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WORKERS' RIGHTS BOARD: A hearing for workers at Giti Tire to share their experiences.



Catawba Area
Workers' Rights Board
in conjunction with
Clinton College

WHEN: June 11th at 1 PM
WHERE: Boilermaker's Union Hall 712 Patriot Pkwy, Rock Hill, SC 29730
Moderated by Brandon Upson Chairman, SCDP Black Caucus
Author: Dr. Lafarah S. Frazier, DrPH, Director, Wellness and
Community Health Institute, Clinton College

September 6, 2022

Workers' Right Board Panelists

Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, II, President, Repairers of the Breach and Co-Chair of the Poor People's Campaign

Sherry East- President- The SC Education Association

Dr. Lester McCorn- President, Clinton College

James Dukes- President- Catawba Area Labor Council

Sue Berkowitz Esq.- Director, SC Appleseed Legal Justice Center

Angela Douglas- CEO/Principal Strategist, Douglas Strategy Group

Carlos Williams- Councilman, Chester City Council

Workers' Rights Board Core Team

Brandon Upson -Chairman, SCDP Black Caucus, Chairman, Alpha Phi Alpha

Natasha Witherspoon -Founder, Moms Against Racism

Dr. Lafarah S. Frazier, DrPH -Director, Wellness and Community Health Institute, Clinton College

Lindsay McClelland -Recording Secretary, Catawba CLC, Board Member, SC AFL-CIO

Kerry Taylor -Tri-Chair, SC Poor People's Campaign

Russell Bannan -Organizer, United Steelworkers

Nichel Dunlap -Fellow, Jobs with Justice/ABSI, Recording Secretary, UE150 NC Public Service Workers Union

Worker Participants

The Workers' Rights Board Panel heard testimony from the following Giti workers and Nichel Dunlap, Jobs with Justice/ABSI Recording Secretary, UE150 NC Public Service Workers Union.

Kathy Rice-Visual Tire Inspector

Linda Buckson-Visual Tire Inspector

Lavera Shealy-Visual Tire Inspector (Inactive employee)

3 Anonymous workers -Job titles unknown. Testimonies read by Nichel Dunlap, JWJ.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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According to the U.S. Department of Labor, worker protection is the “law of the land.”¹ As such, maintaining the health and safety of workers is a mandate for businesses and not a request. The Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 established that workers have the right to workplace safety that is free of known hazards and risks. Furthermore, an additional facet of workplace safety encompasses workers’ rights that coincide with human rights. Worker rights include the right to decent work, freedom of association, the freedom to form a union, protection against discrimination and the right to equal opportunity to be promoted.² Workers’ rights issues and labor abuse continue to plague industries globally. The systematic abuse of workers’ rights is a direct violation of a worker’s dignity and respect because labor rights are human rights. Based on reports from workers at Giti Tire, there appear to be several violations of international labor standards at Giti Tire Manufacturing located in Chester County and that the human and worker rights of Giti employees are not being protected nor upheld by Giti management.

This report describes the shared work experiences of Giti plant workers. The Workers’ Rights Board was an opportunity for Giti employees to publicly address workplace injustices collectively. Common themes included mandatory overtime, unsafe work practices, occupational segregation by gender and the basic lack of respect for human decency. These themes emerged from the testimonies shared by both current and past employees. The worker stories mentioned a great desire for worker protection, pay equality and fairness on the job. While this report is an account of worker stories shared at the hearing, it also entails findings and final recommendations that were provided to the workers, Chester County and Giti Management. The goal of this report is to advocate for those vulnerable groups who have historically been marginalized and exploited for their labor. Furthermore, this report was an opportunity to give workers a voice in creating a safe and healthy workplace and is in support of the “fight” for the right to decent work.

Statement

The Workers' Rights Board (WRB) is a public forum where workers can bring complaints against employers for violating their human and legal rights in the workplace. The Board is drawn from a broad spectrum of community leaders and can intervene with employers and the public to help resolve situations that threaten workers' rights. The Board believes that it is especially important to support the efforts of low wage workers, who tend to be women, immigrants, young workers, and workers of color, to achieve justice in the workplace. Safe, living wage jobs, where workers are not discriminated against for speaking up for their rights, are the backbone of any healthy community. Nationally there are more than 20 Workers' Rights Boards.

Purpose

The Catawba Area Workers' Rights Board is convened to bring to light and respond to injustices in the workplace. The Board also fights for community labor standards that respect the dignity of all workers. In recent years workers' rights have been eroded. Workers are often intimidated or fired for speaking out for union organizing. All too often, the community does not know these stories. It is time for workers' voices to be heard by our community.

Workers' Rights Boards provide a platform and entry point for faith and community leaders to identify their self-interest in these struggles and amplify the voices of workers and other marginalized communities. Government institutions including the National Labor Relations Board, the Departments of Labor on the federal and state level, and the South Carolina State Legislature have increasingly failed to respond effectively to inequality and injustice. Workers' Rights Boards respond quickly and effectively to incidents of inequality and injustice by investigating complaints, holding public hearings, issuing public statements, or engaging in other actions.

Goals:

- Hold public hearings or press conferences to expose workplace injustices and the violation of workers' rights.
- Investigate incidents where employers are accused of violating workers' rights or unfairly resisting efforts of workers to have a voice in their workplace.
- Establish community standards about fairness in the workplace that will serve as a moral benchmark to which employers can be held accountable.
- Support and strengthen workers' democratic rights through community education.
- Release report of the findings from the WRB hearing.



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Background/Introduction

Giti Tire is one of the largest tire manufacturers in the world. It is based in Singapore and has factories in Indonesia and China. It has more than 30,000 employees worldwide and earns \$2.5 billion annually in revenue.³ After decades of importing low-cost tires from its factories in Indonesia and China, Giti opened its first factory in the United States in the Fall of 2017. Giti chose Richburg, South Carolina because it was offered more than \$60 million in tax abatements; in exchange for providing 1,700 jobs and investing \$560 million.⁴ But thus far, Giti has failed to live up to its promises to its workers and to our community. As of today, it has only created about one-third of the jobs it promised and has fewer employees than it did in 2019 (see Appendix B).⁵

Bringing Giti Tire to our community was important. Many of our people have fallen on tough times and needed good jobs. The people of Chester County, where the Giti facility is located, still earn a quarter less than the average South Carolinian, and they are more likely to live below the poverty line, and far less likely to get a college degree. In the City of Chester, where many Giti employees live, people are twice as likely to live in poverty than the rest of the state, and the median household income is less than half of the state average (see Appendix C below).⁶

The workers at Giti Tire reflect the demographics of our community. More than 60% of Giti workers are African American. There are also a substantial number of women working at the plant, comprising more than 40% of the workforce. African American women make up the largest group of workers in the plant and represent 30% of workers (See Appendix D below).⁷



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As mentioned above, Giti was offered generous tax breaks by Chester County and the State of South Carolina to come to our community and these abatements do not come without a cost. Giti has received more than \$12 million in local tax breaks since 2018 and should continue receiving at least \$4 million per year for the next five years.⁸ This is in addition to the \$40.4 million it received from the Governor's Closing Fund, the Rural Infrastructure Authority Grant, and the Port Grant.⁹ Meanwhile, Chester County schools continue to be underfunded. Since 2017, abatements to companies like Giti have depleted \$61.9 million from the Chester County School District.¹⁰

Despite the generous tax abatements offered to Giti Tire, by early 2018, some problems began to emerge, when a federal lawsuit revealed that Giti had amassed more than \$2 million in unpaid debts to a company that supplied it workers and an equipment supplier. This happened after Giti had already received \$40 million in grants from South Carolina.¹¹

It was not until the pandemic hit that we really saw Giti's true colors. On April 4th, 2020, Giti closed its factory in Richburg and laid off 636 workers, many of which never got called back to work. Giti wrote to some employees that although it hoped "the furlough is temporary; at this time, we do not anticipate that you will be recalled." Days later it received \$9.8 million in federal Paycheck Protection Program loans to preserve five hundred jobs in South Carolina and at one of its subsidiaries in Southern California. Giti's failure to use its loans to bring back many of its workers created significant hardships for those left behind. For example, Ray Durmon started working for Giti Tire in 2017 and was one of the first maintenance workers hired for the new factory. In May 2020, when the factory reopened, Ray was not called back. He tried calling the company to find out his status, but they would not return his calls. Ray says, "When COVID hit they sent me home with the rest of them with the understanding that I would be coming back. Then I found out I was fired." After being laid off for six months and struggling to make ends meet, Ray and his family moved to Nebraska for a new job. "I had to sell off everything I had just so I could afford to move. I sold my tools. I sold my storage building. I sold my tractor and all our furniture."¹²

Those who were fortunate enough to be called back to work faced unsafe working conditions and short staffing. The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Agency (OSHA) in the summer of

2020 found that Giti failed to take precautions to limit the spread of Covid and found twice that Giti failed to notify employees who had worked near others who tested positive.¹³

Lastly, with the considerable number of women and African American women at the plant,¹⁴ it is concerning that at least two former workers alleged sexual harassment and racial discrimination and have been issued Right to Sue Letters from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and have filed complaints in court. Below is an excerpt from Kimberly Sutton's complaint. She is a former a Calibration Engineer at Giti. In addition to her allegations of being harassed for missing work while undergoing treatments for Stage 4 Cancer, she also alleged how a manager was inappropriately hugging and touching female workers and making advances.

"Plaintiff found her work environment to be extremely hostile because Abdelwahab was always hugging and touching other female workers. Plaintiff was made extremely uncomfortable at work observing this behavior as well as witnessing Abdelwahab "flirt" with other female employees as well as the fact Plaintiff was made aware of rumors of Abdelwahab was having sexual relations with female workers at Giti. Observing Abdelwahab's behavior caused Plaintiff a great deal of emotional distress and furthered the hostile environment she was exposed to at Giti." As of today, Abdelwahab is still believed to be employed at Giti Tire.¹⁵

Prior to this, another employee, Yolandra Douglas, was issued a Right to Sue Letter. Douglas filed a complaint alleging among many things that:

"Due to the severe and pervasive conduct by Defendant (Giti Tire Manufacturing USA), including the many denials of promotions because of race, the many false and race based disciplinary actions, and the many disrespectful comments, which Giti made no effort to remedy. Comments made to Plaintiff by Defendant's agents, including talking down to Plaintiff and referring to her as "you people," a hostile work environment was created, one in which Defendant was aware and made no effort to remedy."¹⁶

The workers at Giti belong to our churches, our families, and our communities. Over the last months, in speaking with workers, we have heard countless horror stories of how they are being treated at work. They have reported unsafe working conditions, low pay, mandatory overtime, changing schedules, and harassment. And when they have stood up and tried to speak with one voice and form a union, they have been met with a campaign of fear and intimidation including the following:

- Dumping manure at the gate where workers were leafleting. One employee said: "They spread turkey poop near where we are standing. The smell and flies are awful over here. I have encountered a lot of things, but this is absolutely the lowest of the low."¹⁷
- Anti-union captive audience meetings and anti-union literature sent to their homes.¹⁸

Because Giti management has failed to address its workers' concerns and declined our community's request to meet and discuss the issues that Giti workers raised, we convened the first meeting of a Workers' Rights Board in South Carolina. The following is what we discovered and our recommendations for how to achieve justice for workers at Giti Tire and our community.

Findings

On June 11th before a crowd of more than eighty community members, six workers from Giti Tire shared what it was like to work at Giti Tire. The following describes what we heard:

Mandatory Overtime

Countless companies across the globe have experienced an increasing labor shortage. Low wages, an exodus of baby boomers out of the workforce into retirement and Covid-19 are common factors that may explain the lack of available workers in the United States.¹⁹ While the obvious answer to the scarcity of labor workers may be to offer wage increases or better hiring rewards such as sign on bonuses, companies like Giti Tire have resorted to increased overtime to fill the gap. Several workers shared stories about forced overtime when their 10-hour shift quickly turned in to a 16-hour shift on any given day. Prior to coming to Chester County, Giti promised to bring 1,700 jobs to the county. As of today, Giti has only brought less than six hundred jobs which is not enough to sustain their manufacturing demand. As such, mandatory overtime has become the norm at the plant. An anonymous worker shared their experience about mandatory overtime:

“Over the last couple of years, I have been forced to work past my normal hours and required to stay for however long they wanted. On some days, an 8hr shift could turn into a 10hr, 12hr, or even 16 hours depending on the severity of the problem we were facing. Once the issue was fixed, I was allowed to go home to my family.”

Further, inactive employee Lavera Shealy described:

“We usually have ten inspectors on my shift. When I got back there were only 2 or 3, yet we were still expected to make production. To meet production goals, management would cancel my days off and force me to work. At one point I worked so much overtime, it felt like I was working two shifts and when we complained it was ignored.”

Low Pay/Lack of Raises

The Global Living Wage Coalition defines living wage as “the remuneration received for a standard workweek by a worker in a particular place sufficient to afford a decent standard of living for the worker and his or her family.”²⁰ A reasonable standard of living includes the ability to pay for food, water, housing, education, health care, transportation, clothing, and other essential needs including provision for unexpected events. Not only did Giti promise to bring jobs to the community, but they also promised to bring good pay and opportunities for promotions and increases. Sadly, Giti has failed to live up to their promises. Many testimonies heard at the WRB established that although Giti has been present in Chester County since 2017, the pay for many workers has either not increased, been inconsistent for workers doing the same job or insufficient for a standard cost of living increase. An anonymous employee spoke of holding multiple jobs in the plant at the same time, including the responsibility of training other employees, said this:

“I have been at Giti five years now. When I first hired in, I was making \$15 per hour. In 5 years, I have received one raise of \$2 per hour. Considering, I have learned two additional jobs in my department, which is not much. A raise is not based on merit but who your

friends are. If the supervisor likes you then you get the raises. To be honest, I received that raise around 2019 when we first started showing interest in forming a union”.

The lack of raises and promotion was a common theme shared among the Giti workers on June 11th, 2022, at the WRB. In fact, all the employees who shared testimony with the panelist and community expressed that they had not received much in terms of raises at all. Some employees even stated that workers who joined the Giti company after them received raises when they did not. Other employees stated that they were promised raises if they agreed to additional work responsibilities; after they had completed the requirement, they still did not receive a raise as promised. An anonymous employee’s account of their experience with the lack of receiving a raise was read by Jobs with Justice Fellow, Nichel Dunlap:

“I was told that I would be receiving a pay raise, however, when it was time for my pay raise, I was told instead that I needed to learn several other jobs. They gave me verbal directions on how to gain the pay raises because in many cases there is no written policy that backs up what they ask us to do. After completing all their verbal requirements, and learning the other jobs, I requested my pay raise. Suddenly, I was then told they had no record of me completing the requirements so they could not give me the raise.”

The lack of standardized policies and procedures that speak to pay equality was a common grievance against Giti Tire and their leadership team. The workers who gave testimonies communicated that there is a need to document discussions involving pay and job responsibilities because verbal directives do not give workers protection against exploitation. The anonymous worker who was promised a raise after taking on additional job responsibilities spoke specifically to the promise to increase pay and verbal directives:

“Later, when the record was located, I had another hurdle placed in my way. I was told I had to perform yet another job before I could receive the money I had rightfully earned. This company is known for switching up standards on its employees. The policies and procedures are not legally binding so they can switch up the requirements at any time. This leaves us as workers vulnerable to exploitation because there is nothing we can do when we have been treated unjustly. This is worker exploitation as we are having to do more jobs for less money.”

Health and Safety

The importance of health and safety in the workplace is one that should not be underestimated. For obvious reasons, ensuring health and safety on the job is done to protect workers from injury and harm and includes any other individuals who may encounter the business. The lack of proper health and safety procedures can lead to illness, injury, or death. Appropriate workplace health and safety is vital to the health and well-being of employees everywhere. Additionally, an environment that values employees aims to protect the health and safety of workers because it makes workers more committed to their jobs. Furthermore, employees who are protected have proven to be more efficient and productive. An anonymous worker who testified at the hearing shared work experiences regarding employees being injured on the job and the lack of workplace safety:

“I have seen or heard of people being hurt or injured on this job. I have personally seen people exposed to dangerous chemicals with little or no protection. I have seen the people working with these chemicals be completely covered in these dangerous substances. Many



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workers in the plant are fearful because they never know when they will be injured or could come down with a serious illness. Giti's lax handling of safety precautions and protective gear is going to cause someone to get really hurt."

Another worker, Lavera Shealy, who is currently inactive, also recalled that while working in the plant she too was exposed to unsafe work conditions and practices. Specifically, Ms. Shealy spoke to the exposure to toxic and flammable agents, as well as being subjected to extreme temperatures:

"While at my workstation, we were required to wear woven cloth gloves and given rags to dip into a can of liquid that smells like gasoline and is highly flammable. Our hands would be soaking wet from the flammable liquid the entire shift. The worst part was that our workstation was near these large barrels of flammable liquid and my biggest fear was that if something caught fire, then I would never see my family again. The working conditions at Giti are unbearable. During the Summer months it was so hot inside the plant that I could hardly breathe and many of my co-workers would pass out. We had fans in the plant, but maintenance was instructed not to turn them on. They put locks and chains on the ice machines and only a supervisor could access it for you if he chose to do so. I eventually started bringing my own cooler filled with ice. The winter months were no better. When it was 30-40 degrees outside, they would have maintenance turn the fans on. I would have to wear multiple layers of clothing along with a jacket and toboggan to stay warm. It was colder inside the plant than it was outside."

Receiving support from your employer in terms of work accommodations is important in terms of an employee returning to work from an injury. When employee requests for workplace accommodations are taken into consideration, employees can return to work faster. A positive return to work experience can ensure that your employees get the support they need, maintain your company productivity, and can help the employees healing process. Giti has not been supportive of reduced workloads due to an injury when it comes to their employees. In fact, Giti has not granted some requests for accommodations made by injured workers. Linda Buckson shared her experience regarding an injury and Giti's inability to accommodate her:

"Just at the height of the pandemic, I suffered an injury to my leg so severe that I could not work for 7 months. When I returned, I followed all company protocols and brought in a

medical note from my doctor stating that I would need to be placed on light duty as my leg continued to heal. However, instead of following my doctors' recommendations, I was told by the company that I would be returning to my regular position, or I would be terminated."

The Covid-19 pandemic showed the world more than ever before the importance of health and safety in not only the workplace, but in schools, churches, the grocery stores, movie theatres, shopping malls and many other establishments that many of us took for granted prior to the pandemic. Pre-Covid, we were able to walk into an establishment casually without the thought of having to cover half our faces or wear protective gear. Standing six feet apart was not even a thought prior to the emergence of the communicable disease. Many workers shared statements about not feeling safe while working at Giti. In addition to the difficulty of staying six feet apart from one another during shifts, workers also shared that they were not given the proper personal protective equipment to keep them safe while working. Again, Ms. Shealy shared:

"When COVID hit the plant, not only did Giti not provide us with Personal Protective Equipment, such as masks and gloves, but they did not supply necessities such as toilet paper and hand soap in the restrooms on the production floor. I had to bring my own toilet paper, hand soap, and Lysol. The restrooms in the from office were always clean and well stocked but we were told that we were not allowed to use them. Workers who had a positive test for COVID were forced to work. Upper management told them we had a job to do. Giti put each one of us at the plant, our families, and this community at risk of catching and spreading this vicious virus. Giti would not accept Doctor's excuses and if you tried to call out sick then they would threaten to fire you. One of my co-workers tried to call out because he was not feeling well. He was told by the supervisor that he would be fired if he did not show up for work. Unfortunately, he came in and died later that day on the job. A man lost his life, and it did not faze them."

Respect and Dignity

Work represents only one component of an individual's life. Respect at the workplace increases motivation and productivity among employees. As such, it is expected that workers of any kind should be treated with not only respect, but with dignity and professionalism always. Workers should be provided stability, benefits, equity, safety, and advocacy all without the fear of retaliation from management. Dignity and respect are lacking in Chester County at Giti Tire. Many of the employees collectively discussed numerous incidents where they encountered disrespect on the job from upper management. An anonymous worker shared:

"At Giti, the supervisor has total control of everything. He can say whatever he wants, with no repercussions. I cannot tell you how many times the supervisor chimes in and just starts bashing one of us knowing that everyone can hear. He calls us names and tells us how worthless and sorry we are because a piece of equipment went down. Keep in mind that I have no control over the machine going down."

An anonymous employee, confirmed this:

"I have trained so many workers on my job over the years. Many of them have already left due to the way we are treated at work. I do not ask for much, however it would be nice to be treated with a certain level of respect. The same level of respect that I show others."

Anti-union Behavior

Companies that run anti-union campaigns typically do not overtly state that they are anti-union. These companies will instead make comments about the cost of unions and the responsibility of dues, make references to the union not being able to come through on promises or that they are telling you about this information for your own good. What these anti-union companies fail to do is provide you with additional information about unions such as union dues are used to pay for resources that help employees win a fair contract which benefits all employees. Furthermore, broken promises are an indication of opposition from the company, not the union. Some of these anti-union tactics were shared during the testimony of many of the workers. For instance, an anonymous worker shared the following regarding anti-union behavior:

"If we speak out about any issues within the plant or about forming a union, there will be retaliation. Many of the employees in our plant want to get this union formed. But Giti was constantly posting misleading anti-union flyers or having the captive audience meetings that presented anti-union presentations to dissuade us from forming this union. The company has workers from our communities afraid to open their own doors to speak with the people who are here trying to help form this union. We need for Giti to stand down and let us form this union and stop with the intimidation tactics. I will not be made afraid in my own home of what my employer will try to do to me if I answer my door [to a union organizer]!"

An anonymous employee experienced a similar incident at Giti:

"Every time Giti thinks we are heading in the union direction they start having meetings and posting flyers saying, "We are a family, and we do not need any outsiders in here." They will start acting like they care about us, but the truth is they do not. In a few days' time, they go right back to their old ways. They will never change unless we force them to."

Gender/Occupational Segregation

Segregating work by sex is a tactic that is not new and often used by many industrial employers. The consequences of sex segregation are not only impactful economically but also psychologically and is linked to worker job satisfaction.²¹ Women who work in male dominated occupations often earn far less than their male counterparts even when education and skillset are accounted for. Today, more women work outside the home than ever before. Their work wages are crucial to not only the support of themselves and their family, but to the economy and women empowerment. Gender segregation creates a system of disparity and keeps the most marginalized groups impoverished and from thriving economically, socially, and emotionally. Equality in pay and promotion fosters a culture of empowerment and provides women a ticket to a better life. Visual Tire Inspector for Giti, Kathy Rice, said:

"There are ten of us who work in this job, and all of us are women. In our department, most of us are women. I want to see women in our jobs be valued for our work, but we do not advance in jobs or pay. We are stuck."

Fellow Giti worker and Visual Tire Inspector, Linda Buckson, shared the same sentiments as Ms. Rice. When sharing her testimony, Linda said:



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“Giti continues to change the rules about how employees earn a raise. I had to fight just to get \$16 an hour. I have been promised promotion after promotion but have continually been passed over for individuals whom I am training and are earning more money.”

Panelist Responses

Panelists were given a brief opportunity to ask questions and to respond to what they heard. None of the questions were posed directly towards any specific worker but more so towards the situations and conditions that the workers described as well as the local and state government responsibility. Below is a list of questions and comments posed by the panelists:

“...I have heard today about false promises. People being forced to have to train for all jobs and getting paid for one. People getting paid less than the new people they train. This is an old trick... and these are moral issues rooted in classism and racism. They are trying to divide the people but the people and workers are coming together. We also need to know every politician in this county that voted for the tax breaks and let them know that they have a clear responsibility to raise holy hell because they lied to you! Nobody gets a pass: you are either with workers or you are not.”

Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, II, President, Repairers of the Breach and Co-Chair of the Poor People’s Campaign

“In the South women are told to be quiet and look pretty and to just be glad you have job. They do not expect you to stand up for yourself, so I commend you today for standing up to the injustice you face at the plant.... this company moved here with a promise that has not been kept. There is a tax abatement situation that goes on in the state where a lot of these deals are made at the county or city level and sometimes our state legislators do not know about it and do not realize how our schools are impacted. We need to hold whoever makes

these deals accountable and check in and see how our workers are being treated...this must stop and hopefully it started with you today.”

Sherry East, President, The SC Education Association

“We are told to go out and get jobs to take care of ourselves and to make sure that we are providing for our employers, but employers need to provide for us as well. I am more than upset with what I have heard today. I heard all kind of things about pay, but the human indecency that you all have been dealing with is just incredible and I am sorry as a leader in Chester...I am also upset with the Chester County Council where they have decided that these issues have not been enough to intervene in anyway. We need to make sure our residents are getting these jobs and that they pay more than just the minimum wage or \$15 an hour. We want them to be able to buy a house and expand our tax base.”

Angela Douglas, CEO/Principal Strategist, Douglas Strategy Group

“We have heard about some dire conditions in the plant...we need to know how many complaints have been made to federal or state agencies and what they are doing about it.... We also need to know what was promised as a far as workers benefits for the \$60 million. Were they just promises? I am honored to be sitting in this room with all of you and for all the bravery that you are showing.”

Sue Berkowitz Esq., Director, SC Appleseed Legal Justice Center

“I reference the holy work because you recall Dr. King died fighting for exploited workers in Memphis, Tennessee when sanitation workers working in unhealthy conditions were being treated less than human. And what you have described here today sounds like a plantation. It is ungodly in 2022 than any human being would have to work under those conditions... we are fighting the same fight that we thought was over 50-60 years ago. So, this is our moment. I want to thank you all for presenting the moment to us to wake us up so we can join the Poor People’s Campaign and begin to change the tide in this country. What I finally want to say is that Dr. King preached that you are a child of God you have inherent dignity whether they honor you or not. You have dignity.”

Dr. Lester McCorn, President, Clinton College

“I sat and listened to workers talk about how the supervisors and the company (Giti Tire) mentally abused them while these workers were trying to make a living for themselves and their families. These workers were even abused at home by getting phone calls telling them to report to work or get fired for not coming to work on their day off. Some workers were even mandated to work long hours after their shift was over and cheated out of their overtime pay. To me, the lower-class workers (non-Supervisors) have only themselves to stand up and fight for what is right. These workers were not properly given the pay rate they were promised. From the beginning, this company has lied to the workers and the community of Chester County. I do not believe that this is what the workers of Giti tire signed up for.”

James Dukes, President, Catawba Area Labor Council

RECOMMENDATIONS

Many of the testimonies heard from the Giti workers shared common themes: inadequate staffing, discrimination, mandatory overtime, deficient workplace safety, an atmosphere of disrespect, intimidation, retaliation, low wages, lack of promotion and occupational segregation experienced by female workers. The collective work experiences shared at the Catawba Area Workers' Rights Board is a testament to not only the work conditions at Giti Tire but an egregious violation of human and legal rights. It should be noted that many of these complaints have been shared by staff to management, including Mr. Phang Wai Yeen, Chief Executive Officer of Giti Tire Manufacturing (USA) Ltd.²⁵ To date, management has failed to address said complaints. As such, we, the Coalition, the South Carolina Poor People's Campaign, and the Catawba Area Workers' Rights Board advise and recommend the following:

Entity: Giti Corporation

Message: Work represents only one component of an individual's life. Respect at the workplace increases motivation and productivity among employees. As such, it is expected all workers should be treated with respect, dignity, and professionalism. Workers should be provided stability, benefits, equity, safety, and advocacy all without the fear of retaliation from management.

Recommendation #1:

Management: We wholeheartedly recommend that Giti management stand down by respecting the workers' freedom of association and the freedom to organize a union.

Recommendation #2:

As a corporation, it is Giti's responsibility to follow the federal labor laws. We recommend that Giti sign a neutrality agreement and refrain from disparaging the union or discouraging unionization efforts.

Entity: Giti Workers

Message: Under the "Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work," the International Labor Organization recognizes workers' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining as fundamental rights. These are global standards that apply equally to the industrialized countries of the world and developing regions, as well as the town of Richburg, Chester County, and South Carolina. The rights also reflect basic values of our various faith traditions. This is a moral cause that connects to the very tenets of our teaching and innate rights of workers.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) has additionally preserved and developed a system aimed at promoting opportunities for people to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity. International labor standards, faith and the UN Sustainable Development Goals set the groundwork toward moral and legal groundings for you as workers to unionize in your fight for decent work and prosperity.

Recommendation #1:

Giti workers should continue your struggle towards achieving your union. Your effort to organize and collectively bargain for the conditions and respect you deserve is a righteous struggle. We, the Coalition, the South Carolina Poor People’s Campaign, and the Catawba Area Workers’ Rights Board, stand by you and recognize that you are the persons to continue your fight for legitimacy, integrity, fairness, and overall justice for Giti workers in the workplace.

Recommendation #2:

We strongly recommend that you invite your co-workers to join you in your efforts to unionize and share their testimonies of similar struggles concerning workplace bullying, prejudice, discrimination, unfairness, and inequality.

Entity: Chester County & South Carolina

Message: We believe that companies that receive public support have moral and legal obligations to the public that begins with their employees and extends to the taxpayers and the local ecology.

Recommendation # 1:

We recommend that it be required for counties to disclose deal-specific and company-specific performance reports on every project for the life of its tax abatement. We recommend a neutral review of the Giti deal to ensure that jobs of sufficient quantity and quality are being created and maintained.

Recommendation # 2:

We recommend a citizens’ review board that extends beyond Giti Tire where workers who are not represented by a union can address their concerns to a municipal body like independent agencies created to provide oversight of law enforcement.

Recommendation # 3:

We recommend that, for any deal in Chester County, a payment equal to 20% of a company tax abatement from the county be allocated to the county school district from the new tax revenue generated by the presence of the company. For example, if a business is granted a \$20 million abatement from Chester County, spread over various years, that \$4 million in revenue (20%) would be allocated from the county to the county schools over the same time. These deals are generating new tax revenue for the county, and a greater share should be allocated and dedicated to the county schools.

CONCLUSION



Photo by The United Steelworkers

One band, one sound is the essence of teamwork. People working together cooperatively to achieve a desired goal is essential to workplace effectiveness and efficiency. It is crucial that multi-stakeholders collaboratively work towards the eighth goal of the Sustainable Development Goals of “decent work” for all workers by aiding and supporting respect for workers’ rights and their freedom of association and collective bargaining. The Coalition, the South Carolina Poor People’s Campaign, and the Catawba Area Workers’ Rights Board must hold Giti accountable and pledge to do whatever it takes to ensure that the workers are protected and respected. This includes taking this message to local management, and to Chester County who negotiated the terms and contracts with Giti Tire’s management.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Testimony

Anonymous #1-Job title unknown

Worker's story read by Nichel Dunlap, JWJ

I was hired at Giti in 2020. During my time there, I have had to endure verbal abuse, mandatory overtime, and favoritism. At Giti, the supervisor has total control of everything. He can say whatever he wants, with no repercussions. I cannot tell you how many times the supervisor chimes in and just starts bashing one of us knowing that everyone can hear. He calls us names and tells us how worthless and sorry we are because a piece of equipment went down. Keep in mind that I have no control over the machine going down. Numerous times over the last couple of years, I have been forced to work past my normal hours and required to stay for however long they wanted. Some days, an 8hr shift could turn into 10, 12, or even 16 hours depending on the severity of the problem we were facing. Once the issue was fixed, I was allowed to go home to my family.

I have been working at Giti for two years, and I have received a grand total of one raise. It was for a \$1.00. It was not an easy task to receive that either. Like I mentioned before, the supervisor dictates everything and that includes "How Much" and "Who" when it comes to raises. Some people received \$1/hr., some people got \$3/hr., and some people got a \$5/hr. raises. There were no guidelines or certain criteria you had to meet to determine how much of a raise you received, it simply was based off whether the supervisor likes you or not. I know this to be true because I asked to see how the raises were determined and he told me he was the person making that decision.

There are plenty of other issues I could address such as training and safety, but let us be honest, no one is ever going to stay there and work for Giti with the way they treat us. I have already made up my mind that I am here to gain experience and move onto the next job. There is no way I will continue to put up with this abuse any longer than I must. I have two kids and I need a good paying job. Giti was supposed to be it, but they are not. There is only one thing that I know will change my mind about leaving this place and that is to come together and form a union. That is the only way to keep Giti from doing the things they are doing to us.

Anonymous #2-Job title unknown

Worker's story read by Nichel Dunlap, JWJ

I have been an employee of Giti since October of 2017. I am a Wind-up Operator on the Ply Unit in Stock Prep. It is a constant battle inside our plant between management and the workers. I must deal with favoritism, discouragement, and not being paid what I am owed. I have been at Giti 5 years now. When I was first hired, I was making \$15 per hour. In 5 years, I have received one raise of \$2 per hour. Considering, I have learned two additional jobs in my department, which is not much. A raise is not based on merit but who your friends are. If the supervisor likes you then you get the raise. To be honest, I received that raise around 2019 when we first started showing interest in forming a union.

They have this new board in the plant with everyone's name on it that is qualified as a master class operator. A master class operator is qualified on all jobs in the department, and they make \$20 plus per hour. I was looking at all the names on that board one afternoon and I told my supervisor who was standing beside me, that "my name was going to be up there one day." He looked at me and said "who, you?" and started laughing. Instead of encouraging me, he tried to discourage me from trying to better myself and my livelihood. Little does he know, that only motivates me more.

In 2021, we were working five 10-hour shifts per week. In August, we changed to 12-hour shifts, and I noticed that my paycheck was not adding up. I was afraid to say anything to my supervisor or even question it. At Giti, if you ask questions, then you are considered a troublemaker. I need my job and do not want any trouble. In December, I noticed that they still had me working 10-hour shifts in our payroll system. Later that month it changed to 12-hour shifts and the money I made corrected itself. Every 12 hour shift I worked from August to December was short 2 hours due to this mistake in the payroll system. I was not the only person this happened to, several people mentioned it to the supervisor, but Giti did not do anything about it. They know they owe everyone that money, but they will never pay it.

I have trained so many workers on my job over the years. Many of them have already left due to the way we are treated at work. I do not ask for much, however it would be nice to be treated with a certain level of respect. The same level of respect that I show others. The only way for this to happen is to form a union and have a voice. Every time Giti thinks we are heading in that direction they start having meetings and posting flyers saying, "We are a family, and we don't need any outsiders in here." They will start acting like they care about us, but the truth is they do not. In a few days' time, they go right back to their old ways. They will never change unless we force them to.

Linda Buckson
Visual Tire Inspector

My name is Linda Buckson and I started working at Giti five years ago as a Tire Inspector. When I came here, I genuinely wanted this to be the last company for which I would ever work. A place that I could call home. I wish I could tell you that my experience with Giti has lived up to all my expectations, but I regret to say that it has not. Giti continues to change the rules about how employees earn a raise. I had to fight just to get \$16 an hour. I have been promised promotion after promotion but have continually been passed over for individuals whom I am training and are earning more money.

Just at the height of the pandemic, I suffered an injury to my leg so severe that I could not work for seven months. When I returned, I followed all company protocols and brought in a medical note from my doctor stating that I would need to be placed on light duty as my leg continued to heal. However, instead of following my doctors' recommendations, I was told by the company that I would be returning to my regular position, or I would be terminated. I am sixty years old and losing my job would affect my medical attention, my food, and housing so I was left with no choice but to do as the company instructed. I am still suffering with tremendous leg pain and decreased mobility. Every night when I come home, I must keep my leg elevated to help reduce the swelling. It has gotten to the point that I now must sleep with a machine that keeps constant pressure on my leg so that I am able to continue for the next day at work.

I feel like Giti just does not care at all about the well-being of its employees. I was scheduled to work mandatory days off. I missed one of these days due to the pain that I had been feeling in

my leg. The next day I was written up!! I am fed up with working so hard, feeling ignored, and the cost on my body its breaking me down. I just do not know how much more I can take!! All I want is for Giti to respect and appreciate its workers. A union is the only way to get that.

Lavera Shealy
Visual Tire Inspector

My name is Lavera Shealy. Although I am no longer an active employee of Giti, my life is still greatly affected by the time I spent working there. I have come here today to share my story as a Giti employee on behalf of myself, fellow, and past co-workers. When I began working here in 2017, I immediately began to realize the safety hazards and the negligence by our supervisors while working as a Visual Tire Inspector in Final Finish. During my time working there I was exposed to hazardous chemicals, unsanitary and unsafe working conditions.

While at my workstation, we were required to wear woven cloth gloves and given rags to dip into a can of liquid that smells like gasoline and is highly flammable. Our hands would be soaking wet from the flammable liquid the entire shift. The worst part was that our workstation was near these large barrels of flammable liquid and my biggest fear was that if something caught fire, then I would never see my family again.

The working conditions at Giti are unbearable. During the Summer months it was so hot inside the plant that I could hardly breathe and many of my co-workers would pass out. We had fans in the plant, but maintenance was instructed not to turn them on. They put locks and chains on the ice machines and only a supervisor could access it for you if he chose to do so. I eventually started bringing my own cooler filled with ice. The winter months were no better. When it was 30-40 degrees outside, they would have maintenance turn the fans on. I would have to wear multiple layers of clothing along with a jacket and toboggan to stay warm. It was colder inside the plant than it was outside.

In March of 2020, I was laid off because of the pandemic and was not called back until July 2020, more than four months later. When I did return, I found that many of my co-workers were not called back. They had the ability to bring back who they chose. We usually have ten inspectors on my shift. When I got back there were only 2 or 3, yet we were still expected to make production. To meet production goals, management would cancel my days off and force me to work. At one point I worked so much overtime, it felt like I was working two shifts and when we complained it was ignored.

When COVID hit the plant, not only did Giti not provide us with Personal Protective Equipment, such as masks and gloves, but they did not supply necessities such as toilet paper and hand soap in the restrooms on the production floor. I had to bring my own toilet paper, hand soap, and Lysol. The restrooms in the front office were always clean and well stocked but we were told that we were not allowed to use them. Workers who tested positive for COVID were forced to work. Upper management told them we had a job to do. Giti put every one of us at the plant, our families, and this community at risk of catching and spreading this vicious virus. Giti would not accept doctor's excuses and if you tried to call out sick then they would threaten to fire you. One of my co-workers tried to call out because he was not feeling well. He was told by the supervisor that he would be fired if he did not show up for work. Unfortunately, he came in and died later that day on the job. A man lost his life, and it did not faze them.

This must stop! Giti needs to be held accountable for their actions. We need to be treated fairly, we need to be treated with respect, we need to know that we will return to our families in

the same condition as we left them, we need a voice, we need a union!

Anonymous #3-Job title unknown
Worker's story read by Nichel Dunlap, JWJ

I want to first thank the panel for supporting the employees of Giti Tire. I am a middle-aged male that has been with Giti five years, and I am a current employee. During my time with this company, I have experienced and witnessed how poorly Giti treats its employees. I, like so many others, believed all the false promises that were made when I started working there. They told our communities we would have good paying jobs in the tire industry. Yet, what we are experiencing is not what we were promised.

I was told that I would be receiving a pay raise, however, when it was time for my pay raise, I was told instead that I needed to learn several other jobs. They gave me verbal directions on how to gain the pay raises because in many cases there is no written policy that backs up what they ask us to do. After completing all their verbal requirements, and learning the other jobs, I requested my pay raise. All sudden, I was then told they had no record of me completing the requirements so they could not give me the raise. Later, when the record was located, I had another hurdle placed in my way! I was then told I had to perform yet another job before I could receive the money, I had rightfully earned! This company is known for switching up standards on its employees. The policies and procedures are not legally binding so they can switch up the requirements at any time. This leaves us as workers vulnerable to exploitation because there is nothing we can do when we have been treated unjustly. This is worker exploitation as we are having to do more jobs for less money.

I have seen or heard of people being hurt or injured on this job. I have personally seen people exposed to dangerous chemicals with little or no protection. I have seen people working with these chemicals be completely covered in these dangerous substances. Many workers in the plant are fearful because they never know when they could be injured or could come down with a serious illness. Giti's lax handling of safety precautions and protective gear is going to cause someone to get really hurt.

[I believe that] older workers are being purposefully forced to leave the company. There is another worker who works with me, who is over 60 years of age. Recently, this person was supposed to get a pay raise and never received it. Again, Giti placed more requirements on this person, even though this person has already met the requirements and trained others. This person is incredibly good at their job and completed the additional requirements. Yet when it came time to pay the individual, they were given less of a pay raise than their younger and less experienced co-workers.

Another issue is, if we speak out about any issues within the plant or about forming a union, there will be retaliation. Many of the employees in our plant want to get this union formed. But Giti was constantly posting misleading anti-union flyers or having the captive audience meetings that presented anti-union presentations to dissuade us from forming this union. The company has workers from our communities afraid to open their own doors to speak with the people who are here trying to help form this union. We need for Giti to stand down and let us form this union and stop with the intimidation tactics! I will not be made afraid in my own home of what my employer will try to do to me if I answer my door. And when we are done with Giti, we need to start looking at how we can change actual laws to strengthen the rights of workers because there will always be a Giti plant somewhere that takes advantage of vulnerable work populations that they believe they can exploit.

Kathy Rice
Visual Tire Inspector

My name is Kathy Rice and I have been at Giti Tire for more than four years. Giti does not care, and Giti does not listen. Giti does not care about my safety or my coworker's safety, and because I speak up, I am not getting bonuses that others get who have not even been at Giti for a year. There are people coming in the door that are making more money than me. I am doing three people's jobs, and I can barely still afford to make ends meet. I am afraid to go to work. It is becoming increasingly dangerous. Giti does not care about anyone's safety. All Giti cares about is meeting their quota. We are forced to stack tires so high, that it is all you can see. This is not a safe way to manage inventory, with tires stacked five, six, or higher. One workday, a stack of tires fell because the stacking is not stable. When the tires fell on my leg, I screamed for help, and thank God, at least one coworker was near that day. If not, I do not know how long I would have been laying under all those tires. On top of that, it took over a year for Giti to send me to the doctor. For over a year, I was working while hurt, and forced overtime of 70 hours a week. That is six days a week of 12-hour shifts and being forced to work on what should be an off day. This is physical work. Working six days with only one day off is bad for safety and bad for our health. All I want is to be able to go to work and know that I will make it back home at the end of the day. Is that too much to ask?

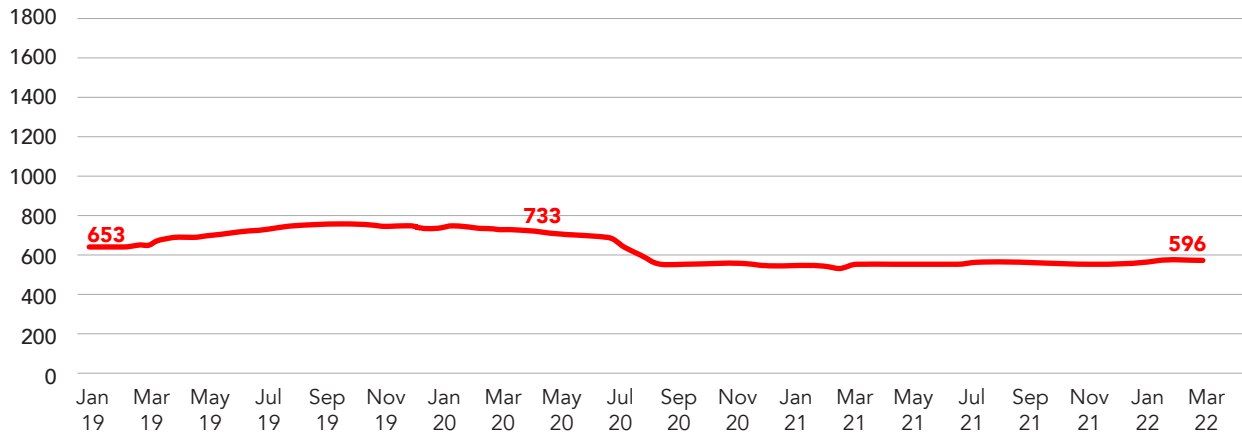
I want to tell you about another work process that is unsafe, but Giti Tire has not listened to us. In my part of the plant, visual inspectors like me need to use the x-rays in the x-ray lab. To get over to the x-rays, the workers must get around machine set-up. This means that a worker can crawl under the machines or climb over them using a ladder. If you crawl, how easy would it be for your hair or clothes to be caught in the machines? I do not crawl because I know that is unsafe. Workers have been offered knee pads to crawl, but there is a better and safe way to set this up. A work process like this should be safe, with safety doors and safety gates. They are offering knee pads instead of making it a safe work process for us.

I work as a visual inspector along with ten other visual inspectors who all happen to be women. In my department, most of us are women. I want to see women in our jobs be valued for our work, but we do not advance in jobs or pay. We are stuck. I train other workers, but I do not see opportunities to move up in my job or pay. Jobs are posted up front on the board. I feel stuck in my department. They do not go by seniority. There is nothing that makes them value seniority. Jobs like ours could be good manufacturing jobs and good for women at the plant and women in the department but I have no other option.

When I applied to work at Giti, they promised good wages, but I barely make enough to get by. The pay is so low that no one can make enough just working 40 hours. We should be able to live off a 40-hour check. I have even worked 80-90 hours a week sometimes. I must have a roof over my head, and I must put food on my table. My coworkers and I have tried to voice our concerns of safety, discrimination, and endless long hours but we are not being heard. Having a voice, a real voice at work from all of us...that would let me know they care. Giti, by their action and inaction, has made it clear to us that the only way we can change things is by forming a union, forcing them to give us a seat at the table where they will have to listen.

Appendix B – Giti Job Creation²²

Total Reported Full-time Giti Workers



Appendix C – Community Demographics²³

Demographics	City of Chester	Chester County	South Carolina	United States
Population, percent change – April 1, 2020, to July 1, 2021	-0.5%	-0.3%	1.4%	0.1%
White alone	40.0%	60.4%	68.6%	75.8%
Black or African American alone	59.0%	36.3%	26.7%	13.6%
Hispanic or Latino	0.9%	2.4%	6.4%	18.9%
Median household income	\$28,750	\$43,985	\$54,864	\$64,994
Persons in poverty	27.0%	18.3%	13.8%	11.4%
Households with broadband Internet	56.4%	63.7%	81.2%	85.2%
Bachelor's degree or higher	10.6%	13.7%	29.0%	32.9%

Appendix D – Giti Worker Demographics²⁴

Group	% of Workers
Black	66%
White	34%
Men	56%
— % of Men Black	52%
Women	44%
— % of Women Black	81%

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Catawba Area
Workers' Rights Board
in conjunction with
Clinton College