

Janitorial union cleans up at Apple, targets 8 other valley companies

Union's activity is exception to rule in valley

BY JONATHAN WEISMAN

Buoyant from back-to-back successes at Apple Computer Inc. and Hewlett-Packard Co., Silicon Valley's powerful janitors' union this week will launch a new campaign against eight of the valley's biggest companies.

The effort—a part of what the union has dubbed a national "Enemies of Justice" offensive—will target Unisys Corp.; Cadence Design Systems Inc.; Applied Materials Inc.; FMC Corp.; Intel Corp.; Everex Systems Inc.; Silicon Graphics Inc.; William Wilson & Associates; and Koll Construction Co. All these companies are

using non-unionized janitorial firms, according to Service Employees International Union Local 1877.

The SEIU plans to construct a mock court and jail on the steps of the Santa Clara County jail to try the chief executives of each company in absentia.

This will be the latest public show of force by a union that has flourished in a region not known for its labor organizations. This spring, Apple's janitorial contractor, Shine Building Maintenance Inc. of Santa Clara, accepted a union contract after a yearlong battle in which

the union targeted both Shine and Apple.

Union tactics in the Shine/Apple campaign hearkened back to the 1920s and '30s, which were glory days for labor. Using strikes, sit-downs, walkouts and sickouts, union organizers kept Shine managers guessing which Apple building would be hit next. The SEIU also punneled Shine with lawsuits claiming violations of wage, child labor and occupational safety laws as well as sexual harassment.

The union's actions cost Shine and Apple about \$400,000, \$250,000 of which was spent on legal fees alone, said Jon Barton, organizing coordinator for SEIU's Building Service Division.

The firm's unionization initially bolstered wages by about 25 cents an hour. Mr. Barton said, Shine will have several months to phase in pay hikes that will raise hourly rates from about \$5.50 to the union's master-contract level of \$6.10. In December, that contract rate will rise to \$6.40.

More important, according to Mr. Barton, union janitors at Shine won rights to \$300 extra a month in health benefits.

Shine executives refused to comment on union activities.

Apple, on the other hand, said it exercised no leverage in Shine's decision to unionize, despite national advertising taken out by the janitors' union calling for a countrywide boycott of Apple products.

Indeed, last December, Apple began contracting with another non-union firm, Sir Thomas Industrial Maintenance Inc., for part of its janitorial needs, said spokeswoman Cindy McCaffrey.

The Cupertino computer maker will begin contracting janitorial services for its new 865,000-square-foot research and development center later this fall, she said, and union status will play no role in deciding which firm it uses.

Instead, Ms. McCaffrey said, Apple will look at bidders' wages, treatment of workers, quality of work and asking price.

Regardless of what Apple did or did not do to influence Shine, other companies in the valley have proved they do not want the same kind of publicity that Apple endured. Hewlett-Packard, for instance, decided to contract with a union shop after only a few months of civil negotiations with the union and one threatened strike.

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H-P spokesman Kevin O'Connor said the company was in the midst of consolidating its 15 valley janitorial contracts down to one when the SEIU turned its attention toward the Palo Alto-based computer giant. H-P then chose International Service Systems of San Jose, a union shop.

Mr. Barton praised H-P's management for having "a very real, almost moral commitment to seeing that their employees and contract workers are treated right." He called the decision, which effectively created 250 union jobs, "the biggest union victory in this valley in five years."

Mr. O'Connor saw things in a different light. "While we appreciate that kind of recognition, it's important not to lose sight of the fact that, ultimately, this was a business decision," he said. "We were disappointed to see it characterized as a victory of some sorts."

Like Apple, H-P insists the union's activity had nothing to do with its decision, although Mr. O'Connor acknowledges H-P was in weekly contact with SEIU representatives during the bidding process. He said the company looked at its bidders' employee relations records and their ability to handle such a huge job. Of the four serious contenders, three were union shops, he said.

"You can draw your own conclusions from there," Mr. O'Connor said.

Mr. Barton said union representatives are certain their bargaining and collective actions had far more effect than either H-P or Apple are willing to admit, and they are confident the momentum is now on their side.

"People start seeing which way the wind is blowing," he said. "And we're getting a bigger and bigger commitment from our international (national office)."

In addition to the targeted technology firm three janitorial contractors—Sir Thomas, S

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