

# Discouraged strikers standing fast

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WATSONVILLE — A cold wind blowing around the Watsonville Canning and Frozen Food Co. plant had a nasty edge to it Wednesday morning.

For stoic strikers picketing outside the plant, it was cold even in the bleak sunlight, cold as their hopes of ever getting their jobs back.

A brief walking tour of the picket lines outside Watsonville Canning — where strikers still take two-hour turns carrying signs, peering through the chain-link fences into the plant and jeering at replacement workers — was like visiting a rag-tag army pushed back to its last bastion, but still defiantly vowing victory.

In the 16th month of the strike that few of them ever thought would last this long, and two weeks before their second Christmas without work, *el pueblo unida*, the Teamster frozen-food strikers, are discouraged and depressed, but still out there.

On Walker Street, across from the plant, four serape-clad women retreated from the wind to a makeshift shelter by a truck cab. The truck reflected the sun and provided a pocket of warmth.

With recent reports that financially troubled Watsonville Canning is doing better, that the company claims it is in a competitive and financial position to maintain its current non-union work force, the women were asked: "Are you discouraged?"

Maria Amezcua said she was discouraged, "very, very much." Nevertheless, she said she still

shows up for her daily two-hour picketing stint.

"It's very hard," said Amezcua. She said she had two small daughters at home, but that she will continue to picket until "this is resolved one way or another."

Has she ever thought the strike might be lost? "I'm still here," Amezcua said.

Altagracia Munoz said she too was discouraged, but "I have a lot of faith in God that something will happen." Munoz said she has seven children at home.

Rosario Jimenez also was discouraged, but said, "Even though the company probably feels we're demoralized, we will still continue forward, no matter what."

Elsewhere on the line, daytime picket captain Francisco Garcia was filling out cards that would allow pickets to collect their weekly union benefit checks of \$55.

"There is no question about it — morale is down. We feel like we're not gaining anything from this," said Garcia. Despite the falling morale, though, the numbers of reliable pickets have remained constant, he said: about 50 for the daytime shifts and nearly 100 for the night shifts.

"People see nothing through the (union) local and they hear (Conco Corp. executive) Smiley Verduzco talking and they are demoralized," conceded union Business Agent Henry Celis.

Last Christmas season, Celis was a picket captain himself. Now he finds it hard to believe so much time has passed with so little changing.



Union picket Angie Elizalde has been waiting outside Watsonville Canning 16 months for the strike to end.

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