

# Local Lodge 1529 Newsletter

## March 2011



Editor: John Murray D49/2nd shift      Next meeting is April 12th. at 2:00 P.M.      Visit our web site at [www.iam1529.org](http://www.iam1529.org)

### President's Editorial

Well it's that time of the year again, that stressful two weeks of the year when we attempt to get our vacation scheduled for the upcoming vacation "year" which starts July 1<sup>st</sup> and concludes June 30, 2012. For the 2<sup>nd</sup> year in a row we are having a dispute with the company on what vacation time should be considered in regards to the 15% off within a classification rule. For many years the company didn't include people requesting vacation one day at a time in the same group as employees who were off for blocks of 40 hours or more when it came to allowing only 15% of a classification off on any given day. That changed last year, and while we were able to get many vacation requests accommodated, not all were. It's unfortunate that we have to struggle through this process every year just to get our people the time off they have earned and deserve, at times when they can most enjoy it with their families and friends. We are continuing our efforts to address this reoccurring problem.

More Work Flow Centers are being added in Departments 47 & 45 (the WFC machines that used to be part of Department 48 have now been designated Department 45). The Post & Bid process has been changed in that bidders are arranged in seniority order and the top most senior names have been given interviews to see who the best candidate for the job is. In some cases there are 20 or more bidders which would make interviewing everyone on the folder logistically impossible. The important thing is the most senior employees are now being considered 1<sup>st</sup> on these postings, so that's certainly a step in the right direction by the company. Hopefully the changes the company has enacted in the selection process will result in far fewer complaints regarding who the final successful bidders are.

Mandating employees for Saturday overtime off their regular shift has now become an issue. It is the Union's position that the company does not have the contractual right to do so. We have filed one grievance, with more anticipated in the near future. It is extremely likely that this matter will be going to Arbitration for a final determination by an outside party. Isn't it odd that we were able to make record billings for years without having to make any employee work off their shift? As for the requirement that employees work eight hours, their own shift, the company continues to show no signs of relenting on this policy. Again, for years we did just fine with the flex hours on weekends and made all the company's objectives.

Under good news we do have a new product line coming into the plant in Assembly soon. This new work involves building wiring harnesses, and the customer, much to their credit (and our benefit), requires the work to be completed in the United States. This new product line is expected to create another ten to fifteen jobs for Sidney, and will be performed under a new Code 107 at Labor Grade 1, which will be filled through the Post & Bid process. There will also be a new group leader position created for this work. After so many years of seeing work leave Sidney it's great to see something new come in!

The company has reinstated the H2 Agreement, which was originally created in the mid 1980's to keep employees working during times of slow work, and has been used several times since its inception. It is being used now to work on continuous improvement projects (5S) throughout the plant. This eliminated the practice of the company temporarily placing other employees in the 990/991 Codes far beyond the Contract's mandated limitations. H2 is not a code, but rather a department and individuals working under the H2 Agreement are chosen in seniority order from the list of employees laid off. They are paid the labor code for the job in which they were laid off from. Individuals not choosing to participate in H2 can remain on layoff without losing their recall rights. There are currently two employees performing continuous improvement projects on 2<sup>nd</sup> Shift under the H2 Agreement.

**Submitted Testimony of Thea M. Lee on “NAFTA at Year Twelve” September 11, 2006  
She is the Policy Director for the Legislation Department of the AFL-CIO**

**Editor Note:** *this is a continuation from the February 2011 newsletter. To read the 1st. part of this article, if you haven't already, contact your department Steward.*

**NAFTA “Plus”?** On March 23, 2005, in Waco, Texas, the presidents of the United States, Mexico and Canada launched a new initiative, the Security and Prosperity Partnership for North America (SPP), to “increase security and enhance prosperity ... through greater cooperation and information sharing.” While the twin goals of greater security and prosperity are ones we support, we have deep reservations about the processes set out to reach them in this instance. It appears that important decisions related to deepening economic integration among our three nations, and the well-being of our citizens, are being made by government and business elites, while civil society and Congress are sidelined.

In 2005, each nation established “Prosperity Working Groups” to consider and carry out proposals on a number of issues, including: manufactured goods and sectoral and regional competitiveness; movement of goods; energy; environment; e-commerce and information communications technologies; financial services; business facilitation; food and agriculture; transportation; and health. These working groups are supposed to consult with “stakeholders” in undertaking their activities. However, it appears that for the U.S. working groups, consultation outside of business circles has been minimal at best. The working group on manufactured goods, for example, is contemplating the integration of the auto and steel sectors of North America. There is little indication to date, however, that unions in these sectors will have any substantial input as to how such integration should be deepened.

Further evidence of the corporate domination of this process was the formation of the North American Competitiveness Council (NACC) in March 2006. The NACC was formed to discuss ways to enhance competitiveness through further elimination of regulations and other barriers to trade. The non-governmental representatives invited to participate in this council include Campbell Soup Co., Chevron, Ford, FedEx, General Electric, General Motors, Kansas City Southern Industries, Lockheed Martin Corp., Merck, Mittal Steel USA, New York Life, United Parcel Service, Wal-Mart and Whirlpool.

In order for the SPP to be mutually beneficial to average citizens in North America, civil society must have the ability to participate meaningfully in these discussions. Simply submitting comments through the SPP website is not enough. Before the SPP process goes further, the task forces and councils advising our government must be expanded beyond business circles.

**NAFTA in the Context of Broader U.S. Trade Policy**

One often-cited argument for NAFTA was that it would improve U.S. competitiveness with the rest of the world. However, since NAFTA was put in place, our overall trade deficit has also ballooned, from \$75 billion in 1993 to \$726 billion in 2005. The current account deficit hit a dangerously high 6 percent of GDP at the end of 2005, slowing any possibility of strong economic recovery and undermining the potential for future job growth. The high import propensity of the U.S. economy means that even as economic recovery gets under way, a large proportion of every dollar spent by consumers goes to purchase imports, undermining the economy’s ability to generate good jobs at home. These figures are very real to working Americans who are losing family-supporting jobs and benefits as manufacturing and even service jobs are lost overseas. This year’s trade figures reveal other startling weaknesses in the U.S. economy, even in those areas which have traditionally been considered U.S. strongholds, like services and advanced technology products. The trade surplus in services has fallen from \$92 billion in 1997 to \$56 billion in 2005. In advanced technology products, similarly, the U.S. surplus of \$4.5 billion in 2001 had turned into a whopping deficit of \$44 billion by 2005, most of that with China. The long-time U.S. trade surplus in agriculture has pretty much evaporated, including in products that compete with U.S. goods. These trends call into question the conventional wisdom that the United States enjoys a permanent and growing comparative advantage in the export of services, high-technology goods, and agriculture. In general, the experience of our unions and our members with past trade agreements has led us to question critically the extravagant claims often made on their behalf. While these agreements are inevitably touted as market-opening agreements that will significantly expand U.S. export opportunities (and therefore create export-related U.S. jobs), the impact has more often been to facilitate the shift of U.S. investment offshore. In fact, the agreements’ far-reaching protections for foreign investors directly facilitate the shift of investment, and such shifts can fairly be considered an integral goal of these so-called “trade” agreements. Much, although not all, of this investment has gone into production for export back to the United States, boosting U.S. imports and displacing rather than creating U.S. jobs. The net impact has been a negative swing in our trade balance with most of the countries with which we have negotiated free trade agreements. While we understand that many other factors influence bilateral trade balances (including most notably growth trends and exchange rate movements), it is nonetheless striking that most of our FTAs have yielded worsening trade balances. Moreover, our overall trade balance has continued to deteriorate rapidly, even as we pursue an aggressive FTA strategy. If the goal of these so-called “free trade” agreements is truly to improve U.S. competitiveness and open foreign markets to American exports (and not to reward and encourage companies that shift more jobs overseas), it is pretty clear the strategy is not working.

*(To be continued next month or you can read the entire article on our web site at [www.iam1529.org](http://www.iam1529.org))*