



September 24, 2007

### **The Demise of Unions and The American Dream**

CWA District 3 **Local Presidents** from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee, representing CWA/AT&T bargaining unit members at the former Bell South, **REJECTED** the recently negotiated CWA District 3 AT&T Premise Technician MOA by a **VOTE of 82 to 6!** It was basically the same Premise Technician MOA already accepted by CWA VPs from Districts 1, 4, 6 and 9. CWA District 3 was the only District that had not negotiated the MOA because the AT&T acquisition of Bell South hadn't been completed. CWA District 3 Local Presidents voted **NO** to this MOA because of two-tier wages, no pensions, no after employment benefits and contracting out of the work for our new and future members.

I congratulate Noah Savant, CWA District 3 VP, for running a truly democratic District and conducting a VOTE by Local Presidents. I applaud District 3 Local Presidents for keeping their "new" CWA/AT&T bargaining unit alive and for their unswerving faith in their "American Dream." Perhaps they can send us their water, as many of us desperately need it.

CWA District 4 did not conduct a vote on the Premise Technician MOA by Local Presidents representing CWA/AT&T/Midwest bargaining unit members. Nor, did our elected bargaining team VOTE on it. I don't know if the other Districts conducted votes by Local Presidents on the MOA. At times, some of my CWA sisters and brothers may criticize my opinions, but that's ok. I have been there and done that many times over the years. However, I will digress a moment for those of you who don't know me, so you may better understand my values and views, if it matters.

I was born in a union family in Burnside, a blue-collar neighborhood on the south side of Chicago, in October 1941. My father and mother retired as members of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, now the United Transportation Union, as did several of my uncles. World War Two disrupted things for a few years as my father and uncles joined the military. We all lived in the same neighborhood and my brothers and cousins attended the same church and schools. It was a family tradition in those days to gather on the "front porch" on summer evenings. Invariably, the discussions would always end up talking about work and unions. In those days the kids would usually attend union meetings with their dads. My father and uncles would always tell us that the "American Dream" was to own a house and provide your children a better life than they had growing up. They all stressed getting an education. In 1959, I received a football scholarship to Iowa State University, in Ames, Iowa. I was the first in our family to attend school beyond the high school level and my entire family was proud. Over the years my parents wish came partially true because they never owned their own house. However, my brothers and I had the privilege of living our parents "American Dream."

I was twenty-six years old when I joined the CWA as an AT&T "Long Lines" Communications Craft in February 1967. I previously worked at various jobs as a member of the Laborers, Auto Workers, Steel Workers and twice for the Teamsters Union while working during the summer and after leaving college. I am especially proud of the fact that I was a member of Local 1033 of the

United Steelworkers Union at Republic Steel in Chicago for four years. Although, in 1962, two of those years were interrupted by something called "The Draft."

In 1967, when I began to work for the "Long Lines" Division of AT&T, the company subtracted the monthly amount of social security AT&T retirees received from their AT&T monthly pension checks and everyone had to pay a portion of their monthly health care costs. In 1968, CWA's union leadership and Old Ma-Bell members became very radical. This newly ignited spark continued unabated into the 70's through the mid 80's. During this time CWA members conducted several strikes and walkouts against AT&T. During those turbulent years, due to our member's solidarity, we achieved significant wages increases, cost of living increases, a 401K Plan, the Alliance For Employee Growth, 30 years and out pensions, improved retiree health care and other benefits taken for granted today. All of this was in keeping with our members collective "American Dream." And, we did it all voluntarily. We didn't expect to be paid for doing what union members and local union representatives are supposed to do. It's a lot different today. Today, too many union members assume everything we have fought and even died for is their inheritance, solely because they pay union dues.

If necessary, I will walk a picket line again as a retiree in 2009 because I believe in unions and the "American Dream." However, now it's for my grandkids. I want them to have a chance to live the "American Dream." They may well be the **FIRST** generation of Americans who do not have it as good as their parents, unless we all draw a line in the sand **NOW**, like the Local Presidents of District 3 have done.

Will our "new" CWA/AT&T members support your values and views in 2009? If necessary, do you believe they will all go on strike to keep your pension and retiree health care that you have and they don't? Remember, four CWA Districts have already agreed to allow AT&T to hire "new" employees with sub-standard wages, **NO PENSION** and **NO** after employment benefits.

Is AT&T building a scab workforce for 2009, consisted of current and future supervisors, contract workers and "new" employees? Some of you may not recall the last "old" AT&T strike of 1983 and the first "new" AT&T strike of 1986. In 1984, after the '83 Contract was ratified, a CWA/AT&T negotiated Agreement created a two-tier wage for "new" AT&T Alpha-Titles. At the time, AT&T had threatened to populate the "new" titles with non-union and/or contract workers. Bending to AT&T's threat, CWA leadership agreed the "new" titles would be paid 20% below existing TG Clerical wages. Today, 23 years later, they are called L Titles in the CWA-C&T/AT&T contract and still work for lower wages than our TG Titles. Has history repeated itself at the "**NEW-NEW**" **AT&T Of 2007**. Also, prior to the 1986 strike, AT&T management instructed our CWA members on how to resign from the union. Will it be "*déjà vu all over again*" in 2009. Or, will the overwhelming **NO** vote by CWA District 3 Local Presidents, who had the guts to draw a line in the sand against AT&T, ignite a "new" spark under CWA/AT&T national leaders, local representatives and members. A spark we must all catch, join and support. Now, before it's too late for our future CWA members "American Dream."

In Unity-Strength & Solidarity:

Steve Tisza, President  
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