



Steelworkers and Supporters Turn Out in Numbers for Metropolis Rally

By: John Smith, USW 7-669

Metropolis(IL)-On a hot August day, an estimated 3000 steelworkers, family, and supporters, marched down Highway 45 in Metropolis, Ill., to Fort Massac State Park where a rally was held in support of approximately 220 members of USW local 7-669 who have been locked out of their jobs since June 28th.

Contract negotiations failed when the union refused a proposal from Honeywell International that would do away with Retiree Healthcare, Seniority, 45 Jobs, Pension Plans, and Hours of Work Structure. The union

worked with no contract for a week before Honeywell locked them out. The union also offered to extend the old contract until an agreement was reached. Since the lockout, members have picketed outside the uranium conversion facility just outside town.

The rally, which was planned by the Contract Action Team (CAT), was held on Saturday August 7. Local union members, families, and supporters from at least 4 states attended the event. Busses rolled in full of other locals, SOAR members, WOS members, and District 7 leaders. Cars packed a parking lot and surrounding streets and the middle of our small town.

The mass of supporters walked up the highway, carrying signs, and chanting, while community members waved and shouted in support from their yards and parking lots. Local businesses with signs of support on both sides of the highway were visible as the walkers made their way to the park where organizers were waiting with cold drinks and food for everyone.

Once the crowd gathered in the park, Dave Dowling, Director of District 7 sub District 2, welcomed everyone. Brother Alton Carter, a retired USW 7-669 member, opened with a prayer, followed by Dowling leading the Pledge of Allegiance.

Dowling then introduced Darrell Lillie, President, USW local 7-669. Lillie thanked everyone for the turn out which he assessed as "more than we could have dreamed of." He went on to give a short history of the local and the process of the Metropolis Honeywell facility where uranium ore, or "yellowcake", is converted to the UF₆ gas to produce nuclear fuel.

Lillie highlighted some of the hazards of working in such a facility, including radioactive exposure, as well as exposure to dangerous chemicals such as hydrofluoric acid (HF). He then spoke of the major issues facing contract negotiations such as Honeywell wanting to do away with retiree medical and pension benefits, seniority, and contracting out of jobs. Lillie went on to thank several people who have been instrumental in his local's fight.

Dave Dowling then introduced State Representative Brandon Phelps, State Senator Gary Forby, and Tim Bagwell, a candidate for Congress. Phelps enthusiastically addressed the crowd saying he was "proud to be union." Phelps encouraged everyone to stay together to win this fight.

Next, Gary Forby spoke saying that in order to negotiate, BOTH parties had

to come to the table and be willing to give and take, not just the union giving and the company taking. Bagwell then took the podium, letting the rally goers know that he is behind them one hundred percent and thanked the USW for helping him in his campaign. Dave then introduced Jerry Baird, a local business owner and proud union card carrier, who thanked all who supported the local and expressed his and others support for them.

Mike Mezo, 7-669's appointed lead negotiator, then spoke, saying that when this is resolved, "Honeywell will think twice before picking a fight with this union again." He went on to point out some highlights from a recent letter sent out by plant manager Larry Smith, who's earned the nickname "Lying Larry" over the past 20 years. Mezo received cheers and jeers from the crowd during his address.

After Mike, Kip Phillips, a USW International Vice President from nearby Benton, KY, addressed the crowd with a letter from International President Leo Girard to various government officials, urging them to investigate the use of untrained, unqualified replacement workers. Phillips then went on to question the motives behind Honeywell's actions. "One thing is for sure, if Honeywell wanted to make an example for the rest of the corporation, they made a mistake picking 669 to do it with," Phillips yelled. He went on to compliment the resolve and solidarity of the workers in this situation.

Jim Robinson, District 7 Director, spoke, rallying the crowd, sending special thanks to SOAR and WOS. "What sets Steelworkers apart is our activism" Robinson added. Dave Dowling then concluded the speaking portion of the program.

Music then played over the loud speakers as people greeted each other, kids took swings at a special Honeywell Honeybee piñata, as the festivities and food continued. It was truly amazing to see such a gathering of people willing to fight for the rights of workers and the continuation of the middle class of America. As the event concluded, everyone was invited to stop by the picket line at the plant and the union hall across the road to show support for the brothers and sisters walking the line.