

...Cascade Steel Mills: Ready to strike

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pay 30% of the premium. In other words, Schnitzer is asking its union steel mill workers to lower their benefits until they match the company's non-union scrap yard workers.

But the jobs are pretty different, says Local 8378 President Jim Blue.

"We work in a pretty harsh environment," Blue said. "Some of the bag house dust is pretty toxic. There's high heat. There's some lead exposure. None of that's really compatible with the human body."

Schnitzer Steel is self-insured. Premiums for its Blue Cross Blue Shield plan are about \$600 a month for employee-only coverage and \$1,700 a month for family coverage. Under the company's latest proposal, a worker who now pays the equivalent of \$2,400 a year in premiums for family coverage could expect to pay \$4,950 a year in three years, given medical cost inflation of 5%.

Schnitzer also wants to slash dental coverage: The current plan pays for up to \$2,500 a year in dental work, and the new plan would only cover up to \$1,750.

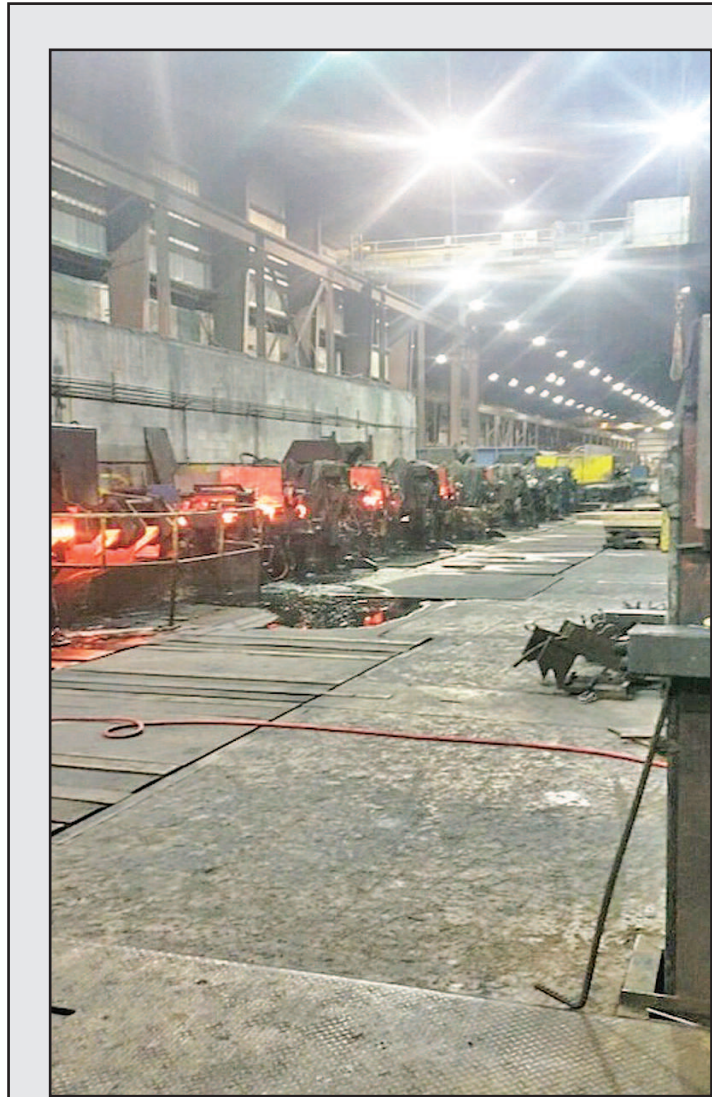
"It's like they think we're all stupid, and we don't know how to use a calculator," Davis told the Labor Press.

The union insisted on open negotiations this time, so that rank-and-file union members could come and watch the negotiations. Some are showing up regularly, and telling co-workers what they're seeing.

"Everybody's pissed," Davis said. "That's the nicest way I could put it."

Roughly four out of five workers at the steel mill took part in a June 26 strike vote, with many coming in on their day off to cast their ballot, and the result was 97% approval to authorize the union bargaining committee to call a strike. Workers last struck at the mill in 2012, and came back to work after 12 days with the company making concessions, including a wage offer that increased from 0.5% to as high as 2.5%.

Union negotiators this time have so far rejected concessions and are calling instead for improvements: Besides 4% annual raises, the union is proposing to make Veterans Day a paid holiday for veterans, and to lengthen paid bereavement leave to five



SCRAP TO CONSTRUCTION: WHAT THEY DO AT CASCADE STEEL ROLLING MILLS

Based in Portland, Schnitzer Steel is the fifth-largest publicly-traded company in Oregon, worth \$670 million on the North American Stock Exchange (NASDAQ.) Schnitzer makes most of its money from its network of 96 auto and metals recycling facilities around the United States, which includes the 52-location "Pick-n-Pull" chain where customers buy used parts off scrapped cars. But McMinnville-based Cascade Steel Rolling Mills, which Schnitzer Steel has owned since 1984, is the jewel of its empire. Along with a distribution center near Los Angeles, the two units make up Schnitzer's Cascade Steel and Scrap division, which generates 20% of the company's revenue. At the McMinnville steel mill complex, located on a 85-acre site off Route 99, members of United Steelworkers Local 8378 turn scrap into building materials. It's a 24-7 operation: Steelworkers put in four days in a row of 12-hour shifts, followed by four days off. At the mill, powered by cheap electricity from publicly-owned Bonneville Power Administration, an electric arc furnace and ladle refining furnace melt and refine ferrous materials brought in from Schnitzer's scrap yards. Molten steel then goes through a five-strand continuous billet caster, which turns out solid metal blocks. Those are then reheated in a natural-gas-fueled furnace and hot-rolled in a computerized rolling mill to create rebar, wire rod (used in chain link fence, nails, wire, and stucco netting), and merchant rod (rounds and square steel bars that are used to produce bolts, threaded bars and dowel bars).

days, up from the current three. Workers are entitled to take the bereavement leave in the event of the death of a spouse or child.

The most recent collective bargaining agreement expired April 1, but Local 8378 agreed to extend its terms while negotiations continued. That extension expires July 31, after which workers could shut down the mill and walk off the job.

The two sides are scheduled to meet July 29, 30, and 31 with the help of a federal mediator.

"Our guys work for their money," says Blue, the union president. "We've made these people a lot of money. We're not asking to break them. We just feel with all the concessions we've made in previous contracts, they can treat us more fairly this time."

Who's on our side?

By Tom Chamberlain Oregon AFL-CIO President



Fixing the gap at Fred Meyer

A recent story in the Northwest Labor Press described how United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 555 is taking the glass ceiling head-on in contract negotiations.

The Institute for Women's Policy Research tells us that not only do women make up more than half of the American workforce, but they are also the sole wage-earner in half of families with children. Women earn more advanced degrees in education than men, yet in 2017, women working year-round earned 80.5 cents for every dollar earned by men.

This wage disparity is a reality in Kroger-owned Fred Meyer stores. Fred Meyer stores operates with two wage schedules. One schedule pays an average of \$3.70/hour higher than the other schedule. While less than half of all Fred Meyer employees are men, 67% of employees on the highest paid schedule are men. This means that women are disproportionately placed on the lowest-paying wage scale. There is no reasonable explanation for this disparity. These types of disparities create divisions within the workforce and are part of an overall corporate strategy to undermine the strength of our members to gather and collectively bargain with unity.

A recent article in the *New York Times* blatantly stated that the U.S. women's soccer team, who just won the World Cup, is not entitled to greater wages because they have a smaller fan base, less television viewers, and otherwise do not bring in as much overall income as male soccer teams and matches. The first women's World Cup was held in 1991. The men's first World Cup was in 1930! It is just this type of reasoning that continues to depress and subjugate women's wages and advancements in the workplace.

Fred Meyer isn't the same grocery chain that my parents shopped at. It was locally-owned and was interwoven into our communities. Freddy's had the reputation of an employer who took care of its workers. Sadly, that is not the case today. Since the sale to Kroger in 1998, Fred Meyer is different. The close interconnection with the community is gone. No longer does Fred Meyer have a reputation of taking care of its workers. The focus is totally centered on profitability with a corresponding impact to its workforce. Kroger is ignoring the fact that women Fred Meyer workers on average earn 25% less than their male co-workers.

As Oregonians and as unionists, we must take a hard and fast stand against all forms of gender discrimination. We know from experience that unity is our strength. We know from experience that this issue will only be fixed if we all go to bat for a change in culture and a reality change in wages for work. Equal work — equal pay.

Over the coming weeks and months, the Oregon AFL-CIO will educate Oregonians on this wage disparity at Fred Meyer.

Please join us by visiting www.FixTheGapOregon.com to learn more and take action.

If Fred Meyer continues its practice of discriminating against women, then vote with your wallet and shop somewhere else. As a community, let's send a clear message: "Fix the gap. Equal work for equal pay."

The Oregon AFL-CIO is a 138,000-member-strong federation of labor unions.