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Envelope Teaser: Dick's Anti-Union Rifle ...

Dear Friend of XYZ Organization,

This time, there's a gun involved.

The kind of abuse Dick and Ruby Bengen, owners of the Ruby Ridge Dairy in eastern Washington state heap on their workers is terrible enough – and all too common.

But what takes the plight of these workers from tragic and infuriating to absolutely frightening is that Mr. Bengen keeps a gun in his truck ... and he has threatened to use it on workers if they won't give up their dream of having the protection of a union.

When **Romaldo Latino** decided he had had enough and wanted to be represented by a union, and joined in a lawsuit against the farm, Dick Bengen confronted him. Romaldo responded that he wanted a union because Dick and Ruby pressure the workers too much.

“Dick answered that we are assholes, and dumb, and that the pressure is from the union. He continued screaming, asking why I signed up for the union and the lawsuit. He then told me that some cows had died. He continued, telling me that I was in big trouble because of it. Dick told me that if he confirmed that I killed the cows, he was going to kill me.

“In a meeting, Dick mentioned that he carries a weapon in his truck and that he is going to kill every worker that gives him problems. On one occasion, he mentioned that he broke the ribs of an employee and that he ended up in the hospital. All the employees know that he carries that weapon in his truck, and in reality, we are all scared to risk our lives because Dick will shoot us with his weapon.”

When a newspaper reporter got wind of what was going on at Ruby Ridge, Dick Bengen was all sweetness and light. Here's what the Tri-City Herald reported:

But Bengen said he's opposed to unionization because a union can create an adversarial relationship between the employer and the employees. “It takes the fun away from dairy work,” he said.

The man who threatens his workers with a gun says that a union would create an adversarial relationship? And takes the fun away from dairy work?

Maybe Dick and Ruby find it fun to lord over their workers and squeeze them for every drop of profit, but that's the only fun being had at Ruby Ridge.

Workers told us of being driven for long hours without breaks and not even being paid for all the hours they are forced to work.

Terecita Angiano is one of those workers Dick Bengen thinks are having fun.

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“When I started this job, it was as a milker. In order to work at this company I had to work about a month and a half for free because Ruby didn’t pay me all of this time.

“You work from 8 to 12 hours without the right to any break, much less to take your lunch. This is the way you have to work at this company. It was because of this that we organized ourselves and looked for the support of the Union. When the company found out that we were attending union meetings and that all of us were already signed up with the XYZ they told us that we were ingrates because they were the ones that give us to eat.”

I guess Dick Bengen figures if the workers were having so much fun, why would they want breaks? And why should he pay them for all the hours they worked?

Miguel Cuevas Gomes tells a similar story.

“In order to work at this company we have to do a little bit of everything and push ourselves to the maximum in order to keep our jobs at Ruby Ridge. I work up to ten hours per day but Ruby always steals hours. There are always hours that I have worked that I do not get paid for. I think that this is unfair as I have to pay my rent and my bills and it is not enough to be able to survive. The company does not provide any benefits. We cannot take any breaks, as the law indicates, much less take our lunch.

“If we do take it, Dick and Ruby threaten to fire us.

“... We bear with it because we need the work; we have families and bills that we need to pay. They know this and because of it they take advantage of it.

“In November of 2007 I had an infected molar and I had to show up to work even though I was sick. I let the owner know I had a severe infection but it didn’t matter to her, as I had to continue working ... Even if we are falling over sick we still have to show up to work, if not we lose our jobs.

“... No water is provided to us and so we have to drink water from the hoses, which is not potable. There are signs saying that this water is not to be used for human consumption.”

Sounds like a fun place to work to me.

So what did Dick and Ruby, those fun-loving farmers, do when Miguel and Terecita complained and got no satisfaction and finally organized to demand their rights?

First, they threatened them with a gun. Then they began to fire them.

Jose Marcos Miranda Garcia was one of the first ones fired.

“In all of my three years of working in this company it has been nothing mistreatment for me and all my co-workers. The company provides no benefits or coverage if we get injured while working ... They don’t have a first aid kit available, no breaks, or lunch periods, no drinking water, or say in this company. All we have is hard work, working 10 to 14 hours a day, no respect, and constant pressure. We have to buy our own uniforms not to mention the times they don’t pay us our complete hours of working.

“When I picked up my last paycheck, the manager Alex Aripe asked me if I wanted to know why I was fired and when I said “yes”, he responded me that it was because I had brought the union to the company. As soon as the boss overheard this he quickly tried to cover the situation

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justifying that his dismissal was caused by not feeding the cows well enough by not giving them the minerals they needed.”

Why did Dick Bengen try to cover up his manager’s assertion that Jose was fired for organizing with his fellow workers?

Because to fire workers for organizing is blatantly illegal.

But one by one, Dick and Ruby Bengen have continued to fire workers who signed union cards. They have fired about 20% of their workers.

If you want a further indication of how the Bengens run their farm, all you have to do is look at the animals themselves. **Juan Palafox** has seen what happens to animals that don’t do exactly what the Bengens want. *“The crew leader Alejandro beats the cows. He pokes at them with a screwdriver and hits them with the tubes on the doors. There are cows with rotten udders, blind cows or with swollen eyes because of this abuse.”*

The Bengens treat their animals as badly as they treat their workers – and vice-versa.

Part of what amazes me about the way the Bengens treat their workers is that so much of this is illegal. Don’t their lawyers ever tell them, *“Cut it out. You can’t do this stuff!”*

Maybe Dick and Ruby are having too much fun to stop. Maybe that’s what Dick meant.

When the workers of Ruby Ridge asked for help, we were shocked to hear what was going on there. And the danger worker are in. We immediately began helping the workers organize. We helped them find a labor lawyer and file a lawsuit to stop the abusive treatment, and recover their lost wages as well as penalties for the mistreatment they have suffered.

We are also working to get the illegally fired workers reinstated, with back pay.

If this is what Dick Bengen means when he says that by fighting for their rights, the workers will create an “adversarial relationship,” then all I can say is, *“You’d better believe it!”* If you really think that it’s okay to treat workers like this, then you are in for a very adversarial relationship with your workers and the XYZ.

Thanks to the support of friends like you, we are always there when workers need help to stand up to abusive growers – especially those who threaten them with a gun.

And we will continue to stand with workers in this fight. Dick and Ruby started this fight when they thought they could treat their workers the same cruel way they treat their animals.

Well, that isn’t going to happen. Not anymore.

For nearly 50 years, friends like you have responded to the plight of abused and oppressed workers and helped them stand up for their rights.

I hope you will help again today. Your Holiday Gift of \$25, \$36, \$100 or even \$500 or more today will help us fight for workers when they courageously face bullies like the Bengens.

And at this special time of year, your donation will be a gift that symbolizes **“Peace on Earth, Goodwill to All.”** You’ll help the workers of Ruby Ridge and so many others win their rights and gain compensation for all that has been unfairly and illegally taken from them.

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What people like the Bengens seem all too eager to forget is that farm workers are people just like them, with the same right to respect and dignity. They have families, they have hopes and dreams. And they have lives outside their farm labor.

Many of the workers the Bengens illegally fired are struggling desperately. They have cancelled all their holiday family plans. **Rafael Muñiz** is one of those workers.

“I had plans with my family for this holiday season. We thought we would spend time with our extended family and participate in gift exchanges, as we’ve always done. Other years we get together with family, eating turkey and enjoying our time with our kids at a family dinner. But now I am unemployed and I don’t know what’s going to happen. With the economy being so bad, it’s not easy to find a new job.”

“I don’t think I will be the only one of my coworkers that will spend the holiday season alone at home, without turkey, without gifts, or a Christmas dinner. There are now ten coworkers that have been fired, ten families that have been affected because we wanted to defend our rights. All we wanted was to be treated with the dignity and respect that we deserve as workers.”

“This Christmas, I wish that Dick and Ruby will have a change of heart, that they will come to an agreement with the union, and that they learn to respect and value their workers. I don’t know how they will go pray at their church this Christmas if their actions are the reason that so many kids won’t have any gifts. At the end of the day it is our families and children that are the most affected by the retaliation and firings.”

In addition to abusive treatment, and threatening their workers’ lives, the Bengens have destroyed the holidays for at least ten families.

Your Holiday Gift to XYZ today can help right these wrongs by helping workers to fight back for fair treatment. You can help give these workers a great holiday gift: respect and dignity in their workplace. Please be as generous as you can. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Signer
President

P.S. It’s bad enough that Dick and Ruby Bengen treat their workers so badly. But when they started threatening the workers with a gun, the situation became a crisis. We will be there with the workers, but we need your help. Please send a generous Holiday Gift today to help the Ruby Ridge workers and so many other workers fight for their rights. Thank you. I wish you a joyous holiday.