

# Wisconsin Coffee Retailer's Employees Vote to Join the Electrical Union!?!?!?

## Labor & Employment Law Update

By Peter Hansen on August 25, 2021



Wisconsin employers discounting the possibility of organizing campaigns and unionization in their workplace, take note: the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers' (IBEW) recent victory at Colectivo Coffee Roasters Inc. demonstrates that unions are desperate to increase their membership, targeting industries and workers outside their typical areas – and winning. Following a hotly-contested organizing campaign that saw multiple

elections, a tie, and challenged votes, the IBEW will now represent a bargaining unit comprised of baristas, roasters, and bakery and warehouse workers.

The IBEW's involvement in this hospitality/service industry organizing campaign is itself noteworthy. The IBEW, which typically targets workers in the construction, telecommunications, and manufacturing industries and is not exactly associated with food service workers, will now be representing the largest unionized coffee chain workforce in America. This pivot to targeting workers in other industries signals, at the very least, an aggressive drive to increase membership — even in a Right-to-Work state. The construction trades unions (such as the IBEW) can have much greater resources than some of the more traditional unions focused on the hospitality and service industry, and if this is in fact the initial stages of a push into industries less familiar with their aggressive organizing campaigns, employers would be wise to contact experienced labor counsel immediately.

The fact that a food retailer employer is unionized is also generally surprising, given the industry is historically resistant to unionization. Whether this result portends an increase in organizing campaigns in the industry remains to be seen,

but it wouldn't be all that surprising to see a renewed push in light of this relatively high-profile victory.

The Colectivo Coffee election results are a lesson and a warning for all employers in general and those in Right-to-Work states (e.g., WI). If you think unionization can't happen to you, think again. Any employer preferring to remain union-free not only must have a counter-organizing plan developed and in place, but management in all levels must be working that plan every day.

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