

# Unity Council

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## Turning up the heat in Brazil



*USW reps were met by enthusiastic supporters at many Gerdaу locations in Brazil.*

The USW's campaign to win decent contracts at all Gerdaу and Sheffield locations where labor agreements have expired is increasing intensity as two local union representatives crisscrossed Brazil, spreading the word of Gerdaу's unfair treatment of workers in the U.S. and Canada.

From passing leaflets to the 400 employees at Gerdaу World headquarters in Porto Alegre to visits with workers at Gerdaу's plants in Chaqueadas, Bacabeira and Sao Leopoldo, Jim Whitmore of Local 8581 in Wilton, Iowa, and Ben Hallas, of Local 7263 in St. Paul, Minn., campaigned tirelessly, telling workers, union representatives and government officials how Gerdaу is making millions in profits while company negotiators relentlessly pursue insatiable demands for contract concessions.

Whitmore's appearance and speech to the 2,000 delegates at the opening of the 9th National Congress of the CUT (Brazilian Metalworkers) turned out to be one of the major highlights of the trip. The USW reps received pledges of solidarity from trade unionists in over 30 countries, did interviews with the press, and held meetings with various Brazilian locals.

"Gerdaу Ameristeel must learn to respect worker rights, and negotiate in good faith, as the company does in Brazil," Whitmore told delegates the First Congress of the National Confederation of Metalworkers of the Força Sindical (CNTM/FS) where the USW received strong support and resounding applause.

Gerdaу's workers in South America are largely unaware of what is happening in North America. Delegates interrupted his speech several times with applause and calls for solidarity.



*Metalworkers in Brazil read about Gerdaу's union-busting activities.*

The Metalworkers Congress passed a resolution supporting the USW's fight against Gerdaу. In addition, messages of solidarity came from trade unionists from 30 different countries attending the conference.

Hosted by the Metalworkers Union wherever they went, an early morning visit by USW delegates to Gerdaу's Margusa plant was preceded by a handbill explaining the reason for the visit. In boarding buses to talk with the workers before they entered the plant, Whitmore noted that he felt right at home. "The workers here look just like us," he said.

When they left, everyone in the Margusa plant knew about Gerdaу's refusal to respect union members' rights in North America.

Hallas attended a CUT Congress in Sao Leopoldo where he opened the conference with a speech about Gerdaу. He met a lot of people at the state level of CUT and told about Gerdaу's attempt at union-busting in the U.S.

His calls for solidarity were answered by the CUT Congress unanimously passing a resolution condemning Gerdaу's anti-union, anti-worker behavior in the USA, and demanding that Gerdaу respect workers' rights.

The story of Gerdaу's disrespect for workers in North America is hitting the media in Brazil. The visits by Whitmore, Hallas and others are making headlines. Elected officials at all levels are learning of Gerdaу's actions and demanding answers.

The campaign to win good labor agreements will continue across all nations where Gerdaу has investments. Gerdaу is getting the message. The USW will not go away. The USW will be wherever the company does business. The USW will do whatever it takes to win decent contracts. Gerdaу can count on it.

## Truck of Truth Circles Joliet

Big Nick Mikatich is on the road again, this time in Joliet, Ill., where he has been driving the USW Truck of Truth around the Sheffield Steel plant.

The truck and its message was well received by everyone. The HR man and several managers came out to have a good look. One of them took lots of pictures.



The sign on the truck said:

*Nolan and top execs get nearly \$2 million.  
Sheffield workers and retirees get the shaft.*

The HR guy asked if union reps thought the sign was fair. "Yep, it's fair," came the reply. "Do you think a concessionary contract is fair?" He didn't ask any more questions.

After stationing the truck near the plant gate during turn changes, Big Nick drove the truck around town, stopping for a while at locations where lots of passersby could get a good look.

The citizens in Joliet are getting the message.

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## \*Storm clouds gathering

When the labor agreement expires at Perth Amboy on July 19, it will become the eighth Gerdauplant where workers continue working without a contract.

USW negotiators have been very patient during the drawn out process to reach agreements and the memberships have stood firm in rejecting the company's concessionary demands.

But patience is running thin at many locations and calls for action are resonating through the ranks.

Here are Gerdaus North American plants currently in negotiations.

*Kansas City	Oct. 31, 2003
*Beaumont	March 31, 2005
*St. Paul	July 31, 2005
*Wilton	Sept. 30, 2005
*Joliet	January 31, 2006
*Sand Springs	March 2, 2006
*St. Andrews	June 30, 2006
*Perth Amboy	July 19, 2006

\*Denotes locations where negotiations are continuing and all but Perth Amboy have expired labor agreements.

## Sheffield workers under charm attack

Now that the sale of the three Sheffield Steel mills is completed, Gerdaus management team is wasting no time in trying to woo the workers.

"That's their style," says a long-time observer of Gerdaus methods. "They try to charm our members to death – and try to charm them away from the union."

Gerdaus managers are in the Sheffield plants, talking to workers one-on-one, passing out trinkets and holding general meetings.

If Sheffield's managers have been listening, they know that Sheffield workers have not had pay raises for five years and they expect something now. Trinkets are nice. Remodeled lunch rooms and improved locker rooms make for a more pleasant workplace.

But none of these things show up in paychecks. The only thing that will satisfy workers at the Sheffield mills is a decent union contract.

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## Specter Tells Gerdau – Negotiate in Good Faith

Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), a long-time supporter of the USW and Chairman of the U.S. Senate Steel Caucus knows trouble when he sees it happening in contract negotiations. He has written a letter to Jorge Gerdau Johannpeter, telling how the USW's strong history of working with steel companies has benefited workers and the industry.

Specter recognizes that little progress has been made in negotiations on the labor agreements that were inherited by Gerdau through acquisitions and mergers.

"As a Senator from a steel producing state," Specter tells Gerdau in the letter, "I urge you to work in good faith to negotiate with plant workers and their union representatives to achieve a middle ground that will benefit the people living and working in the local communities and benefit your company."

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## Lockout Anniversary Attracts Media

A year ago on May 26, Gerdau locked out members of Local 8586 in Beaumont, Texas after the contract expired and the workers refused to knuckle under and give the company contract concessions.

This year, the media came calling. The Beaumont Enterprise interviewed Local 8586 President Pete Savoy and wrote a great feature article. Savoy also appeared on a local television station in a story about the lockout.

Of course, local management gets upset when reminded of the failed lockout. Supervisors like to take the focus away from local negotiations and they enjoy spreading tales about what's happening at other locations.

Media coverage about the lockout was sure to sour them. So local union leaders thought they'd toss plant management a few more lemons by encouraging the membership to start wearing their lockout T-shirts on different days, at random. That way, the bosses will have constant reminders. Now, when the sourpuss bosses try to spread the company's propaganda, the lockout T-shirts will serve as a reminder that the truth comes from the mouths of union reps, not Gerdaus foremen.