 2004, at the Falling Springs Arts and Recreation Center in Versailles.



Workers' Rights Board members listen to testimony. From left to right: Jason Bailey, Father John Rausch, Ted McCormick, Jesse Harris, and Rep. Joni Jenkins.

Serving on the Workers' Rights Board panel were:

State Representative Joni Jenkins, Shively, Kentucky, Workers' Rights Board Hearing Chair

Jesse Harris, Kentucky State Labor Chair, NAACP

Ted McCormick, Professor Emeritus, University of Kentucky, Center for Labor Education and Research

Father John Rausch, Peace and Justice Minister, Archdiocese of Lexington

Jason Bailey, Co-Director, Democracy Resource Center

Reverend Cynthia Cain, Unitarian Universalist Church of Lexington

State Representative Charlie Hoffman, Georgetown, Kentucky

Quebecor World's local management, workers from the plant, and the Graphic Communications International Union were all invited to testify before the Workers' Rights Board. Quebecor World did not send a representative.

Testimony was provided by:

Laura Drury, Employee, Quebecor World-Versailles, Kentucky

Jack Yeager, Employee, Quebecor World-Versailles, Kentucky

Lucy Frost, Employee, Quebecor World-Versailles, Kentucky

Tim Neat, Employee, Quebecor World-Versailles, Kentucky

Richard Newtz, Employee, Quebecor World-Versailles, Kentucky

Wanda Jones, Employee, Quebecor World-Covington, Tennessee

Steve McDonald, Employee, Quebecor World-Versailles, Kentucky

Dean Compher, Employee, Quebecor World-Versailles, Kentucky

Don Butler, Employee, Quebecor World-Versailles, Kentucky

Lloyd Mayes, Employee, Quebecor World-Olive Branch, Mississippi

Bert Haft, Organizing Director, Graphic Communications International Union



Dean Compher and Don Butler from Quebecor World-Versailles testify with Lloyd Mayes from Quebecor World-Olive Branch about harassment and intimidation.

History of Justice@Quebecor

Workers in Versailles and in Quebecor World plants across the United States began forming a union with the Graphic Communications International Union (GCIU) in December 2003. The GCIU currently represents 7,000 Quebecor World workers in the United States and Canada, roughly one-third of Quebecor World's North American workforce.

Quebecor World, based in Montreal, Canada, is one of the world's largest commercial printers. Time Magazine, the latest Harry Potter book, and Kohl's Department Stores' newspaper inserts are all printed by Quebecor World. Quebecor's website boasts that "on any given day, virtually everyone in North America touches a product printed by Quebecor World." The company's 2002 sales topped \$6.3 billion.

The company has approximately 37,000 employees working in 160 different plants in 17 countries. About 800 of these employees work at Quebecor World's facility in Versailles, Kentucky. This plant was previously owned by World Color and Rand McNally, and is a major employer in central Kentucky.

Quebecor World Workers Want Safe Jobs, Affordable Healthcare, and a Fair Process to Form a Union.

During the Workers' Rights Board hearing, workers testified about many issues of concern in their plant, including:

- Safety,
- Affordability and quality of health care, and
- Intimidation and harassment for union organizing.



the plant, call us back there, show us the videos. They literally threaten us. Enough people believe it – they get scared, they don't want to lose their jobs.” *Lucy Frost, Quebecor World–Versailles*

Workers also testified about their campaign for union recognition through majority verification, also known as a card check/neutrality agreement, and why this process is a necessary alternative to a traditional National Labor Relations Board election.

“Things never get fixed until someone gets hurt.” *Richard Newtz, Quebecor World–Versailles*

“With labor board elections, Quebecor has several weeks to call us into their little private meetings. They shut down

Severe safety hazards are endemic in the Versailles facility and in plants throughout the country, according to Quebecor World workers. Workers testified that two Quebecor employees recently lost their fingers in a period of three months at the Versailles plant. Another worker was sucked into a press that did not have safety guards and was out of work for months with injuries.

According to Bert Haft, Organizing Director of the Graphic Communications International Union, Quebecor World has one of the worst health and safety records in the industry.

The U.S. government and state agencies have cited the company more than 325 times for safety violations since 1996. That's more citations than Quebecor World's major competitors combined.

Workers testified that accidents in the plant are caused by three main factors:

Lack of Training. Quebecor World–Versailles worker Tim Neat said, “They have people with less than a month's experience training new people.” Workers testified that a number of workers in the plant do not speak English, and that the company does not provide training materials in any language other than English.

Understaffing and Production Pressures. Tim Neat reports that “Quebecor only wants faster and cheaper production. They tell three- and four-person crews that they expect the same results as if they had four or five people. This is causing people to rush and accidents are going to happen.” Quebecor World–Versailles worker Richard Newtz said, “Our crews have been cut to the absolute bare minimum.”



“Before Quebecor World bought the plant and it was still World Color, the plant was a completely different place than it is now. Back then, we had a stretch of

over 300 accident-free days. When I came back, I thought I had entered an amputee ward! Occasionally, somebody would get hurt when I was there before. But when I came back, there were several people walking around without fingers and hands. That just didn’t happen before.” *Tim Neat, Quebecor World–Versailles*

Management Negligence. Quebecor World–Versailles worker Dean Compher testified that his press operator was ordered to run a press when the manager knew there were no safety guards. Two days later, a worker was seriously injured on that machine and was out of work for months. Richard Newtz told a similar story of a worker who lost two fingers because the levelers on his press had not been fixed, although there had been work orders requesting a repair that had been submitted months before.

“There have been times when we have had to go without our medicine because we can’t afford it.” *Laura Drury, Quebecor World–Versailles*

Like workers across the United States, Quebecor World workers face rising health insurance costs. Lloyd Mayes, a worker from the company’s Olive Branch, Mississippi, plant described how the cost of health care is going up, but the quality of care is going down. He pays \$70 per week for health insurance. But when his wife had to visit the emergency room, he was still forced to pay hundreds of dollars.

In an effort to cut health care costs, Quebecor World in Versailles has changed its health insurance plan to require workers to order their prescriptions through the mail. Lucy Frost said, “This is inconvenient and dangerous. I recently had a bad reaction to the mixture of an over-the-counter drug and my prescription medication. This didn’t happen when I was able to go to my local pharmacist and seek his advice.”



“Our health insurance costs doubled at the beginning of the year. A month and half after the increase, my family started noticing the negative economic impact of the

increase. I had to give up my car because I had to make the choice between paying for a car, and paying for insurance that we need.

“I know having a union would improve our health insurance. We’d have a voice in our insurance.” *Jack Yeager, Quebecor World–Versailles*

Quebecor World–Versailles worker Steve McDonald summarized the issue of insurance by saying that “everyone knows health care costs are high, but the workers are absorbing all of the costs, not the company.”

“When I wear my union button, I feel like I have a target on my back.” *Dean Compher, Quebecor World–Versailles*

Nearly every worker who testified described experiencing some kind of intimidation or harassment by management for forming a union. Workers said that they have been taunted by managers for wearing union apparel and that managers give preferential treatment to anti-union workers.

Workers reported on management’s efforts to silence discussion about forming a union. Lucy Frost said she was called into the management’s office three times for engaging in these activities and told to stop. Lloyd Mayes said that he was told by a supervisor that he was not allowed to talk to any other workers at any time. A supervisor also instructed Steve McDonald to stop talking to people about the union.

When four workers were distributing information on unions in the Versailles parking lot, the management forced them to stop. After they filed an Unfair Labor Practice charge with the US government, managers called the workers into the office. Rumors began to circulate in the plant that they were in



trouble. Other workers said, “See, that’s what happens when you stick your neck out for the union.”

The workers were not disciplined and they won their Unfair Labor Practice charge and now have the right to distribute literature on company property.

Quebecor World–Versailles workers Laura Drury, Lucy Frost, and Dean Compher said that during the last union election, Quebecor shut the plant down and forced workers to watch anti-union videos and threatened that the plant would close if they voted for the union.

“In the last campaign, we signed cards and filed for an election with the National Labor

Relations Board. As soon as this happened, the company started an anti-union campaign. They put a fear in us that by getting a union, it would cause us to lose our jobs. The fear of losing our jobs is probably the worst thing the company can do.

“I signed a card last time in support of the union and after going through forty-five days of this type of bombardment, I got scared and voted no. I was scared I’d lose my job if the union came in or I’d lose my job if I was a union sympathizer.” *Don Butler, Quebecor World–Versailles*

Majority Verification is the Most Fair Process

Workers are now demanding that Quebecor World sign a majority verification or card check/neutrality agreement. This means that the company would stop interfering with employees’ decision on forming a union, and that Quebecor World management would recognize the union if a majority of workers sign union authorization cards.

“If it were left up to us workers—without having to worry that the plant would close and we would lose our job and our income—then we would be able to just talk about and decide what’s best for us,” said Quebecor World–Versailles worker Dean Compher.

Card check is the law in Quebec, where Quebecor World is headquartered.

Recommendations of the Kentucky Workers' Rights Board

The employees of Quebecor World's Versailles plant showed courage in testifying publicly about the painful and often personal impact of decisions made by Quebecor World management. It is clear that the values this community holds dear are not being upheld within the walls of Quebecor World's Versailles plant because of the choices that management is making. These workers deserve the basic dignity and respect that any human being would ask of another. Meeting the demands listed below is the first step for Quebecor World's management to come in line with those values. The Kentucky Workers' Rights Board recommends the following:

Safety. Quebecor World's management should put the safety of employees first. We recommend a strengthening of the plant's labor-management safety committee to more effectively deal with the numerous workplace safety issues being brought up by Quebecor World employees. And we call on the management to adopt a policy of immediately correcting any safety problems identified by employees. We also call on the company to properly train new employees and employees who are working on new equipment.



“I believe that the top managers at Quebecor World are God-fearing people, but religion doesn't stop when we come out of

church on Sunday. How we live the rest of the week is just as important, and recognizing workers' rights to respect and dignity is part of that.”

Father John Rausch, Peace and Justice Minister of the Archdiocese of Lexington



“It is important that Quebecor World workers have a union because the abuses and violations of their rights would clearly be curtailed and

stopped if workers had a voice.” *State Representative Joni Jenkins, Workers' Rights Board Chairperson*

Health Care. We call on the management of Quebecor World to allow full participation of employees as partners in decisions about employee health care benefits. Without that participation, harmful decisions damaging to employee morale—and employees' lives—can be made. Workers are the ones affected by decisions about health benefits and so management should respect them enough to engage them as partners in these decisions.

Union Organizing. The management at Quebecor World must end the atmosphere of fear and intimidation that currently pervades the workplace at Quebecor World's Versailles plant. The employees should have the right to choose a union free from the management's harassment. The management should therefore agree to majority verification whereby employees can make their own decisions. The company should also pledge to remain neutral throughout this process. The right to choose to form a union is a basic human right that cannot and should not be ignored or violated by Quebecor World management. The employees of Quebecor World's Versailles plant deserve no less than the employees at Quebecor's own headquarters in Montreal.



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