

ILLEGALLY SUBSIDIZED IMPORTS TAKE JOBS FROM 1,900 TIRE BUILDERS

BY JACKIE STARKS

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For years, people talked about the possibility that Goodyear would shut down the Union City, Tenn., tire plant. I never really believed it was going to happen. The factory wasn't ancient or anything. It was built in 1968.

Then, all of the sudden, they did it. It was announced on February 10, 2011.

More than 1,900 people worked there then on several shifts, people from Tennessee, Kentucky and Missouri. They called us together in groups of about 100 or 150 and spilled the beans to us. Then they moved to the next section of the plant and did it again. You have to understand, this was a massive factory, 52 acres under roof.

When those guys said the place was done for, everybody got quiet. You could hear a pin drop.

Some were in shock. Some guys believed it would shut down, but some, until the day Goodyear closed the door, really thought it wasn't happening. As for me, I took them at their word.

Goodyear said they'd stop production before year's end. They claimed our work wasn't going overseas. But just a month later, in March of 2011, Goodyear announced



it was spending half a billion dollars to modernize a tire plant in Chile and another \$200 million on a factory in Brazil.

Why weren't they spending that money on Union City? It's simple. They could pay people in Chile and Brazil less for a day of work than what they paid us for an hour.

Also, this happened just shortly after cheap, illegally subsidized foreign tires had begun flooding the American market. Between 2004 and 2008, there was a 215 percent surge in imports, mostly from China, of passenger and light truck tires. That's what we made in Union City. That import surge bankrupted American tire plants and destroyed 8,100 good American jobs.

The United Steelworkers (USW) union, which represented the tire workers at Goodyear, filed a tire trade case. Because the Steelworkers won that case in September of

2009, tariffs were placed on imports of passenger and light truck tires. But it wasn't enough to save Union City.

We thought the plant would be open until year's end. But then Goodyear jumped us. In the middle of the summer, on July 11, 2011, they showed up at the beginning of each shift and told us the place was closed as of that day. We could get our stuff out of our lockers, but then we had to leave. We were done.

That threw 1,900 people into an already bad job market. Factories in that area had been closing and going overseas for years. In 1970, the eight counties in western

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Tennessee and southwestern Kentucky that are called the Jackson Purchase employed more than 30,000 people in 28 factories. By Goodyear's announcement in 2011, most of those plants had moved overseas. Goodyear was the last one employing more than 2,000.

You just couldn't find a job then.

I was out of work for two years. My wife works, but before I lost my job at Goodyear, we both made good money. On my last day at the tire plant, I earned \$24.76 an hour and had a decent health care plan.

So when I got laid off, we had to cut back on a lot of stuff, on everything really. We had a camper and a little place at the lake, and we had to let all of that go. We sold the camper.

I had to draw down my 401(k) savings, my retirement money, for us to live on.

At one point, my 10-year-old son asked me if he should get a job.

This was the first time I had been without work since I was 15 years old. It sucked. It takes a toll on you. I didn't blame myself because I didn't do anything wrong. They up and left me. I am still kind of bitter about it. They cost me quite a bit.

We got Trade Adjustment Assistance, which is federal money to help retrain workers who lose their jobs because of bad trade. I used it to go to welding school, but after I got certified, I couldn't find a job welding anyway.

Finally, I got a job at Insteel in Hickman, Ky. I started at \$10.25 on June 18, 2013. That's less than I made at the job I got right out of high school with a company that was bought by Kohler, the faucet manufacturer. I am topped out now at \$14.25 an hour. That's a \$10-an-hour pay cut from what I made at Goodyear. And I have to contribute a lot more for health insurance.

I am trying to put some money back in my 401(k) for retirement now, but it's hard because I make so much less.

Don't get me wrong, though. I am thankful to have a job. And it's a good job. I am the lab technician and storeroom attendant. I test the tensile strength of the wire mesh we make.

You know, my dad worked at Goodyear. And it would have been nice if I could have spent my career there. And maybe if one of my boys had wanted to work there, he could have, and he would have earned wages that are enough to support a family.

But, instead, Goodyear went to Chile and Brazil and China.

Now there are no jobs that pay anything in this area.

If you could rewind it, and put everything back where it was, it would be awesome. But for that to happen, somebody's got to fix the problems this country has with trade. I believe it can be fixed. Everything can be fixed.

I just don't trust lawmakers to actually do it. They certainly haven't yet.