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## 3M WORKERS CAMPAIGN TO KEEP PLANT

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FREEHOLD TOWNSHIP, N.J., Dec. 18 -- George Kaffl knew something was wrong when he walked into the company cafeteria just before midnight and saw the plant manager.

"It's quarter to 12 at night, and I see the plant manager?" Mr. Kaffl remembered saying to himself. "Something's cooking."

Something was cooking; the plant manager was there to announce a decision by the 3M Company to close its audio and videotape manufacturing plant here by next June 30 and eliminate 360 jobs.

In the last decade and a half, thousands of plants have been closed in the United States, costing the jobs of millions of workers, experts on workplaces say. The experts say imports have risen, companies have sent work to cheaper locations in the United States or foreign countries, and the nation has continued its move from a manufacturing to a service economy.

### Rise of Service Economy

Today, according to the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, the nation has more workers, 22.4 million, in a single service-economy sector - miscellaneous services, which includes hotels, laundries, beauty shops, health services and legal services - than those, 19.4 million, in manufacturing, the center of the economy since the industrial and westward expansion that followed the Civil War.

But the situation in Freehold, festooned with Christmas decorations that mask the sadness, has stirred unusual interest.

The Freehold workers are part of a growing, profitable economy - leisure and high technology. They had read or seen on television of plant closings in automobiles, steel and other manufacturing. They thought their jobs were safe.

"We didn't think it could happen here, to us," a material handler, John Bodtmann, said.

### Refusal to Give Figures

The situation is also important because the workers and their union, the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers, of Denver, have retained a labor consultant, the Labor Institute, of New York, and have begun an unusually imaginative campaign to try to persuade 3M to keep the plant open or to place new work here.

The company declined to reveal income figures for the plant, saying solely that the operation was part of a company sector - electronic and information technologies - that is profitable.

The market for audio- and videotapes is booming, and many Freehold workers, who earn an average of \$8.50 an hour, have been working 20 or more hours of overtime a week. The tapes, sold under the Scotch brand, have a substantial share of the market.

The company, based in St. Paul, said that it regretted it had to make the decision to close the plant, but that it was too small for the upgrading that would be necessary to make it more competitive.

#### Rug Mill Closed in '64

Freehold is the hometown of Bruce Springsteen, the rock star, who sings haunting songs of working-class life. His song "My Hometown" is based on the closing of a textile plant, the Karagheusian Rug Mill, in Freehold in 1964.

The old plant still stands on the eastern side of town, which although it is a blue-collar town, is a rather handsome place, the site of Revolutionary War fighting, and dotted with well-kept homes that date to the 18th century.

At the request of the union, Mr. Springsteen and the country singer Willie Nelson signed newspaper advertisements that ran Dec. 4 asking the company to retain the Freehold operation.

"We had no choice" but to start the campaign, Stanley Fischer, the president of the Freehold union, Local 8-760, said. "We are a very small town and a very small plant facing a multibillion-dollar global corporation."

#### Pride in Innovative Products

A second series of advertisements, bearing the names of 12 actors from the television program "Hill Street Blues" appeared Dec. 11. Although 3M maintains its Freehold plans are irreversible, the union and the Labor Institute plan to intensify the campaign.

The company, which rose decades ago with a new product, sandpaper, and developed masking tape and Scotch Tape, prides itself on problem-solving and innovative management.

"The workers have no economic power," the director of the institute, Les Leopold, said. "They only have public-relations power."

Ken Roman, a machine operator, supports the campaign. "So many times the company has said it is not 3M, we are 3M," Mr. Roman said. "I agree with that. We are 3M. Those guys are abandoning their own company."

#### To Nonunion Plants

Workers and local union leaders moved quickly when the company, on Nov. 13, announced its plans to close the plant. The company said it would move the tape-manufacturing work to plants in Hutchinson, Minn., and Wahpeton, N.D.

The Minnesota and North Dakota plants are nonunion plants, although the director of public relations of 3M, John Lively, said this was not a factor in the decision to close Freehold.

Mr. Fischer called the institute, which provides education and research assistance to unions, and, at the suggestion of staff members, wrote to Mr. Springsteen.

Mr. Springsteen, who got his start on the Jersey Shore and who lives in nearby Rumson, responded enthusiastically. He and his wife, Julianne, went to Bricktown and had dinner with Mr. Fischer, his wife and children, and met with other leaders of the campaign. He gave the workers \$20,000 for the effort.

#### Effects of Closings

Mr. Leopold said the campaign would try to persuade the company that it could use its much-praised management methods to retain the Freehold operation by using the skills of the Freehold workers to upgrade productivity and profits.

He said the campaign would also stress that lump-sum severance payments could not make up for years of wages workers lost when plants closed. Plant closings, he added, not only mean workers lose their jobs, but also that new jobs are often unavailable.

In negotiations with the company, Mr. Fischer is trying to limit talks to ways to keep the Freehold operation open and to postpone discussions of severance pay. But the sadness here is acute. Many workers, with overtime, have become used to larger-than-normal checks, with some making \$20,000 to \$30,000 a year.

The John Williams family has five members employed at the plant - Mr. Williams, his two sons, a daughter and a daughter-in-law.

"If you had the ambition to get up and go to work," Mr. Williams said, "you had a job, you could take care of yourself."

photo of workers leaving plant (NYT/F.N. Kinney)

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