



STOPPING HARASSMENT

In a meatpacking plant in Pasco, Washington, management had had its way for years. Conditions were dangerous, floors were slippery, and harassment was a constant. The union was weak; very few members were involved.

But that all began to change when a few workers decided to organize their co-workers to make their work life more tolerable.

One of their first steps was to hold meetings in the cafeteria for people who worked on each production line. Anyone willing to attend could help make plans to deal with their worst shop floor problems.

"The company wasn't happy about the meetings," said Maria Martínez, the chief steward. "They started sending supervisors to listen to us. They said we weren't allowed to hold union meetings in their cafeteria. I told them that the National Labor Relations Act gives us the right to organize and to hold meetings in non-work areas at non-work times.

"Management told me to put it in writing. So I did. I wrote a grievance and had 100 people sign it. That was the last I heard from management about that. And we kept on meeting in the cafeteria."

A common topic at the meetings was harassment. So volunteers on each production line began training their co-workers to document the harassment and encouraging them to stand up to it. Martínez said, "If a supervisor said something, we'd say

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real loud to other people on the line, 'Did you hear what he just said?'"

When incidents piled up, members would go as a group to higher-level managers. They prepared in advance to tell their stories, so that one person wouldn't be stuck doing all the talking.

The actions worked. Supervisors—perhaps to avoid friction with their own bosses—started to back off.

To keep supervisors in check, another tactic the workers used was grievance forms, modeled after disciplinary tickets. Workers could "write up" their supervisors by checking off violations. Usually all the people from one line would sit down and document the harassment together. One copy went to the offending supervisor, one to the union, and one to management.

Later you'll read more about how these meatpackers changed their workplace—and dozens of other stories from workers who noticed something wrong and started organizing to fix it.