

Over the past 79 years members of U.E. 506 in Erie, Pennsylvania have helped General Electric Company earn hundreds of millions of dollars in profit—and we were proud to do it!

The opportunity to work inside the gates of GE Transportation is something we have long fought to protect. There is nothing our union members would like to see more than a long term commitment by GE to modernize our Erie plant and partner with us to continue the long tradition of quality and efficiency our members have helped them build.

Our community has watched with distress as GE Transportation jobs have been transferred to a non-union factory in Texas. As part of our ongoing efforts to staunch the southward bleeding of jobs and do our part to preserve our local economy, we recently agreed to sit with the Company and attempted to bargain in good faith. In nearly 80 years of successful contract negotiations the members of U.E. 506 have never asked to re-open a ratified contract, while the Company has done so during the past three contracts.

An agreed to, legally binding contract no longer offers a period of mutual work toward an agreed upon goal, but a systemic threat to the livelihood of workers and their families. After laying off most of the workforce, companies come to the workers and issues ultimatums: work here harder and for less or we'll take your job too. It's classic whipsawing and it's happening across America.

Our negotiations ended in a stalemate. The U.E. 506 elected leadership team proposed reasonable concessions in an effort to secure more family-sustaining jobs for the region. To our dismay, the company's final proposal included extreme wage decreases and diminished working conditions including an 8 ½ hour workday coupled with a net job loss of 93 more jobs. The Company also attempted to reduce International volume by 30% of the 100% already guaranteed. In a nutshell: fewer jobs, reduced pay, increased work schedule and compromised long-term sustainability.

The most offensive portion of the proposed wage decreases was not to our negotiating team, but to “recalled hires.” These are our fellow workers who lost their livelihood this past winter, through no fault of their own. Our neighbors, the company proposed, would be rehired at 61% of the current rate or \$13.50 less per hour—a year 2000 equivalent wage level.

Andy Stern, a labor leader, once said that labor unions are the best anti-poverty program that actually worked and didn't cost the government a dime. The truth in that statement has never been more evident than today in Pennsylvania. Some workers in GE's Grove City plant now qualify for welfare. These highly skilled diesel engine manufacturers were forced into a lower tier pay scale and are now collecting welfare..non-union workers, working full time jobs.

More and more often, non-union jobs offer few benefits to families such as sick leave and vacation and almost never offer pensions. Wages for skilled laborers no longer lift families into the middle class, but doom them to poverty. In Erie thousands of families are currently shifting to some form of government subsidized lives—not because they're lazy or aren't up for the job, but because companies like GE have run roughshod over our community.

If we agree to devalue the worth of our fellow workers today the ripple effect to our local economy is limitless. The further destabilization of the American family will generate further need for government intervention. The burden of low-paying, non-union jobs falls squarely on taxpayers through increased need for social services. We are already seeing the effect to more than 400 small businesses crippled by GE's latest efforts to increase profits beyond the 20% they are currently enjoying.

The locomotives we build move consumer goods to retailers across America. The spending power of the working class is how a consumer-based economy thrives. The middle class workers of Erie buy goods and services from small business owners and help support our tax base, which funds schools and local infrastructure. When consumers lose the ability to purchase goods and services, Capitalism fails and communities deteriorate.

We seek to unite with small business owners across the region also feeling the effect of the work transfer, and invite the Erie Regional Chamber of Commerce to join us in protecting our local economy.

Labor unions proudly worked to establish the middle class in this country and we will continue to fight for family-supporting jobs, despite a well-financed dismantling of unionism by companies earning gluttonous profit margins.

This Labor Day weekend we are reminded of the union workers who came before us. With fear for their lives union trailblazers fought to protect children from being subject to work at tyrannical companies; established safety standards while mourning the workplace deaths of fellow coal workers, and proved that a skilled worker is worth his or her negotiated wage.

We believe Erie workers are worth their wages. Our members and their families have endured this brutal and demoralizing period with honor and dignity—they have bravely stood by their fellow workers in the long tradition of solidarity. We are grateful that the people of Erie and the surrounding communities have grit and a long tradition of charity. We believe a rising tide lifts all ships and we will not give up the ship, Erie. We have felt our neighbors rally behind our members and we are proud to continue to fight to keep it made in Erie!

UE Local 506 Officers and Executive Board

