

# WESTERN COUNCIL OF INDUSTRIAL WORKERS SURVEY

## *Summary of Survey Methodology and Results*

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### *Introduction*

The Western Council of Industrial Workers (WCIW) recently attempted to organize a laminated beam plant. In a close certification election workers voted against unionization. As one part of a larger effort to understand why workers did not vote to be represented, the WCIW contracted with the Oregon Survey Research Laboratory (OSRL) to conduct research on the attitudes of the members of the bargaining unit toward to recent election and toward the WCIW. Working closely with representatives of the WCIW, OSRL planned, pretested and implemented a telephone survey of 35 members of the bargaining unit in May 1997. This report summarizes the survey methodology and results.

### *Survey Methodology*

#### *Survey Instrument*

The broad goals of the survey were to obtain valid and reliable information from bargaining unit members. More specifically, the survey targeted:

1. **Assessments of how good a job the volunteer committee and the union did in answering workers questions;**
2. **The concerns workers had about events that might have occurred if the union had won the election**, including strikes, plant closings, changes in pension plans; improvements workers desired; and general changes in things that were important to workers.
3. **The company's current grievance procedure**, including its expected effectiveness;

4. **Whether or not members of the bargaining unit changed their minds immediately prior to the election, and if so why;**
5. **The perceptions workers had of their wages and benefits,** including their perceptions of wages and benefits in unionized plants and what benefits they would like to see improved.

In designing the survey instrument, OSRL used a multi-path approach which included: which included working with WCIW and with the University of Oregon Labor Education and Research Center for questions related to WCIW's needs; creating original survey questions; and pretesting individual questions and the entire survey instrument with, professionals, survey experts, and potential users of the data from WCIC.

The survey instrument was programmed into OSRL's computer-aided telephone interviewing (CATI) system and further pretested. A facsimile of the survey instrument is provided with this documentation. All interviews were completely confidential, and human subjects approval was obtained.

### ***Sample and Data Collection***

Interviewer training was conducted on May 12, 1997. Interviewing was conducted all times of the day and all days of the week (except Sunday mornings) until the target sample was exhausted. More than 20 calls were made to each valid telephone number. The net response rate was 85% and the refusal rate was 0%. See the enclosed sample report.

### ***Survey Results***

The presentation of the survey results is organized around the subject areas identified on pages 1 - 2. Readers of this report may refer to the enclosed survey instrument with the frequency responses to each question for more detail.

Narrative responses to open-ended questions are also enclosed, grouped both by question and by individual respondent.

### **Assessments of how good a job the volunteer committee and the union did in answering workers questions**

Almost all members of the bargaining unit thought that the volunteer committee answered questions to their satisfaction. Only three respondents felt that this was not true. The results were similar on the question of whether or not the union organizers answered questions to the members satisfaction, with only 4 respondents reporting that this was not the case (see the remarks by respondent 20 to the final open-ended question "COMMENT")

for an example of someone who did not think the union representatives were not straightforward in their answers to questions).

### **The concerns workers had about events that might have occurred if the union had won the election**

Members of the bargaining unit expressed a fairly large amount of concern over two specific issues that they felt might have taken place if the union won the election. The issue that raised the most concern was the potential replacement of their 401K plan. When questioned about the 401K plan 35% of the respondents said they were “very concerned” and another 26% said they were “somewhat concerned”. The issue of strikes also concerned respondents, with 23% reporting that they were “very concerned” and another 29% reporting that they were “somewhat concerned”. Interestingly, the issue of plant closings was not of great concern, with 71% of respondents reporting that they were “not at all concerned” about the plant closing.

Additional evidence about the concerns of workers can be found in two of the open-ended questions; IFWON and CONCERN2. In response to the question about potential improvements they would have liked to see if the union had won the election, most workers report a desire for improvement in such things as wages, sick leave, grievance procedures, and the establishment of seniority. However, some workers reported what are really concerns about what might have changed, including increased tension in the plant (respondent 26), and a general feeling that things in the plant were working well before the attempt at unionization and that unionization might upset this (respondents 3,5,6,16, 22, 27, 31, 35). When asked directly about concerns over what might have changed if the union had won the election, a number of respondents reported fears about changes in plant atmosphere, the ability of workers to talk to management, or the establishment of a seniority system that would not reward hard work by new employees.

### **The company’s current grievance procedure**

Almost all workers thought that the company had instituted a new grievance procedure, and well over half (57%) felt that the new procedure “will solve problems efficiently and fairly.” One respondent did volunteer to an interviewer that the new grievance procedure had not yet been used and it was thus too early to say how well it would work (see open-ended comment INTOBS).

### **Whether or not members of the bargaining unit changed their minds immediately prior to the election**

Only one respondent claimed to have changed their mind in the two days prior to the election. When asked why the respondent claimed that there was something the

“unionization” people do that they do not like. When probed about what this was the respondent refused to be more specific.

### **The perceptions workers had of their wages and benefits**

Most respondents (69%) felt that their wages and benefits were equal or better than those of other who work in the laminated I-beam industry. At the same time 49% of respondents felt that unionized plants had better wages and benefits than most other plants in this same industry. Clearly, some workers feel that unionized plants have better wages and benefits than most plants, but that their plant still had above average wages and benefits. For these workers their plant is not “most” plants.

When asked what benefits workers want to see improved, wages was the clear favorite, with 37% of respondents picking it as their first issue, and another 21% picking it as their second issue. Other issues that were seen as important by large numbers of respondents include promotional opportunities, job security and equal treatment.

### ***Conclusions***

The results show that feelings about the unionization of this plant are mixed among the members of the bargaining unit. Many people are clearly in support of unionization. The issues that respondents raised, as concerns and as areas that they would like to see improvement in, are issues that unions have traditionally addressed. On the other hand the results clearly show that there were concerns with some issues that came up during the campaign, particularly changes that might occur to the pension plan. Additionally, job security, seniority, and the threat of strikes were issues of concern and fear.

The results do not offer clear evidence of any particular actions of the company immediately prior to the certification election. What they do show is that workers were concerned about very specific issues and that it might have been possible for the company to play on those fears.

This report has not given a conclusive answer to the question of why the certification vote came out as it did. What this report does is to point to issues that apparently were important to workers and on which their voting decision seems to have hinged.