

Why union assault is 'failed campaign'

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BY PETER BRONSON

There was a small clump of people standing in the rain near the Cintas headquarters in Mason as I drove up for the annual shareholders meeting. They looked like a tour group waiting for their bus, until I noticed the signs. Something like, "Remember Eleazar Torres Gomez."

Who is Gomez, I wondered, and what does he have to do with Cintas? The answer tells us a lot about how far unions will go to distort the truth and destroy a successful company.

Unite (Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees) has been trying to wedge a foot in the door at Cintas since 2003. Unable to get enough worker support to force an election, Unite wants to skip the customary secret-ballot and force 17,000 Cintas workers to join the union and pay dues. But Cintas and its workers have said no thanks.

"What they're asking for is they want me to agree to put all of our people in a union without giving them a chance to vote for themselves," said CEO Scott Farmer, after the shareholders meeting on Tuesday. "Our position is that our employees have a right to say yes - but they also have a right to say no."

So Unite has resorted to desperate attacks on the Cincinnati-based uniform company.

Unite copied license numbers from Cintas workers in Pennsylvania, to snoop in personal information and harass them at home. The union has been ordered to pay the workers \$2,500 each. Unite also published a false press release that caused Cintas stock to drop \$300 million, according to a defamation suit by Cintas that is going to trial in Warren County court.

"For four-and-a-half years now our people have heard it all," Farmer said. "The union is not going anywhere, but I consider it a failed campaign."

For every "sweatshop" accusation from Unite, there are dozens of Cintas workers who like their jobs and want no part of a union. Many have signed petitions asking Unite to stop harassing them. So this is how Unite described an unfortunate fatal accident in March:

"Eleazar Torres Gomez was working in the Tulsa laundry's automated washroom. He was caught on a conveyor and dragged into an industrial dryer - where he was trapped in temperatures up to 300 degrees for at least 20 minutes. He died on the scene of trauma and thermal injuries. Cintas CEO Scott Farmer issued a press release blaming Mr. Torres Gomez for his own death soon after the fatality."

But Gomez was caught in machinery and pushed into a dryer after he climbed onto a conveyor to clear a logjam of wet laundry - a violation of training and safety rules. Farmer expressed grief and condolences, and did so again at the shareholder's meeting, when union officials brought up the accident.

Farmer explained recent steps to improve the Cintas safety record, which is 30 percent better than the industry average. Cintas is disputing a \$2.78 million federal fine for the accident, and is being sued by the victim's family.

"The tragic accident in Tulsa shook us all up tremendously," Farmer said.

I believe him. Just ask employees - Cintas bosses are good people. They care about their employee "partners." That's why Unite can't get a foothold.

Unions are in decline because companies like Cintas have figured out that happy workers make better widgets. But the mythology of the left lingers like a stubborn stain: "Business bad. Union good. Workers of the world unite - you have nothing to lose but your jobs at General Motors."

Cintas has gone from shop rags and uniform rentals in 1959 to a multinational service provider with 34,000 workers, delivering first-aid kits, welcome mats, cleaning, uniforms, document shredding and fire protection.

Farmer told shareholders sales are up 60 percent in five years, to \$3.7 billion in revenue last year.

That's good for workers, good for Cintas, good for Cincinnati, good for the economy.

"Remember Eleazar Torres Gomez"? Sure. His death could prevent another fatal accident. But exploiting a dead man's mistake is a creepy way to beg for union dues.

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