Monsanto

The Chemical Group
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June 21, 1994

Steve Donahue
Department of Labor
Washington, D.C.
Fax: (202)219-4315

Dear Steve,

Pursuant to your request for examples of labor/management cooperation at Monsanto's St. Louis area plants, attached please find an article which appeared in our company magazine highlighting an important safety training effort.

Monsanto Company's J. F. Queeny plant and the International Chemical Workers Union (ICWU) have created an innovative safety training program under which the union will customize a safety education program for training workers at the plant. The ICWU Training Center program will meet the specific needs of Monsanto and provide much of the safety training required by the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the U.S. Department of Transportation.

The agreement represents the first U.S. collaborative effort by an international union and a company to enhance employee safety through joint ownership of safety training.

Should you have additional questions, or need additional information, please do not hesitate to call me at (314)694-7518.

Sincerely,

Kevyn S. Canill
Manager, Public Affairs

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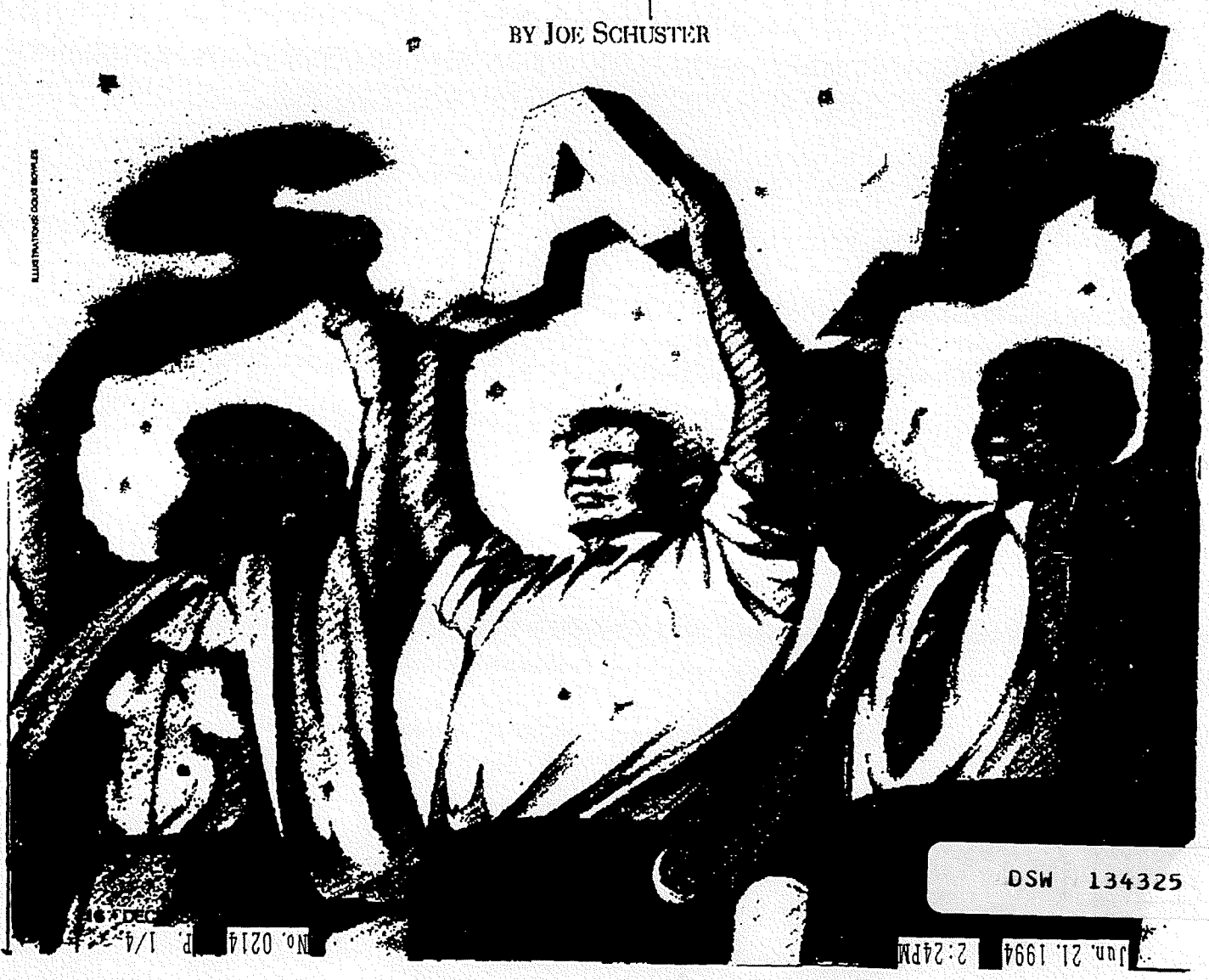
United We Stand

A unique training partnership between Monsanto's John F. Queeny plant and the International Chemical Workers Union enhances worker safety.

BY JOE SCHUSTER



ILLUSTRATIONS DOUG BOWLES

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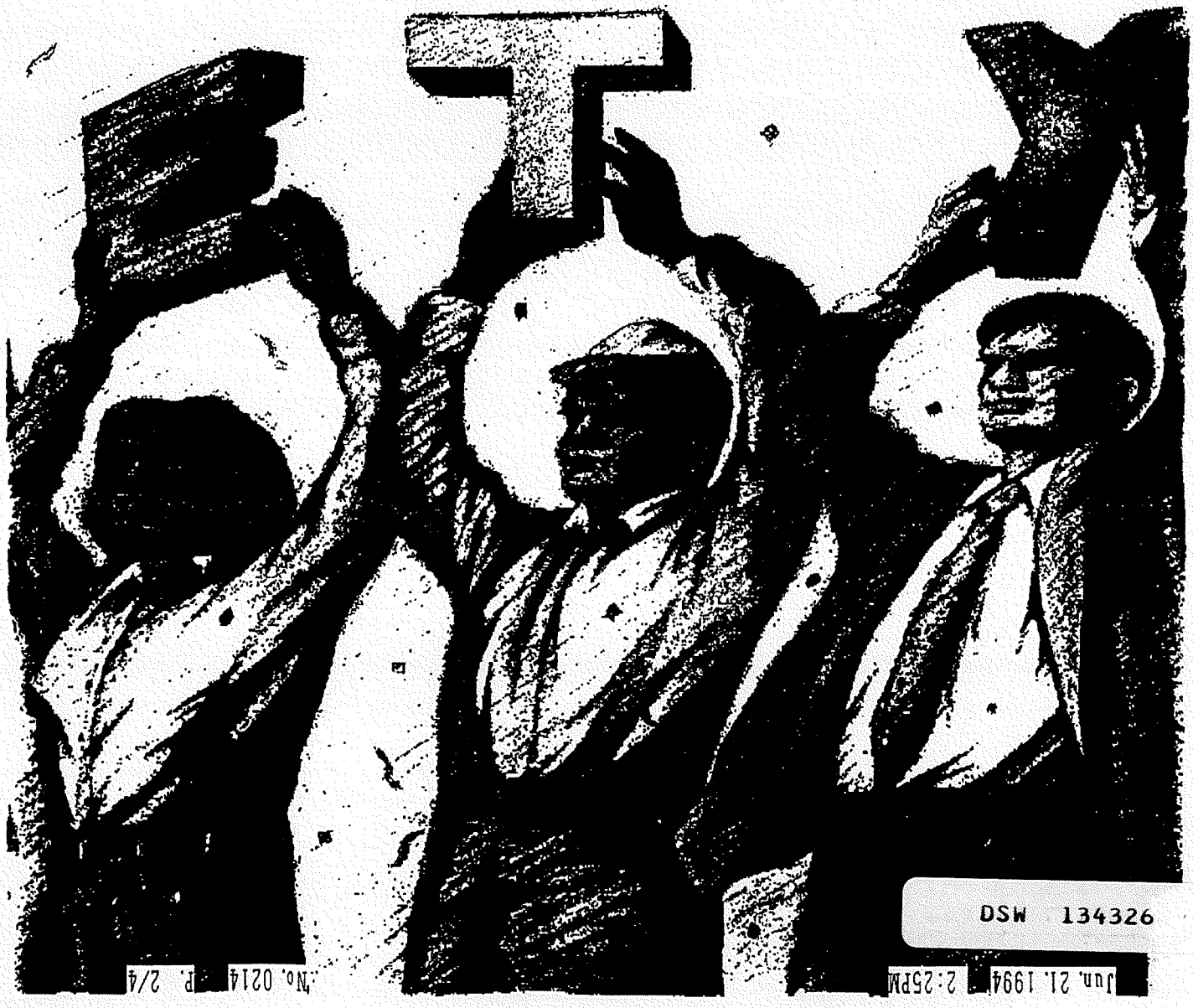
Monsanto's John F. Queeny plant has added a new dimension to the relationship between union and management. In October, the company signed a two-year contract with the International Chemical Workers Union (ICWU). The agreement calls for the union to provide training on safety and environmental health issues for Queeny's 150 workers.

"This venture is unprecedented in union and management relationships," says Frank Martino, ICWU president. "Monsanto has demonstrated a great deal of faith and confidence in us. I wouldn't be exaggerating if I called the agreement historic. When a company and a union can put together this kind of program, and do it in a sense of cooperation, the company gains and the union gains."

The agreement calls for the union to open a St. Louis branch of its Cincinnati-based national health and safety training center, and to provide a trainer who will instruct Queeny plant personnel in most aspects of safety and environmental health — from general awareness of hazards to the proper use of respirators and protective clothing, to emergency response and the handling of chemical spills. The union will also undertake the complex and time-consuming task of documenting the training sessions to meet the record-keeping requirements of federal agencies, including the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). By law, Monsanto is still responsible for certifying that the training has, at the very least, met the federal regulations.

The ICWU began its training program in 1988, after it received a grant from the National Institute of Environmental Health. The grant funded a cooperative program with the United Steelworkers and the University of Cincinnati to train union workers in chemical awareness as required by OSHA.

Monsanto was one of the first companies in the United States to send plant



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workers to Cincinnati for the training. It was also one of the first to invite the ICWU to provide sessions at one of its own plants. Two dozen employees at the W.G. Krummrich plant in Sauget, Illinois, attended on-site sessions in August 1989.

Monsanto was impressed with the quality of training. The ICWU program was a practical solution for Queeny which, because of its small size, had found itself increasingly hard-pressed to keep up with the growing number of new regulatory requirements. Monsanto management sat down for a three-day meeting with the ICWU to begin the hard work of designing an on-site training program. After seven months, they came up with a training model that would pass OSHA scrutiny. The union opened its St. Louis training office on November 1. Steve Knapp, a veteran of 24 years at the Queeny plant, was chosen to facilitate the training.

"I really believe we're going to see a marked improvement in the quality of our training," says Bob Aquadro, supervisor of safety, health and training at the Queeny plant. "Because we haven't had the resources to provide a dedicated training department, we'd been developing training material based on plant procedures, then giving it to someone in each department, saying, 'You're going to handle this.'

"We didn't have as much control over quality under that system as I'd have liked. It created an additional duty for people who might not have had any expertise in instructing others. With Steve, we're getting someone who knows the plant, who knows the procedures from a practical standpoint, and who will be a dedicated, certified trainer."

The fact that Knapp has such a long history at the Queeny plant is an advantage; it's one of the reasons that Aquadro and others at the plant are so enthusiastic about the program.

"Like a lot of companies, we're constantly looking for more ways to be competitive and reduce costs," says Steve Henderson, Queeny plant manager. "We could have gone that route with training, but I don't think the program would have been as effective. What we have now is a partnership between two parties [Monsanto and the union] that definitely have a vested interest in keeping our employees safe, rather than a commercial agreement with an outside party whose principal interest is in getting paid for a service."

There are other benefits to allowing the ICWU to provide training, both Henderson and Aquadro say.

"One of the things I like about this is that I'm getting experts here, people who have more than just book learning on the subject," Aquadro says. "The people in the plant may be more inclined to pay attention, too. Rather than having a supervisor read to them from a manual or a packet, they're being trained by someone they've worked side by side with for years. That's a lot more powerful and a lot more meaningful."

Knapp agrees. "It's easier for people to get involved with their peers," he says. "Maybe it's a little more palatable, because we speak the same language."

Another benefit of the on-site, dedicated training program is that the training sessions can be more practical than hypothetical.

"We could have just put together some videotapes, told people to show up for a session, and collected their names on a roster," Aquadro says. "Generic training may meet OSHA requirements, but we want to do more than just squeak by. Because Steve is on site, and because he knows the plant, we can design task-specific training modules; we can really zero in on what workers need to know. Steve can find out the specific chemicals people are confronted with, and then talk about them.

"That's far more powerful, because the training will actually apply to them. It's better than having a supervisor say, 'Now, we're going to talk about benzene,' while the workers are thinking, 'I don't use benzene, so what do I care?' It's a turnoff.

"Specific training creates a different mindset, such as, 'I handle ammonia, so I need to pay attention to this.'"

To ensure relevancy and to ensure that training sessions meet OSHA, DOT and other federal requirements, Knapp worked with the ICWU, Aquadro and other personnel at the plant to draw up a matrix for training.

"Because our training was so scattered before this, we ended up with a lot of repetitive training," Knapp says.

"This venture is unprecedented in union and management relationships. Monsanto has demonstrated a great deal of faith and confidence in us. I wouldn't be exaggerating if I called the agreement historic."

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"Because DOT has a requirement for general hazard awareness training and OSHA has a requirement for general awareness, we seemed to be training our people in the same things over and over again. So we put this matrix together, to figure out how the regulations overlap.

"We looked at what OSHA required and what DOT required. Then we figured out how to incorporate both requirements in a single session."

Another new aspect of the program that may increase its effectiveness is that the ICWU model encourages worker participation in and ownership of the training process.

"We don't call our trainers 'instructors,'" says ICWU trainer Bruce Mahan. "We're 'facilitators.' Every module is designed to ensure that everyone participates. We don't lecture; we use small group activities. If someone tells you how to do something, you might not learn it. But if you do it yourself, you're far more likely to learn.

"Let's say we're addressing respiratory protection. We write a course objective and spell out what we want the workers to learn. Then we allow them to learn it by participation. We'll pose a problem and work together to decide which kind of respirator is the most effective one, given the chemical, the exposure level and the oxygen level. We'll try to come up with a consensus response to questions such as, 'What are the limitations of a cartridge-type respirator?' 'How do we measure the oxygen level?' and 'How do we measure the contaminant?' Then, each group will report to the facilitator. For us, a successful session is one in which the facilitator doesn't talk much. This is about worker empowerment."

Aquadro agrees with Mahan.

"The more the people out there know, the better they can do their jobs," he says. "And there are those intangibles and unmeasurables you gain by doing more than just meeting the baseline. Rather than just doing things blindly, people can question things and help prevent accidents from happening. They can say, 'Well, I know something about this, and we shouldn't do it this way. We need to take an extra precaution.' They can get more involved, because they have experience they can draw on. As they say, knowledge is power."

"It's not a we-win/you-lose proposition. We're honestly working for the same goal and openly admitting it. We're willing to take that step and not let misconceptions get in the way. We trust each other and are committed to making this happen."

The new model has already paid dividends in the workplace, Knapp says.

"We've already been helped in the use of protective clothing. As a result of the participatory training, we've redesigned the suits that people wear when they open pipes. We're requiring protective boots now, rather than just allowing workers to wear their leather shoes.

"When you open a pipe that has some chemical in the line, you always clean it out. But you can never be sure that it's entirely empty, so you have to take precautions. Sometimes, the chemical sprays out and runs down the protective clothing and onto people's shoes. During the training, we talked about the pluses and minuses of suits with boots and without. People decided that even though suits without boots met OSHA requirements, we could do something better. So now boots are required."

This is what the ICWU had in mind when it developed the program.

"There's not a company in this country that hasn't talked about cooperation in the last five years," says the ICWU's Martino. "But often when people talk about cooperation, they just want others to cooperate on their terms; they try to impose the 'cooperative' program. This program, on the other hand, is a good indication that labor and management can work together. And it can only spill over into other fields. Production can only improve."

"I've wanted to see this kind of partnership for a long time," Aquadro says. "Finally, we're saying, 'We're in this together. We're all working for the same thing.'

"It's not a we-win/you-lose proposition. We're honestly working for the same goal and openly admitting it. We're willing to take that step and not let misconceptions get in the way. We trust each other and are committed to making this happen.

"It's a win-win proposition all the way around." ■

Joe Schuster is a St. Louis-based freelance writer whose articles have appeared in *Sport Magazine, U.S.A. Today, St. Louis Magazine* and numerous trade journals

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