ACTWU loses union vote at Cannon Mills

By ROBIN ADAMS
Chronicle Assistant Editor

After 15 months of organizing, the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union of America lost its battle to unionize Cannon Mills in Kannapolis.

Cannon employees voted 5,982 to 3,530 against the union last Thursday, marking the second time the ACTWU has failed to unionize 98-year-old Cannon Mills, the nation's largest pro-

ducer of sheets and towels.

Because of several factors -- including more blacks and females employees in the plant -- the union had expected a better showing than the vote in 1974, when the union lost 8,473 to 6,801. In fact, the day before the voting began, the union conducted a telephone poll that gave it the edge. Similarly, Cannon conducted a poll that gave it the edge.

Union officials said they con-

sider the loss "a very respectable showing rather than a decisive defeat."

Said union organizer Roosevelt Broadnax: "It was the workers' decision, but this won't discourage us (the union) from targeting some other plants to go after."

Cannon President Doug Kingsmore said he never had any doubt the company would win.

"I've been confident from Day 1," said Kingsmore.

The union's effort to unionize Cannon Mills was one of the largest such undertakings in the nation since 1977. The ACTWU's membership has dropped from 509,000 to 350,000 since 1977. A union victory would have provided a boost in membership for the ACTWU and might have indicated that Southern attitudes about unions are changing.

Despite the loss, union organizers say that eventually Cannon will have a union.

"Your chances improve in North Carolina after you've had two or three elections," said union organizer Bill Patterson. "With each election the company says, 'Give us one more chance.' Then, after the election, it doesn't prove itself. Those promises get pretty hollow "

Kingsmore called the right between the ACTWU and Cannon a "battle for survival."

The union's strategy was an all-out attack on David Murdock, Cannon Mills' owner. The union called the California millionaire "a greedy man who is raping the community."

Murdock in turn, referred to the union organizers as "carpetbaggers."

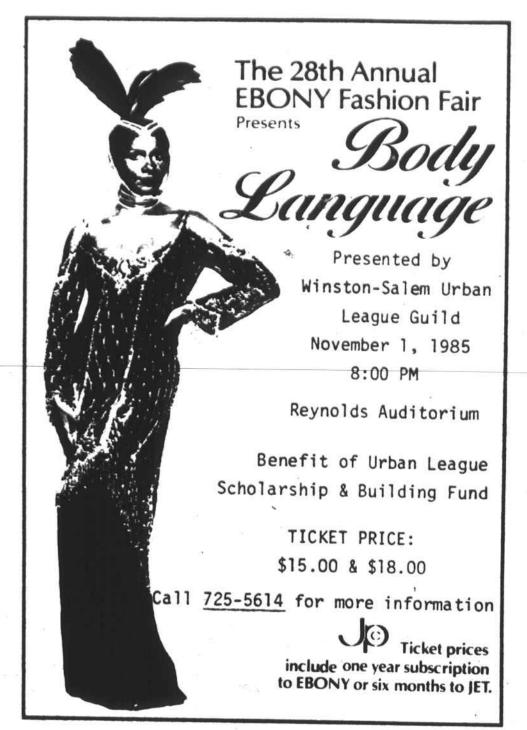
The determining factor in the union's loss may have been Murdock's last-minute appeal to Cannon employees. Days before the vote began, Murdock showed employees a mandatory 45-minute videotape and held a press conference during which he threatened to close Cannon if the union won.

"If I determine that Cannon cannot operate competitively, I can and I will cease to operate Cannon," Murdock said on videotape.

Posters of Cannon Mills with a padlocked gate were also posted throughout the plant.

The union has filed complaints with the National Labor Relations Board claiming that the

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'Can Do!

Former North Ward Alderman Richard Davis and Richard Ziglar, president of Ziglar Distributing Co., watch a demonstration of the new recycling machine at Ziglar Recycling Center, 3121 Starlight Drive (photo by Art Blue).

Businessman

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Beth Hopkins, a consultant to the Minority Business Council and a coordinator of the event, agreed.

"It was a worthwhile evening for the exchange of information," she said. "It gave business owners a chance to build alliances and discuss what tangible opportunities are available for them."

That information exchange included Robert J. Brown, chairman of B&C Associates Inc. in High Point, the reception's guest speaker.

Brown, who served as a government adviser for small businesses during the Nixon adminstration, discussed the importance of working long hours to be a business success. "If you're going into business, you have to mind the store," he said.

Brown also said that blacks who become successful in business have an obligation to help others. He asked business owners not forget their roots after they've become successes and to give something back to their communities.

Brown said there is "a golden opportunity" today for minority businesses. Minority businesses don't have to wait for the federal government to help them, he said. They can help themselves.

In addition, the reception featured short presentations from business resource people in the area.

James Mack, owner of HRC Inc., and Ernest H. Pitt, publisher of the *Chronicle*, were the co-chairmen of the event, which was sponsored jointly by the Chamber of Commerce, Contract Office Furnishings, the *Chronicle* and HRC.

Pitt served as master of ceremonies for the program, which opened with greetings from Chamber President G. Dee Smith.

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