

long time, you take the union for granted. The boss does too. The new management set out to change that.

In Canada, the union settled a contract without interference from Tampa. But when the first US contract expired in Beaumont, the Tampa Thugs made their move. First they hired a notorious anti-union law firm (paying their anti union lawyers, who have never produced anything useful for the company, hundreds of dollars per hour) to handle negotiations.

Texas Heroes

The union busters demanded concessions in Beaumont. But workers stood up to the company and refused any givebacks. The company locked them out. Six months went by. The members of Local 8586 stood together in solidarity and refused to be defeated. While on the picket line, Hurricane Rita hit Beaumont. Neither wind, nor rain, floods nor tyrannical management could beat these guys. Our Texans are tough.

"We see the Beaumont guys as heroes," says Denis Kavanagh, president of Local 6571 in Whitby, Ont. "If they had broken Beaumont, St. Paul would be locked out and they would have gone after Wilton too."

When Beaumont wouldn't break, Tampa management recognized its mistake in locking them out and recalled them to work.

But Local 8586 does not have a contract. The workers were not recalled under the terms of the previous agreement. They were called back by the company illegally implementing their proposal. The fight in Beaumont is not over.

Council meeting hosts leaders from all 8 locations and Brazilians

The Unity Council meeting in St. Paul on Jan. 9&10 discussed the situation in Beaumont and the slow pace of negotiations in St. Paul and Wilton where contracts have expired. Local leaders easily grasped the situation. They are all in the same boat.

The company's proposals are clearly pointed at breaking the union. Contrary to statements coming out of Tampa, the union-busting negotiators are out to lower wages, pensions and benefits, in addition to overturning

work practices in place for decades.

"Our members won't stand for it," said Bill Clevenger, president of Local 8581 in Wilton. "We will do whatever we have to do to protect ourselves."

Sure enough, the company is setting out to pick off one plant after another.

Contracts have expired in St. Paul and Wilton. Perth Amboy is coming up in July. Calvert City, Ky., expires in March '07. Whitby, Ont., and Selkirk, Manitoba also expire in '07.

The Unity Council unanimously agreed to a series of actions to bring pressure on the company to recognize that the union is a force that Tampa must deal with fairly and honorably. Otherwise, there will be hell to pay.

Global support

The Brazilian leaders were keen participants during the two days of meetings. Fernando Lopes, Secretary General Secretary, Metalworkers of CUT, told the local leaders, "On behalf of 800,000 Brazilian metalworkers, we support the fight of workers in the US and Canada because the only way we can guarantee our workers' rights is to be sure that all workers' rights are protected."

"With globalization, unions have to show global strength," said Nair Goulart, Director of Confederation of National Metalworkers in Brazil, FORCA SINDICAL.

"That's the way to achieve victory."

Gerdau Ameristeel's

US and Canadian Steelworkers are working together in unprecedented solidarity. Brazilian union leaders, representing some 15,000 steelworkers, are in Sao Paulo, fully supporting and making efforts to see that their North American brothers and sisters achieve a decent contract.

That's what it takes to win. When the Tampa Thugs get the message that they cannot break the union, they will sit down and negotiate a fair agreement. That's all we want - a fair agreement that protects our standard of living, while working and when we retire.

USW members at all locations can look forward to increasing solidarity actions at every Gerdau location. With everybody working together, we all win. Send the company a message by your participation in these activities. Let's move forward together. Solidarity works!



Lead negotiator Jim Stewart brings St. Paul workers up to date on contract talks.