

Meatballs

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

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January 23, 2002

PLEASE PASS THIS ON

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 voluntary and views are those of the writers.

Outsourcing & Contracting Out

Start from two simple assumptions:

- ◆ **We do not want to stop and cannot stop technological improvements which may destroy some current jobs.**
- ◆ **But we also deserve to benefit from the improvements.**

To keep our number of jobs and improve the quality of our jobs these assumptions lead to two simple conclusions:

- ◆ **We have to stop outsourcing and contracting our current work.**
- ◆ **We must take on the new work that technology creates.**

Doing this, of course, starts with fighting for the contracted jobs done in the plant. But we also have to eliminate the outsourcing disguised by technological change. Some electrical examples:

- Management pays a vendor to write elaborate diagnostic code into new controls to indicate the likely cause of problems partially eliminating our function.
- Management pays vendors more money to include extended warranties on modules.
- Vendor equipment that we could service comes in (with management consent and even encouragement) as “black boxes”. For example, many controls are nothing more than software running on PCs with Windows NT operating system (Fori, Johnstone, Perceptron). This use of PCs for controls is a big part of the future. Yet we get no training on PCs themselves, are locked out of the systems by passwords, and only vendors service them.
- The Medweld 300 hard tooling welders contain PLCs but we are locked out of the PLC program. What is to stop vendors from bringing in entire operation control panels with the operating PLC program called “proprietary” and access denied to us?
- Who will maintain the new CMM equipment now being installed?
- Lack of adequate training means vendors are called in.

In other trades there are similar issues. When the company chooses to send out for repair entire units or modules rather than repairing them in-house, it is a form of outsourcing. When the company brings in “technical expertise” to help us do things that we could do if we had proper training it is a form of outsourcing. When the company sends out for specialized machining or treatment because we do not have a 5 axis NC mill or hardening or coating equipment, it is outsourcing our work.

For some items there may not be enough work in this plant to justify the cost of equipment, But does management look for additional work to bring in to justify it the capital costs? Does management investigate possibilities of sharing equipment with other plants nearby so we can keep the work in-house and maintain our skills?

Doing the work in-house usually means we can do it quicker and

better which means more up-time, better quality and lower costs. It also means better morale and more pride in work.

But these are not what drive company decisions. Instead the mantra is “reduce headcount”. This shows up in the benchmarking studies and the Harbour reports. Corporate management has created the atmosphere that the politically “safe” decision for lower level managers is to outsource to reduce head count even if in fact it costs the company more, decreases quality, and increases downtime. (See next issue of Meatballs)

It is up to us, through our union to redefine the conditions of what “politically safe” means to help management start making the right decision.

December Skilled Trades Meeting

Resolutions

The December trades shift meetings discussed resolutions for the upcoming Skilled Trades conference. A large number of resolutions were submitted. If you didn't get a packet ask your Steward for one. The most frequently submitted resolutions concerned the use of vacation and PA days. Why can't we use individual vacation days instead of having to take them in week blocks? Why can't we carry over the PAA and vacation into the next year? If we could agree on reasonable notice for scheduling these, it is hard to imagine what company interest would be harmed. But for management, the jargon “win-win” usually means the company wins *two* ways.

Unity is Key

The bulk of the meetings were taken up with questions and discussion about the company's hardball tactics, use of contractors, and delays in scheduling overtime.

We have forced the company to live by the contract in a number of areas. Kris pointed out that we were successful because we showed a growing unity in making it clear to the company that we were not going to accept its ignoring the contract. The solidarity is essential. Isolated actions and dumb violations of the contract allow the company to pick off individuals. This puts the company in a stronger position. Similarly, if we stick together and systematically document management abuses, violations of the contract, and safety issues, the union gets leverage in bargaining for their correction. Kris thanked the trades for their unity and support of our bargaining representatives.

These skilled trades meetings are important to maintain communication and for building solidarity. Every trades person should try to attend. You learn valuable information, you can let others know about your situation, and you make the union stronger. The working conditions you save may be your own.

Union-Busting Continues

Workers at the Henderson Kentucky Accuride plant which supplies wheels for trucks have been locked out since 1998. The latest company “offer” includes such charms as replacement workers training returning strikers and the company evaluating returnee performance to see if they are qualified. Seniority and job rights are gone, wage increases will be on the “merit” system. The company has unrestricted rights to outsourcing and contracting out.

Skilled Trades might note that the company has no plans to take back any of the 90 machine repair, electricians, and tool & die maintenance workers. This is usually what it means when a company determines to bust a union.

The union membership of UAW local 2036 has stood solid these four years and has overwhelmingly voted down the repeated company offers. In November of last year they voted 97% to reject.

The International UAW has undermined these courageous workers. Its main intervention has been to try to discredit the elected leadership of the union, threaten trusteeship, twice withdraw strike benefits and to encourage workers to go back under this rotten offer.

Most of the wheels produced by this scab operation are used in UAW organized plants of Ford, GM, Navistar, Mack, Freightliner etc. The International has not done what it needs to do in this case and similar cases in the parts industry: put the assembly plants on notice that UAW members will not willingly accept using scab parts in the building of quality products. When workers at Ford made this clear about a labor dispute at Johnson Controls, the dispute settled very quickly.

Ironically, militant action by a union with clear leadership is sometimes good for a company which has a misguided management. If the UAW had followed such a union solidarity policy at Ford when the Rubberworkers/Steelworkers were being attacked by Bridgestone/Firestone, we would not only have won that battle at the tire maker but probably both Firestone and Ford would be in a lot better shape today.

From the Floor

Why doesn't management do anything about the Demon Drop for carriers at BB9? Carriers come off at high speed in an unguarded area. Millwrights have simple suggestions for fixing this. But management does nothing.

(NWBR)

Safety Glasses and Cynicism

Recently management assigned supervisors to stand at the doors to remind us of discipline for failing to wear safety glasses when we enter the plant while production is running.

Let me be clear. I think safety glasses are extremely important. Most people who are practically blind without glasses (as I was until recently) have a strong appreciation for the value of eyesight.

If DCX management were truly concerned about employee eyesight and safety it would do everything it could to make safety glasses more comfortable and safer to wear. But it does not do that.

For example, **OSHA approves metal frames.** GM allows them. But DCX management prohibits them even though it would allow glasses to be lighter, and allow more flexibility in shape and in fit than the few current plastic choices we have. They would also look better. (Warning corporate *Shap-poo* here: The idea that metal rims are a shock hazard has relevance only to electricians. And even there the policy is of questionable value give the drawbacks of the limited choice of plastic.)

Second, **OSHA approves a polycarbonate material that allows glasses to be significantly thinner and therefore lighter** than the regular safety-glass material. Again DCX does not allow this material because it costs a few dollars more. In my own case (with a large lens correction) the edge of the regular safety glasses was 3/8" thick. Not only were these glasses heavy, uncomfortable, and constantly slipping, but these edges picked up weld flashes from the side making it appear that there was a flash from something I was working on—an unsafe situation. The polycarbonate lens glasses I had to purchase myself made the glasses more comfortable, useable, and safe. The company has been refusing to move on a grievance on this issue for two years.

Safety glasses are difficult for people who are not used to glasses at all. They are also difficult for those with substantial corrections where a difference in style affects vision. If management really wanted to encourage people to wear glasses then they would accept the small expense to make them as light, comfortable, and flexible as possible rather than waste money on threats.

When the company limits people's choices of glasses and tries to implement the policy periodically through discipline, it demonstrates that the primary motive is not our safety but protecting company ass(ets) from liability. And it is that attitude which builds cynicism about the safety glasses and every other plant safety policy.

I am thankful for the OSHA laws and the union policies which have forced the company to adopt certain safety policies. We have to resist the company promoted cynicism and take safety seriously as our issue. The company will only take real safety measures when they are forced.