



& Beyond

# Making Change

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## Wrestling with the Largest Corporation in the World

### *Labor Mobilizes for General Electric Contract Negotiations: Jobs for the Future*

SOME 4,100 IBEW MEMBERS WORK AT GENERAL ELECTRIC COMPANY facilities across the United States. On May 30, the IBEW and other labor unions began negotiations with GE on a new contract that will help determine future industry trends. Labor unions representing GE employees in the United States bargain jointly through the Coordinated Bargaining Committee of GE Unions (CBC).

The U.S.-based multinational giant, one of the world's 10 biggest companies, manufactures everything from light bulbs to jet engines and other highly sophisticated equipment. GE has eliminated some 150,000 U.S. jobs since 1981. The company has even pressured some of its suppliers to move to Mexico as well.

"The 2000 contract talks with GE [are shaping up] to be a major showdown on the future of good-paying industrial jobs in the United States," reported the CBC, whose 14 member unions represent 37,000 GE workers. In addition to IBEW, other major unions at GE are the Electronic Workers (IUE), and the non-affiliated United Electrical Workers (UE). The current three-year GE contract expires June 25. The CBC rolled out its Contract 2000 Strategic Campaign with a spring 1999 rally in Memphis and has launched new communications tools including a new web site and a periodic newsletter.

"We are in a battle to preserve and restore America's most fundamental resource: good, stable jobs—for now and for tomorrow," stated the CBC in its initial GE Contract 2000 newsletter. See the CBC web site: [www.gecontract2000.com](http://www.gecontract2000.com) for more information about the GE campaign. The *IBEW Journal* will report more fully in an upcoming issue on the outcome of contract negotiations.

### *Contract 2000 Rallies: 'Get Up- Stand Up! For Contract 2000'*

As part of the Member Mobilization Campaign, GE workers and retirees have turned out by the thousands at major rallies across the country to shine a public spotlight on GE's practices as an employer and to stand up for good jobs, decent health care coverage and fair pensions.

GE workers and retirees scored an initial



**IBEW Local 2249, Bloomington, Indiana, members and supporters rally at a GE refrigeration plant to protest GE's announcement that 1,400 jobs would be moved to Mexico by 2001.**

victory in April, when GE announced the first pension increase for CBC retirees in four years. "The action comes after a strong, united effort by active and retired union members. There is no reason why GE's pension fund should be overfunded by some 200 percent while many retirees receive poverty level pensions," said Tex Cosby, president/business manager of IBEW Local 1627, Lexington, Kentucky, and chair of the IBEW's System Council EM-5. "GE's action is good, but it is only the first step along the road to pension fairness."

## GE Exports U.S. Jobs

GE has "moved thousands of [manufacturing] jobs and billions of dollars of investment out of the United States to low-wage, non-union havens around the world," notes the CBC. "Only 15 years ago, some 300,000 of [GE's] 370,000-person global work force were employed in U.S.-based operations," reported the 2000 Inter Press Service. "Now only about half of a total global work force of about 300,000 work in the United States."

## IBEW Members Face Job Loss At GE Refrigerator Factory

On December 10, 1999—15 days before Christmas—GE announced its decision to cut 44 percent of the work force at a side-by-side refrigerator factory

in Bloomington, Indiana, where IBEW Local 2249 members are employed.

GE had previously announced in September 1999 that it likely would lay off 1,400 off the plant's 3,200 employees and move some production to Mexico unless millions in annual savings could be found. Despite Local 2249's efforts during three months of "decision-bargaining," GE is expected to begin phased layoffs later this year. The Associated Press reported that the lost Bloomington jobs will be moved by mid-2001 to a \$250 million plant being built in Celaya, Mexico, where comparable workers are paid about \$2 hourly.

On March 8, Local 2249 held a labor-wide informational picket line in front of General Electric to inform the community about the impact the reduction would have on Bloomington. On April 29 union workers and community supporters rallied on the lawn of the Monroe County Courthouse Square to protest the cuts.

On a brighter note, GE is "proceeding with previously announced plans to spend \$100 million in Bloomington on a new generation of energy-efficient refrigerators" to meet federal energy-efficiency standards that take effect in 2001, reported *The Indianapolis Star*. GE supposedly will keep production of its highest-volume models in Bloomington, but higher-priced, lower-volume models will be manufactured in Mexico. The *Hoosier Times* reported that GE "is

looking ahead to 2003 when the Bloomington plant must again be upgraded to be able to meet a new set of federally mandated environmental standards." In addition, the IBEW's representatives in the CBC have made the enhancement of early retirement provisions a major issue in the national negotiations with GE in another effort to reduce the negative impact on the workers.

## Workers Call For International Code of Conduct

In March the CBC met in Washington, D.C., with union delegates from 20 nations who pledged to work together to monitor GE's treatment of workers worldwide. The meeting was sponsored by the International Metalworkers' Federation.

Delegates adopted a statement deploring GE's "strategy of income cutting and employment downsizing in a global auction to determine which workers can be forced to work for the lowest possible wage," and urged GE to adopt a workplace code of conduct based on internationally recognized labor rights.

Delegates acknowledged that international bargaining is not coming anytime soon, but vowed that even this year, GE will be hearing the same message on the same issues from all the unions around the world. ■

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## Local 1505 Maps New Strategy at Raytheon

If the work is outsourced, then organizing has to go out to the source. And if multiple unions are affected, they have to work together.

That's the strategy of Local 1505, Waltham, Massachusetts, with Raytheon, a giant defense contractor that is busting up its longtime electronic manufacturing work in Massachusetts. In a race for lower wages, Raytheon has contracted out, attempting to pit union workers against nonunion employees and, in various parts of the country, has tried to pit members of one union against another.

To fight back, Local 1505 put together a strategy of tracking Raytheon outsourcing and mounting organizing efforts at the vendors who get the work in order to deny the company the low-wage atmosphere it seeks. The local has started training

member organizers who have already assisted in one successful campaign. Then early this year, Local 1505 took part in a historic gathering in San Diego forming the Raytheon Inter-Union Coordinating Conference. Some 20 local unions across the country represent 15,000 workers at Raytheon, including locals of the Machinists (IAM), Auto Workers (UAW) and Government Employees (AFGE).

The unions found the landscape splattered with misleading stories Raytheon had planted to pit union against union. They have devised a detailed tracking system on Raytheon and are coordinating both bargaining and organizing to protect workers' rights at Raytheon, which became the third largest defense contractor in the nation, employing more than 100,000 since acquiring Hughes, E-Systems and Texas Instruments.