

Hired guns stake their ground in Raley's labor negotiations

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

On one side is a third-generation union man, leader of a labor empire stretching from the Oregon border to Death Valley.

On the other is a veteran labor-relations consultant and Republican politico with a history of tangling with unions in the public and private sectors.

Little wonder they have trouble getting along.

Jacques Loveall and Bob Tiernan are two of the leading actors in the labor drama that's gripped Northern California's supermarket industry over the past few months. They couldn't come from more radically different backgrounds.

Loveall, 50, a self-described "union man for life," is president of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 8-Golden State in Roseville. He succeeded his father as local president and signs every message to his membership with the slogan, "Solidarity Works!"

Tiernan, 57, leads the contract negotiating team at Raley's. A lawyer by trade, he's a former Republican legislator and state GOP chairman from Oregon. He once helped a small Berkeley supermarket chain dislodge its union. He joined Raley's about a year ago.

Nine months of bargaining on a new contract have left labor and management in a tense and increasingly bitter standoff. It could lead to the first strike in Raley's 77-year history.

In a recent memo to his members, Loveall referred to Tiernan as a "small-time union buster," a reference to Tiernan's work in Berkeley. Loveall also said Tiernan "is in over his head."

Tiernan said last week he's no union buster – just someone trying to help Raley's regain its competitive edge in a grueling business. He said Loveall "seems either to have a lack of knowledge or refuses to acknowledge that Raley's needs to control its costs."

Raley's has declared an impasse in order to put more pressure on the union. Workers voted to authorize a strike. A walkout doesn't appear to be imminent, but no negotiations have been held since June 8. Both sides say they won't let the situation go on for much longer.

"We need it over," Tiernan said.

Loveall and Tiernan, of course, aren't the only participants in this rift. Two other UFCW locals are involved, Local 5 in San Jose and Local 648 in San Francisco. And two other grocery chains are struggling to negotiate contracts with the union, Save Mart and Safeway.

Save Mart might actually be closer than Raley's to a strike. Local 5 officials last week said talks with the Modesto grocer had reached a "crisis situation" and the local has scheduled a strike-authorization vote for this week.

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