

WORKING WOMEN

Sambo's waitresses vote 'no union'

By Barry Wolf

On November 25, a three month effort on the part of the hourly employees at the Sambo's Restaurant on Pierson Road to unionize ended in defeat.

The unionization effort began in early September with the arrival of a new manager, Jeff Beery. Within one week of his arrival, according to the employees, personality conflicts began to surface between Beery and his staff.

Both sides accused the other of disrespect and incompetence. The waitresses accused Beery of denying them the difference between their pay and that of a dishwasher when they were ordered to wash dishes. This is a charge that Beery has denied.

Beery was also accused of reducing the wages of a waitress who had been employed for three years. Beery explained that her job classification was changed from that of a hostess to a waitress.

By mid-September these conflicts had reached their breaking point and culminated in the firing of five high seniority (8-9 month) people.

It was in this atmosphere that the employees began to talk about unionizing. A representative from the Hotel, Motel, Restaurant employees, Cooks, and Bartenders Union, Local 24 was contacted. She provided Chrisanne Ferman with "representation authorization" cards. Within two weeks Chrisanne was able to secure the signatures of 16 of the restaurants 23 hourly employees.

During the next four weeks, twelve of the sixteen persons that had signed the authorization cards were fired.

When confronted with this, Beery once again denied doing anything wrong. He insists that he had no way of knowing who had signed authorization cards. Further, he stated that all of those who had been fired were done so for justifiable reasons and that there was no attempt on his part to break up any unionizing effort. The fact that all those who had been fired had signed authorization cards was merely coincidental.

The firings were only one aspect of the harassment, according to Chrisanne Ferman. Persons who didn't sign authorization cards were given more and better working hours. Also, new employees with less experience were given the best hours and sections

of the restaurant to work.

Along with the subtle and the more overt efforts on the part of Beery to dissuade his employees from voting in favor of a union each employee received a letter from Sambo's headquarters reminding them of what they have received from management. But the underlying thrust of the letter was that the union will provide them with no increase in wages or benefits and will probably end up costing them existing benefits. The letter addressed the areas of wages, vacation time, personal time, promotions, insurance and job security. In each instance the letter stated the benefit and said there would be no changes forced on management by any union. The letter went on to warn the employees that if they joined the union they would have to pay a costly initiation fee plus weekly dues.

According to Chrisanne Ferman and Treana Freece, another former waitress at Sambo's, it is the method in which job promotions are given, the level of pay and job security that forced the employees to seek unionization. A waitress at Sambo's earns \$2.33/hour. The company estimates (and the law allows for taxing purposes) that the waitress' will earn at least \$.77/hour in tips, bringing her up to minimum wage. According to Beery, the company does not believe in giving waitresses raises.

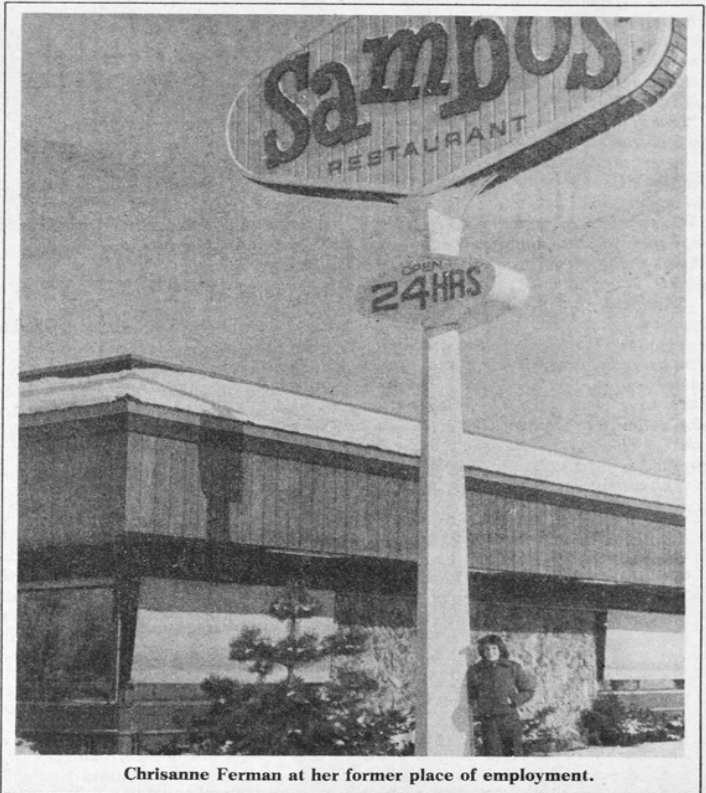
"It is the company's belief", Beery said, "that, as the waitress improves with her job, her tips will increase and this will act as her raise."

When Beery was asked how other employees receive raises he stated, "I promote and give raises for one reason and one reason only — merit." He said merit involves "doing extra work, above and beyond what the job asks for."

Beery also said, "as long as an employee does what I ask and shows continued improvement in their job, they have no worries about their job."

It is this arbitrary nature of raises and job security that Chrisanne felt a union would change. It was her hope that the union would force Sambo's to recognize, respect, and financially reward workers who have accumulated seniority and to provide all the employees the right to due process.

On November 25 these hopes went down to defeat. Says Chrisanne, "I don't think there will be a new vote. For now, the unionization effort seems to be dead."



Chrisanne Ferman at her former place of employment.



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STEVIE WONDER, Jan. 11, Cobo, 8 p.m., \$10.50, \$12.50.

CHUCK BERRY, Jan. 12, Second Chance - Ann Arbor, 7 p.m. and 11 p.m., \$10.00.

4TH ANNUAL ANN ARBOR FOLK FESTIVAL, Featuring **Leon Redbone**, Michael Cuny, Andy Beckman, Eugene O'Donnell, Jan. 18, Powers Center - Ann Arbor, 2 p.m. and 8 p.m., \$8 each, both shows for \$13.00, 763-3333.

PLAZMATICS, Jan. 19, Second Chance - Ann Arbor, 7 p.m., \$7.50.

HARRY CHAPIN, Jan 20, MSU Auditorium, 8 p.m., \$7.50 and \$8.50. Tickets available at MSU Auditorium, Recordland and Campus Corners in East Lansing.