

Striking Versatronex workers end 6-week walkout, 12 laid off

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Vowing to continue to seek better working conditions at Versatronex, the remaining 35 striking production employees ended their six-week walkout Tuesday, and sought to return to work, but only 23 were given their jobs back.

When the employees returned to work, officials at the Sunnyvale-based circuit board assembler said that 12 of the strikers had been laid off because of "business changes." An additional eight workers, who had not

gone on strike, also lost their jobs. The dispute, highlighted by a four-day hunger strike by Versatronex workers at Digital Microwave Corp., one of Versatronex's biggest customers, centered on workers' demands for higher wages and better medical benefits.

The workers ended their strike after the National Labor Relations Board issued a complaint Monday against Versatronex alleging that the company wrongfully discharged worker Jose Lito Munoz because he spoke up at a

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meeting called to air workers' grievances. Under federal labor law, an employer cannot fire an employee for expressing workers' concerns, according to Irma Valencia, a field examiner in the NLRB's regional office in Oakland. The hearing is scheduled for April 12, 1993.

"We are happy that they're back," said Bob Martin, a quality engineer manager at Versatronex. "But I think in the end, the reason (for striking) was unjustified."

Union organizers and workers said they will continue to try to force Versatronex to recognize the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America as their bargaining unit, said David Bacon, an organizer for the union. Workers and union organizers also hope to "bring an end to the sweatshop conditions" at Versatronex, Bacon said. Another

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strike could be in the offing if demands are not met, Bacon said.

"I feel sorry for my fellow co-workers who have been fired," said Maria Enriquez, who returned to work. "We first started fighting for one person (Munoz), but now we are fighting for another 12."

About 50 workers walked off the job Oct. 16 to protest Munoz's firing. Many of those workers had been replaced by temporary workers. About 15 of the striking

workers had returned to work.

"Due to some changes in our business, some workers had to be laid off," Martin said. He would not elaborate.

Workers who were laid off Tuesday were told that the company did not have enough work to keep them employed, said Antonio Aguilar, who lost his job.

Representatives for the workers met with Digital Microwave Corp. officials on Nov. 12 to urge the San Jose-based manufacturer of digital microwave products for telecommunications to stop sending work to Versatronex. After DMC, which provides \$300,000 worth of work to Versatronex annually, refused to comply with the workers' demands, the workers staged a four-day hunger strike beginning Nov. 17 in front of the company's headquarters.

"I'm always pleased when a dispute ends," said Marjorie Howell, DMC's director of human resources.