



BUILDING AMERICA AND FIGHTING FOR A MORE JUST COUNTRY

-The Struggle for Dignity and Justice at Great Western Erectors-





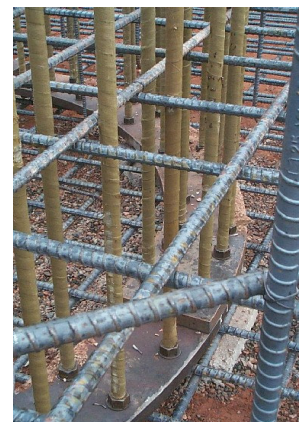
Nearly every structure you can think of – sports stadiums, shopping malls, bridges, office and industrial buildings – all required the skills of trained iron workers. Structural iron workers place and install iron or steel

OF STRONG MIND AND BODY

The construction materials and the tools of the iron worker trade are heavy and bulky. Iron workers must be in good physical condition. They need good agility, balance, and eyesight to work high up on narrow beams and girders or suspended from columns. They need to know how to read a blueprint and mechanical drawings, perform the mathematics for layout work,

girders and columns while their reinforcing iron worker counterparts set reinforcing bars (called rebar) in the forms that hold concrete. Reinforcing iron workers, often called “rod busters,” fasten the bars together using wire, pliers, and hard work. They sometimes cut the bars with shears or acetylene torches, bend them by hand or machine, or weld them with arc-welding equipment. Or they’ll reinforce the concrete with welded wire fabric or substitute in post-tension cables. These rod busters use their sweat and toil, and sometimes sacrifice their bodies and blood, to position and secure the skeletons of America’s concrete structures.

and know the basics of erecting and reinforcing, welding and assembling. They also have to learn the care and safe use of tools and materials, proper unloading and storing and rigging.



WORKING HARD, BUT NOT GETTING FAIRNESS

From California to Florida, the vast majority of rod busters are recent Latino immigrants. They do the job that most people shy away from, one of the toughest jobs in the country.

These workers have no qualms against doing a hard day of honest work. However, honesty and fairness is often lacking in the concrete reinforcing industry. Workplace abuses are common. Safety and working conditions are often secondary to profits.

2

Workers are often made to work through rain, ice, snow and wind. They may not be paid properly for all the work they have done. They may be forced to work through their coffee and lunch breaks. They may be forced to pay for their own personal safety equipment. They may suffer from discrimination and racism. They may be fired or disciplined when they try to speak up and raise issues.

These practices are generally illegal yet happen regularly.

GREAT WESTERN ERECTORS BUILDS WITH INJUSTICE.

Great Western Erectors based in Dallas, Texas is one of the largest rebar and concrete reinforcing contractors in the nation. Great Western employs some 300 workers at a time—with operations primarily in Phoenix, Arizona; Denver, Colorado; and Dallas, Texas. They build a diverse number of structures including privately owned structures like office buildings and condominiums and publicly financed projects like highways, schools, museums, and water treatment plants.

Unfortunately, Great Western Erectors workers are subjected to a number of hardships, injustices, and abuses. Great Western worker Esteban Ortiz said, ‘because we’re Mexicans, they treat us like machines, not people, not even humans.’

In May 2005, a dozen employees of Great Western Erectors in Arizona went on strike over not being provided drinking water at the jobsites. Great Western worker Leobardo Corona said, “A group of workers and I went to the offices of Great Western to speak to [the area manager] Howard Parsons about providing workers with water at all the jobsites, [better wages and family health insurance]. He said, “if you don’t like it here, get out.” Great Western worker Ismael Espejo Jimenez recalls that Howard Parsons said, the company “wasn’t going to change anything and if we didn’t like it, the door was open.”

Since then, Great Western workers are still on strike over the mistreatment, disregard

and indifference the company shows its workers. Contrary to Great Western management’s assertions, this is not an isolated event or problem. Workers in Texas, Arizona, and Colorado say they suffer from:

- Low salary,
- Poor working conditions and job safety,
- No affordable family health insurance,
- No vacation days or sick pay,
- Favoritism and Discrimination,
- No respect from managers, and are often
- Forced to skip their break and lunch times, and face

Great Western worker Anastacio Corona says, “the company gives some workers productivity bonuses but it’s not based on anything. The decisions are all up to the company. They should be given to all workers, whether new or old, without favoritism.”



Great Western worker Armando Flores said, “the work is very hard but the pay and benefits are very low. We deserve better. We deserve water, to be listened to by our bosses and have a voice on the job, to have reasonable wages, vacations, medical

insurance, a retirement plan, the things that other companies provide their workers.”

NO RESPECT AND DIGNITY AT GREAT WESTERN. NOT EVEN WATER AT THE JOBSITE

The issue of not being provided water in one of the hottest states in the U.S. shows the general disregard that Great Western has for workers. “The heat is very strong in Arizona, but they don’t even give us water to drink,” said Great Western worker Armando Flores. Great Western worker Jorge Espejo said, “I went on strike over Great Western’s injustices. It was really hot that day and I was working really hard. I had to put up with being really thirsty. I know the company can provide water to the worksite but they don’t do it... The owner just doesn’t care about workers, only the money.”

Great Western worker Daniel Flores said, “we [the workers] did a visit to the company boss and tried to talk with him about the things we need for work like water.... They give us a small water cooler and say we have to fill it. But you have to buy my own water and ice. But [the cooler is worthless and the water gets hot [after a short while]. In this heat, we need big water coolers filled with ice. [Howard Parsons] said if we didn’t like the way things were, the door was wide open. All we’re asking for is respect and a voice on the job.”



DYING FOR WORK?

Latino workers suffer disproportionately from job hazards. The rate of work-related fatalities among Latino workers is 25 percent higher than for workers overall, and foreign-born Latinos are more likely to die than Latinos born in the United States, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Even though private-industry injury and illness rates overall dropped 35 percent between 1992 and 2001, fatalities among Latino workers in the United States increased by 67 percent in the same period and have dropped only slightly since then, according to BLS statistics from November 2003. Assistant Labor Secretary for Occupational Safety And Health John L. Henshaw said the “construction industry accounts for about 7 percent of all employment, but 20 percent of fatalities.”

GREAT WESTERN ERECTORS SHOULD KNOW BETTER.

Great Western's key executives and officials are from a number of individuals and construction companies. Among the principals are Great Western's Dallas-based President Maurice "Butch" R. Duggan and Arizona operations manager Howard Edgar Parsons. Other key principals include GTR Ltd and EJV, subsidiaries of George Weiland Jr's Gateway Construction of Chicago, IL and John Lang's Chilstrom Erecting of Milwaukee, WI respectively.

Iron Workers Union Local 1 in Chicago represents iron workers employed by Gateway and Ironworkers Local 8 of Milwaukee, Wisconsin represents iron workers employed by Chilstrom. These companies have profited greatly from working with the Iron Workers Union and the high degree of professionalism, quality, stability and reliability that comes from being a union contractor.

Great Western Erectors workers do the same job yet receive less for their work. They know that workers at Gateway and Chilstrom work with dignity and respect under a union contract that guarantees fair wages and treatment, a voice on the job, safe working conditions, paid vacations, a pension, free family health insurance, and the best apprenticeship training programs to ensure opportunities for advancement.

Great Western workers are fighting for their own union. Workers in Texas, Colorado and Arizona workers are as entitled to justice and fairness as their counterparts in Wisconsin and Illinois. The principals of Great Western should agree also. Great Western worker Leobardo Corona said, "We know we help Great Western make millions of dollar every year and they can provide worker benefits like they do at other companies."

More and more, construction industry workers are standing up for justice and calling for fairness. And a growing number of construction employers are also saying enough is enough by becoming signatories with the Iron Workers Union. They understand that the narrow quest for short term profits damages the industry in the long run. They agree that it's a race to the bottom if employers build off the backs of exploited workers



DON'T LET YOUR TAXES AND DOLLARS SUPPORT GREAT WESTERN'S EXPLOITATION OF WORKERS.

Much of Great Western Erectors' work is
5 for the construction of public projects like highways, bridges, water

treatment plants and universities, high schools and middle schools. A large

percentage is for the construction of hospitals.

Great Western Erectors is usually hired by a general contractor or rebar fabricator. These businesses are responsible for stopping the abuses of workers and should not encourage such abuses by demanding low bids regardless of pay and working conditions, then turn a blind eye to the mistreatment of workers. Even those that do not directly hire Great Western, but profit from its work like building owners, bear a responsibility. Cities and municipalities, owners, and others have an extra responsibility to ensure

that their dollars, especially when public dollars, do not support bad business practices that “take the low road” and exploit and injure workers.

Great Western worker Luis Uribe said, ‘All the workers at this company are fed up with the injustices but many of them don’t say anything because they’re afraid of being fired. I took the risk because there is only so much mistreatment you can suffer. At some point, you just have to say “Enough. No more. I will fight these injustices.”’

WORKERS AND THEIR ALLIES UNITE TO STOP THE INJUSTICE

Great Western Erectors workers are receiving widespread support from other workers in the industry, the Iron Workers Union, the AFL-CIO, religious leaders, political leaders, community leaders, students, and labor activists. This broad coalition is engaging contractors, developers, politicians, the public and others at the jobsites, at their executive offices, in the city council, and wherever else they may be with the simple message:



practices. All those that profit from Great Western Erectors work are morally accountable and ultimately responsible for the practices that Great Western uses. These organizations should say unequivocally that they will not support businesses that abuse workers and ensure that all current and future projects do not contract with, and will not contract with unscrupulous companies that build on the backs of exploited workers.

Business and public entities should demand that all subcontractors on the jobsite treat workers fairly, obey the law, and maintain the highest standards of ethical business

Great Western worker and strike leader Felipe Hernandez said, “there are over a thousand workers and their families in the reinforcing industry. The only way we are going to better our working conditions is to unite and fight to win against the injustices.”

Join the workers' fight for justice!



IRON WORKERS UNION
1750 New York Ave NW,
Suite 400
Washington, DC 20006

AFL-CIO
815 16th St NW
Washington, DC 20006

