



PRESS ASSOCIATES UNION NEWS SERVICE

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A PAI SPECIAL REPORT ELECTION 2016

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OPEIU: BIG CO-WORKING FIRM SETTLES NLRB CASE BY REWRITING HANDBOOK

NEW YORK (PAI)—The nation's largest co-working startup, New York-based WeWork Companies, has agreed to rewrite an employee handbook that broke labor law, the National Labor Relations Board confirmed.

The charges against WeWork, and its forced changes in the employee handbook, are important because they show even more ways that firms in the emerging “gig economy” exploit workers and break labor laws.

But the labor law-breaking isn't over at WeWork, NLRB records show: The same union local that filed the case against the firm's handbook, Office and Professional Employees Local 153, also has an open case against WeWork in Crystal City, Va., just outside Washington, D.C. And an individual worker in California is awaiting a ruling on her illegal firing.

According to its website, WeWork provides firms, especially startups, with workspace designs and Internet connections. But it also runs happy hours, arranges meetings with “investors and industry leaders,” sets up networking events and even has a summer camp for its employees and customers.

What it also did, the NLRB said, was illegally bar its workers from “engaging in legal activities, such as discussing wages and unionizing.”

"One offending section of the handbook, titled 'Do the Right Thing,' told employees to weigh whether a situation may be unethical by asking themselves questions like, 'How would I feel if it made headlines in news outlets?'" OPEIU added.

To settle the New York case, WeWork promised to e-mail its workers and post notices in its U.S. offices telling workers of the right to unionize. The firm denied the handbook banned unionizing, but said it would change it anyway.

Local 153 is "pleased that WeWork is finally being held accountable for violating federal labor law and will be required to maintain an open environment where employees have the freedom to speak out on work issues," union rep Seth Goldstein told OPEIU.

In the Crystal City complaint, filed Sept. 16, Local 153 told the board's regional office in Baltimore that WeWork broke the law by illegally retaliating against pro-union workers, illegally disciplining and firing them and illegally refusing to hire workers due to their pro-union views.

Besides the charges in Crystal City, the board is considering a WeWork case in San Francisco, filed last December, by former employee Tara Zoumer.

Zoumer said she was fired after refusing to sign a mandatory arbitration agreement and a ban on class action suits as a condition of continued employment with WeWork. The NLRB has recently been tossing out firms' mandatory arbitration clauses – and their bans on class action.

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