

IKEA's (Sad) Spin Reply to My Boycott Letter

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Tuesday, July 23, 2013

<https://politicsrespun.org/2013/07/ikeas-sad-spin-reply-to-my-boycott-letter/>



Solidarity means an attack on one is an offense to all!

So if you have [sent your letter to IKEA explaining why you are boycotting them](#) for locking out their Richmond workers for 10 weeks, you may have received this precious reply from the corporation, below. I will re-spin it down there, but first I need to talk about words.

For IKEA, "strike" is Swedish for "lockout."

It thinks it's being clever disputing the word, but it has locked out its employees for 10 weeks now. It started as a one-hour lockout after which the workers were invited back, but only if they accept the inferior contract they had already voted down. If IKEA had never locked out its workers, a strike may have happened. Letting workers re-enter only under inferior terms means the employer is defining the conditions for return. That, friends, is a lockout.

Bear that in mind as we drift through the IKEA spin email to convince me that it still loves its employees, despite wanting to reduce wages and benefits and contract out work, all while having earned \$3.85 billion in profit in 2011.

Below is the re-spin. IKEA's email is in italics, my responses aren't. Emphasis is mine.

Subject: IKEA Contact

Date: Mon, 22 Jul 2013 17:52:55 -0400 (EDT)

From: IKEA CANADA <support@ikeaservice.ca>

To: stephen elliott-buckley <stephen@politicsrespun.org>

Hello Mr. Elliott-Buckley,

Thank you for contacting IKEA Canada. We appreciate your feedback with regards to the current labour dispute in Richmond; however, it is unfortunate that you have been misinformed regarding the agreement that was offered to our valuable co-workers.

- Misinformed? Right. Let's see how.

We have been bargaining in good faith for six months with the Union representing our Richmond store co-workers; but, we remain at an impasse. Throughout this dispute, IKEA's goal has been for a quick, reasonable and equitable contract resolution for all concerned. That being said, under the recent advice of The BC Labour Relations Board, both parties have agreed to meet with a mediator to try to reach a settlement. Those meetings are now underway.

- Good faith bargaining is really subjective.
- I agree with its desire for a quick settlement. After the lockout it reduced its offer in stages so the sooner workers capitulated, the less they'd have to suffer. That's called bargaining in reverse.
- Reasonable: subjective, as is equitable. Employers often like to define concessions as equitable. Did I mention IKEA made \$3.85 billion in profit in 2011? How do you define equitable? And if IKEA wants all concerned to feel a contract resolution is equitable, I wonder what would make the workers think concessions are reasonable and equitable.

Please be assured that IKEA continues to be committed to providing our co-workers with employment conditions that meet or exceed industry standards. We will not waiver from this commitment under any circumstances.

- Industry standards. This is really important. This means that IKEA has been paying its workers higher than some kind of average, or some number someone asserts as an industry standard. Its goal in forcing concessions is to ensure it still meets or exceeds [by less] such a standard. That is

called a race to the bottom. Others are paid less, therefore by definition, IKEA is paying too much. That, ladies and gentlemen, is why we have foreign sweatshops.

However, we think it's important for you to know that we offer wages that are well above the industry standard and none of our co-workers will have a reduction in wages under the new agreement. IKEA Richmond offers very competitive paid benefits for both full-time and part-time co-workers as well as generous sick day eligibility for both full-time and part-time workers at levels unheard of in the retail industry.

- Here, IKEA is being more explicit that it is paying its workers too much above the industry standard, which, by the way, it doesn't define. What is the industry standard, BC's minimum wage?
- I also believe IKEA when it says none will have a wage reduction. What it doesn't mention is that in a new 2-tiered wage system, new hires will work for less doing the same job. This is how that works: over time, the new hires outnumber the old ones and the new lower wage becomes the norm and the old wage earners are disappeared.
- I believe IKEA that it offers benefits and sick days. Its email doesn't mention that it will reduce eligibility for benefits. Levels unheard of in the retail industry? Sorry, I had to recover from the vapours after reading that. IKEA doesn't mention what those levels are, or why it is so much better in the industry. But again, even if it's true according to some kind of meaningful measurement, all it is really saying is that it wants its employees to not be such an awesome outlier and fit in with the rest of the industry--and save some loot and pad their \$3.85 billion profit some more.

On behalf of IKEA, there is nothing more we want than to return to business as usual and welcome our co-workers back into the store so we can return to what we do best – providing outstanding service and products to our loyal customers. It is our hope that mediation will assist in reaching a settlement. IKEA Richmond cares about its co-workers and we understand this is a difficult time; however, they are welcome to return to work anytime.

- Any employer that says it cares about its workers after locking them out, bargaining backwards, then continuing forcing a concessionary contract needs to look up some kind of definition of caring.
- A difficult time. What a disturbingly innocuous phrase. That's like a political leader sending soldiers "into harm's way" as if harm is like the rain or gravity or something. I wonder who created this difficult time. It is not like a hurricane or a flood in Calgary or Toronto, or some kind of earthquake. Difficulties just don't occur. Someone started this one: IKEA.

Thank you again for sharing your feedback with us.

Tina

IKEA Canada

- Sure, thanks for that.