



Unity Council

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U.S. Execs Hide Rather than Meet with Union Reps

The American executives of Gerdau Ameristeel, the Brazilian-owned multinational, got a global taste of what is in store for them if they continue to view our hard-won benefits such as health care, pensions and vacations as "burdens" and refuse to negotiate in good faith.

Union leaders from Brazil met with USW Local and International representatives in Tampa on Aug. 9, to get a briefing on the scurrilous behavior of Gerdau's U.S. executives toward the company's North American employees.

Following the union caucus, a delegation of USW and Brazilian union leaders went to Gerdau Ameristeel's Tampa headquarters in an effort to meet with their American managers and hand over petitions that had been signed by 1,500 North American Gerdau employees calling on the company to negotiate in good faith.

Located in the sixth floor of a building in a modern office park, the Gerdau headquarters was easy to find. In what was intended to be a surprise visit, the union leaders parked their cars and entered the building. Security let them pass.

They boarded the elevator and pushed the button for the sixth floor. The doors closed, the elevator ascended and the doors open on the fifth floor. Seconds passed and the doors stayed open. The elevator did not move. They got off.

They got on another elevator. They pushed the sixth floor button. Nothing happened. The doors stayed open.

Somebody pushed seven. The doors closed. Up they went.

Without a word, the union leaders figured out what happened. The company had been tipped off about their arrival and shut off the elevators to the sixth floor.

The doors opened on seven. The union leaders spotted the "Exit" sign that led to the stairs. They moved quickly

down the steps to six and into the offices of Gerdau Ameristeel.

"They're here," a receptionist shouted as executives scampered for cover.

The union delegation stood in disbelief, watching frightened execs take refuge in offices like they were sandbag bunkers.

Stephanie Shelton, Gerdau's communications manager, came out to talk to the delegation.

"We're members of the Gerdau 'family,'" the unionists announced themselves, referring to nomenclature the company uses referring to its employees.

She said that no one from Gerdau would meet with them because they didn't have an appointment.

"What about the company's 'open door' policy?" they asked. She did not budge. It made no difference that union members traveled all the way from Brazil.

Shelton went so far as to say that Gerdau and Gerdau Ameristeel are "two different companies."

She took the petitions and demanded that the delegation leave the building or she would call the police and charge them with trespassing.

The encounter lasted for about 15 minutes when the building security arrived to escort the union reps downstairs. (The elevator was working now.)

Outside, some 50 union members from the Tampa area arrived at the office park to conduct a rally in support of the USW and Brazilian union delegation.

Five Tampa police squad cars arrived on the scene as office workers came out to watch the spirited demonstration. Most observers had never seen anything like it and several hundred handbills were distributed to passersby.

What does Gerdau Want?

A contract or a fight?

First, Gerdau attempts to dictate a labor agreement in Beaumont instead of bargaining in good faith. It takes two parties working together to partner; ultimatums aren't generally accepted as part of the process.

Next, they spread rumors about "labor problems" at Beaumont - both in the other plants and in the media - then say that orders are slack because customers are worried about Beaumont's reliability. Why?

Instead of bargaining in good faith to reach a mutually beneficial agreement so we can take advantage of favorable conditions in the steel markets, they've instigated a full-blown, needless, counterproductive confrontation by locking out Beaumont's Steelworkers.

Now the contract has expired in St. Paul and will soon to expire in Wilton. While the company has different negotiators in each location, they keep singing the same tired old song. They want to bring workers to their knees. They want to bust the union.

Let's look at the union's record.

No strike in the steel industry since 1997.

The USW has played a leading role in creating an industry-wide partnership to stabilize markets and preserve the industry during the steel crisis.

The USW has ongoing, productive working relationships with the leading companies in the industry - U.S. Steel, ISG, and Mittal Steel.

The USW is ready to join in a partnership with Gerdau to ensure that Gerdau Ameristeel is a global competitor in the steel business. Is Gerdau's American management ready to work with us?

St. Paul members authorize strike while Brazilian union leaders pledge support

Members of Local 7263 have voted to authorize their negotiating committee to authorize a strike if it is necessary to reach a contract settlement with pledges of international solidarity from leaders of unions representing some 37 million workers in Brazil.

Gerdau Ameristeel is owned by a Brazilian multinational that prides itself on fair treatment of employees in its home country. If true, the company's U.S. management is despicably betraying those principles.

Fernando Lopes, General Secretary of Brazil's CUT labor federation and Nair Goulart from Força Sindical

have been in the U.S., meeting with Gerdau's employees on a fact-finding tour.

"Usually, we travel abroad to look for help against the multinationals," Lopes said. "This is the first time that we are traveling to give solidarity." Lopes has worked for Gerdau in Brazil for 18 years.

Lopes and Goulart have pledged to form an alliance with their union and USW members at Gerdau's North American locations.

Gerdau is the fourth largest steel operation in the U.S. and had a profit of \$337.7 million in 2004.

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<http://local8586.tripod.com>