



# 'ANGUS BARKS'

By Jeff Francis  
AEG Executive Board

## *History of N.S.B.*

For production workers in Lynn, the Night Shift Bonus is older than our Union. In the 1920's GE paid a 5% NSB for work on second and third shifts. In 1929, the Company eliminated NSB, eliminated paid vacations, cut wages 10%, and laid off the majority of Lynn's employees.

It was the start of the Great Depression. **The Company could make these cuts at will, because there was no Union.** Most of the country was out of work. These were hard times for our grandparents and great grandparents.

When industry began to recover in 1933, workers trickled back into the plant, resolved to better protect their families from economic hardship. In March 1934, Local 201 won representation rights in a plant-wide vote of the membership. We were the first such Local in the GE chain. The members had in mind regaining the benefits lost in 1929. GE was as hard-headed then, as they are now. Effective 1-1-1937, the 5% NSB was re-established in the Riverworks, but only for the hours 6PM thru the end of third shift. That meant second shift did not have all their hours covered, and overtime hours were not covered.

That inequality between second and third shifts did not sit well with the Stewards Council, who launched a petition campaign. **However, it was clear one Local could not do it alone.** In March 1936, Local 201 joined with delegates from 17 factories in the electrical industry to found the UE. In December 1936, Local 301 at Schenectady won representation rights at GE's largest plant.

In January 1937, leaders from six pioneering Locals in the GE chain met to plan how to win a first contract from the world's most successful electrical manufacturing giant. Those locations were Lynn MA, Schenectady NY, Ft. Wayne IN, Bridgeport CT, New Kensington PA, Ashland MA. Meanwhile the country's attention was riveted on the Flint Michigan sit-down strike, where autoworkers took possession of GM's factories. This becomes a watershed event for democratic industrial unionism, when the world's biggest car manufacturer was forced to recognize the UAW and negotiate a first contract.

Suddenly GE took the demands of six small united UE Locals more seriously. By February 1938, GE signed the first national contract with the UE, and it contains a 5% NSB for all second and third shift hours. The 1940 contract gives 10% NSB to third shifters, but leaves second shift at 5%. Again, the 201 membership protests. By 1941, Local 201 has grown from 2000 members to 11,000. The UE had grown from 6 original GE Locals to 23 Locals. Lynn and Schenectady are joined by Erie Local 506 in 1940, which means **GE must face a united negotiating committee headed by union leaders from it's 3 largest plants.** The 1941 contract wins a 10% NSB for all employees on second and third shift.

**Thus established, the 10% NSB does not change for the next 47 years.** Thru war and peace, thru recessions and booms, thru UE to IUE, it continued the same. There was general agreement between the Company and Union, that this payment is compensation for working hours that interfere with family life. As the 1937 Stewards Council petition put it, the NSB is compensation for the **"sacrifice of those hours during which average people associate with each other, both from the family and general social standpoint"**.

The 1988 contract took away the 10% NSB for new-hires and replaced it with a 60¢/hr adder their first 2-1/2 years of service. The 1991 contract expanded this takeaway to the first 3 years, and the 1994 contract made the new-hire wait 5 years to get the 10% bonus. These contracts were negotiated while Neutron Jack was closing our plants and outsourcing work overseas. As a result, our membership is down to 1930's levels.

Since 2001 we've had 350 new-hires. This means we have members working side-by-side on the off-shift, doing the same work, but getting unequal pay. It is no surprise that the Executive Board received a petition last year from those new-hires seeking reinstatement of the 10% NSB. It was an echo of the same sentiment and aspirations expressed seventy years ago.

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