

We need the

**Employee
FREE
CHOICE ACT
NOW!**

‘CEOs Demand Contracts To Protect Their Pay’ — Why Don’t Workers Have that Right?

My name is Robert Hackenberg and for 14 years I’ve worked in the Harrisburg, Penn., call center for the company now known as AT&T Mobility. We’ve worked without union representation and with a union, and let me tell you, there is no question that it’s better to have a union voice.

When Cingular took over our company in 2004, and we heard that Cingular had promised to stay neutral in union organizing drives, it took us by surprise. In fact, we waited a while to see what would happen. Why were we skeptical? Because neutrality was a big change from our previous management, one that was determined to keep us from making up our own minds about having a voice on the job.

I know this better than anyone. I was the tool they used to keep the union out during an IBEW organizing drive when we were AT&T Wireless.

My bosses knew that employees liked me and listened to me, and they talked me into handing out anti-union buttons and flyers to my coworkers. I was told not to tell anyone that management and human resources were pulling the strings.

I had a real dirty feeling about the whole thing. It was a sneaky trick, and it worked. By the time our company became Cingular and CWA was involved in organizing our office, I’d decided that it was time we had representation.

CWA and Cingular had a neutrality agreement, but that didn’t stop managers left over from AT&T from approaching me again to do their dirty work. There were some wide-open mouths when I told them that I was done being a puppet and I was going to lead the voice for change. I even told them I was going to run for chief steward.

Under Cingular and the neutrality agreement, the difference was like night and day. In the old days, workers couldn’t distribute union literature. You couldn’t talk about the benefits of a union with coworkers. You couldn’t freely express yourself, even on your own time without being afraid of some kind of retaliation.

Cingular decided to go a different route, one built on respect in the workplace, respect for employees and respect for our decisions. That means a lot. That’s why in September 2004, the 450 workers at my call center chose CWA representation. Along with our union voice, we got superior health benefits, a pension plan, pay progression and other significant gains. It has made a real difference for all of us.



Robert Hackenberg

Management has a lot of power, and many people may not realize that a union supporter gets fired in at least 25 percent of organizing drives. But management has a lot of other ways to pressure employees, far short of firing. Maybe you never get the vacation time you want, or maybe your boss makes it clear to

coworkers that you’re a “troublemaker.” Those kinds of actions have a chilling effect on workers who want a voice on the job, but don’t want to fight every day to get it.

That’s why I am helping my union, the Communications Workers of America, lead the fight for the Employee Free Choice Act. Millions of American workers want a union, but most of them don’t work for companies like AT&T Mobility that allow them to exercise their rights. Under the Employee Free Choice Act, they’d finally have a fair opportunity.

Ironic, isn’t it, that CEOs and other executives all demand — and get — contracts to protect their pay and benefits, but those very same CEOs will fight and even break the law to keep employees from having that same voice.

I’m proud that my employer, AT&T Mobility, believed that employees should make their own choice.