

# ...Year of China

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mostly finished products, consumer goods like apparel, footwear and tires. Ships leaving Portland for China carried \$294 million worth of goods, consisted overwhelmingly of raw materials like wheat, fertilizer, scrap metal and soda ash (used to make glass.)

Again, for the most part, American companies are selling raw materials and the machines to turn them into finished products to Chinese contractors, and Chinese contractors are selling finished products to American companies. Everything is being made in China, from the crucifixes in New York City cathedrals to the cowboy boots in Texas boot stores to scenery-filled 2008 Oregon calendars.

That's a real problem for many American workers, like Michael Rivenes, who until Sept. 4 was a skilled machinist at Williams Controls in Tigard, Oregon, and chairperson of his United Auto Workers bargaining unit.

Rivenes spent 28 years at Williams, and in recent years operated a computerized milling and lathing machine. Rivenes and his co-workers made throttle controls for trucks. He earned a base salary of \$38,500, not counting overtime and bonuses. The company also paid for health insurance for his family, and a pension benefit.

But in 2006, Williams announced it would shift production to China, and terminate most of its Tigard factory workers over a period of 18 months.

"When you're a worker and your CEO starts to talk about 'strategic realignment of operations' you'd better cut up your credit cards and start stocking up on canned goods," Rivenes told the NW Labor Press. Rivenes was in the last group to go. In effect, his pink slip had a "Made in China" sticker on it.

"I'm worried about America," says Barker, the state representative. "Everything is going offshore, and that's not good for American workers."

At the Williams Controls plant in Tigard, which two years ago employed

120 production workers, just 48 hourly jobs will remain — shipping, receiving, packaging and assembling of parts made elsewhere.

Meanwhile, the laidoff workers qualify for a package of retraining and extended unemployment benefits, courtesy of the U.S. taxpayer.

Rivenes is optimistic about his future. He starts classes Jan. 7 at Chemeketa Community College in Salem, and hopes to work in human resources. Still, he liked his job at Williams.

"It was a good place to work for a long time," Rivenes said. "It was sad to give it up."

**Union members rallied Dec. 5 outside a Southeast Portland WalMart to call attention to the company's preference for Chinese-made goods. Protesters handed out a flier to shoppers citing a 2004 article in China Business Weekly reporting 70 percent of WalMart's products come from China. At the very least, that gives Faded Glory, the flag-themed WalMart house brand, a whole new meaning. Pictured, from left to right, are: Lucy Hamill of UFCW Local 555, Tim Carrier and John Kirkpatrick of Painters and Allied Trades District Council 5, and Al Panek, labor liaison to Oregon U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden.**



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