

A Slap in the Face

Pipe Made in India Infuriates Unemployed Steelworkers

Congress Asked to Tighten Trade Laws, Support U.S. Jobs

With the big mill in Granite City, Ill. idle for the first time in 130 years, it was startling for unemployed steelworkers to discover flat-bed train cars pulling into town loaded with miles of steel pipe made in India.

“Just it being in our country in these trying times is an insult to me, my membership, our community and America in general,” said outgoing USW Local 1899 President Russ Saltgaver, whose local represents some 2,000 workers laid off from U.S. Steel’s sprawling Granite City Works.

The pipe, each section stenciled with the phrase “Made in India,” will become part of a new pipeline under construction to carry tar sands crude oil from Canada to refineries in the U.S. Midwest.

The presence of imported pipe in the shadow of an

idled American mill has caused an outcry among workers and sparked calls for Congress to tighten trade rules and for more companies to Buy American and support U.S. jobs.

Trade laws fail workers

It’s another example of how inadequate or unenforced trade laws are failing American workers and have led to a dangerous decline in the capacity of manufacturing industries in the United States.

“I think it is an outrage and a manifestation of what’s been happening to manufacturing in America for a number of years now,” said USW Sub-District 2 Director Dave Dowling.

“As a matter of public policy, we’ve allowed our manufacturing base to slowly disappear. It’s a trend that must be stopped.”

The USW has stepped up the filing of trade actions against China and other countries that are

illegally subsidizing steel exports and dumping steel in this country at below fair market prices.

The union and its activist members are also pushing for domestic policies to restore America’s manufacturing capacity and the family-supporting jobs that manufacturing has historically provided.

Around the country, USW members are asking state and local governments to use federal stimulus money whenever possible to Buy American and support domestic jobs.

Politicians show support

In Granite City, politicians of both parties expressed their support. U.S. Rep. Jerry Costello (D-Ill.) called for fair trade policies that create good-paying jobs in the United States.

“At a time when thousands of local steelworkers are laid off, shipping steel from India for a project in our area is unacceptable and outrageous,” Costello said. “We can and should make that steel in the U.S.”

Now in its second year of construction, the Keystone Pipeline, a \$5.2 billion joint venture between ConocoPhillips and TransCanada, an energy producer and transmission company, will run 2,148 miles and move Canadian tar sands crude oil from Alberta to markets in the U.S. Midwest.

In Illinois, the oil will be processed at the Conoco Phillips refinery located about 12 miles away from the Granite City Works. The refinery has undergone a major upgrade to process the Canadian crude.

The irony of imported pipe stacked in the shadows of a once productive American plant that has been closed for lack of orders is hard to take for workers who have been laid off by the thousands.

“I’m sure everyone can understand the emotional impact for me, watching this within sight of our idled mill,” said Doug May, a USW member and crane operator who has worked at the Granite City plant for 35 years. “I felt like someone punched me in the gut.”

May and Dennis Barker, Local 1899’s Rapid Response and PAC chairman both got close enough to the train cars to

photograph “Made in India” and other markings linking the pipe to the Keystone project.

Retiree sounded alert

Jeff Rains, a Granite City retiree and activist with the Steelworker Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR), made the discovery while walking from his home to the union hall.

He was delayed at a rail crossing by a pipe-laden train as it was switching back and forth into the River’s Edge, a former Army depot that has been designated a U.S. foreign trade zone.

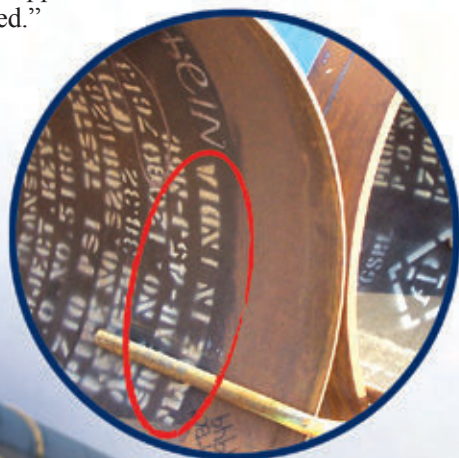
“It was a huge train and I got curious,” Rains said. “I started looking for a port of origin, but there was nothing. Then I walked up to the cars and saw the stencil “Made in India.”

Rains, who worked for most of his adult life at the Granite City Works, said he was “very, very angry” over the foreign-sourced pipe and the loss of work it potentially represents.

“I worked over 30 years at that plant. My older brother had 40 years and my younger brother is a current employee, now laid off. So, it’s a vital part of my family,” he said.

The jobs issue has strong local support. Some 1,000 people attended an April rally staged by Local 1899 to draw

attention to the foreign-made product. In February, before Rains discovered the pipe, 5,000 people marched through Granite City to support a strong Buy American clause in the federal stimulus package.



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Photo by Dilip Vishwanat



Photo by Gary Gaines

