

## **Union drive at Wal-Mart comes to nothing Colorado lube shop workers reject bid 17-1 after firm's concerted effort to squelch it**

Steven Greenhouse, New York Times  
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**Loveland, Colo.** -- Joshua Noble, 21, jolted Wal-Mart in November when he persuaded a majority of his co-workers to sign statements that they wanted to vote for a labor union.

The unionization drive in a tiny Wal-Mart tire and lube shop stirred a storm in this town at the foot of the Rockies and became a closely watched test of labor's efforts to bring unions to the world's largest retailer.

But on Friday, the workers at the Wal-Mart Tire & Lube Express here abandoned Noble, voting 17-1 against unionizing. And the vote became another setback for labor at the very moment that the nation's union leaders are trying to pressure Wal-Mart for better wages and benefits.

Not one of Wal-Mart's 1.2 million workers in the United States belongs to a union. The union support dissipated locally after Wal-Mart exposed workers to daily showings of videos about problems with unions and transferred several other workers into the garage shop. Two of the original union supporters left for college.

Company officials say the workers at the Tire & Lube in Loveland concluded from all the information that they did not need representation by a third party.

Officials with the United Food and Commercial Workers Union counter that Wal-Mart struck fear in the hearts of workers with an intensive antiunion campaign. The union said it will challenge the vote, citing the lack of a union observer during the election and saying the additional workers were sent to dilute support for unionizing.

Noble rounded up union support three months ago from nine of his 17 co-workers, with complaints about wages, health insurance coverage and their treatment by managers.

Wal-Mart responded to the pro-union movement by flying in a team of labor experts from its Arkansas headquarters.

"Every day, they had two or three antiunion people from Bentonville in the garage full time, showing antiunion videos and telling people that unions are bad," Noble said.

What irked him most, Noble said, was that after one union supporter was fired and two others moved away for college, Wal-Mart transferred in six workers. He believes all were antiunion.

Christi Gallagher, a Wal-Mart spokeswoman, said the garage was merely replacing workers who had left. The vote's results show that its workers are satisfied, company officials said.

Wal-Mart decided earlier this month to close a store in Quebec, one of its first to unionize. It said the store was barely profitable and was not closed in retaliation.

In 2000, meat cutters at a Wal-Mart in Jacksonville, Texas, became the nation's only Wal-Mart workers to vote to unionize. But two weeks later, Wal-Mart announced it was replacing its meat-cutting operations in the South with prepackaged meat.

Dan Wright, a technician in the Tire and Lube shop, said he voted against the union because he feels he can go straight to management with problems. "My grandfather said that during World War II, unions were helpful," he said. "But I don't feel I need one. This company treats me well."

Cody Fields, who earns \$8.10 per hour after two years at the garage, said he originally backed the union "because we need a change" but said the antiunion videos were effective. "It's just a bunch of brainwashing, but it kind of worked," he said.