

Russell Stover strike:

Employees unite, boycott continues

By Terri Willson

The majority of employees at two Russell Stover candy outlets in the country recently joined Lincoln Russell Stover employees in voting to be represented by the Bakery and Confectionery Workers International Union of America (B and C). The nationwide Russell Stover's candy boycott is beginning its fifth month of attempted bargaining, negotiators say. Meanwhile, employees at the Montrose, Co. plant have received 22-cent and higher raises, and about 175 stores in the nation won't carry the candy.

Factory workers at the Marion, S.C., plant and employees at Stover's largest warehouse in Allentown, Pa. voted for B and C Union backing, while the boycott continues in the other four manufacturing plant cities: Denver and Montrose, Co., Clarksville, Va. and Lincoln.

Lincoln employees, the first to vote for union backing since the boycott's instigation by the confectionery union last March, have been boycotting since mid-April. Lincoln will host a B and C Union meeting July 11.

Other plants are holding elections. The Denver plant will vote August 13.

According to Vaughn Ball, director of research for the B and C Union, negotiations are at a standstill because of "one man's antipathy toward the union." Ball said Louis

Ward, president and chairman of the board of Russell Stover's, is reluctant to "get decent working conditions for Russell Stover workers, if it may make a cut down in his own personal profit." Ward owns 49 per cent of the stock in Russell Stover's and owns the Ward Paper Box Co. which sells its product to Stover's.

Unfair labor practices

However, Ball explained that the AFL-CIO-backed boycott was started mainly because of National Labor Relations Board findings of unfair labor practices going on at the Montrose, Co. plant and because of the low wage rate at the Lincoln plant.

Ball said the board cited Russell Stover's for unfair labor practices when the company allegedly threatened to close down its Montrose plant if employees favored the union. Russell Stover's is now appealing the case, he said.

Ball said the Russell Stover Company would not engage in "any serious bargaining" or offer improved wage rates to Lincoln's Stover employees.

The average wage rate at the Lincoln plant is \$2.79 an hour. Included in this average is the \$4.50 an hour non-boycotting maintenance workers pay, Ball said. A one-pound box of Russell Stover's chocolates costs \$2.95, and the average worker makes less than this per hour, he said.

According to Martha Gesch, local union negotiator and 23-year-veteran chocolate dipper, workers receive a penny-an-hour raise each year for the first 15 years of employment and no raise after that time. Gesch complained of "no seniority rights" saying the "older help gets pushed around," and are given no recognition but all the odd jobs at the local 8th and P factory.

Benefits slight

And company benefits are slight, the workers said. According to Ball, employees make a maximum of \$50 a month in retirement pension. Health insurance is offered at \$11 a month which provides for a maximum of 30 days hospitalization payment. Ball said these benefits are "inadequate."

Believing in this inadequacy and believing in the "principle of the thing" keeps local Russell Stover workers boycotting, they said.

They dip chocolate or load crates of candy on push-carts for eight hours a day. Then they spend two hours a day outside of every store selling Russell Stover's candy telling the consumer not to buy the product they helped produce.

While workers recently had a two-week vacation boycott picketing was at a minimum locally.

About 150-175 stores in the nation have agreed not to carry Russell Stover's candy during the boycott, Ball said. Two large chain stores have agreed not to advertise or display the candy.

Figures on recent sales of Russell Stover's candy were not available. But Ball said the company is "profitable and successful" and that the candy has a "fine reputation."

Employees spend hours

One local employee who has spent hours carrying the "Don't Buy Russell Stover's Candy" sign, said, "You slave for \$2.45 an hour from 7:30 to 4 every day, while the head guy in Kansas City (Mo.) clears several million."

Russell Stover's President, Louis Ward, when questioned about his opinion of the boycott, refused to talk about it. Another executive was unavailable for comment.

As employees vote for the union, the boycott gains momentum. Martha Gesch said, "If the candy doesn't move, the profit goes down." The workers hope to force Ward into acting on their complaints, since he "refuses to listen" to their problems, she said.

"It's too many years to throw down the drain," she said. "You've got to try."

News in brief

Candidate Debate

State Sen. Steve Fowler and Donald Stenberg, State Legislature candidates from Nebraska's 27th district, will meet in public debate Monday, July 5. The two will debate from 7 to 8 p.m. at Mount Zion Baptist Church, 12th and F streets. Unemployment insurance is one topic expected to be debated. Format for the debate includes thirty minutes of debate followed by a thirty-minute question and answer session with the audience.

Campus Holiday

UNL offices will be closed and there will be no classes on Monday, July 5, in celebration of Independence Day, July 4. The University of Nebraska State Museum will be open from 1:30 to 5 p.m. The Nebraska Union will be closed Saturday, Sunday and Monday, July 3, 4, 5.

Sky Show

The Ralph Mueller Planetarium in the University of Nebraska State Museum, 14th and U streets, will present the program "13 Stars", beginning Saturday, July 3. "13 Stars" charts the heritage and future of the United States reflected in the stars. The time trip will start in the year 2276, go back to 1054 and will end in 2076 A.D. The show will be presented Saturday, Sunday and Monday, July 3, 4 and 5. After that it will

be shown at 2:45 p.m. on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and at 2:30 p.m. each Saturday and Sunday. Alternating with "13 Stars" will be "The People", a program about American Indian legends of the sky, shown at 2:45 p.m. on Tuesday and Thursday and at 3:45 p.m. each Saturday and Sunday.

Study Tour

Flights and Study Tours is sponsoring a charter flight to London or to Zurich, Switzerland from Dec. 26, 1976 through Jan. 14, 1977. Three-credit-hour study tours registration through the UNL Extension Division begins at 345 Nebraska Union in July. Flight-Only and Non-Credit tour registration begins in August. Interested students may register in the Nebraska Union. Information about the tours may be obtained at the Flights and Study Tours office, 345 Nebraska Union.

Redlining Workshop

The Lincoln Action Program (LAP) will sponsor a workshop on redlining Thursday, July 24 from 1 to 4 p.m. Redlining is discrimination according to geographical area in extension of credit. The workshop will be at the American Forward Association Bldg., 8th and D streets. Gale Cincotta, chairwoman of the National People's Action Group, based in Chicago, will be the featured speaker. State Sen. Steven Fowler of Lincoln, chairman of the Legislature's Urban Affairs Committee, also will speak at the workshop.

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