



Why we're on strike at Kohler

By Tim Tayloe, President

The 2,100 members of UAW Local 833 are in a struggle to preserve our community's middle class. With spouses, children and retirees, our numbers are at least three times that or more.

We are your friends, neighbors, customers, fellow citizens and taxpayers. Our kids go to school with your kids. Our families need the same things as yours.

Since 1934, the working folks of UAW 833 have fought for and won wages, benefits and working conditions that have elevated the entire community. We took our hits in tough times, just like you, and like all fair-minded people we expected to share in times of corporate prosperity. But that's not happening. Not for us. And not for you.

In 2010, Kohler laid off 600 of our members and threatened to outsource or offshore more jobs. We reluctantly accepted a five-year contract that

simultaneously froze our wages and increased out-of-pocket healthcare costs.

Worse, we got a two-tier wage system that undercuts new hires. At 65 percent of regular pay, they earn as little as \$11.50 an hour with few or no benefits.

Many of them are temporary and don't know from one day to the next what they'll be doing or if they'll be working.

They are stuck forever behind the rest of us, no matter the skills they bring or how long they work. With a 94 percent strike vote and 99 percent of our members still out, we are holding strong for incremental raises that will get our newer folks close to wage parity in five years.

This is the defining issue of our strike.



Production workers picket round the clock. More than 99 percent of the 2100-member UAW Local remain on strike since the union reached impasse with the company November 15.

We are taking a moral and necessary stand for equal pay for equal work. Our nation has fought battles like this before and continues to do so. Discrimination against women and minorities, for example, is illegal, yet their wages still lag. Now, under wage schemes like Kohler's that are becoming epidemic in the US, we find a new group of unequal citizens: our youngest workers.

'What kind of corporate citizen would decimate the community whose labor created billions because, it says, it wants to "compete" with the slave wages of the third world?'

What does the future hold in store for them? What does it mean for us all? If past is prologue, it doesn't look good.

Wisconsin has the fastest shrinking middle class in the nation. Low-wage jobs spiked sharply in the last 15 years, especially since 2010. Median household income fell in a stunning two-thirds of Wisconsin counties, including Sheboygan (-9.1 percent) and neighboring Manitowoc (-10.1 percent). Nationally, it's not much better.

Meanwhile, the ever-expanding income and wealth gap between the very rich and the rest of us is the worst it's been since The Great Depression. The Kohlers are among those fortunate few. Their wealth

nearly doubled in just 12 months, 2012-2013, and, as of December 2, they have \$7.7 billion in their pockets.

What kind of employer threatens the livelihood of working families while making money hand over fist? What kind of company demands a permanent underclass? What kind of corporate citizen would decimate the community whose labor created billions because, it

says, it wants to "compete" with the slave wages of the third world?

The sad fact is that, for much of America's wealthiest and the toadies who serve them, dividing the middle class and driving

down our standard of living has become routine. They pay big bucks to outsider consultants who care not a whit for the communities they hurt while pushing talking points out of their playbook to scare the hell out of us.

We're not falling for that again.

We're feeling the squeeze, and we know the risks, and we know you do too. We are inextricably linked, you and us. Please support our cause. Call Kohler. Spread the word. Drop off donations at our Emil Mazy Hall. Help us restore fundamental fairness and shared prosperity to the community.

If not now, when?

If not us, who?

On strike for a 'normal life'



By a vote of 94%, members of UAW Local 833 struck Kohler Company November 15 after reaching a bargaining impasse over the employer's two-tier wage scheme that keeps newer workers (Tier B) permanently behind longer-term workers (Tier A).

With wages as low as \$11.50 an hour, Tier B workers are struggling to make ends meet. They earn 65% of the Tier A rate for the same work, depending on the job and other factors. Within Tier B, workers are either permanent or "flex," i.e. temporary, with benefits and other extras ranging from radically reduced to nonexistent.

At the union's busy Emil Mazey hall, Haley Goldbeck and Mariah Mand are making a huge card for the family of union member Darius Wray, who died suddenly on Thanksgiving at age 34. It will bear the signatures of striking Local 833 members who will present it at a vigil and take time out from their own troubles to pay their respects.

Huddled together, multi-colored markers in their hands, the women look up from their work to talk about life on Tier B.

SCREWED TO THE BOTTOM

Goldbeck looks Millennial young, and like so many of that generation, she is, at the moment, screwed. Hired in February, she's been flex and pretty much at the bottom of the totem pole ever since.

She's "at will," meaning that Kohler can end her job at any time. She has no recourse, no benefits and no rights other than to try to transfer to another position. So far, that's been impossible.

"In my area, I can't even get a permanent job," she says, somewhat exasperated.

As Tier B flex, she doesn't know from one day to the next where she's working or if she's working. Permanent work, even at Tier B, would at least provide a little more certainty to her life. Right now, "they can put me anywhere." Or nowhere.

"If you come in, and they want you to paint the walls, that's what you do," quips Mand.

Compared to Goldbeck, Mand's a veteran. Hired as flex in June 2012, she eventually transferred to a permanent job, but Tier B wages and meager benefits mean her workaday woes are far from over. Competition for better paying jobs in the plant can be fierce, and even after three years she is not earning enough.

"You pay your bills and have nothing left," she says matter-of-factly.

SQUEEZED AT THE TOP

Tier A hasn't had it so easy either. About 600 of their ranks got laid off in 2010; 400 of them never came back. Of those still employed, five years without a raise and skyrocketing out-of-pocket healthcare costs have diminished their purchasing power.

Dean Gehrke feels the pinch all too acutely, even after 18 years.

Laid off in 2010, he maintained his Tier A status picking up temporary work at Kohler and hoping it would morph into permanent employment. He also secured work at another company.

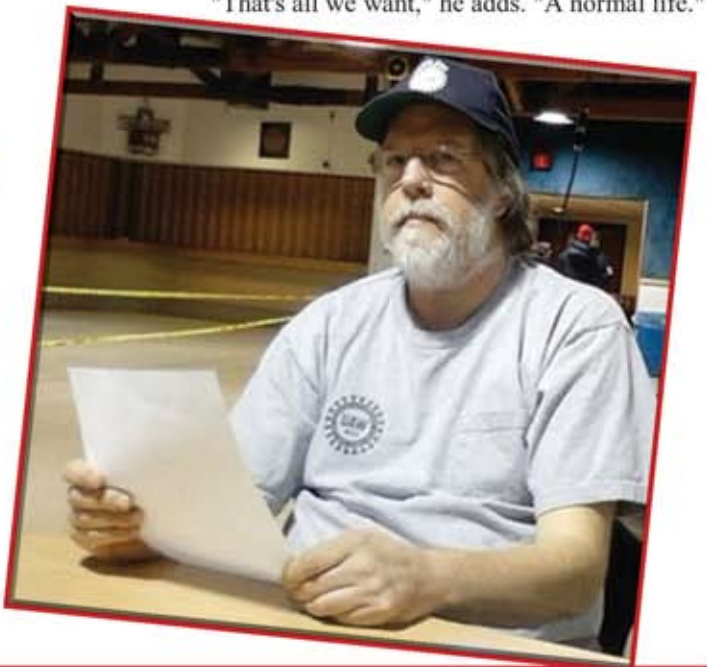
"I was working two full-time jobs and over 100 hours a week before I finally got called back to Kohler," Gehrke says.

"I came back to Tier A, but other people who couldn't work temporary—they had to be sure about wages and benefits—lost their status and either came back as Tier B or didn't come back at all. At first, there was some conflict between Tier A and Tier B, but as time went on people realized this was brought on by the company."

Reflecting on the union's last proposal, a copy in his hand, and thinking about what Kohler has done, Gehrke, like all who spoke on the record, is thoughtful and determined.

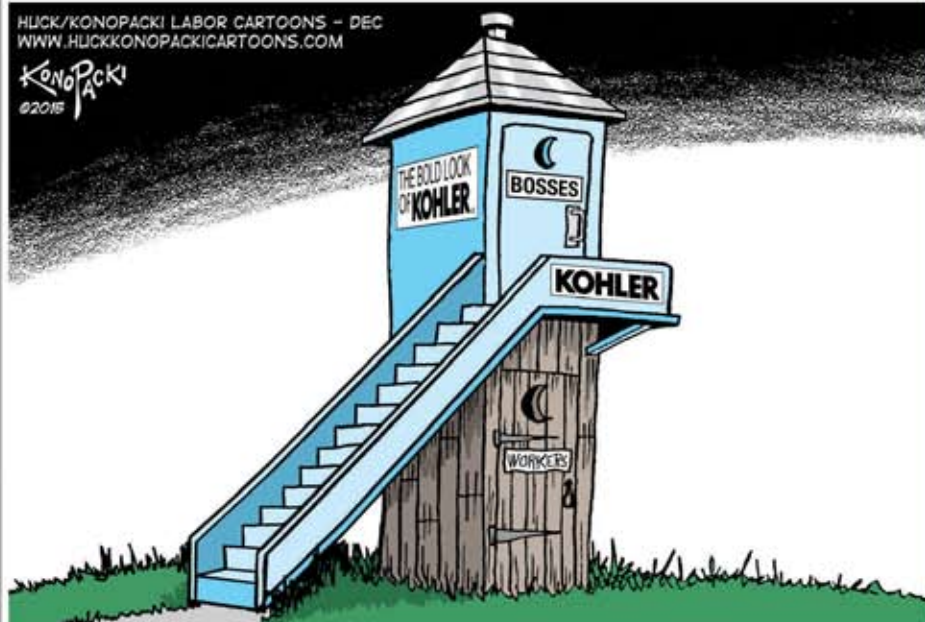
"Anyone working full time should be able to live comfortably, to pay the bills, and do the normal things that people do with a decent job.

"That's all we want," he adds. "A normal life."



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Kohler Kash

The Kohler family ranks number 65 on the Forbes 400 list with wealth of \$7.6 billion as of December 9, 2015.

Forbes: <http://onforb.es/1M4aOBy>

Their wealth nearly doubled in 12 months from 2012 to 2013.

Journal Sentinel: <http://bit.ly/1Z0e4ao>

They are active in Wisconsin politics. Company chairman Herbert Kohler has contributed \$40,000 to Governor Scott Walker. Between 2009 and 2013, Kohler family members and workers contributed over \$51,000 to Walker and other state officials.

WDC: <http://bit.ly/1mbKmRw>

The Kohlers have ties to the Wisconsin Club for Growth, which has backed union-busting state legislation, including Act 10, the controversial law that decimated public workers' bargaining rights, and the "right to work" (RTW) law that gives private sector workers the option to get union services for free.

PR Watch: <http://bit.ly/1nn1QpT>

The Kohler's Windway Capital Corp. is associated with the American Legislative Exchange Council, which fashioned model legislation for both Act 10 and RTW.

SourceWatch: <http://bit.ly/1NjBbVU>

Kohler Company paid no state income taxes in 2011 and 2012, based, it said, on various tax credits it had received.

Fox 11: <http://bit.ly/1HVOK0W>

In fiscal year 2013-2014, Governor Scott Walker's Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation gave Kohler tax credits of \$2 million.

WEDC: <http://1.usa.gov/1NcSE4q>

Kohler is the fifth richest closely-held company in Wisconsin.

Journal Sentinel: <http://bit.ly/1QguWbf>

Kohler controls an extensive network of operations under various names in the US and abroad.

PrivCo: <http://bit.ly/1Q1PJj3>

Kohler Co. also operates hotels and golf courses, and, right in the Village of Kohler, it has a luxury resort whose guests recently complained of noise from a UAW picket line.

Kohler: <http://bit.ly/1Z0fKAG>



UAW Local 833 members maintain picket lines at all hours, even as the holidays and the Wisconsin winter approach.

Photo: Eric Koene



Chris Baugnet says he wears day-glow yellow so that he "doesn't get hit by a car." It happens!

Warm them up!

Put a sign in your window showing support for the members of UAW Local 833

Businesses that do will be added to our "DO Patronize List" to show the entire community who supported us and should be supported in return.

We also need donations. Wood, food and supplies can be dropped off at UAW's Emil Mazey Hall, 5425 Superior Avenue, Sheboygan, WI 53083.

We welcome financial support too. Make checks payable to UAW Local 833. You can drop them off at the hall or mail them.

With your help, we can win. We don't have Kohler's billions, but on the other hand, Kohler doesn't have our friends!

Happy Holidays