



**Delco Daily Times, July 4, 2009**

## **Letter to the Editor:**

To the Times:

The American dream was once described to me as “the ability to make a better life for one’s children.” Apparently, Acme Markets has missed the memo.

On June 9, Acme announced its intention to terminate the contracts of its employees in the Greater Philadelphia Area on July 10, 2009, and to implement its “last, best and final” contract. Acme employees have been working under the extension of an old contract for over a year due to unsuccessful negotiations between Acme and the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, Local 1776.

As this is, admittedly, a matter of personal importance to me as a current Acme employee and a member of Local 1776, I have spent the past few weeks following the developments of the story and poring over the proposed changes to our contract.

It is true these changes will affect me and the many others current employed at Acme, but that is not the reason I opposed this new contract at the union meeting held at the Spectrum June 24. The new contract proposed by Acme may attempt to appease current employees on some fronts, but it intends to leave a wasteland for future employees.

Some changes were expected, even understandable. Society has moved past the days in which one would be hard-pressed to find a store open on Sundays, and thus the need for Sunday premium pay has become a luxury. In a harsh economic climate such as this (and facing competition that pays no extra on Sundays), I can understand why the company would seek to eliminate Sunday premium for new hires.

I can even stretch my understanding to see why it would want to deny new hires holiday pay until they have worked at the store for two years, though I fundamentally disagree with this proposal on the basis that a holiday is a holiday, no matter when you were hired. Yet even that might be passable, if it was not for other provisions in the contract, like one:

“Part time employees hired after 7/11/2009 shall not be eligible for spouse/dependent/family coverage until completion of 84 months of continuous service provided a part-time employee works or is paid an average of 28 hours per week in any rolling two month period following completion of 84 months of continuous service.”

Take, for instance, a single parent. Assuming their parental duties allow them to work 28 hours a week (I assume they would be hard-pressed not to work those hours in order to support a family), it is now up to the company to provide those 28 hours. And it is doubtful that many part-time employees will be given those 28 hours, considering the constant salvo of hour-cutting mandates decreed by the company.

In fact, I would suggest this provision is a way of denying coverage to employees under the guise of cutting hours. The contract, by the way, only guarantees part-time employees a minimum of 20 hours per week – and those 20 hours are only guaranteed if employees are available to work Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, and evenings. And on top of all that, coverage doesn't even begin until seven years after employment has begun.

All this while Supervalu (the corporation that owns Acme) CEO Jeff Noodle relaxes with the \$5.3 million package he's made for the economically harsh 2009 fiscal year.

Acme has been extremely good to its employees over the years, blessing them with various benefits and coverage. However, if the company's opportunistic bid is pushed through, and is able to effectively eliminate coverage of countless future employees, who is to say it will stop there? What happens when this contract ends and other negotiations take place for further cuts? And what voice do future workers have concerning the jobs they will inherit?

Our society has been sculpted around consumerism, but that consumerism only functions if people (largely the middle class) can afford to spend money. Faced with a shrinking middle class, I advocate confronting the large corporations that dominate the workers, and demand consistent treatment – not only for ourselves, but for our successors as well.

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Narberth