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OFFICE WORKERS PUSH BACK AGAINST RACIAL, GENDER DISPARITIES AT MGE

10/24/23

Madison, WI – Office workers at Madison Gas and Electric (MGE) say that the company is promoting racial and gender pay disparities in their latest wage offer. Office workers, such as customer service, billing and accounting clerks, and field support administration are represented by the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU) Local 39. The Union and Company have been bargaining a new contract since April.

Compared to other divisions at MGE, OPEIU 39's unit are majority women and largely people of color who are the lowest wage earners at the company. While the Union has named wages as one of its top priorities for the negotiations, MGE has not offered raise parity with other units at the company. "We surveyed our members about the latest proposal," said Kelsey Hahn, OPEIU 39's Chief Steward at MGE, "The overwhelming majority of our membership said they would not accept the proposed wages."

In an attempt to bypass the Union negotiating committee, MGE management sent their proposal directly to union members. Bypassing the Union's representatives skirts an unlawful practice known as "direct dealing". "It had the opposite effect of what they were trying to do," Hahn said, "Members started emailing management back letting them know how unhappy they were with their proposals and their tactics."

Merl Banks, a customer service representative, wrote, "Do you think our Bargaining team is not telling us this information? Why are our increases MUCH less than IBEW??? Are we valued less than they are? Does our work not matter to you?"

Another worker emailed, "It's embarrassing to have to admit that I am living paycheck to paycheck and barely making ends meet. Do I deserve less because I'm a woman of color? Does my hard work and my family deserve less than others in the company?"

Camyle Hughes, customer service representative, wrote, "MGE's commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion states "We work to provide a welcoming environment where all of our employees feel supported, valued, respected and included". If that is in fact the case, not negotiating in good faith, not listening to employees and union reps is in direct opposition to that commitment."

One member commented on the hypocrisy of MGE's public posture while devaluing its workers,

"As a Latino all I can think about is how every year the Company likes to pat themselves on the back with the Día De Futbol aimed at the Latino community and using Latino employees as the faces. To present this image of how much they support Latinos and how inclusive and diverse they are. But what about

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701 Watson Avenue #102 Madison, WI 53713

608-257-4734 www.opeiu39.org



the Latino community of employees they have, they don't think much of us if they think we don't deserve fair pay."

A Hmong worker added,

"If only they truly knew how it felt, what it was like to not have white privilege maybe they'd understand a little bit about really helping their community instead of letting those below them do all the hard work for them like the business marketing team working hard in the communities to engage with our people of color."

"MGE's strategy assumed that the Union was withholding information, but it's the other way around. When we asked for the market data management used to tell us we're *overpaid*, they repeatedly refused to provide it," Hahn explained, "In August, the MGE Labor Relations manager berated me and my bargaining team for putting up posters detailing the wage disparities at MGE. He actually told us that he tore our posters down, which is a clear violation of labor law." OPEIU 39 has since filed an Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) complaint with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) regarding the incidents.

Bargaining between the Union and Company is ongoing. The Union will be holding a rally on November 4th at 9am on the Capitol Square with fellow unions TruStage United (OPEIU 39), UW Hospital Nurses (SEIU), Starbucks Workers United, and Madison Sourdough (UFCW 1473).

<https://www.facebook.com/events/s/union-solidarity-march-rally/278151431792951/>

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