

Meatballs

“You get no bread with one meatball.”
Depression era folk song

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Meatballs is put out in the belief that a strong union at SHAP depends on an informed and involved membership. Meatballs welcomes different points of view. Contact Mike Parker, electrician second shift, body shop, or you can email meatballs@rts-tech.com. Publication labor is volunteer and views are those of the writers. For back issues go to www.rts-tech.com/meatballs

The Plant Limp Along

Is crazy management a permanent policy? We have major downtime virtually every day and production is forced to work overtime to make numbers we should easily be able to make in less than eight hours. The trades have to solve problems that could have been prevented with adequate time and staff for PM. But we can only solve problems when we can get to them. Management’s favorite solution seems to be closing the work ticket whether or not the work is done.

Speaking for myself, the message I expect a competent management to get is: *the trades have the ability to keep this equipment running smoothly. But when you spread us thin, the result is downtime from lack of time, lack of PM, lack of training, and low morale*. Maybe management can make their new lower production numbers. But it is La-La Land logic to believe they are managing well by having to run departments overtime every day to make up for the shortages of trades that corporate insists is the “right number.”

Good work = job protection. We have to be careful not to shoot ourselves in the foot. Supervisors are scared of not making production numbers. They discourage inspection of critical equipment, changing weld tips, stopping leaks, or making careful adjustments that might hold up production. Too often we take the easy way out and say OK. The customers suffer from lower quality, and we end up providing top management with the statistics that prove they can do with fewer trades.

Insist on doing your job, doing it professionally, and doing it completely. If management does not give you enough time to do Masse inspections, change caps, or fix equipment properly, keep doing your job till you are done or management comes around and tells you to stop.

Local Contract

It is pretty impressive in the current economic context that the proposed local contract has no concessions and even has some improvements. The skilled trades section includes a fair system of overtime and project equalization to change a procedure many trades found objectionable last year.

Of course the hard bargaining over the introduction of the new product is still going on. The bargaining committee has notified management that any changes to this local contract will have to come to a vote of the membership. One way we can help the bargaining committee is to show unity and back them on the proposed local contract. I urge a **YES** vote.

If you find your time and ability are not being used efficiently, or you cannot fix something because of lack of training, management *is* getting what it deserves in the short run. But realize that corporate uses this as their evidence for more cuts and for taking the work out of the bargaining unit. Our answer has to be doing good work in spite of management’s policies.

Supervisors working. With the shortages of trades, a lot of supervisors bend to management’s pressure to keep the line running by jumping into breakdowns, pushing buttons and “helping.” We should remind them politely that these are our jobs. If we need help, they should get us the appropriate trade. If they don’t take gentle reminders, keep a log with the exact time, date, and names of people involved. Give the log to your steward and ask for a grievance. Here is a form you can use:

Poor planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part!



Supervisor Working

Specific supervisor actions:

Witnesses

Date

Time

Signed

Presidential Elections and the Union Can Good Unionists Support Bush?

Everybody knows that good jobs are disappearing and that no health benefits and \$14/hour seems to be the high end these days for any new jobs.

I start from the following assumptions:

- The only reason that we have good wages and decent health benefits is because we have a union.
- Whatever the problems with our unions, if we lose them we can expect to see our wages, benefits and, most important, any workplace rights disappear.

Our unions are under attack by the corporations directly and indirectly through their political puppets. We are losing bargaining power because the non-union competition in the Toyotas, Walmarts, and FedExes is growing. Good union conditions cannot exist in an industry where the competition does not have to provide those same conditions. The survival of our union conditions *requires* organizing the unorganized.

I am trying to understand how people who understand these basic economic notions and consider themselves strong unionists can support Bush for President.

To be clear: The labor movement can find much better friends than the party that gave us NAFTA and candidates like Kerry whose only mention of unions in the last debate on economic policy was to show how he could talk tough to unionists.

But Bush is viscerally opposed to unions. Bush wants to super-size NAFTA. Bush's appointees to the NLRB have consistently voted to make it harder for unions to win representation elections. His new regulations will remove non-union skilled trades from overtime protection, thereby putting new economic pressure on our contract. Bush has used terrorism as an excuse to de-unionize sections of the federal workforce.

I think Bush's attitudes toward unions, alone, would be sufficient reason to reject him. But then I look at the other issues people have suggested to me might override his anti-unionism. I think they make the case against him even stronger:

1. Taxes. Bush gives you one dollar today hoping you won't notice that he is taking three from you (or your children) tomorrow. (That is the tax-cut-with-

deficit-spending shell game.) Tradespeople who have seen through the "signing bonus" trick should see this one easily. Besides, for every dollar he gives you he gives thousands to those in the top 1%.

2. National Security. Over a thousand Americans and thousands of Iraqis are already dead in a war built on untruth and incompetence. Many more are maimed while Bush cuts veteran's benefits. For all this, we are not safer from terror. Bush's policies have been the most effective recruiter to the terrorist cause and have created sympathy for them around the world. The chief beneficiaries of his policy are the Halliburtons, Bechtels, and oil companies, while working people are paying the price.

3. Guns. I strongly support the right and responsibility of people to be armed. History has shown that an armed population is a critical part of the ability of people to keep their freedom. Legal restrictions on arms will not disarm criminals. But it does no good to protect your right to arms if you give away the liberties you want to protect. The so-called Patriot Act and parallel regulations allow the government to gather any information they want on you, prevent you from organizing, and hide more government goings-on than ever before.

I simply cannot understand the logic of good unionists supporting Bush. But if you disagree and believe a vote for Bush will help build the union and defend our jobs, then let's discuss it.

—Mike Parker

Words of Wisdom

Local 1700 lost a committed union activist when Neil Chacker, recently retired inspector, lost his battle with cancer. Neil had a great wit as well as a deep understanding of which side he was on. When asked how he did his steward's job at Jefferson years ago, he replied, "I look everything up. I write everything down."

Shortly before his death, Neil wrote this last advice to his 4-year-old granddaughter Alisha: "Always tell the truth. Never spend money you don't have. When you grow up to be a worker, remember that all the other workers of the world are your sisters and brothers."