Trader Joe’s in Hadley: A Unionization Battleground

Karen Galvan

2025-02-16

In 2023, a significant surge in union activity was observed, with 115,000 workers participating in union elections—the highest number in a decade, according to the Center for American Progress. This trend has continued into 2024, with Western Massachusetts alone seeing nearly 600 workers vote to join unions, as reported by The ShoeString.

Over the past year, Hampshire county has been experiencing a wave of unionization across various sectors, including medical centers, cafes, and retail franchises. One of those retail franchises has been Trader Joe’s in Hadley, whose workers, represented by Trader Joe’s United, voted to unionize in 2022 in a 45-31 vote in 2022, becoming the first Trader Joe’s franchise to do so in the nation.

Since 2022, the Trader Joe’s location in Hadley has submitted **53** filings to the National Labor Relations Board related to unfair labor practices and petition filings since 2022, more than any other organization in Hampshire county. The NLRB supports workers who choose to form unions, ensures that corporations allow free and fair union elections, and protects union workers if businesses retaliate against them. Some of the charges union members have charged Trader Joe’s with include “Refusal to Bargain/Bad Faith Bargaining”, “Coercive Rules”, “Coercive Statements (Threats, Promises of Benefits, etc.)”, interrogation, and discharging employees. The former are examples of numerous tactics businesses use to dissuade workers from further pursuing unionization efforts, creating an environment of fear and uncertainty. In addition to the charges, the Daily Hampshire Gazette reports “Trader Joe’s illegally terminated a long-term employee, allegedly for failing to remove a small power tool from the store’s premises when asked to do so by management, and retaliated against workers at two unionized stores by providing them a less favorable retirement benefit than at non-union stores”.

The unionization efforts at Trader Joe’s in Hadley reflect a broader national trend of workers demanding better wages and improved working conditions. The success of Trader Joe’s United has inspired workers at other Trader Joe’s locations across the country to consider unionizing, signaling a potential shift in the retail sectors. However, unionization is rarely ever a smooth process. Companies frequently stall negotiations, hold union-busting campaigns, or, according to More Perfect Union, leverage organizations like the National Right To Work Foundation to spread dissent among members in efforts to decertify the union.

The Trader Joe’s case in Hadley is a microcosm of a larger, national movement. The sheer volume of NLRB filings from the Hadley location demonstrates the persistence of workers in holding their employer accountable and fighting for their rights. As Trump’s administration attacks numerous federal agencies, including the NLRB, it will be vital to keep close watch on labor movements like Hadley’s Trader Joe’s United chapter that continue to organize and resist.