

North Bay Bohemian
June 21, 2017

Ratto Workers Stand Up!

by Martin J. Bennett

Amidst the mounting scandals and the unraveling of the Trump administration – the most anti-labor presidency since Ronald Reagan – an important victory for the county labor movement has not received news coverage.

On May 19th, drivers, mechanics, recycling, and clerical workers employed by North Bay Corporation (a subsidiary of the Ratto Group), voted to join Teamsters Local 665 by a 271 – 31 margin in a National Labor Relations Board election.

North Bay Corporation has won waste management contracts for the county and most cities by delivering rock bottom rates. However, an auditor for the City of Santa Rosa in 2016 found that the company is way out of compliance with terms of the franchise agreement, including failure to rebuild an aging fleet of polluting and unsafe garbage trucks, inability to meet minimal rates of recycling and diversion from landfills, poor customer service, and operating a substandard recycling facility.

Many county residents are unaware that North Bay's 'always lower prices' are possible because the company pays less than a prevailing industry wage for drivers and barely above minimum wage for recycling workers.

The union victory, according to Teamster officials, will lead to a substantial wage boost to family-supporting levels; job security; retirement benefits; and paid sick leave and

vacation. Ratto workers recently elected a 12-member rank and file bargaining committee.

Moreover, the recycling industry is one of the nation's most dangerous with the fifth highest fatality and injury rates. Experience in other jurisdictions suggests that unionization will result in much improved health and safety because workers are empowered to monitor hazardous conditions and report violations.

North Bay Corporation has recently entered into negotiations--that will lead to the sale of the company to Recology, a San Francisco based firm with a long history of maintaining the highest labor, environmental, and customer service standards. Recology has agreed to retain the workforce, recognize the union and begin bargaining after the sale is completed.

North Bay Jobs with Justice helped to build a community – labor support network for the organizing campaign. We look forward to partnering with the union and Recology to develop a fiscally responsible waste management system in with excellent job quality and environmental standards.

Martin J. Bennett is Instructor Emeritus of History at Santa Rosa Junior College and co-chair of North Bay Jobs with Justice.

Thursday, June 29th Public forum: “Good Jobs and Zero Waste” from 6:30-8:30 pm Christ Church United Methodist 1717 Yulupa Santa Rosa sponsored by North Bay Jobs with Justice. For more information contact: **(707) 293-2863**
northbayjwj@gmail.com

Ratto Workers Stand Up! (original)

Amidst the mounting scandals and the unraveling of Trump administration – the most anti-labor presidency since Ronald Reagan – an important victory for the county labor movement has not received news coverage.

On May 19th, drivers, mechanics, recycling, and clerical workers employed by North Bay Corporation owned by James Ratto, voted to join Teamsters Local 665 by a 271 – 31 margin in a National Labor Relations Board election.

North Bay Corporation known as the “Wal-Mart of garbage” in the North Bay has won waste management contracts for the county and most cities by delivering rock bottom rates. However, an auditor for the City of Santa Rosa in 2016 found that the company is way out of compliance with terms of the franchise agreement including failure to rebuild an aging fleet of polluting and unsafe garbage trucks, inability to meet minimal rates of recycling and diversion from landfills, poor customer service, and operating a rat-infested and substandard recycling facility.

Many county residents are unaware that Ratto’s ‘always lower prices’ are possible because the company pays less

than a prevailing industry wage for drivers and barely above minimum wage for recycling workers.

However, the recycling industry is one of the nation's most dangerous with the fifth highest fatality and injury rates. During the five-month campaign to unionize the company, Teamster organizers reported that the conditions at the recycling facility are some of the worst they've ever witnessed.

The union victory, according to Teamster leaders, will lead to a substantial boost in wages to family-supporting levels; comprehensive benefits including retirement; job security; and improved health and safety conditions. Ratto workers recently elected a 12-member rank and file bargaining committee

North Bay Corporation has recently accepted a purchase offer from Recology, a San Francisco based firm with a long history of maintaining the highest labor, environmental, and customer service standards. Recology has agreed to retain the workforce, recognize the union and begin bargaining after the sale is completed this summer.

North Bay Jobs with Justice helped to build a community – labor support network for the organizing campaign. We look forward to partnering with the union and Recology to develop a fiscally responsible waste management system in with excellent job quality and environmental standards.

Martin J. Bennett is Instructor Emeritus of History at Santa Rosa Junior College and co-chair of North Bay Jobs with Justice.

