

Frequently asked questions about the Hawaii Teamsters labor dispute with Times Super Market

Q: What do you mean Times is Mainland owned? Isn't it still run by the Teruya family?

A: Times was established in 1949 by kama'aina Wallace and Albert Teruya. Their younger brother, Herman, actually came up with the idea of opening a grocery store, but he died in combat during World War II while serving in the U.S. Army in Italy as a member of the highly decorated 100th Battalion. His brothers founded Times Super Market in his honor, taking the name from their successful restaurant, Times Grill, which was located on Kapiolani Boulevard next to the Hawaii Newspaper Building.

PAQ, Inc., a privately held Stockton, California company, purchased Times from the Teruya family in 2002 to supplement its Food4Less chain of stores in Northern California. PAQ chief executive officer John Quinn created a local subsidiary, Quinn's Supers, Inc., to operate Times. Quinn assumed the role of president of QSI last year, succeeding local food industry executive Roger Godfrey.

Q: Why did the Union take its members out on strike against Times?

A: The Hawaii Teamsters Union is a democratically run union. The Union and the employees' negotiating committee exchanged proposals with management for several months before the company presented its "last, best and final" offer in mid-December. The Union took the proposal back to all our Times members for a vote. Since it was the company's "last, best and final" offer, the members felt they had no other choice but to go on strike to keep the company from taking away an important employee benefit.

Q: What do your members want? I heard the company gave your members the largest wage increase they've had in years.

A: The issue has never been about "getting more." It's not about wages! Our members were willing to accept "no increase" in wages if they could maintain current benefits, which includes medical coverage for the employee and his/her family members when an employee is injured on or off the job or suffers a catastrophic illness and must be on extended medical leave. This is a benefit our members have had for years. It is a benefit they (and former union members) fought for and earned over many decades of dedicated service to Times.

By the company's own admission during negotiations, this benefit only costs the company pennies per hour. However, the company claimed this issue was not about cost but about "principle." The Union then proposed a two-year cap on medical coverage for employees on extended leave, but the company rejected it. The Union answered this with a proposal to cap the medical coverage at 18 months, but that was rejected by the company. The Union then gave the company a "no wage increase" proposal as an incentive to maintain our members' current benefits. Our proposal was flatly rejected.

Q: What is your Union's position on Times hiring replacement workers?

A: The Union has filed unfair labor practice charges against Times regarding this action with the Labor Relations Board. One of our biggest concerns is for the safety of the public. Our union members, with their 20, 30 or more years with Times, feel they have a responsibility to ensure that the meats, seafood and deli items purchased at Times are safe for public consumption and adhere to the highest quality standards. Our Teamster members, like other unionized labor, must go through an apprenticeship training program and work their way up to journeyman status. We are professionals in our chosen fields, whether it is driving a bus, building a home, providing patient care in hospitals, or putting perishable products on grocery store shelves. In all cases, safety and quality is our overriding mission. We learn our profession from the unionized workers who came before us, and our union reinforces the professional standards of our industry because – like any professional association – that is part of their responsibility to the membership and the public.

Q: I heard Times is using "pre-packaged meat." What is that?

A: The term "pre-packaged meat" is used for product that is cut and prepared for sale off of store premises. We understand that the practice, also called "modified atmospheric packaging," involves removing regular air from meat packages and injecting them with a gas such as carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen or oxygen. This process helps retain the color of the product so that its appetizing red appearance is extended to more than 10 days, with the ability to stretch it to as many as 28 days, according to Washington, D.C.-based Food and Water Watch. The meat may look fresh, but can still be spoiled. The shelf life for fresh meat is typically two to four days.

The Food and Drug Administration allowed the use of gas to treat meat in 2002, but the FDA has never formally granted its approval and does not require companies to note the use of gas on product packaging. Europe banned gas-treated meat in 2003. Some areas of the U.S. have considered bans, and a number of consumer groups have been asking Congress to look into the use of gas-treated, pre-packaged meat.

Q: Where does your labor dispute stand now?

A: The company has implemented a one-year cap on medical coverage for existing employees and a three-month cap for new hires. Additionally, the company eliminated:

- The guarantee of a 40-hour work week for full-time employees;
- The employee annuity (retirement) plan; and
- All deli clerk positions, thereby leaving employees with as many as 38 years of service without jobs.

Despite the company's insistence on taking away many long-standing benefits from Teamster members, the Union remains willing to return to the negotiating table to settle this dispute.

Q: What can consumers do to help?

A: The Union encourages consumers to BOYCOTT TIMES. This is the most effective way you can show the company that our community will not accept this treatment of local workers.