

Twinkie-shortage sparks snack-food outcry in East

BOSTON (AP) — Forget the high gas prices. Folks along the East Coast are swallowing bitter news this week: There is a shortage of Twinkies and other snack-food favorites, courtesy of a labor dispute.

Supply problems are being reported from the nation's capital to Maine, wreaking havoc on untold snack breaks.

"I'll have to eat healthy food," complained Rubens Breeden, a 28-year-old state worker longing for Ring Dings and Devil Dogs on Tuesday.

Charlie Bianchi, who works at a snack bar in one of the busiest state office buildings, has faced the wrath of the hungry masses.

"All day long, they're saying, 'Where's my Twinkies? Where's my coffee cake? Where's my pound cake? Where's my Devil Dogs? Where's my Yodels? Where's my Ring Dings?'" Bianchi said.

"They're ready to kill. They look at me with doubt in their eyes. They think that I forgot to place the order. It's always the coffee slinger's fault," said Bianchi, 42, assistant manager of Hal's Place.

Actually, a Teamsters strike

"All day long, they're saying, 'Where's my Twinkies? ... Where's my Ring Dings?'"

Charlie Bianchi
snack bar worker

has led to shortages in a variety of well-known bakery products, including Wonder bread and Hostess brands such as Twinkies.

As shelves empty across the region, the area will have to do without deliveries of about 2 million Twinkies and cupcakes per week and another 400,000 loaves of Wonder bread, a company official estimated.

The strike began a week ago when 1,400 Teamsters responsible for delivery and sales of products from Interstate Bakeries Co.'s only New England bakery in Biddeford, Maine, walked off the job.

Since then, that bakery and others have shut down as Teamsters in other states honored the pickets. Interstate Bakeries officials say five bakeries in four states have closed.

The union has accused the company of refusing to honor arbitration rulings. The company maintains it was shut out of the arbitration process, and it has asked a judge to clarify the process.

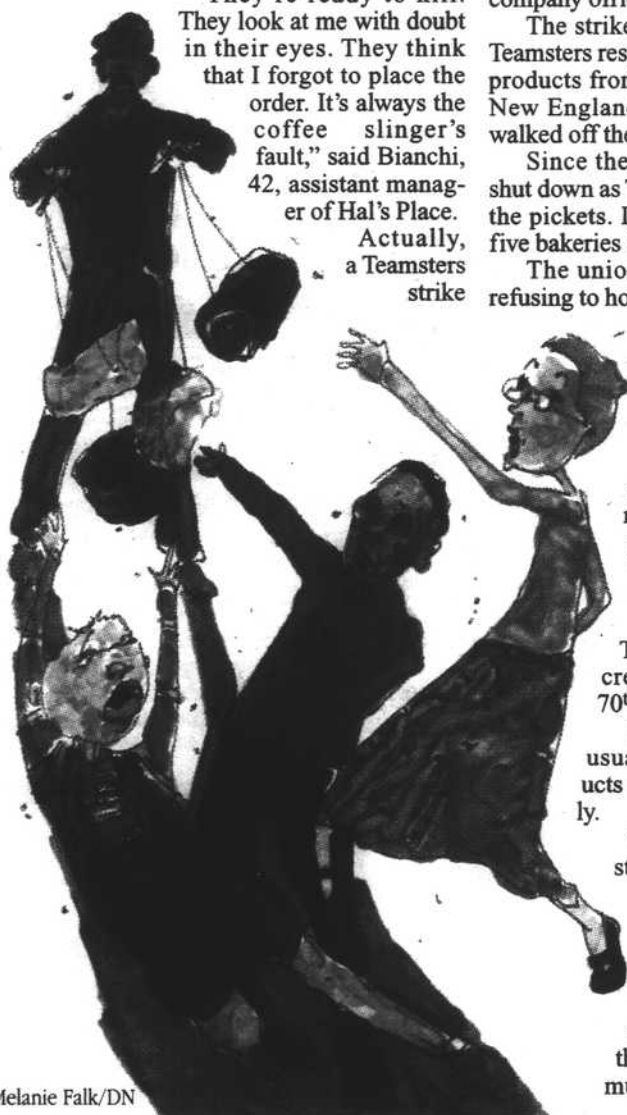
One of the major sticking points has been the company's requirement that drivers deliver more than one brand of Interstate products. The Teamsters say drivers are supposed to be paid different amounts for each brand.

All of this comes as the Twinkie, the yellow, spongy, cream-filled cake, approaches its 70th anniversary next month.

In downtown Boston, shelves usually occupied by Hostess products were bare or getting there quickly.

To Breeden, the Massachusetts state worker, eating Twinkies and other snack cakes is just part of growing up American.

"It's like everything from baseball to watching the Celtics," he said. "Basically, every little kid does it; it's like throwing rocks and playing in the mud."



Melanie Falk/DN

An evolutionary clue

Research: Knuckle-walking an ancestral trait

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS — A new fossil analysis is rattling the family tree with evidence that humans evolved directly from an ancestor that walked around on its knuckles like gorillas and chimpanzees.

For decades, anthropologists have considered upright walking, or bipedalism, a defining characteristic of the human lineage. Knuckle-walking was thought to have evolved uniquely in apes after humans had taken a separate evolutionary path.

But in an article in today's issue of the journal Nature, researchers said they found fossil evidence that two species of early humans descended from knuckle-walkers.

"Instead of coming down out of the trees and walking upright, the ancestors of early upright walkers were already adapted to a life on the ground," said Brian G. Richmond, an anthropologist at George Washington University in

Washington, D.C., and a co-author of the study.

In the two fossils studied, both of hominids that walked upright more than 3 million years ago, the researchers found structures in the wrist bones that once could have supported knuckle-walking by restricting movement of the wrist.

The researchers believe those wrist structures were traits left over from distant ancestors, much like the tail bone or appendix.

The study's findings also challenge theories of a special chimpanzee-gorilla relationship, which was based on the fact that they are the only primates to exhibit the unusual way of walking, Richmond said.

"We showed the ancestor that gave rise to upright walkers and humans was a knuckle-walker," he said. "That means it's shared between the ancestors of humans and chimpanzees and gorillas."

The newly analyzed fossils belong to Australopithecus anamensis and Australopithecus afarensis, known as Lucy. Both lived in Africa between 4.1 million and 3 million years ago — at least a million years after the evolutionary split from apes.

Richmond and colleague David Strait, who compared existing fossils with the bones of today's apes, predict a hominid from 5 million years ago will show evidence of actual knuckle-walking.

"We didn't actually find fossils from this critical time period," Richmond said. "We found for the first time echoes of the earlier ancestor in the earliest human fossils that we currently have."

Today's chimps and gorillas as well as the early human fossils have a bony projection from their forearms that the wrist locked into, preventing it from moving back more than 30 degrees.

Task force to interview inmates

■ The group will gather opinions on medical services.

By Michelle Starr
Staff writer

The task force to investigate the state's medical services in correctional facilities will continue its query by interviewing inmates within a week.

James Davis, assistant state ombudsman, said he supports the scheduled interviews because the task force should get the inmates' opinions and not just testimony and information from the Department of Corrections or the ombudsman's office.

The task force was created by Gov. Mike Johanns in December 1999 after Dr. Fraisal Ahmed, an employee of

the Department of Correctional Services, spoke out to the state ombudsman's office against medical treatment inmates receive.

Ahmed's whistleblowing sparked an extensive report by the ombudsman's office, which was released Nov. 23, 1999.

David Montgomery, from the Department of Health and Human Services, said more than 100 inmates have requested to be interviewed by the task force.

Montgomery said he did not think the task force would be able to conduct all of the requested interviews because of time constraints.

But he said most of an executive session of a meeting held Wednesday was spent planning the interviews that will be conducted over the next three to four weeks.

Along with planning inter-

views, the task force also developed its final requests for information at the meeting, Montgomery said.

William Hastings, retired Nebraska supreme court chief justice and task force member, said the task force hopes to speak with inmates from each institution in the state.

He also said he hoped that during the interviews, the task force would be able to tour the facilities it was unable to tour last month.

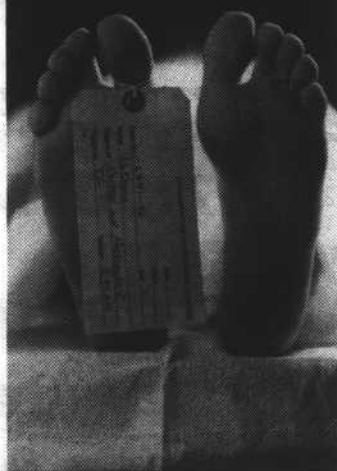
In February, the task force toured medical facilities for the institutions in Lincoln.

Along with planning interviews, the task force heard information about requirements for physicians' assistants to work in the department and how the department selects other medical staff, Hastings said.

The next scheduled meeting for the task force is April 7.

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