

I didn't fully understand NAFTA until it affected me. Now I know what these kinds of trade deals can do to American workers, because NAFTA cost me my job.

I worked for 15 years as a fab tech — a fabrication technician — at Carrier in Indianapolis. I've lived my whole life in Indianapolis, and lots of my family, including my mother and brother, worked at Carrier, too, making furnaces.

In February 2016, Carrier announced that they'd be closing our plant, eliminating 1,400 jobs and sending all our work to Monterrey, Mexico.

The day they made the announcement started just like any regular workday. Then we saw supervisors blocking the walkways. When we asked them what was going on, they told us they didn't know. There were so many of us crowded together that we had to be really quiet as the CEO finally told us they'd be shutting us down.

Everyone was obviously really devastated because it was such a shock. There were lots of people crying. They sent us all home after the announcement and set up a bunch of new security measures. I guess they were worried we'd tear up the plant or something.

The next day it was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. It stayed like that for a long time as people processed what was happening.

In the meantime, they still expected us to bust our butts like we had before, expected us to make them a bunch of money like we had before.

After they made the announcement, the supervisors started cracking down on everything. Carrier was a good place to work before they told us they were sending our jobs to Mexico, but afterward people were angry and it seemed like supervisors were looking for reasons to write people up.

BAD TRADE DEALS DEVASTATE WORKERS

BY **LAKITA CLARK**

Former member, USW Local 1999

Honestly, no one wanted to give it their 110 percent like we used to because we knew what our hard work meant to the company: nothing. We even had to watch as the people from Mexico came in and took measurements. I mean, we did our jobs, but we weren't going to go above

and beyond like we did before. People were quitting every week so they could find new jobs, which meant everyone else had to work even harder just to keep the lines running.

When Donald Trump came in December 2016 and told us he was saving our jobs, we didn't really know what to think. Only about 80 people were able to go into the meeting, and the rest of us watched social media to find out what happened.

The company agreed to keep some of the jobs in Indiana, and I'm happy for the people who were close to retirement. It was going to be hardest for them to find new jobs. But the deal still left 550 hourly workers and some supervisors out on the street.

I decided to take a buy-out because, like a lot of people, I just couldn't trust that Carrier wouldn't do this again. Ten years from now I'll be 50, and I'll be in the same boat as the older folks at Carrier. No one's going to hire me then. Now at least I have a few options.

I've been applying to jobs, and I've even gotten an interview at a local hospital, although I think my 15 years in manufacturing hurt my chances of getting that position.

I can honestly say I'm in a better place than I was in

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the last few months at Carrier, even though I don't know what the future holds. It's not draining me anymore. Everyone left at Carrier is getting pinched harder and harder, and the trust is broken.

There were a lot of us with rotator cuff problems, and I think my job may have been the cause. I was just cleared by my doctor this month to go back to work after my surgery earlier this year. So I'm done with manufacturing. I'll do something else, administrative work maybe.

Laying off all those hundreds of workers is going to hurt the area around the plant. There's another plant, Rexnord, down the road that's also moving to Mexico, and the local businesses are really going to feel that we're not there.

Before this happened to me, I didn't really understand what bad trade meant. We used to make all our parts in house. Then we started having more and more of them shipped to us. Now I realize they were outsourcing our work. There should have been more education so that we knew what was at stake.

NAFTA took away a lot of our jobs here. It took away a lot of meals. It's killing the middle class.

I'm a mother of four, I'm active in my community and I have to trust that something will come through for me before my severance benefits run out. Carrier dumped us when its leaders thought they could make even more money in Mexico. We need to let people know it could happen to them too.



Lakita Clark