

Letter from worker locked out by AK Steel in Ohio

4 March 2006

The following is a letter from AK Steel worker in Ohio. On Wednesday, nearly 2,700 steelworkers at the company's Middletown, Ohio mill were locked out of their jobs by the corporation, which is seeking to wipe out jobs and impose sweeping health care, pension and work rule concessions. (See "AK Steel locks out 2,700 Ohio workers and hires replacements").

I have worked at AK Steel for about three weeks short of thirty years. There aren't many of my co-workers that truly understand that this is a class struggle, not just a local job action. This is part of the larger war waged relentlessly by the capitalist ownership class against the working class. GM, Delphi, and AK Steel are all part of this war.

Some, including our union president, wish another, larger, company would buy us. "Buying us" is the correct concept here. Slaves are bought and sold. We are chained to the plant and machinery just as surely as if it were a pre-civil war plantation.

Owners come and go. We used to be Armco Steel. The new owners, AK Steel, are harsher masters than were the Veritys, who founded Armco. Things started to go downhill fast in the early 1980s. Verity divested and moved to Florida. The company headquarters moved to New Jersey. We were locked out for a while in 1986. We were being softened up for sale to a new company: AK Steel.

AK is a mean-spirited master. They hate us. We are the most productive, highest-quality integrated steel company on the planet, yet they take all the wealth we create and throw us crumbs and the lash. The situation is like a slave who goes to every length to please his master, so the beatings will stop.

But they only get worse. They want nothing less than to control our minds and bodies, from dawn to dawn. Hitler would have been proud. I'm sure that our masters must be wife-beaters.

We have had six consecutive concessionary contracts. Enough is too much. Our union is united, but, when it became apparent that the company wanted us to train our replacements in anticipation of a work stoppage, we should have gotten up from the negotiating table and shut the place down, right then, before they could train scabs and before they could idle the hot end of the mill.

Before they were ready we could have seized the upper hand at that time. We passively allowed that window to close. Our union leadership didn't want to appear to be "not negotiating in good faith." Well, BS now!

Training scabs isn't negotiating in good faith either. Fear of the master's wrath, especially when you know you can't escape it anyway, is irrational. If you're about to get into a fight and your opponent pulls his shirt up over his head to remove it, you had better jump him while his face is covered up and his arms are still caught up in his sleeves.

The fact that AK felt comfortable enough to remove their shirt, so as to lash us harder, speaks volumes about the beaten-wife syndrome our leadership exhibited. "Oh... What if we get in trouble?!"

We feel like fools now. We saw this coming... and did nothing. The company will not be able to run the plant. Even with their bumbling scab force, they will only hear silence on the premises after a few more days. The place is crashing to a halt, even as I write this.

I expect talks will resume shortly. AK will get a concessionary contract and claim victory. We will get back to picking cotton.

This is the way life stumbles on in the big steel mill. Unless our leadership gains an understanding of the class war; unless we some day assert our secret desire for freedom from the master and begin to make demands that the company "can't live with," we will

remain virtual slaves to the capitalist wage system.

TB

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