Report of the Public Hearing on Contract Negotiations at Powell's Books

June 13, 2000

The hearing was held at St. Andrew Catholic Church, 808 NE Alberta Street, Portland, Oregon

Transcription and Editing by Board Member Carri Munn with the assistance of Tricia Schultz

The Worker's Rights Board is a community-based project of Portland Jobs with Justice

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Introduction

Margaret Butler, Portland Jobs With Justice
Diane Rosenbaum, Panel Chair

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Panel Introductions:
Diane Rosenbaum - Panel Chair
Other WRB Board Members present:
Barbara Dudley
Marty Hart-Lindsberg
Denny Scott
Carri Munn

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We will be hearing from many workers this evening. We believe that this venue is an appropriate place for the community to address the issues faced by workers in Portland. In the United States it is a basic democratic and civil right to form a union. Although this is not the very worst situation that workers may face, the Powell's employees are confronting serious issues that deserve our attention.

The panel will be hearing from three panels composed of three workers. The members of the board and audience will have the opportunity to ask questions following each presentation. At about 8:05 the board will deliberate and report back about the decisions that they are making on behalf of the WRB.

Before we begin, Linda Chavez Thompson, of the National AFL-CIO, will present special testimony. Linda is here in Portland for national series of events called The 7 Days in June organizing campaign.

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First Panel: The Bargaining Process
Mary Zartman, Doug Chase, Edwards

Mary Zartman:

I work in the kids section at the Burnside store. In the past three months I have been struggling with the Portland Community offering me much less support as a Powell’s worker than I had expected or imagined. When I ask to be paid for the work I’m doing, which is far more specialized at Powell’s than regular retail work, people in Portland tell me I’m whining.

I bring home less than $1 thousand dollars a month. I have been at Powell’s nearly four years. I am 38 years old and have been in customer service for fifteen years. I have no BA. Why would anyone begrudge me a living wage? I make money for Michael Powell.

I started at Powell’s in the parking department. I worked full time and was given NO lunch breaks and no coffee breaks for almost a full year. I wanted to work at Powell’s so badly I gave up my rights, but I won Willamette Week’s parking garage Attendant of the Year award anyway.

When I began working with books, I met several people who had been at Powell’s many years who were leaving. They said their wages were capped, they worked more and better, and they couldn’t pay their bills. It sure was a great place to work, they said, but you have to live poor.

Then in the fall of 1998 all raises were capped and the promotional system was changed. I didn’t even understand what I had lost until a fellow employee explained. They said, “We’re going to build a tower, so hold on a bit, and we’ll give you raises later.” They said they didn’t have enough money to give us raises. I kept working harder and better at $7.50 and hour. Then I got another announcement, my job was going to be reorganized for better database accuracy. After a year in sections work I was just getting proficient at some of my job. After three years now, I feel confident at my work. It has taken me three years to learn this job. Even without the drastic changes, it would have taken me this long to learn Powell’s section work.

I needed an advocate, so I voted for the ILWU on April 22, 1999, and last September we began to bargain with Michael’s people. A short time into it, Dunn & Bradstreet released financial records from Powell’s to the union bargaining team to clarify the ABILITY TO PAY question I described earlier. With Michael owning the real estate, we have one pocket furnishing another, since he also owns the company. But
Powell's had a very healthy intake. Being told they couldn't afford to give me fifty cents more an hour was baffling and confusing when the tower rose in front of me and internet book sales for Powell's tripled each year.

My 5 year old son keeps asking me, "Is Michael Powell ready to share yet?"

Doug Chase:

My name is Doug Chase. I have worked for Powell's for eight years, five years in computer support, and the previous three years at the Powell's store in Beaverton, where I did sales to schools and libraries and worked in sections. In the five years in computer support I have worked closely with top managers, including a couple of managers that are on the management's bargaining team.

Because of this close relationship with these managers I had a hard time with the union organizing effort. In fact, I came out publicly against the union before the election. Once the union was voted in I understood, though, that there were new rules. I still had very mixed feelings. As I heard different things, bargaining updates from Local 5, letters from Michael Powell, I felt like I was hearing a lot of rhetoric. We were getting the spin from both sides.

Last December I started observing the bargaining sessions. I did this in order to represent the interests of the twenty or so people that have tech support jobs at Powell's. I also figured the bargaining table was where the rhetoric would be put aside.

It was at the bargaining table that management lost me. I saw the attorney for Powell's insult, lecture and threaten the employees that sat across from him. I saw him talk down to the employees that observed, including myself. He said things like, "This is my final offer. If you don't like it you can take it to the streets."

The managers that were present went along with it. This was really disturbing to me. One manager muttered insults under her breath. The others, people I respect a great deal, did nothing to stop this behavior that continued session after session.

I have a pretty good understanding of compensation and these kinds of things at Powell's. I have served on the company compensation committee for three years. I have always paid very close attention to this kind of information. What I saw at the table was that the union side kept trying to come closer to management, but that management mostly shifted things around, like a shell game, paying for one thing by taking it away from somewhere else.
I sat there watching this, hearing the insults and lectures, and just thought, "This is wrong. This is just wrong." My closest friends are in management, but they lost me at the table.

In April of '99 the union was voted in by a 52% to 48% vote. Recently almost 70% of employees signed a petition supporting the goals of the bargaining team. Management is continuing to lose people by their behavior at the table.

Carol Edwards:

I have worked at the Burnside store for four years and make $8.44 an hour. I am a new book orderer and see $1500 spent per week to order books. After we held union elections, a nine member bargaining unit was formed. This team is representative of all of Powell's locations, not just the Burnside store. I am a member of the bargaining unit. We've been at the bargaining table for nearly 10 months, since last September. If management had been bargaining in good faith we would have a contract by now. Instead Michael Powell hired attorney Larry amrborue, who is well known for his anti-labor stance and union busting attitude. During the bargaining process, the attorney has gone over personal anecdotes about his child's school, wastes time and money, and repeatedly changes the verbiage of proposals without altering the sense of the clauses.

The company's constant position with this is that this is your first time bargaining. We're sorry that you are disappointed with our position. If you think you can do better, take it to the streets. In bargaining sessions, legal council just stares at the bargaining unit. He gleefully intimidates us. He wants names of people participating in actions and wants pictures. All of this when he should be spending the time he's being paid for to bargain with us in good faith. Upper level mtg. Corporate smirk, and give support for.

Management says it takes them days to cost things out. We wait for hours for them to show up at bargaining sessions. Often they are not present or haven't costed things out so we can proceed with discussions. When they do cost out proposals, there are always mathematical errors to their advantage. What we most object to is that they (management) adamantly refuse to give respect to workers.

Questions from the panel

Marvin (P): Mary, what do you tell your 5 year old about the situation?
Mary. (R): My son has picketed with me, and I tell him Michael Powell is not sharing yet.

Diane; (P): I’m wondering if the issues that originally brought people to unionize have changed? Has participation changed the issues?

Doug (R): My experience has been with a very supportive manager who tries to get raises for everyone in the department. It’s hard for people to see that it’s a superior to supervised situation. Now that the veneer has cracked, it’s not as easy for the nice managers to be nice. There’s not that dividing line between good managers and others. It is clear that there is an epidemic problem of not being nice.

Jose (P): In this process, what have workers experienced as far as unfair practices of management?

Carol (R): With regard to NLRB’s definition (National Labor Relations Board)?

Jose: Technically and broadly.

Carol: Management hasn’t changed their behavior much. They discriminate and favor one employee over another. They probably don’t intimidate as much as before. Management has been racking up ULP’s (unfair labor practices) which are still being investigated by the NLRB.

Doug (R): I work in corporate building. Within the department the manager in accounting is very opposed to the union. Three employees wanted to sign petition for the union, but were afraid to sign because manager would see. It’s a closed environment so we don’t say anything in public because it will make it very uncomfortable. The manager a few days ago taped article to her door with highlighted passages. Sending a message to the members of her department that the union is a bunch of idiots. No ULP was filed, but the atmosphere makes it hard for people to do what they want: to show open support for the union.
Marc Perry:

Hello, my name is Marc Perry. I have worked at Powell's for seven years. I work in the Architecture Section and I'm a used book buyer. I come from Detroit where my dad was a welder and a member of the UAW. I was raised with the knowledge that the union was the only protection from the corporation. I have been a member of six unions including the ILWU in Michigan, Alaska and Oregon. This is the most democratic and energetic union of which I have been a member.

Local 5 has filed ten ULP's (unfair labor practice complaints) since October of 1999. (I then listed them succinctly.) The complaint filed this May 26th grew out of the second incident I will recount. Since we don't have a contract yet I am an information steward, not a regular steward, but last fall a young woman who is one of my steward contacts approached me at the Used Book Buyers Table. She was upset and wanted to talk. She was about to cry and was ready to quit. The lead worker (who is like a foreman) in her department was changing her job but not providing training, a promotion or a raise. We went to the union office and established some alternatives to her quitting. She and her coworkers are still trying to change their working conditions.

About a month ago I was working in the Architecture Section when the second young woman approached me. She also was shaken and threatening to quit. She had just been denied her pre approved vacation. She was going to her brother's wedding. Her earned leave had been used up during three days of unfair labor practices strikes during the week of May Day. She spent many hours on the picket line.

At Powell's earned leave can be used for either vacation or sick leave. People usually are allowed to take unpaid leave if they have no earned leave available.

After talking a while this young woman regained her composure and dried her eyes. Her regular information steward took over after that. The latest ULP was filed on her behalf.

Before the union (came along) these people probably would have left Powell's. With a union contract they will have recourse to the full protection the law allows. During contract negotiations these women have come rights but we all look forward to having a union contract. Thank you.
Ryan Teckas:

I am a truck driver at the Hoyt warehouse. I’ve been working for Powell’s for nine months. When I first started working a union steward approached me with information about becoming a member of the union. I took the opportunity to be involved after my probationary period. Then I became a bargaining member and steward for the warehouse. During my probationary period, I found could talk about cats, look at massage books, and the Kama Sutra. When I became involved with the union I began looking at labor books and taking about upcoming union meetings and events.

My manager pulled me aside and warned me about talking to people too much. I understood my manager’s issues, although I could see I was being singled out based on the topic of my conversations, so I tried to accommodate management. I told my manager that I’d begin talking to people by asking if they wanted to take a 15 minute break with me. I was told by my manager that, “We expect two things: data entry and truck driving, that’s it.”

It’s not right that people can talk about other things that affect their life as long as it isn’t about union, when union is the thing that affecting their lives most closely. A ULP (unfair labor practice) was filed on my behalf after this incident. Employees have the right to request to speak to a union steward. Powell’s employees who support union so strongly should have the right to talk about union as well as kitty cats.

Wendy Brown:

In March of this year a vocally anti-union employee who had worked at Powell’s for six weeks was promoted to a lead position, which is a supervisory position. He was chosen over two other candidates who had each been there over six months, had far more experience, but were union supporters who had participated in several actions, including an unfair labor practice strike just days before the position was awarded to the vocally anti-union six week employee.

This decision has been demoralizing to everyone in our department. The managers who chose him do not have to train him, we do: I ma also a lead and I have to take time from my normal duties to train him on basic tasks. Other staff, that he supervises, who make less $2.00 less an hour than him—have to train him. He also earns lots of overtime by coming in on his days off when we are on strike. We then have to endure his complaints about “having” to so and his comments on payday about how he can now afford that motorcycle He’s wanted.
Worse than this is how our manager treats us. She is known for treating people rudely, which she jokingly refers to as her "management style." After unfair labor practice strikes she has threatened us by accusing us of taking long lunches without permission. On May Day, before the shipping crew walked out to protest and unfair labor practice by Powell's management, she told two employees that she brought her mace to work. On the day we planned a rally outside of Powell's, she locked our doors, which usually stand wide open, five hours before the rally was scheduled to begin because she said that she was afraid of the "violence." In addition to her job at Powell's, our manager is a part-time bartender and hires her regular customers into our department.

Part of my job description is to take part in interviewing and hiring. I have never once been asked to participate in an interview with any applicants because interviews don't happen. The manager just brings people in form her bar, and one of those people became the shipping lead I spoke of. This type of favoritism is not how people are normally hired at Powell's and a glaring example of why we need a fair contract. In general, there is a marked tension when our manager works with us on the floor. She feels our union activity is a personal attack on her and she therefore has a right to treat us poorly.

Her behavior is just one example of management at Powell's. Just because someone is good at tasks, they get promoted to management without training on how to manage people or any accountability on how they do so. I don't know what our manager hopes to accomplish with her behavior, but I do know that it has made the rest of us stronger in our resolve to support whatever actions it takes to move towards getting a fair contract. Despite the hostility that we face day-to-day, we have managed to create an enjoyable work environment for ourselves by making all of our decisions together and by looking out for one another. I am proud of the solidarity that my co-workers have shown me.

Thanks you for the opportunity to tell you about what is happening at Powell's Books.

Questions from the panel

Marvin (P): What makes this union so special?

Mark (R): It's exciting to get in on the ground floor of new local. Other places if you want a job you join the union. You might go to a union meeting once in a while. In this union I have gone to lots of meetings and am also a steward. I feel good about being involved.

Diane (P): You have had a lot of experience with unions. A lot of Powell's employees have not had this same experience. How are others reacting?
Mark (R): Unions have been weakened over last decades. Unions haven't been around. Some have been with other unions and haven't been convinced that this is a better union. We're putting it all together ourselves.
Panel 3: Issues Remaining Unresolved
Pat Love, Ryan VanWinkel, Mary Winzig

Pat Love:

I have worked for Powell’s for two years in two departments. I am an email runner for the internet sales division and also work in sections. I make $8/hour. Over the course of bargaining, health care has been one of the most passionate discussions. Few employees can afford health care. Those that do have to .... It costs $240 per month for the health care plan for a family. On $8/hour that means 1 paycheck. The lowest paid employees (basically everyone under 7 years) are hard hit by deductibles because they can’t afford care.

Powell’s wants to double our insurance costs. Management proposed that all prescriptions be handled by mail with and increase from $5 to $10. I don’t feel comfortable not knowing the pharmacist who’s providing me my medications. They (management) thought that mail would equal less prescriptions and therefore save them money. Powell’s pays $129 per month per employee for health insurance which is below the national average, and they say it’s too expensive. Management has exaggerated the expenses and say it costs them $800,000 per year when it reality their cost is more like $600,000 because they aren’t including the amounts that are refunded to them.

Many people have to forego health care. Employees should have a $100 deductible. Right now the cost makes employees choose between food or health care.

Ryan Van Winkel:

I was customer for 10 years before I became an employee. I’ve been working for one year in the mystery department. I love job, and I love Powell’s. A living wage in Portland is $11.44 an hour for a single person and $18.45 and hour for family of three. The average wage at Powell’s $8.42 an hour. Since this is an average, and includes the people making 6 figures, most employees make less than $8.42 per hour.

The company has instituted a policy of a 0-3% yearly merit raise, which is at the discretion of managers. With this rate structure it will take me over a decade to get to a living wage. In comparison it takes Safeway grocery checker only 3 years to make a living wage. If we don’t get a contact, I can get $7.52 per hour next year with a 3% raise. Each month after I pay my rent, I have $460 left over for food clothes, and other my
only pair of shoes got a cracked sole. I can’t afford to buy new ones. I can’t afford contact fluid, and I can’t afford deductible to go the dentist. This month was a three paycheck month. I could go to the doctor or the dentist, but not both. I can’t afford to own a car or go on vacation, and I can’t imagine what it would be like to have kids. Mary you’re amazing!

The company’s attorney has said at bargaining sessions that, “if we could pay you less, we would.” The company is making record profits. Now that the retail sector is the largest employer of workers in the country, it is our time to fight. We deserve to be treated with dignity.

Mary Winzig:

Hi. My name is Mary Winzig and I'm an employee at the Burnside Powell's Store. My job description is "new book purchaser." I find it ironic that I had been talking to a reporter from Publisher Weekly and when I told her my job title, she just laughed and said, "In the industry we call that a buyer and Powell's probably calls you so that they can pay you nothing." I make $8.76 an hour after 5 years.

I want to talk to you all today about the importance of a Union Shop for Powell's Books workers. Other terms that mean the same thing include "Union Security," "Agency Shop," and "Fair Share." What this means is that there is a provision in the contract that specifies that every person in the bargaining unit will share the cost of negotiations and enforcement of the contract. Because the majority of the bargaining unit at Powell's voted for representation, Local 5 is obligated by law to represent us. This includes contract negotiations, representations in grievance procedures and other benefits that the Union contract will provide like higher wages and good healthier. Basically everyone gains and everyone pays. A good analogy is that it wouldn't be fair that Ryan pays to get on the bus and I don't. As Ryan pointed out we are low wage workers and what would happen is that Ryan and others would be footing the bill for me to get a free ride.

But that is not all—a union shop means a strong union. It is no coincidence that a vast majority of union in Oregon are union shops. Those are the ones that survive. If we want to keep Local 5 alive and help others get a voice in their workplace like we are working for now, we need everyone paying dues. As you have been hearing from my co-workers testimonies, I think that you know how far we have come in our struggle. We have gone from feeling isolated and bitching about our jobs, to standing together, going through a process and exercising our rights. We are a community. Without a strong local, we will lose all of this. If we do not have Union Security, we will not have an effective union. It's like management wants to write union busting into the contract. We would have to stretch fewer resources to cover more people. Without Union Security, we also would not have dues check off—so we would be focusing time
and effort on collecting dues and keeping track of dues—time that could be better served helping workers.

Something to point out is that we are not asking for everyone to be a card-carrying member of the ILWU. By law, there is a religious exception and we are also allowing Powell's employees to choose if they want to join the ILWU, but we are asking that everyone pay their fair share.

It distresses me to think that Michael Powell, a leader against censorship, would actually use “free speech” as his argument against a union shop. If Mr. Powell was really for free speech and democracy, not only would he be here tonight, he would also realize that we are exercising our democratic rights by voting for a union. We elected a bargaining team to represent us at the negotiations table and we want our civil right to have a fair contract that we, the Powell’s workers can vote on.


*Margaret Hallack*

They don’t need an expert. Mary did excellent job of explaining the importance of a union shop. I’ll try to be brief. My training is in economics, and I am not an attorney. I will speak to union shop agreements as a standard.

Union shops agreements are expressly permitted in the National Labor Relations Act. Why is such a thing in the basic law? The provision says that labor and employers can agree that as condition of employment all workers share in the cost of union representation. These are known as union security provisions because they provide support that unions need to represent the employees. These are also called membership or fair share agreements because they require that union represent the interests of all workers. Union shop agreements DO NOT require that all employees join the union, agree with union policies, be union activists, just that employees support cost since they gain from the benefits of union contracts. Obviously, since they are obligated to represent all workers, the unions function as the exclusive bargaining representatives of the workers. As their duty, then workers should share in the cost. The union cannot act in arbitrary fashion or with discrimination. Legally, this relationship is likened to the responsibility of legislators to follow interests of people without regard to who voted for them. Like with roads which are build with taxes, we all pay because the roads are used overall. Many union activities benefit employees in small ways. Increased workplace safety is an indirect benefit.
Further, beyond the practical and compelling; this issue is written into the union legislation because this is about people. It’s a labor market and there are a few fundamental conflicts in the workplace. It is up to workers in the United States, through unions and management, to negotiate contracts. In other countries these are matters of public policy. Here unions must negotiate for them. Unions are asked to be experts in wide range of issues, and to provide this expertise, participants must invest a lot of effort.

Employers have more power. Workers need collective voice. Individually workers have no power, no effective means of representation. Unless unions have financial support, collective bargaining is a sham because when only a few people support the work, the rhetoric of a weak union becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Twenty-one states are right to work states. In these states there are lower or no state minimum wage provisions and higher levels of poverty. Workers don’t have the kind of security and power they need. Union security crucial to workers.

In a democracy, workers vote. Unions raise the issue of democratic rights. If all workers agree to have a union then they vote for one. We have democracy in community, in city, why not in workplace?

*Mary (P)*: It is stark to hear of those who have health care that cannot afford to use the benefit. Doesn’t Michael Powell know that there will be point where ..... 

*Ryan (R)*: How could he not know? His name is on the pay checks.

*Marilyn (P)*: How close do you sense that you are to an agreement?

*Mary (R)*: We keep hearing that negotiations are going into federal mediation, but I don’t know how close that is. This has been going on for so long. I used to think, “this is the day,” but...

*Carol (R)*: We are getting closer. To clarify, the union and management are about $400,000 apart in wages right now, over 3 years. We are trying to get closer. Management doesn’t try, and unless they do, there’s a problem.

*Diane (P)*: How do you feel about response of community?

*Pat (R)*: It has taken a lot of community support come this far because of... It’s frustrating to hear editorials that talk about us employees as whining. One guy wrote that if they [Powell’s employees] are college educated, how
about buying some real clothes and getting real job. We ignore it. We believe in what we’re doing and continue working very had towards it. Speaking negatively just makes us stronger.

Mary(R): I have been indigent most of adult life. As I began watching all money pour out of Powell’s, I realized that I’m tired of running and going somewhere else’s to get job. I’m excited about my coworkers and trying to make it work here, This is my family and community. People I’ve been serving for ten years come in regularly to ask me for book recommendations.

Jose (P): This questions is for Margaret regarding the adverse reaction that Michael Powell’s credibility trumps the issues of the workers. What type of credibility does open shop give you?

Margaret (R): The open shop, union security, is a fundamental issue of worker democracy. The public should support the position of the union regarding open shop. Fundamentally anti-union anti-worker states come with broad issues. PART OF Broad package, fundamentally.

? (R): Bill Sizemore and George W. Bush are also on record in support off open shops.

? (R): Michael Powell votes for union shops though his appointment with the Port of Portland and the Longshoremen.

Audience questions:

Q: Has the NLRB (National Labor Relations Board) helped at all in forcing Michael Powell to bargain in good faith and what have they done about the ULP’s (unfair labor practices) filed?

Carol (R): The NLRB moves like molasses. A lot of us are testifying this week to officers of NLRB. Some are open, others are full of crap. I am convinced that they are slowing down process when they just called now about a ULP filed last September.

(R): The NLRB is really weak. Not everyone on the board is an advocate of employees by any means.

(R): The NLRB set me a letter that I got today at 4:45. The letter said to respond by Tuesday, which is today, at 4:00. It’s kind of ridiculous.
If the NLRB finds in our favor, the result is that Powell’s will have to post the ruling of the NLRB on the employee bulletin board for 90 days that they committed an ULP. That’s the sanction.

Q: What are the biggest issues in the contract negotiations?

Carol (R): Health care. As discussions continue our case is getting stronger. Management provides national statistics that don’t apply. Powell’s has young healthy workers. They have a very cheap health plan. The only way that costs are rising is because they are hiring more people to fill openings due to business expansion. Union shop is big one also, and wages.

Q: What is the single most important change you would recommend in voting and bargaining for a contract?

Michael Cannarella, ILWU: In British Columbia (BC) the first contracts go to arbitration if the two sides cannot reach an agreement. Both sides then present case to an arbitrator who decides the terms and gives a contract. In BC the time required to obtain the first contract is less than a year. Another Canadian provision is that if employees agree by a majority, there is a union.

Q: Can the union provide benefits for multi-employers at a lower cost?

(R): The people at Powell’s like their coverage and frankly, won’t find it cheaper. Public workers, who the taxpayers pay for benefits, average $400 per month per employee for health coverage. Powell’s can’t get another cheaper plan.

Q: Please respond to statement that Powell’s already pays better than other bookstores.

Doug (R): Powell’s isn’t a regular bookstore. My manager makes five times what a regular bookstore manager makes. What’s being asked of workers is more complex, in depth, and requires more training. In addition to that, regular bookstores should make more money. I got an offer the other day to make $10 an hour more in another workplace. I don’t really want to take that job because I like the people I work with and I like Powell’s. I just want to make it a more fair place to work.

(R): We are seeing sales go up exponentially, we’re seeing managers making more money. Why are we asked to take pay cuts, pay more for health care when we’re seeing the company prosper?
Q: What will happen next, what can members of the audience do to support you?

Mary W. (R): We are not going to stop until we get a contract. When the union started in September 1998, one of the things that we talked about is the reason that we wanted to unionize is that we love Powell’s Books and we love our jobs. We’re a community now. It’s amazing the progress that we all have gone through. I am so proud of all my coworkers, the people on the panel, the audience; we have worked so hard. I have to thank the community. We could not have done this without you guys. One of the things we have been thinking of is a boycott pledge list. We don’t really want to do this, but we hope that if local 5 calls for boycott, that people will follow. I hope that we can take the message to Michael Powell that we deserve a contract. Hopefully you guys can talk to him, make him listen, before we have to call a boycott.

Margaret Butler: It is now time for the panel to break for deliberation.
The Panel’s Recommendations

Diane Rosenbaum: It is now 8:30. The panel has considered your testimony and now each of us will take a turn to offer our responses and recommendations.

Marvin: I’ve known you all now for some time. I go into the children’s store often and I’m impressed with that your doing. This is a problem that must be resolved. As employees, you all are just too smart, too responsible, and too committed. They want to wear you down and dumb you down which is why they are pulling the tricks and delaying the process. Your strength will lead you to justice. Unfortunately, there is no better way to an agreement. Keep on truckin’ and eventually you’ll win.

Jose: As a Worker’s Rights Board that attempts to represent the community, we tried to get a sense of the community values that are not represented in the negotiations. We found four values that are fundamental but not represented:

1) Having a democratic right to a voice in the workplace;
2) If a person is willing to work 40 hours per week, then you should make a living wage. This ought to be a value that people who work full time out to be able to live a decent life.
3) The value to peace of mind when it comes to health issues. People should not to make a choice between shoes or going to the dentist or the doctor.
4) We have a strongly held value against discrimination of any sort. Institutionalizing a 2 tier system where some gain and others don’t, is discrimination.

We cannot condone actions that violate these values. The abridgement of these values is damaging to the community.

Mary: I am so impressed by you values and commitment. We Support your efforts to gain a living wage. As an economist, I see these numbers. People need the living wage. You don’t need to wear diapers on the job to need a union. If you work, you need a form a union to maintain a voice. Your hard work is really a public service. You are making it easier for all the retail workers around the country to do what you’re doing.

Aryeh: Here we live in a society where we don’t have the will to take care of everybody. It has to start somewhere. It’s moving and touching to see you take a stand. Thank you for your efforts.
Cecil: Thank you all for your dedication and you steadfastness. I echo the sentiment that what you are engaged in is a community building process that is not only at Powell's but also at the larger community. As you continue to do this good work and continue to recognize its purpose, remember that the atmosphere and that management is sending a message that prevents people from doing what they want to do: to serve people. Your rights should not be violated in accordance to what Michael Powell thinks is right and wrong. What you are working for is to create democracy in the workplace. The importance of our democracy is not only in our greater government but in where you want to work and live. I am encouraged by who you are and what your are doing. Keep the faith and keep up the good work.

Marilyn: I am appalled at the economic inequity in the country. Our current condition should not be a way for a wealthy country to live, with people having to make the choices between medicine or food or clothing.

(? New) I am struck by the articulateness, passion, and aliveness of the group. Powell's is known all over the country. You are doing this not just for yourselves, but for many workers all over this country that are working for wages that are not enough and not what they deserve.

Diane: There is little for me to add other than the recommendations. Powell's is a special place that matters to a lot of people. The union is another institution. That people have fought and died for the rights that they have supported, you know that you are not alone. This is the struggle of the entire labor movement.

The findings of this panel are the following:
We support the principle of union shop.
We ask that the union and employer allow independent experts to evaluate their costs to eliminate the discrepancies in the numbers.
We will again encourage and invite Michael Powell to meet with this WRB to find ways to move the process forward including a facilitated meeting.
We will support you in any way that we can.