

Meatballs

“You get no bread with one meatball.”

13

November 2005

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

Rosa Parks

Everyone knows that Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the Cleveland Avenue bus sparking the Montgomery bus boycott and the modern civil rights movement. Often the media presents the story as one of a courageous but tired woman who simply made a decision that she would not get up.

Parks was a committed activist. She had held meetings in her home going back more than 15 years. She went to training sessions at Highlander Center. She was an officer of a civil rights organization in a state which made even membership very dangerous. The segregated bus system was particularly obnoxious to African-Americans who depended on it for work and the Montgomery Improvement Association had been looking for a way to challenge it. It was the organization and activity of people who were able to turn Rosa Parks' courageous act into a local victory and the start of a national campaign which permanently changed the U.S.

We honor Rosa Park's courage but the lesson is that it takes more than a single act of courage to win. In honoring Rosa Parks we also honor the many activists whose names are not famous but who, despite the danger, drove the cars, walked the streets, and distributed the leaflets which made her act a symbol for all of us. Change doesn't just happen, it takes committed activists, organizations, and a willingness to struggle for years.

Teamster Election

Two weeks ago Tom Leedham announced that he is putting together a slate to run for President of the Teamsters Union against James R. Hoffa. Why should we in the UAW care what goes on in another union?

1. First of all we can learn something. Despite the mob influence in the Teamsters, as a result of rank and file organization the Teamsters are a far more democratic International union than the UAW. In the Teamsters there will be a contest for President of the International where issues will be debated, different plans put forward. Every member can vote for the top International officers and be involved in setting the direction for that union. When is the last time the membership in our union felt they were involved in setting the union's direction.

2. The issues that have given rise to this campaign are the same issues which our union and every other union is facing: how to defend and advance our contracts and our retirement rights in the face of an ongoing attack by every corporation and their buddies in the Bush administration.

3. The Leedham campaign says that the answer for the Teamsters is an involved and mobilized rank and file, and returning the union to its roots of fighting for working people rather than backroom deals and partnership with the bosses. A victory for the Teamsters rank and file can ignite a spark for the whole labor movement.

If you know Teamsters urge them to check it out and get involved. They can contact the Leedham campaign through Teamsters for a Democratic Union www.tdu.org.

Plant Training

As one who has long been critical of the training (and lack thereof) for the skilled trades, I am pleased to report that there have been some recent significant improvements in this plant. It not enough and the progress may still be destroyed by red tape and generally dysfunctional management procedures.

I still believe that corporate wants to deskill the trades and shift the most skilled work to vendors. But I also think they are finding it is more difficult than they thought and they are not ready. There are many in the plant and corporate who are beginning to worry that their massive investment in flexible manufacturing technology for the new model will be a giant white elephant if the trades can not handle it.

Some of the improvements in training include trades input to the training, more and better classes, more and better equipment and software. Part of whether we make progress depends on you. You have to demand the training you need and speak frankly about the training you are getting. If there is something wrong you have to speak up in order for there to be a chance that it can be fixed.

Management has to understand that it needs to cooperate with this training and release people as scheduled for training. Management also needs to know that while training is a necessary condition for getting a good launch it is not a sufficient condition, Good training can not fix un-

derstaffing, and it can not motivate a demoralized workforce to take the extra steps necessary to overcome the hurdles. So a lot still has to change before we have a successful launch.

Don't sign off what you don't do.

The former body shop maintenance area manager got 30 days off. The strongest rumors say that it is because he removed or signed off on some TMS issues that, if acted on, might have avoided a major production loss involving overhead conveyors on Pallet Line 5. There have also been production workers who were disciplined for "falsifying company documents" --signing off on inspections management says they did not do.

It would seem that some in management regard PM as a kind of magic that guarantees the equipment against future failure. (Forgetting that other supervisors have regarded "magic" as an answer a cause for discipline.)

One letter circulating among the trades in Assembly says "Management has threatened to write up tradespeople who have signed off on PM work because the equipment failed several weeks after the PM work was performed. Just because the equipment worked on the day of the PM, does not mean that it will work fine right up until the next scheduled PM."

The letter asks for protection from unreasonable expectations by management by "written confirmation from my supervisor that I will not be disciplined for equipment that breaks down after the PM was signed off."

Signing off on TMS items is a serious business. If something happens that costs production or becomes a quality or safety problem, you know that management's policy is to find someone to blame.

If your TMS requires you to sign off on something you cannot do in the allotted time or under the conditions, take the time to explain it but don't sign off. If your TMS is vague, get the supervisor to give you a fuller explanation in writing if possible or get your steward to get clarification, or get witnesses to the verbal instructions. If you need training then request it—in writing. But just signing off on an undone TMS because it seems less hassle for now and makes your supervisor happier just puts you in jeopardy.

Delphi and GM

The last two weeks have seen large meetings of rank and file Delphi and GM workers who are fed up. They are fed up with the company and its promises and have no faith that our International will defend them.

The UAW, at one time the strongest union in the country, appears to have collapsed in the face of Delphi and GM's attack. The issue is not whether the specifics of the current concessions to GM are tolerable or not. They are the foot in the door.

Delphi shows where the whole industry is trying to go. It's not just that Delphi is demanding what used to be unimaginable concessions. Delphi wants to outsource the bulk of its work overseas and to still-lower wage employers. While Delphi is demanding 2/3 wage cuts from its workers and shifting its pension obligations to the government (we pay) they are busy giving raises and bonuses to executives in order to keep their talented management. "We need the knowledgebase that is here now to see us through the next 12 months, says a Delphi spokesperson concerning the millions in management bonuses. It is so outrageous that the New York Times cannot keep a straight face in its reporting:("Oohs and Ahs at Delphi's Circus" 11/13/05)

The games at the Big Three are not that different, just a step behind Delphi. It's time for the union to stop being "reasonable" and start getting mad. The UAW should say NO to further concessions and be leading the campaign for National Health Care and telling the companies that this is the only way the UAW will help them on their medical costs. It's time for the UAW to lead the national campaign which says you cannot treat workers as disposable items to be discarded when they are older or when management has screwed up.

We have to rebuild our unity. Unity includes retirees, low seniority, high seniority, parts workers, line workers and skilled trades. It should be obvious to all that we need all of us to deal with the corporation and we need to be a strong political force as well. It should also be obvious that two-tier kinds of strategies for solving problems short-tem are a cancer in the labor movement. The only good thing about the GM concessions is that it blocks attempts to pit active workers against retirees.

But there is no future for a labor movement that keeps making concessions to cover the mismanagement of the companies. We need to demonstrate the value of unions by defending our wages and working conditions and organize all working people who could be used as competition to undermine our wages and conditions.

—Mike Parker