

Industrial Worker

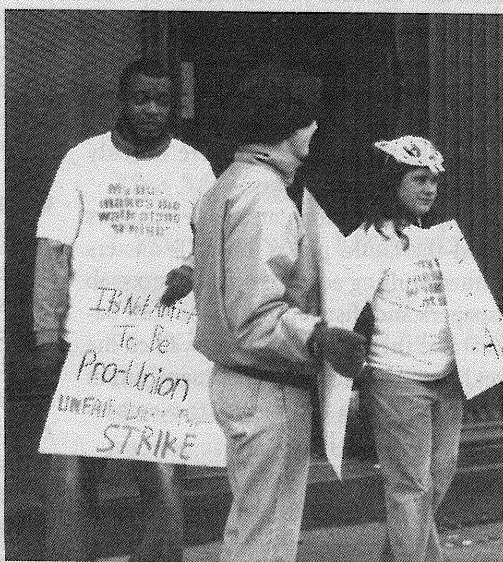
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March 2001

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Philly ACORN workers strike for safe jobs & end to union-busting



ACORN strikers wore shirts reading: "My Boss Makes Me Walk Alone At Night." On the back, they identified workers who had been sexually assaulted and robbed at gunpoint on the job.

The IWW struck the Philadelphia office of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) February 8 to protest a series of unfair labor practices that had made working conditions intolerable. ACORN workers asked management to recognize their union and respond to their concerns about job safety and working conditions Jan. 29. Although ACORN claims to be a progressive community group promoting rights for working people, management refused to recognize the union or address workers' grievances.

In the ten days between the demand for union recognition and the workers' decision that they had no choice but to strike, managers subjected workers to captive meetings, threatened workers for engaging in direct action on the job to address unsafe working conditions, threatened to terminate and later briefly suspended a member of the union organizing committee on alleged productivity grounds (though ACORN's own records document that he is as productive as a pro-management employee who was not disciplined), threatened to discipline a worker for taking a lunch break during her 10-hour shift, blamed the union campaign for its refusal to transfer another worker to a safer job, subjected union supporters to surveillance and investigations, and, after the decision to launch the unfair labor practices strike had already been made, fired a member of the IWW organizing committee.

A lively picket line in front of ACORN's offices drew 15 ACORN strikers and supporters, and enthusiastic support from many passersby. A United Parcel Service driver refused to cross the picket line to make deliveries, and several ACORN members pledged to speak to management to demand better treatment for workers. The picket line concluded with a march into the ACORN office to collect pay checks

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Unionization rate sinking

Now 9% of US private-sector workers **5**

"Why I joined the IWW"

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The new slave economy

Working prisoners are organizing and fighting back **6**



The boss ran the safety program, but he did not know a damn thing about industrial safety. And the system did not require that he hire someone who did...

Cleaning up the industrial hellholes

BY ARTHUR J. MILLER

Damn fate! What did I ever do to be condemned to such dreadful toil? It is not like the gods of fate need to further convince me that we exist within a putrid system of blood-sucking parasites. I need no further evidence of the essential need of those in wage bondage to rise up against their masters and cast them off to the fires of hell.

I pull on my slicker suit and taped the ends to my boots, adjust my respirator and take one last look at the outside world. Then go in, feet first, through a hole barely wide enough to fit my shoulders. Once my knees pass the opening, I must bend them down as far as they will go. By twisting and turning, I am able to get the rest of my body into the vessel. Once inside, I have one shoulder against the side of the vessel and there is a little over three inches between my other shoulder and the other side of the vessel.

The holewatch passes in my hard hat, which has a face shield attached, and the pressure washing gun. The vessel is about 20 feet tall, and I am able to get close to the top by squirming upwards and standing on short pieces of angle iron. Holding the gun above my head and turning my body, I wash away all the chemical residue and rust scaling. As I wash, much of the residue rains down upon me. Once I am able to bring the gun down to my chest, I can just turn my body around the vessel to achieve the goal. Then I climb down to the next set of angle iron and repeat the process.

I cannot help but wonder why I have found myself in such a place. I had worked many years in shipyards, but the new globalization has sent most of that work overseas. For a while I drove a long haul truck, but that kept me away from home too much. I did try to just drive locally, but that involved almost continuous shifting which caused pain in a knee injured long ago on a ship.

Since there were so many yardbirds out of work, a government retraining program opened up to us. I took a little time to look into different training opportunities and decided upon environmental technician/industrial health and safety training. I thought I would be doing mostly paperwork, things like Environmental Site Assessments, safety programs and so on. I thought I would have an advantage, because I had done so much work in industry that I knew most everything I would see. I worked hard, and in the final tests I came in third in my class, even though I was the only one there who had never been to college.

I applied at every environmental company within 50 miles of where I lived. I first found out that they only wanted much younger techs. And they were not interested in industrial experience, but rather wanted those with the ability to place mounds of meaningless paper upon any given situation. Real environmental protection, industrial health and safety, was not the actual purpose of this industry. Instead the purpose was to give a false impression of dealing with problems with paperwork written by those that don't have a clue - most of the paperwork was never applied to reality anyhow.

As it turned out the only useful thing I got out of the training was my 40-Hour HAZWOPER card. This meant I could work within hazardous exclusion zones. All the work I could find was either part-time or through contract agencies. The agencies rent you out to other companies that needed enviro techs. They have you sign a contract for each job, agreeing not to work for the company you were sent to for six months after that job was over. If that company wanted to hire you before that six months was up, they had to buy your contract from the agency. I have been able to survive by working short pipefitting jobs and when

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Millions too poor for unemployment benefits

11 million workers want jobs

BY JIM ELLSWORTH

A new General Accounting Office report has found that low-wage workers are twice as likely to become unemployed as higher-wage workers, but only half as likely to be eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits.

The GAO found that only about 18 percent of workers who had earned less than \$8 an hour on their last job were receiving unemployment benefits, compared to about 40 percent of high-wage unemployed workers. Eligibility requirements vary from state to state, and can be more difficult for low-wage workers to meet because of earnings requirements and intermittent employment histories, among other factors. Workers forced to quit their jobs to care for sick children or to seek better-paid work are excluded from jobless benefits, as are workers whose earnings are too low to meet eligibility requirements.

US Department of Labor unemployment statistics for the month of January report: "The number of unemployed rose by about 300,000 to nearly 6.0 million, pushing the unemployment rate from 4.0 to 4.2%" (seasonally adjusted).

The corporate media immediately relayed the news, and while acknowledging the rate increase, they attempted to downplay the significance. The BBC quoted one analyst as saying, "It's the most encouraging report on employment statistics in over a month." CNN claimed, "job growth posts surprising jump."

As usual, the pundits never read past the second paragraph in the Labor Department's report. A closer inspection of the numbers reveals a very different picture from that re-

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Free speech is still a right ... sometimes

BY MARK DAMRON

Several protesters arrested in Cincinnati while protesting the TABD Summit on November 16th - 18th (see report last issue) were acquitted Jan. 9.

The TABD is an organization of chief executive officers of the largest U.S. and European corporations. The organization's goal is to harmonize trade laws between nations, making trade less restrictive. In practice, that means the breakdown of worker, consumer and human rights for the sake of profit.

During the TABD conference over a thousand protesters descended on downtown Cincinnati. Several hundred police officers were there first, many of them in riot gear. It was inevitable that there would be arrests.

However three of the most noteworthy cases were dismissed in a bench trial before Judge Ralph Winkler, who based dismissal on the First Amendment of the US Constitution. At least one of the defendants has already filed a lawsuit against the Cincinnati Police Department for false arrest.

Meanwhile, the last of the protestors awaiting trial was FW Jim Tackett of Nashville, Tenn. FW Tackett's trial for disorderly conduct, originally scheduled to take place with the others, had to be postponed when he was held up in transit to Cincinnati.

Originally charged with a fourth-degree misdemeanor, FW Tackett requested a jury trial. Prosecutors then reduced the charge to a minor misdemeanor, so Tackett was forced to take a bench trial.

He was arrested Tackett Nov. 18 during a hastily organized march against police brutality. Although only 150 protestors took part in that demonstration, there were over 45 arrests - almost 10 times the total for all the other demonstrations and events.

The disorderly conduct complaint filed by police states that FW Tackett "engaged

in violent and turbulent behavior in the presence of others" and "failed to disperse after being ordered by police. (Tackett) then attempted to disrupt others around him."

At his trial on January 31st, the defense planned to base its case on three points. First, Tackett had a First Amendment right to gather with others and express his beliefs. Second, he did not abuse or exceed his constitutional rights while doing so. Third, he was not given enough time or an avenue to disperse.

Before trial the prosecutor offered to dismiss the charges, if Tackett promised not sue for false arrest, but he refused.

Two of Cincinnati's finest were called to testify, and their testimony guaranteed acquittal. Within seconds of taking the stand the arresting officer was changing his story, and was led by the defense into admitting that they had "profiled" FW Tackett from the start, and that he had been "compliant." So the defense moved to dismiss on grounds that the officers had failed to make their case. The judge agreed.

FW Tackett is now considering whether or not he too will join in an action against the CPD.

No right to picket

The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled that the Intl. Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 48 has the right to discipline a member for picketing a union job site, calling attention to unsafe working conditions and a company blacklist. The IBEW allows employers to place workers on a "do-not-hire" list, effectively blacklisting union militants. The court ruled that although Joseph Kofoed did not call on workers to walk off the job, his "unauthorized picketing" interfered with the union's contractual obligations to the boss. Kofoed had argued that he had a free speech right to voice his concerns.

AFL censures member for not supporting Al Gore, has no problem with union scabbing

The Champaign County Central Labor Council has censured its vice president and COPE director, David Johnson, a rank-and-file Carpenter, for supporting Ralph Nader's presidential campaign instead of backing the AFL's preferred anti-labor candidate. Johnson was found guilty and censured January 17, despite presenting overwhelming evidence (including a videotape of his remarks) that he had clearly stated that he was not speaking in his AFL/COPE capacity, but solely as an individual.

The charges proceeding was held behind closed doors over the objections of Johnson and many labor activists who wanted to observe the proceedings. However, a representative from the national AFL-CIO was allowed to participate in the hearing at the charging party's behest.

However, the AFL-CIO evidently does not consider union scabbing nearly as serious a violation of union principle as endorsing a politician other than the one preferred by the Federation. Seattle Teamsters Joint Council 28 President Jon Rabine cut a last-minute deal (without the formality of letting union members vote on it) last November with the Seattle Times and Seattle Post-Intelligencer, breaking solidarity with Newspaper Guild members who were quickly forced into a lengthy strike.

While other unions at the newspapers honored the Guild picket lines, Teamsters continued stuffing advertisements into scab newspapers and distributing those scab papers even as their fellow workers walked the picket line. (Although the pressmen's union refused to sanction the strike, its members honored the picket lines)

The federation has taken no action against Rabine, or against the rank-and-file Teamsters who crossed picket lines.

11 million jobless...

continued from page 1

ported by the boss press. The unadjusted "unemployment" rate is 4.7%, (6.6 million) and only includes workers who fit a very narrow definition of "unemployed."

In addition to the half-million unemployed who show up in the "unadjusted" figure, the Department also reports an additional 4.5 million workers who "currently want a job." Almost one million of these workers didn't look for work in the previous four weeks due to child care and/or transportation problems, therefore they were not "unemployed."

According to the definitions used by the government, "those not classified as employed or unemployed are not in the labor force", and, presumably, are therefore non-persons. The definition of "employed" is equally narrow: a person is employed "if they did any work at all" during the survey week. Part-time, temporary, and full-time work situations are all considered the same. There is no provision for people who are underemployed.

Together, the 6.6 million officially unemployed and the 4.5 million who want a job add up to 11.1 million, or 7.6% of the labor force. The same calculations for January 2000 result in an unemployment rate of 7.4%, instead of the widely reported rate of 4.0 percent.

Grievance won 236 years late

Even when the union rep plugs away diligently, fighting for your grievance, sometimes a little patience can go too far. The British GMB union has just won a grievance for the country's six remaining lamp attendants, 236 years after they presented their claim for a Christmas bonus of one farthing. British Gas just paid each worker \$6.12 (having saved a bundle by waiting until electricity displaced the lamp lighters).

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Post Office Box 13476
Philadelphia, PA 19101 USA
215/763-1274 • ghq@iww.org

General Secretary-Treasurer:
Alexis Buss

General Executive Board:
Joshua Freeze (chair),
Sam Adams, Jeff Brite,
Mark Damron, Breeze Luetke-
Stahlman, John Persak,
Mickie Valis

Editor: Jon Bekken
11 Bexley Road #2
Roslindale MA 02131 USA
iw@parsons.iww.org

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IWW directory

Australia

IWW Regional Organising Committee PO
Box 152, Birdwood SA 5234. roc@iww.org.au
www.iww.org.au

Melbourne GMB: PO Box 145, Moreland VIC
3056. melbourne@iww.org.au

British Isles

IWW Regional Organising Committee
PO Box 4414, Poole BH15 3YL

**Pioneer Cooperative Retail Society Job
Branch & General Distribution Workers IU**
660 c/o Ray Carr, 42 Winifred Rd., Poole,
Dorset BH15 3PU.

Swindon Region GMB & Research Councils
IU 620 Group: Kevin Brandstatter, del.,
9 Omdurman St., Swindon SN2 1HA.
01793-610707

Canada

Alberta

Edmonton GMB: 10905 - 106 Avenue,
T5H 0R2. 780-421-0726 iww-edm@iww.ca
edmonton.iww.ca

British Columbia
Vancouver IWW: PO Box 4755, Stn. Terminal,
V6B 4A4. 604-682-3269 x8493

Victoria GMB: PO Box 8283, V8W 3R9.
250-360-9803 vicwob@hotmail.com

Manitoba

Winnipeg GMB: c/o WORC, Box 1, R3C 2G1.

Ontario

Ottawa GMB: 388 1/2 Kent, K2P 2A9.
613-231-2922 bh295@freenet.carleton.ca

Toronto GMB: PO Box 108 Stn P, M5R 3S8.
toronto.gmb@iww.ca

Quebec

Montréal: Case postale 205, Succ. C. H2L
4K1. 514-273-0874

Germany

IWW c/o Barrikade, Bismarckstrasse 41a,
D-47 443 Moers
Daniel Zimmerman, del., syndikat-a@fau.org

Ireland

PO Box 178, Cork. iww@ireland.com

Italia

Delegato Andrea Benetton: Via Molino 1,
21047 Saronno (VA). +3902-96709372
andbene@tin.it

United States

Arizona

Tucson: Desert Tortoise GMB, c/o Feral Press,
PO Box 1212, Tucson 85702.

Phoenix IWW: c/o Aaron, 1309 S Farmer Ln,
Tempe 85281. aaron@iww.org 480-305-9580.

California

**East Bay GMB & IU 670 Berkeley Recycling
Center Job Branch:** 2022 Blake St, Berkeley
94704. 510-845-0540.

Los Angeles GMB: PO Box 207, San Pedro
90733-0207. 310-831-6023

Mendocino County: Bill Meyers, del.
PO Box 1581, Gualala 95445.

Monterey: Ray Brown, del.
1231 4th St, 93940. 831-333-9803.

San Francisco GMB: PO Box 40485, 94140.
Office: Redstone Bldg, 2940 16th St (at Capp),
#216. 415-863-WOBS staff@iww.org

Santa Barbara: PO Box 23008, 93121.
John Baranski, del., jbwob@yahoo.com

Santa Cruz GMB: PO Box 534, 95061.
831-427-5566.

Colorado

Denver: P&L Printing Job Shop: 2298 Clay,
Denver 80211. 303-433-1852.

District of Columbia

Washington DC: Ground Zero GMB:
PO Box 1187, 20013 iwwdc@hotmail.com

Florida

Tampa Bay: PO Box 8929, 33674-8929
www.onebigunion.org

Hawaii

Honolulu: PO Box 11928, 96828.
Mike Long, del., 808-396-1078
mlong@hawaii.edu

Illinois

Chicago GMB: c/o 937 Sherman Ave.,
Evanston 60202. michaelhargis@netscape.net
Mike Hargis 847-328-5919

Indiana

Bloomington: Secret Sailor Books, 202 N
Walnut St, 47404 secretsailors@yahoo.com

Kansas

Lawrence GMB: PO Box 176, 66044.

Kentucky

Louisville: Ben Fletcher GMB,
7904 Brownsboro Rd, 40241
502-327-7382 or 451-3459.

Louisiana

New Orleans GMB: c/o Jeffrey Brite,
3805 Houma Blvd C202, Metairie LA 70006
jbrite@acadiacom.net

Maine

Clinton: Jim Ellsworth, RR1 Box 20, 04927
jimells@mint.net

Massachusetts

Boston Area GMB & Education Workers IU:
PO Box 391724, Cambridge 02139.
Steve Kellerman 617-469-5162.

Michigan

Detroit GMB: 6135 Regular, 48209.
313-215-5633.

Huron Valley: c/o Fred Chase,
422 N River St #1, Ypsilanti 48197.
734-483-2788. fredchase@provide.net

Grand Rapids GMB: c/o Alles-Curie,
7063 Brewer NE, Rockford 49341.
aboveriver@earthlink.net

Minnesota

Duluth GMB: c/o Laverne Capan,
1522 N 8th Ave E, 55805-1115.

Minneapolis/St Paul GMB: 1708 E 26th St,
55404. Dels. Sam Adams 612-724-9158, Andy
Gifford, 870-9168, Don Kurth 869-4139.

Missouri

St Louis GMB: PO Box 63211, 63163.
Del. Richard Burke, 314-849-3530.
rburkemo@earthlink.net

Montana

Butte: Mark Ross, PO Box 233, 59703. 406-
782-4465. Construction IU 330 Del.: Dennis
Georg dengeo@montana.com

New York

NYC GMB: c/o Korber, 342 21st #31,
Brooklyn 11215.

Rochester: Ric Garren, del, 716-385-6681.

Upstate NY GMB: PO Box 74, Altamont
12009. 518-861-5627. Rochelle Semel, del, RD
1 Box 158-B, Hartwick 13328. 607-293-6489.

North Carolina

Greensboro GMB: Dave Coker, del, PO Box
10093, 27404. davecoker@usa.net

Ohio

Cincinnati: Mark Damron, del
PO Box 42233, 45242.

Dayton: D.E. Reuben Slaton, del
PO Box 26416, 45426.

Oregon

Eugene GMB: PO Box 371, 97401.
iwwlu@efn.org 541-343-7828.

Portland GMB: PO Box 15005, 97293-5005.
pdx@iww.org 503-796-3474

Pennsylvania

Lancaster GMB: PO Box 796, 17608

Philadelphia GMB: PO Box 42777, 19101
phillyiww@iww.org 215-763-1274

South Carolina

IU 450 Harbinger Publications Job Shop
Meril Truesdale, del, PO Box 8325, Columbia
29202-8325.

Tennessee

Knoxville: UT Station Box 16010, 37906
iwwknow@dog.com

Texas

Austin GMB: 304 W 55th St, 78751.
512-467-7360 delgin@io.com

Utah

Salt Lake City GMB: PO Box 520835, 84152-
0835. slcgm@iww.org 801-485-1969.

Vermont

Montpelier: Bob Heald, del, PO Box 1285,
05601. 802-229-1719.

Washington

Industrial Transportation Project: Arthur J
Miller, PO Box 5464, Tacoma 98415-0464.

Olympia GMB: PO Box 2775, 98507.
360-956-3713. olywobs@hotmail.com

Seattle Industrial District Council:
5215 Ballard NW, 98115. 206-706-6250.
bp172@scn.org

Wisconsin

**Madison GMB & IU 450 Lakeside Press Job
Shop:** 1334 Williamson, Madison 53703.
608-255-1800.

Wyoming

Jackson: Teton Jack Langan, del, PO Box 4056,
83001. 307-733-4553.

Portland IWW continues resurgence

BY MORGAN MILLER

Portland, Oregon, Wobblies are going full speed these days as we gear up for a number of organizing campaigns. Portland currently has three chartered branches: General Membership, IUB330 for Building Construction and IUB670, which is primarily made up of workers in government-funded non-profit social service agencies.

Your correspondent had a chance to interview several of the organizers at Janus Youth Programs. Janus is a veritable non-profit conglomerate and employs around 700 workers, making it one of the largest agencies in Portland. The IWW has bargaining rights at one program, Harry's Mother, and is actively organizing – primarily through direct action – at many more job sites. IWW organizer Bill Bradley reports that at job sites in which the IWW has been active, wages have risen \$2-3 an hour over the last three years. This is significantly higher than the average in the industry.

Harry's Mother: Fellow Worker Bradley reports that contract negotiations continue. Three of the union's strongest supporters were laid-off for 'financial' reasons, even though parent agency Janus is making a huge surplus (profit). IU 670 Wobs have organized phone-ins around the 'lay-offs' which have won (at time of writing) a two-week extension of employment. A protest is scheduled to occur February 15, the new date for the lay-offs.

Streetlight Shelter: An emergency shelter for homeless teens employing 18 full- and part-time workers. The full-time workers put in 40 hours a week in only three shifts. The IWW has been acting as the de-facto union there for several years. Using solidarity and creative tactics they have won a number of grievances as well as workplace improvements. These include:

1) Breaks! Before the IWW, there were no breaks in a 13+-hour shift. Breaks were won in the old time IWW way – by taking them. IWWs simply would go on break when

work was slow. The boss argued at first, but more and more of our Wobblies were leaving for some fresh air and coffee. Amazingly, breaks eventually became official.

2) Workers used solidarity to get unfair bad evaluations removed from one worker's job record.

3) A fellow worker was fired after being reported smoking marijuana in a park on his own time. The report was never proven and came from one of the program's clients. The Streetlight workers wrote letters protesting the unjust firing to Janus's executive director. The FW was rehired to a better position within Janus because of these protests.

4) Streetlight Wobs have also used staff meetings to win raises for workers whose job descriptions were changed to reducing their wages.

5) IWWs all took May Day off, forcing management to work on our Labor Day.

The IWWs at Streetlight and its sister program, Porchlight, are looking seriously at filing for a NLRB election soon. I asked FW Paul, "Why go official after all these victories gained by direct action?" His answer is that the workers feel that official recognition would solidify gains made. Some people in these programs would like to be working there for another 10 or 15 years. They see how IWW organizer Jordana Sardo was "laid-off" after nine years at Harry's Mother, and they're pissed.

After being more or less dormant for a year, our Building Construction Workers Branch has recently picked up a number of new members. They have been talking organizing to workers at a carpentry contractor.

The General Membership Branch has also been extremely active. There is a very hot organizing campaign in a company of 40 workers. While it's not public at press time, an industry-wide committee is being formed made up of workers in a number of other shops across the city. If things continue to develop we'll have very good news in the

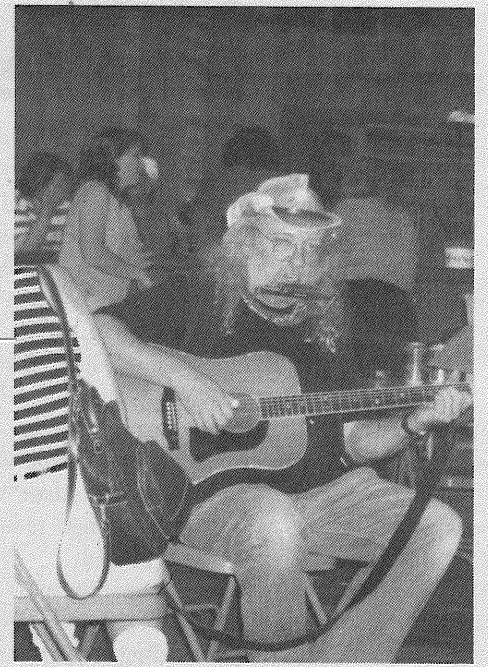
April IW.

At our January meeting, the GMB authorized the formation of an IU640 Organizing Committee (Hotel and Restaurants). The 640 committee has eight members right now, including a number of experienced organizers from 1999's Mallory Hotel organizing campaign. The strategy will focus on industrial and community organizing rather than shop-by-shop organizing.

General Administration meets in Kansas

For the second year in a row, the General Executive Board and GST began their year by planning a face-to-face meeting where they could begin to formulate plans and lay out goals for what we hope to accomplish in the coming year. This year's meeting was hosted by the Lawrence General Membership Branch February 3 and 4th.

One of the areas that sparked the most discussion and excitement were the proposed Organizer Training Program, and the future of a General Organizing Committee. Also high on everyone's list were plans to increase organizing efforts in the high-tech fields. Another topic of considerable import was that of the General Administration's relationship with Regional Organizing Committees outside of North America. Everyone agreed that communication was key and needed improvement.



Farewell, Fellow Worker

Al Grierson (pictured above at an IWW General Assembly), poet laureate of Luekenbach, Texas, drowned in a flood in the central Texas hill country late last Fall. He was my friend and comrade. He was a musician and writer. He played for the GEB meeting last February. He was a Wobbly.

Al played guitar, travelled, fell in love, and lived a good life, if short. We will miss his guitar, we will miss his impatience with political cranks, but mostly we will just miss Al. I don't know his exact age, but I'd guess 50.

— Joshua Freeze

New editions of IWW Constitution, One Big Union pamphlet available

New editions of the IWW Constitution as amended through January 1, 2001, and the eighth edition of the One Big Union pamphlet (as revised and approved by last year's General Executive Board) are now available from the IWW Literature Department in Philadelphia for \$2 each. Copies are also on the web on the Headquarters page at www.iww.org.

Around Our Union

The Grand Rapids (MI) General Membership Branch held a Labor Law for the People workshop in mid-January, kicking off a series of workshops that will run throughout the year. The St. Louis (MO) GMB is launching a labor film series, which opened with a showing of "The Wobblies."

In Ottawa, Ontario, the GMB is active in organizing against the proposed Free Trade Agreement of the Americas, is involved in efforts to organize workfare recipients being forced to labor under appalling conditions to maintain their benefits, and campaigned against recently enacted amendments to provincial labor law including regularizing the 60-hour work week.

In Toledo, Ohio, IWW members have begun regular meetings and are well on their way to establishing a General Membership Branch. Toledo Wobs are doing strike solidarity with Toledo Spinning workers, and meeting with teachers disgruntled over the new state testing regime.

May Day Greetings

It has for some years been tradition to run in the May IW greeting ads in honor of International Workers Day. Greeting Ads must be received by April 2 to run in the May issue. Suggested donation levels are \$10 for a 1 inch tall ad (1 column wide); \$40 for 4 inches by 4 7/8 inches (2 columns); or \$80 for a quarter page (8 by 4 7/8 inches). We can set it up from your message, or you can send it in camera-ready. These rates are for non-commercial greeting ads only.

We can also provide extra copies of the May issue at normal bundle rates (20 cents per to members and branches to cover postage; 60 cents per to non-members). We hope to include a special section on labor in the new global economy for that issue.

Preamble to the IWW Constitution

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the earth.

We find that the centering of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever-growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers.

These conditions can be changed and the interest of the working class upheld only by an organization formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.

Instead of the conservative motto, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work," we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, "Abolition of the wage system."

It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for the everyday struggle with capitalism, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

Join the IWW Today

The IWW is a union for all workers, a union dedicated to organizing on the job, in our industries and in our communities both to win better conditions today and to build a world without bosses, a world in which production and distribution are organized by workers ourselves to meet the needs of the entire population, not merely a handful of exploiters.

We are the Industrial Workers of the World because we organize industrially – that is to say, we organize all workers on the job into one union, rather than dividing workers by trade, so that we can pool our strength to fight the bosses together.

Since the IWW was founded in 1905, we have recognized the need to build a truly international union movement in order to confront the global power of the bosses and in order to strengthen workers' ability to stand in solidarity with our fellow workers no matter what part of the globe they happen to live on.

We are a union open to all workers, whether or not the IWW happens to have representation rights in your workplace. We organize the worker, not the job, recognizing that unionism is not about government certification or employer recognition but about workers coming together to address our common concerns. Sometimes this means striking or signing a contract. Sometimes it means refusing to work with an unsafe machine or following the bosses' orders so literally that nothing gets done. Sometimes it means agitating around particular issues or grievances in a specific workplace, or across an industry.

Because the IWW is a democratic, member-run union, decisions about what issues to address and what tactics to pursue are made by the workers directly involved.

TO JOIN: Mail this form with a check or money order for initiation and your first month's dues to: IWW, Post Office Box 13476, Philadelphia, PA 19101.

Initiation is the same as one month's dues. Our dues are calculated according to your income. If your monthly income is under \$1,000, dues are \$6 a month. If your monthly income is between \$1,000 - \$2,000, dues are \$12 a month. If your monthly income is over \$2,000 a month, dues are \$18 a month.

- I affirm that I am a worker, and that I am not an employer
- I agree to abide by the IWW constitution
- I will study its principles and make myself acquainted with its purposes.



Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Occupation: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Amount Enclosed: _____

Membership includes a subscription to the Industrial Worker.

IWW recyclers win recognition

BY BRUCE VALDE

The four month organizing campaign at Community Conservation Centers in Berkeley, California, ended February 7th when 16 workers voted unanimously to be represented by the Industrial Workers of the World.

The tally was probably a mild shock to management. However, IWW organizers had predicted the outcome for a couple of weeks before the voting took place. From the beginning, the workers had been enthusiastic about unionizing with the IWW. Their resolve strengthened as the vote neared.

Apprehension about participating in a NLRB-run election was never far from the surface as the days passed heading to February 7th. Were we being lulled to sleep? When management held a captive meeting of all the workers it seemed maybe they were about to bust a move on the drive. According to workers at the meeting, there was a feeble attempt to appeal to worker loyalty. But the bosses were met with silence when they tried to get the workers talking. The day before the voting a second meeting took place. I guess the boss must have heard we were having pizza parties while we met to discuss

strategy. The boss broke out champagne and pizza at the second meeting but to no avail.

During the campaign, the CCC workers had the support of the recyclers at curbside. Curbside are the people who collect the bins of bottles and paper left at the curb throughout the city. Curbside has been IWW for over ten years. What curbside collects is taken to CCC and sorted. The presence of IWW members at curbside right next door played a large role in convincing the workers to go Wobblly.

Working with the NLRB is this instance turned out all right. The boss chose to play by the rules and that reduced the impact of the NLRB to a minimum. It all came together at around 3 p.m. on February 7th when the Feds, the boss and organizers Steve Toff and myself gathered in the lunch room. While the NLRB people set up a voting booth, they advised the two sides of their roles. Paper went up to cover the windows and at a few minutes to 4 we left. By the time we returned it was time to count the votes. The ballot box was opened and the yes votes went to one pile the no votes to another pile. Actually there was just one pile and a few moments later it was hugs and high fives in front



After the election, workers gathered to celebrate their victory.

of the lunch room.

The boss was heard to say, "I guess the employees have spoken." I'd say so. Steve T. handed the boss a letter stating the IWW is ready to proceed with contract negotiations immediately. The boss indicated a willingness to begin with out delay. However, a day later he was quoted in a local paper as saying that these negotiations would take him away from other duties.

Perhaps he has some time to give the

workers what they deserve, namely more pay, more time off, paid holidays and vacation time, health benefits for family members and some respect.

We found the names of over 50 recycling companies in the phone book covering San Francisco and Oakland. Some of these are already represented by Teamsters and the ILWU. The IWW is looking at some of the shops and preparing to negotiate a great contract with and for the workers at CCC.



People are getting killed every day. Not by wars and earthquakes alone, either. The frustrations of everyday living under our present society can at times cause ordinary working folk to take up arms against each other. Unfortunately, this latter type of homicide goes on every day without much notice. A gun is capable of wreaking more irreversible damage than a fist or club.

Once in a while something transpires on a larger scale that makes a big splash in the news media, like the disgruntled working stiff who visited his erstwhile place of employment and did in five of his erstwhile co-workers, as well as himself. Obviously he had some strong gripes to carry things that far. Instead of the arsenal he brought into the plant with him, had he only his bare fists he could easily have been cooled down by his co-workers – suffering no more than a bloody nose on his own part.

Along with the media's report of the incident came the usual hand-wringing about too many guns in the hands of too many people. Not to mention the need for stricter gun control, an anathema to pretty boy Charlton Heston. (Incidentally, that surname in Fellow Worker wife's language means "crap on," which I am fond of pointing out.) But I digress... Your scribe has mentioned before in this column that there is only one effective means of gun control – and that is to stop making the damn things.

Whenever I express myself thusly, I am invariably labeled unrealistic. Unrealistic if one would rely on such action being legislated. Our rulers and those who manipulate them would, of course, shout down any such idea as impossibly utopian. To the ruling class guns are very important. How else could they intimidate the billions of us into docilely keeping them in their parasitic luxury. And whenever we start waking up, we can easily be diverted by nationalistic wars where nobody gets hurt but us uneducated and unorganized working stiff.

That is why an industrial magnate of the past once boasted that he could hire one half of the working class to shoot down the other half.

Don't expect our legislators to do away with implements of destruction or any such that would be of benefit to any but their own class. It will only be when workers come to the realization that guns are made to be used against them, and no one else. Be it police repression against workers' actions, or if workers are drafted to shoot at each other in the bosses' wars. Rest assured that the employing class will not look with favor at the elimination of weapons.

Guns, like anything else ever produced, are made by workers, and only workers can stop making them. Such will happen when workers realize that they are meant to be targets of guns. Of course, there are those who indignantly protest: What will happen to all the armies and the governments behind them? As a utopian, your scribe finds the answer to that question quite appealing.

If the producing classes can get their act together enough to realize that guns and other implements of destruction can be done away with, they are quite capable of devising an alternative to the present obsolescent institution of the nation state. At our present status of hybridization, we can well afford to divest ourselves of the institution of chauvinistic nationalism.

Ethnic pride is one thing. Your scribe enjoys three sources of ethnic pride, but he would not deign to cleanse his desire with any of the flags that purport to represent either of those ethnicities.

Draftees of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your generals!

— C.C. Redcloud

We, the workers

BY ARTHUR J. MILLER

Since the beginning of civilization, workers have slaved under one master after another; we, the workers, have produced all the goods for society. We have fought all the wars and made all the sacrifices that the masters' economic system has required.

Whether under capitalism, state communism, monarchism, or fascism, we, the workers, have been forced to produce, and never have we had a say in what we made, how it is made, or what it is used for.

We have been slaves to them all, be it by wages or chains. To them we are a commodity, to produce at their bidding. And what do we, the workers of the world, have to show for these years of toil? They have given us as little as they can get away with!

They work us as hard and fast as they can. They make us produce goods that they turn around and sell back to us at high prices.

They make us produce cheaply, with no regard to quality or possible hazards from the products. They make us build dams, bridges, homes, cars, ships, etc., out of inferior material and work us in such a way that we cannot make our work of best quality. They make us produce things that are a hazard to our world. They make us destroy food when there are thousands of people dying of starvation.

Low wages, inflation, shortages, unemployment, war and hunger are some of the

problems we, as workers, have had to face all of our lives and throughout history. Is this also the life we doom our children to?

In any time of crisis, who are they that are told to make the needed sacrifices? We, the workers, have always carried this load in time of need. Have you ever heard of the rich helping? Have they ever been willing to use their great wealth (which they got from our labor) to relieve suffering? Do they not always use these times of crisis to add to their wealth? Do they not even hold back food from the hungry to drive up prices?

Inequality has existed in our economic wage system since its development. On top there are the masters who own and rule industry, and below are the slaves, the workers, who produced all the goods. Wages are paid to workers for this production, which is only a small portion of the market value of the goods, that we the working class produce. The greatest part of the wealth we create goes to our masters in the form of profit.

As long as there are masters, the workers are no more than a commodity, to be bought when needed and cast away when not. Because of this, a class war has gone on through the ages of civilized history.

Every strike, boycott, or any job action is a battle in this class war and it shall continue until we, the workers of the world, take industry into our own hands use it for the benefit of all.

"Wobble" is a verb

The essential value of union lies in what it can do. What it can do for you and yours and for your class as a whole. How you can use it to do what you need to do. To do is a verb. Action is what we're talking about.

When we come together on the job to address our common problems with the shared strength of our common action, we are doing something. We're not talking about it, though that's important, and we're not reading or thinking about it, we're not seeking publicity or making a big show, though these things can be valuable in their place. We are acting on it. Doing. We are the subjects, to put it in grammatical terms, and the problem is our object, which we, in common activity, act to change. That's action. Verb.

In the construction trades the verb "to wobble" is commonly used to describe a group action that seeks to address and fix a problem on the job, a problem with the boss, as on the job problems tend to be. To wobble the job is to walk out, slow down, all go to

the boss for a confab on work time, to come together to address the problem by direct means. That's what it's all about.

It's happening all the time, all over the place. It's a necessary part of daily life on the job. You can do it to. You and your fellow workers, on your job, can wobble the situation to make it better. That's job control, and that's the thing we need to establish and protect, for our own safety and health, to ensure good compensation for our precious time, for fun and profit and relief from the boredom and loneliness that pervades our lives in this modern workaday world.

The key to good wobbling is union. That's small "u" union, meaning cooperation and concerted effort amongst fellows, people with the same needs and circumstance, the people you work next to day after day. Alone we are weak and ineffectual. Together we are awesome in our power. We have only to organize this power and to wield it, for our common good, to make this world a better place. Together we can win. We just have to do (verb) it. Let's act now.

Private-sector unionization rate down to 9%

BY JON BEKKEN

The percentage of American workers belonging to unions has fallen to 13.5 percent, its lowest point in six decades. The Bureau of Labor Statistics also reports that the number of union members declined by 200,000 last year to 16.3 million, despite AFL-CIO claims to have organized more than 100,000 new members last year.

The decline reverses a 240,000-member increase in 1999, a gain that had kept the percentage of workers in unions steady at 13.9 percent, down from a peak of 35 percent in the 1950s. More troubling, membership among private-sector workers has now fallen to 9 percent, offset by a 37.5 percent unionization rate among government workers. Government agencies are covered under different labor laws, which make it more difficult to engage in the sort of heavy-handed union-busting encouraged by the National Labor Relations Act.

The continuing decline comes despite, or because of, massive AFL-CIO expenditures to elect "pro-labor" politicians.

A recent report by labor educator Harry Kelber indicates that although the AFL has doubled its expenditures on organizing, unions are losing more than half of NLRB representation numbers, and two-thirds of elections to decertify unions. The figures are even more dismal in elections for 500 or more workers, typically involving employers with deep pockets for union-busting.

Wobs aid Arizona roofers

BY AARON ROTHENBURGER

Construction in Phoenix is booming but not all workers are sharing in the prosperity. Many roofers working for Diversified Roofing Corp., a major subcontractor for the Southwest's biggest homebuilders, say they are getting ripped off. The roofers claim that they are not being paid for all their work.

Although most roofers in Phoenix are non-union, the Roofers Union helped workers file a lawsuit last September to force Diversified and a materials supplier to pay them what they are owed. While lawyers on both sides are gearing up for legal battle, Roofers Union Local 135 is taking the fight to the streets.

"These are forgotten people," says Alex Cano, an organizer for the Roofers Union. "There are no checks on companies here. Unions are formed out of social issues—don't cheat workers, show them respect."

With support from religious and labor groups the union kicked off the Justice for Roofers campaign in Arizona and Nevada last December. The campaign aims to inform homebuyers about the roofers' plight and to end numerous abuses, including racism and retaliation for workers who discuss working conditions. Fliers list the workers' grievances and implore: "Don't sleep under a roof built with injustice."

Fellow Workers Bill Krist and Marty Beck have actively supported the campaign since the beginning. Each Saturday morning they drive Wobs to one of Phoenix's numerous developments and hand out fliers to people touring model homes.

Beck was attracted to the cause because it sought community support. Krist also supports the broader goals of the campaign.

"This is not an organizing drive," says Krist. "It's primarily to help the workers whether they're in a union or not." Krist says the roofers' cause has affected him. "It's the same as oppression to me because an injury to one is an injury to all."

Cano appreciates the solidarity of Phoenix Wobblies. In early February that solidarity helped the roofers take another step in their campaign.

In the East Valley where cotton fields are rapidly giving way to new homes, six Phoenix Wobs met Cano and other unionists.

Unions are winning less than 40 percent of such representation elections. Most organizing campaigns never get to the election stage, of course, having been crushed by selective firings and other union-busting efforts. Unions have responded not by waging a public campaign to repeal the NLRA, nor by mass picketing or other direct action strategies which could force employers to permit workers to unionize, but by begging the bosses to sign "neutrality agreements" pledging not to fight the union. Few employers are willing to sign such agreements, of course, and fewer still are willing to honor them.

The US labor movement's in a sorry state. The "reformers" who now run the AFL-CIO grovel before the bosses, begging them to declare neutrality in the class war. The left-wing of the labor bureaucracy calls on unions to redouble their political efforts, arguing that labor law reform is the key to membership gains. (There's some truth to this; California public sector unions just picked up tens of thousands of dues-payers after successfully lobbying the legislature to require all public employees working under union contracts to pay union dues or agency fees. This is no doubt good for the treasury, but what it has to do with unionism is far from clear.) US labor law is indeed heavily stacked in favor of the employing class, but it's hard to see how pouring more money into the Democrats' pockets (where it joins the bucks poured in by the employers) will change

anything for the better. And the old guard cuts sweetheart deals with the bosses.

Nor is the problem unique to the United States. The Guardian of England reports that unions there have just scored their first membership in two decades, not by putting up a fight for better conditions, but by entering into "partnerships" with the employing class to run training schemes and the like. The Trades Union Congress has just launched a "Partnership Institute" in partnership with chambers of commerce and Barclays Bank, among others, to develop class collaboration schemes. Some unions have renamed their shop stewards "learning rep.s," and reassigned them from pursuing (however poorly) workers' grievances to diverting disgruntled employees into training schemes. Liz Smith of the TUC's Learning Services initiative says the point is "to improve workers' self-esteem, ... [and] help them get over the failure attitude."

If workers rely on these sort of tactics much longer, the labor movement will go the way of the dodo bird. The labor movement was not built by coying up to the bosses or bribing the politicians—it was built by workers themselves, organizing at the point of production and using the power that comes from the fact that we do the world's work. Sometimes the old ways really are the best.

Legislation tops AFL-CIO agenda

AFL-CIO President John Sweeney has told the Daily Labor Report (Jan. 18) that the Federation will focus on its legislative agenda over the coming year and believes it will be able to pass some measures with the support of Republican legislators. Sweeney said he was "hopeful" that the AFL could work with incoming Labor Secretary Elaine Chao, who has served on several corporate boards of directors. Sweeney claims Chao has been "responsive on issues that affect workers," though he offered no examples.

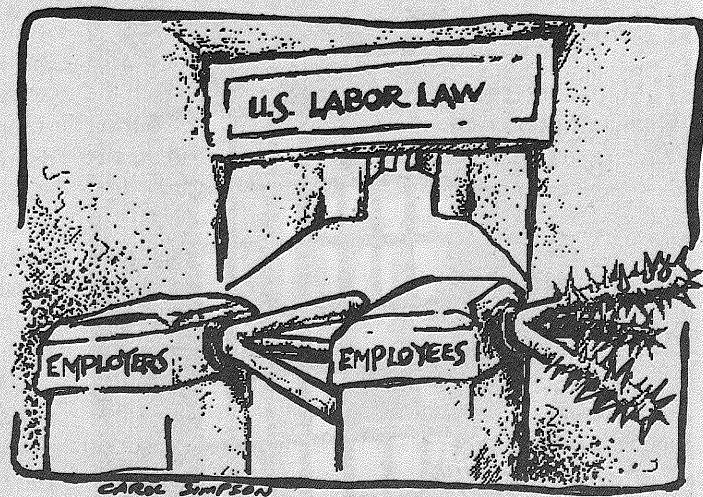
Sweeney reiterated his desire for a "dialogue between government, business and labor ... to build consensus" around issues of education, health care, Social Security, Medicare, a patients' bill of rights, minimum wage increase, tax policy, and trade policy. However, he expressed concern that the Bush administration might try to implement a national right to work (for less) law.

Sweeney said organizing would be the federation's top priority outside the political arena, and would try to find ways to use organizing campaigns to reinforce its political agenda.

Teachers union funds Bush inaugural

While thousands of unionists took to the streets to protest the inauguration of George W. Bush as U.S. president, the National Education Association—the country's largest teachers' union—donated \$25,900 of its members' dues to his inaugural committee.

The bulk of the funding for the \$35 million affair was raised from corporations with business pressing in Washington: energy companies seeking the right to drill in national parks, pharmaceutical companies concerned about a Medicare drug program, sports teams wanting to protect taxpayer subsidies for sports arenas, and companies such as American Airlines, America Online and Microsoft looking for favorable treatment from government regulators.



Amazon.com workers stage quickie strike

Some 50 Amazon.com workers protesting recent layoffs staged a short warning strike in early February. Workers at Amazon's Seattle customer service center had been in the process of unionizing when the company announced plans to close the facility and move their work to New Delhi, India. Management said the move was "simply a matter of economics," noting that wages were much lower overseas.

Amazon initially demanded that workers agree not to criticize the company in order to receive severance pay; while it has since dropped that requirement it is still requiring workers to surrender their right to sue for discrimination and other labor rights.

"Protecting" rights

A NLRB judge has ruled that managers at the world's largest pork processing plant, the Smithfield Packing slaughterhouse in Tar Heel, NC, committed "egregious and pervasive" violations of labor law, illegally firing 11 workers for their union activities and threatening many more.

The intimidation was so pervasive, Judge John West ruled in a 436-page opinion, that the results of a 1997 representation election, which the union lost, must be set aside and a new election scheduled in a location—possibly in another county—where workers can be assured of the right to vote free of company intimidation. County officials stationed sheriff's deputies in a plant parking lot on the day of the election in an attempt to intimidate workers. The judge also found that company lawyers and managers had lied under oath in an attempt to cover up their misconduct.

Smithfield has vowed to appeal the findings to the full NLRB and ultimately to the federal courts, which could delay resolution of this four-year-old case for several more years. Meanwhile, the fired workers remain unemployed.

Smithfield managers deny firing workers for union activity, noting that the complaint identified only 11 of some 16,000 workers (out of 5,000 employees) who either quit or were fired from the plant over the five-year period during which the company was battling the union on the plant floor.

World dock strike for Charleston 5?

At press time, a trial date for the Charleston 5—longshoremen facing felony riot charges stemming from an Jan. 20, 2000, picket of scabs unloading a Nordana line ship—has not yet been announced, although AFL-CIO officials have finally begun to organize a public defense campaign (see article last issue).

Dockers unions on the west coast and in Spain have called for strike action when the case goes to trial, and rank-and-file dockworkers are reportedly pressing the International Longshoremen's Association, to which the five belong, to do the same.

Wobs teamed up to cover several sites and handed out fliers amid roofs waiting to be tiled.

Shortly thereafter, the police arrived. A real estate agent for the development had called. She claimed the activists were a "nuisance" interfering with her business. Cano informed police about the campaign and told them of his right to speak on the workers' behalf. Police questioned the right to protest the homebuilder instead of the contractor and told Cano and Wobs they had to leave. Again the activists asserted their free speech rights.

"Hey, I'm just doing my job," the officer said.

"No, you're doing her job," Cano shot back.

Police then ordered Cano and the others onto the sidewalk. Looking at the crowd of mostly young, mostly white activists the officer asked, "Who here is in a union?" Everyone raised their hands. Puzzled, the officer then asked, "Who's in the Roofers Union?" One Wob said, "It doesn't matter what union we're in. We're here to show solidarity."

Police checked identification and took down license plate numbers. Cano told the officers that police in other cities knew the law much better than they did. Cano stuck to his guns and prepared to be arrested on principle. The officers now realized they had a showdown, and decided to call their legal advisor to the scene to clarify the situation.

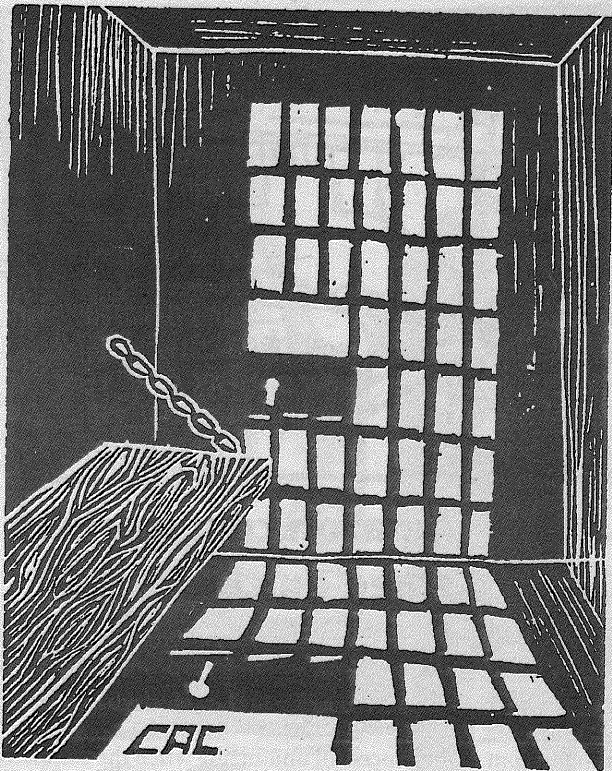
Cano grabbed a box of doughnuts from his car. Jokingly, he asked if the cops wanted a doughnut. "No, we're bagel cops," one officer replied. "We have to live above the expectations of the public."

The police advisor told their officers the activists had a right to be there. It was a small victory for free speech. And during the course of the standoff, the president Diversified Roofing requested a meeting with an official of the Roofers Union.

"All corporations depend on the way the public views them," says Cano. "Do you want to buy your home from someone who exploits people?"

For more information on the campaign go to www.justiceforroofers.org

The slaves are revolting



BY MIKE LEE

The use of convict labor has been an integral part of the American economic landscape since the early 1800s.

After the end of slavery, the "convict leasing" program was instituted in the South. Along with Black Codes, this program functioned to return African-Americans to the plantations. Before long, community members, ministers, women's groups, and union organizers rallied against this oppressive system. By the 1930s, every state had abolished convict leasing. Unfortunately, leasing was replaced by state-run chain-gangs, a despicable form of slavery and torture.

In the late 19th century, the use of leased convict labor to block unionization of "free" workers led to a series of state laws prohibiting the use of prison labor by private businesses. In 1935 the Ashurst-Sumners Act made it a federal offense to transport prison-made goods between states, regardless of state laws.

However, as part of the 1979 Justice System Improvement Act, Congress passed an amendment establishing the first Prison Industry Enhancement (PIE) projects, exempting participating businesses. In 1990 Congress passed a law allowing for up to 50 PIE projects, thereby completely nullifying

Ashurst-Sumners and paving the way for exploitation of prison labor in every state. Notably, Federal Prison Industries Inc. (or UNICOR) engages inmate labor in the production of military materials, including a variety of missile and bomb parts for weapons that ultimately may be shipped overseas.

Although prison-made goods were initially only manufactured for state agencies, they now flow into all sectors of the economy, competing with outside companies and jobs. Corporations ranging from J.C. Penny and Victoria's Secret to IBM and Toys R Us utilize prison labor to cut costs and increase profit margins. In fact, the next time you call TWA to make airline reservations, you may be

speaking to one of 300 youth offenders working as receptionists in a Los Angeles prison.

But prison labor again became a major issue in the 1980s when the U.S. began a massive prison-building binge. Until then, most prisons produced goods for their own use or for sale to other state agencies, license plates being the most famous example. But in 1986, former U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger called for transforming prisons into "factories with fences." In essence, he argued that prisons should once again become not only self-sustaining, but profit-producing entities requiring minimal financial input from the state.

Organized labor nationally and in the states has consistently supported efforts to provide training opportunities for prisoners to help in their rehabilitation and to reduce recidivism, but always with the caution that prisoners should never be used in competition with free labor or to replace free labor.

Increasingly, however, prison labor is being used in both the states and by the federal government to perform work ordinarily done by free workers. Twenty-one states have statutes that compel prisoners to work, and others enforce policies that penalize inmates who refuse to work. Prison laborers are gen-

erally denied coverage under minimum wage, unemployment compensation, workers compensation, collective bargaining and other worker protection laws.

The use of inmate labor in this manner appears to violate Convention No. 105, adopted by the International Labor Organization in 1957 and ratified by the United States in 1991, which prohibits the use of forced or prison labor for economic development. While it has failed to support prisoners' right to unionize, the labor movement has brought prison guards and other corrections workers into its fold. While inmates receive a pittance for their work, unionized prisoners guards make entry-level salaries of \$35,000 per year or more. The exploitative conditions and practices concerning prison labor stand in profound contradiction to everything the labor movement has represented historically.

On The Plantation

Despite numerous obstacles and the failure of the courts, legislators, organized labor and the peace-social justice movement to oppose the continued exploitation of prison labor, prisoners have taken matters into their own hands and organized in their own economic self-defense.

On August 3, 1998, the Missouri Prisoners Labor Union was created by prisoners and supporters. The MPLU states "It is our desire to better the living and working conditions of Missouri prisoners in particular and two million United States prisoners in general. We provide prisoners a much needed political forum from which to promote the principles of social justice, economic and political issues confronting Missouri prisoners and workers... One of the linchpin principles of the MPLU is that there is nothing more powerful than a worker with arms folded refusing to pick up tools or perform any labor."

During the past two years the MPLU has grown from an idea of a handful of people to an organization which carries over 500 members on its rolls and is providing technical assistance to prisoners in other states who have launched similar organizing drives.

...There is nothing to stop the boss from applying the same type of work conditions found in prison to that in the free world under the threat of sentencing your job to an institution of confinement.

Their simple demand is "A Fair Day's Pay For A Fair Day's Work." That any labor performed by prisoners either for public or private interests must be compensated at the prevailing wage and health and safety regulations must be applied to a prison work environment.

For this stance MPLU members have been subjected to all forms of abuse and harassment propagated by the Missouri Department of Corrections. On February 17, 2000, President White-Bey was finally released from Administrative Segregation (the hole) after being confined there for almost two years. His offense was simply to advocate that as workers we have the right to organize and the human and civil rights of prisoners must be respected. Presently several of our members still remain in the hole and are subjected to daily abuse. But the union rolls on.

In Defense of Ourselves

The use of prison slave labor endangers all of the gains that organized labor has achieved in the past. For there is nothing to stop the boss from applying the same type of work conditions found in prison to that in the free world under the threat of sentencing your job to an institution of confinement. "With the globalization of the marketplace our members now face competition from many fronts. It would be criminal to allow our hard-working members endure downward wage pressure and possible loss of work by having their livelihoods taken by those doing time in a correctional facility," said R. Thomas Buffenbarger President of the International Association of Machinists.

The solution is not to oppose prisoners performing work but to ensure that work is compensated at a rate and under conditions which do not threaten other workers' jobs. Prisoners must be allowed to organize not only in their own economic self-defense but that of the working class. Not building such a vehicle only ensures your job will be the next sentenced to the modern day plantation called prison.

For more information on prison labor see www.angelfire.com/sc2/mplu

Student activists fight Sodexho

Students at Wesleyan, Johns Hopkins, SUNY-Albany and other colleges occupied campuses last spring to urge administrators to stop tolerating contractors' exploitation of workers on campus.

One of the worst offenders is Sodexho-Marriot, the largest campus dining hall management company in the world. Its parent company, the Paris-based Sodexho Alliance, is also the largest investor in the U.S. private prison industry through its 17 percent share in the Corrections Corporation of America. Prisoners kept in for-profit facilities make up the fastest-growing segment of the burgeoning U.S. prison and jail population.

The Prison Moratorium Project has launched a campaign linking Sodexho's role in the prison industry with its grim history of union-busting on college campuses. An unfair labor practice charge brought by the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees union recently forced Sodexho to abandon a written policy prohibiting employees from discussing their working conditions with others or meeting each other away from work, although some managers are reportedly still enforcing the gag rule.

At Earlham College, a one-day boycott kept 90 percent of students out of the Sodexho-operated dining hall; 500 students signed a petition demanding that the union-busting prison profiteer be booted off campus. The campaign won an immediate 10% wage hike for cafeteria staff, and while ad-

ministrators refused to boot the company off campus they did replace its traditional five-year contract with a one-year extension.

Sodexho was kicked off SUNY-Albany after a year-long campaign by activists, and an incident where sloppy food handling resulted in several students suffering food poisoning. At Oberlin, student dining hall workers have been trying to unionize. A boycott persuaded administrators to address some labor issues, though they refuse to even discuss Sodexho's role in private prisons.

In the British Isles, Sodexho grabbed several contracts in the National Health Service during recent waves of privatization, and were involved in a scheme to issue vouchers to asylum seekers rather than giving them money. A campaign in Glasgow is trying to bring the workers back under the NHS.

Activists at University of Massachusetts - Boston are similarly demanding that campus food services be de-privatized. When the U.S. presidential debate was held there last fall, food service workers were docked two days' pay by Sodexho as administrators kept students and staff off campus, and the presidential entourage did not care to eat Sodexho food. Campaigns against Sodexho are also being waged at Canadian universities including U Toronto, McGill and Concordia, and by activists at the University of California Santa Cruz, Evergreen State, American, Howard, Skidmore, Maryland, James Madison and St Louis University.

Temp work and the "new" economy

More Americans now work for temporary-help outfits than in auto and aircraft factories. About 10% of the job growth in the 1990s was in temp agencies, twice as much as in the 1980s. Manpower Inc. boasts of being America's largest employer.

Is this a temporary feature of an economy in which workers have been scarce, one that will vanish along with Alan Greenspan's halo if the U.S. is sliding into recession? Or has it become a permanent feature of the new economy?

Temp-agency payrolls zoomed in the 1990s as the slogan of shopkeepers became "help wanted." By 1996, according to one national survey, half of all employers and three-quarters of all manufacturers were using temp firms. Today, more than 3.3 million workers are on temp-firm placements, mostly in clerical or light-manufacturing jobs.

Temp agencies do help some workers get jobs they wouldn't get otherwise. In some states, more than 20% of the people leaving welfare for work spend time in a temp-agency placement; some wouldn't get jobs unless a temp agency vouched for them. And some agencies help workers brush up on computer skills, making them more employable.

But that's not the whole story. Employers use temp agencies to lure sorely needed workers without raising wages for existing workers. Hospitals use temp-agency nurses because they say they can't fill vacancies oth-

erwise. They mean they can't fill vacancies at the wages they're paying. "One reason temp agencies are able to get nurses and we're not is that they are paying them outrageous dollars that we won't pay," a Michigan hospital administrator who uses temps, told Upjohn economists, without apparent irony.

One North Carolina hospital hires as many permanent nurses as it can at \$25.76 an hour in wages and benefits. Then it fills its remaining vacancies by paying \$40 for temps, of which the nurses get between \$28 and \$32 an hour with few fringe benefits. Although the temp nurses receive more pay, the hospital still saves money by refusing to pay market rates for regular hires.

In factories, the dynamics are different. A Midwestern auto-parts plant pays \$15.67 an hour for permanent workers and \$10.88 for temps, of which \$7.50 goes to the workers. The company can't hire enough seasoned workers at the higher wage. Instead it relies on cheap temps who can be fired easily if they can't do the job.

Many "temporary" workers find themselves working for the same boss for months or years, but as second-class workers without benefits or equal pay. In December, Microsoft agreed to pay \$96.9 million to settle two class action lawsuits brought by "perma-temp" workers hired through temp agencies or as independent contractors in order to avoid paying benefits. Up to 12,000 workers were affected by the practice.

ACORN workers on strike...

continued from page 1

owed the strikers. While inside, Wobblies subjected the manager to a barrage of questions about ACORN's unsafe working conditions and union-busting, finding that he had almost nothing to say in response.

ACORN is a national organization bringing low-income people together to campaign around issues such as predatory lending and a living wage. (ACORN also operates a national living wage coordinating center, the ACORN Housing Corporation, the Arkansas Institute for Social Justice, charter schools, community radio stations, two SEIU multi-state locals, Project VOTE, and several other affiliated operations around the country, all administered out of its New Orleans headquarters.)

"We work 54 hours a week, we work every weekend, and we don't get overtime pay," says ACORN worker Gina Giazzoni. ACORN

workers' low salaries combined with weekly overtime means an hourly wage hovering around minimum wage. They plan to bargain for a guaranteed lunch break, eight hour work days, and at least two weekends off per month.

Another urgent concern for all ACORN workers is job safety. "Every night after dark we are sent out alone into city neighborhoods to recruit new members," Giazzoni explains. "It's not safe for us. I've been grabbed and molested while out in the field by myself. Our supervisors haven't done anything except issue a vague memo saying to take appropriate precautions. We want to work in pairs, but they won't let us." Another worker was robbed at gun point while working the streets alone after the union had demanded the right to work in pairs.

ACORN workers have also discovered disparities in pay and in work assignments which seem to be based on the race of the workers, and called for measures to address institutionalized racial biases.

The Philadelphia workers have launched a national newsletter for ACORN workers, To-Gather, the first issue of which has been distributed to workers at over a dozen ACORN offices around the United States.

ACORN is closely linked to the AFL-CIO, making its union-busting even more ironic. One of ACORN's founders, Wade Rathke, is also an international vice president of SEIU, and head of HOTROC, an AFL inter-union committee to organize hotel workers in New Orleans. While Rathke leads a campaign for management neutrality, urging employers to stay neutral instead of fighting against their workers' organizing efforts, the Philadelphia branch of ACORN is fighting the union tooth and nail - going so far as to advance the ridiculous claim that it would be "illegal" to recognize a union for its Philadelphia staff.

The IWW will be picketing ACORN offices intermittently, while reaching out to grassroots ACORN members and workers nationwide in order to pressure management into respecting workers' rights.

Why We're On Strike

Following is the text of the leaflet distributed on the first day of the strike:

We're on strike to protest ACORN management's many unfair labor practices,

which began almost immediately after we requested union recognition and have made our working conditions intolerable. Management violates our most basic labor rights, and harasses and threatens workers for organizing.

We organized a union because:

- We want organizers working in pairs in the field after dark for more safety. In the past two months one worker was molested, another robbed at gunpoint, and others have experienced harassment. Management responded with a memo claiming that there have been "no major incidents" in the past three years. Maybe they're waiting for someone to get killed.

- We want an eight-hour work day, and two weekends off per month. Fifty-four hours a week is just too much.

- We want procedures to deal with racial bias. We're tired of unequal pay and management insensitivity.

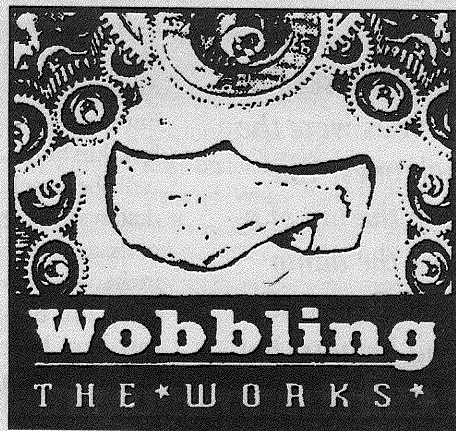
- We want guaranteed lunch breaks. Putting in eight or ten hours at a stretch, we need a chance to eat.

ACORN management can afford to meet these demands. Instead, they order us to continue unsafe work practices, threaten to fire and subsequently suspending a member of the union organizing committee, telling a worker she can't have information necessary to do her job because she's organizing the union, and denying another worker a transfer to a safer job using the union drive as an excuse.

These attempts to intimidate and harass union supporters are illegal, and unworthy of an organization established to work for social justice.

If you agree that ACORN management should stop its illegal union-busting, call "Head Organizer" (and boss) Jeff Ordower at 215-765-0042.

Tell him you support the ACORN strikers, and justice for ACORN staff.

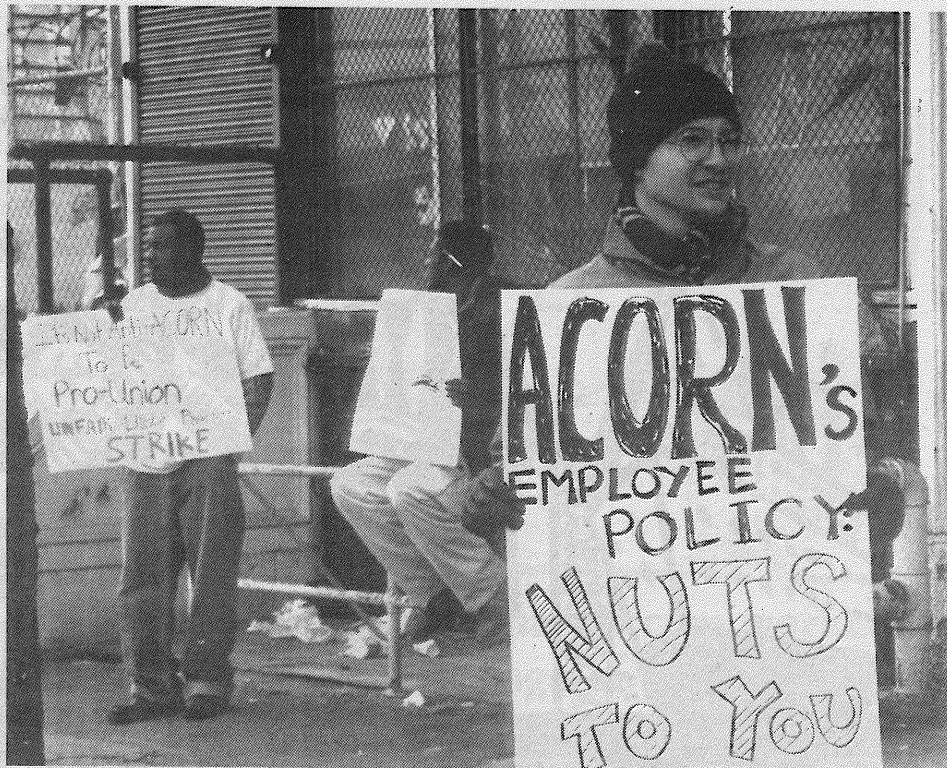


Determining the "appropriate" bargaining unit

Last week I got a letter from the boss of the Philadelphia ACORN. In it, he returned the authorization cards our organizers had collected from a majority of the workers there with a note which said that ACORN was taking no position on the unionization of its workers. However, he would not be able to recognize the union of the Philadelphia staff because it would be "illegal."

Illegal? I'm still puzzled. It's interesting to see how afraid of breaking the law bosses become when a request for union recognition is made. I guess it's on account of the Authorities who are all the time storming bosses' offices, AK-47s in hand, hauling upper echelons of management off to remote prisons to do hard time for illegally recognizing unions. I'm sure if it weren't for this unfortunate condition in society these liberal bosses would otherwise have no problem negotiating in good faith with their workers.

The logic put forth by management in this case was that since ACORN was a national organization, the only "legal" bargaining unit would be a nation-wide unit. Now, the workers in the Philadelphia office, some of whom had previously been union orga-



Pickets pointed to ACORN union-busting on the first day of an unfair labor practices strike.

An 8-Hour Day with No Cut In Pay

ACORN has been campaigning for a living wage and decent labor standards for many years. But ACORN doesn't extend these rights to its own employees.

The labor movement won the 8-hour day more than 60 years ago. Yet ACORN staff is asked to put in 54 hours a week without breaks or overtime pay. We work six days a week, never getting a full weekend off. The hours are too long and we have no time to relax or for our families and friends.

We're constantly under pressure to turn out too much work with too little staff in a perpetually disorganized office. It's little wonder that turnover is so high that very few of us last long enough to collect benefits.

This turnover isn't good for the organization, and it prevents us from doing our organizing work as effectively as we could. We don't have time to work with our members, or even get to know them. By the time we establish contacts in a community, we're out the door and a new person has been brought in.

The way ACORN treats its staff doesn't only affect us - it also undermines our ability to do the important work we came here to accomplish.

ACORN was founded on the premise that people need to organize in order to be heard, and to better their conditions. It's true for the people we organize and its true for us too. We need a voice at work, and a say in determining the conditions under which we work.

reprinted from To-Gather #1

nizers (interestingly enough, so had their boss), were not especially interested in going to the National Labor Relations Board to settle the question. That's because they rightfully were not willing to invest their small amount of spare time in winning the right to bargain when they could instead take direct action to remedy their concerns.

But for the benefit of confused bosses that we will no doubt continue to encounter, I will explain the simple facts about bargaining units. First, be assured nobody is going to drag anyone off to jail for illegally recognizing a local bargaining unit. The NLRB makes a determination based on the appropriateness of the petitioned-for unit. They don't comb the record of past cases to see how it's been done, and they don't even try to figure out what the "most appropriate" unit would be, instead they decide if the petitioned-for unit makes sense on its own merits. The determining factor is the "community of interest" that the workers share.

As Wobblies, we recognize that all workers share a community of interest in running the bosses out of our workplaces. And bosses would probably happily agree to a bargaining unit of the entire working class. But sometimes it is in our interest to take these things one step at a time. The NLRB looks at factors like the following, outlined in *Purnell's Pride, Inc.*: 1) similarity in the scale and manner of determining earnings; 2) similarity in employment benefits, hours of work and other terms and conditions of employment; 3) similarity in the kind of work performed; 4) similarity in the qualifications, skills and training of the employees; 5) frequency of contact or interchange among the employees; 6) geographic proximity; 7) continuity or integration of the production processes; 8) common supervision and determination of labor-relations policy; 9) history of collective bargaining; 10) desires of the affected employees; and 11) extent of union organization.

Because the Board usually considers

units defined for a single workplace location, many of the above apply in those kind of cases. For instance, at a restaurant, a union might petition for a unit of just the waitstaff, but would most likely be unsuccessful because the waitstaff share a significant community of interest with the kitchen workers.

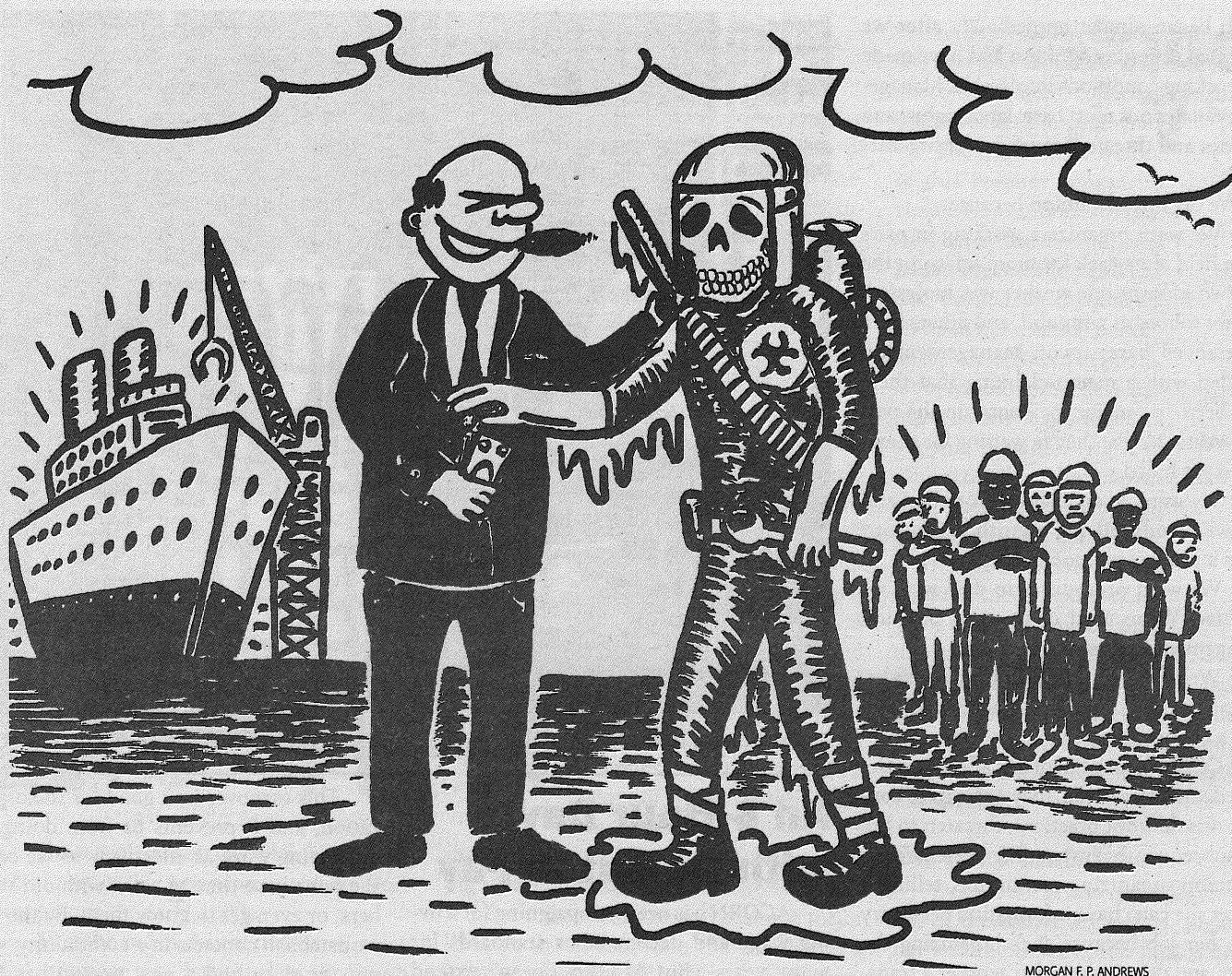
But when talking about workplaces that are united by a management hierarchy, like a national chain store or non-profit, the fact that the workers involved never see each other and do not have the same immediate bosses holds a lot of weight. Borders Books tried to assert a regional unit and failed. AFSC, a national non-profit, has been organized one shop at a time. Applebees in Louisiana wanted to include a restaurant ten miles away from one where the workers were organizing in the unit and failed. Wal-Mart, the notorious union-busting mega-mart, has unsuccessfully tried to argue that all its stores in a given state would be the only appropriate unit. That's because the NLRB since the early 1960s, has held that a single shop unit in a multi-shop operation is "presumptively appropriate." From *Dixie Belle Mills, Inc.* (1962):

"A single plant unit, being one of the unit types listed in the statute as appropriate for bargaining purposes, is presumptively appropriate... Moreover, even assuming that the unit urged by the Employer... may be the most appropriate unit, this does not establish it as the only appropriate one. ...[T]he crucial question in each case is whether the unit requested is appropriate."

I tried, but could not find a case where a boss made a claim that the only appropriate unit would be a nation-wide one. I think it's probably because anyone making such a claim would be laughed out of the NLRB office.

And on the part of ACORN, the nationwide unit claim is part of the sickening display of anti-union attacks made by management on its workers.

— Alexis Buss



Cleaning the industrial hellholes

continued from page 1

those are not available working out of environmental staffing agencies.

The agencies send you out on all kinds of jobs. Some of those that I have worked are: lead remediation, emergency spill response, contaminated soil remediation, soil sampling, household hazardous waste, mold remediation, dismantling hazmat incinerators, and turnarounds (a turnaround is when they shut the place down for maintenance) in saw mills and oil refineries.

So here I was, inside a tight vessel working an oil refinery turnaround. I was almost at the bottom when my holewatch yelled in that I had to get out of the vessel immediately. In an oil refinery you do not question when someone says to vacate your work area. I twisted my way out of the damn thing. The holewatch told me there was a Hydrogen Sulfide (H₂S) leak. H₂S is extremely hazardous. When you first smell it, it smells like rotting eggs and then it deadens your sense of smell. It can be deadly if inhaled or absorbed through the skin, and it is extremely flammable.

The spill had taken place less than 20 feet away from where we were working, and we immediately headed upwind. Once we were in a safe area across a road, we started to look around for other workers from our company and gather together.

When everyone was accounted for, the talk turned to why no siren had sounded. Everyone had been told to evacuate by word of mouth. By law, when there is a hazmat evacuation in a refinery, a loud siren is sounded so that everyone immediately knows to evacuate. The best guess we had was that the refinery was already behind in the work of the turnaround and did not want to alert outside authorities to the leak, which would have meant greater delays. The fact that the whole refinery did not stop working, as it should have done when there is any type of leak, tends to reinforce that view.

The next day at our morning safety meeting, the boss jumped on our case for how we evacuated (going straight upwind from the leak). He told us that whenever there is an evacuation that we were to go straight to our work trailer. Having the biggest mouth on the crew, I spoke up and said: "You mean that you wanted us to go through the contaminated area and then walk down wind of a leak of a deadly substance? I don't think so! Look in the regs or any industrial safety

manual and you will see that we did what we should have done."

The boss only wanted a place where he could count heads and he was not well educated on industrial safety procedures. He then changed the subject and went on with the safety meeting. But this pointed to a dangerous flaw in the system. The boss ran the morning safety meetings and the safety program, but he did not know a damn thing about industrial safety. And the system did not require that he hire someone who did. This problem became more obvious throughout the turnaround.

One untrained worker mangled his foot, damn near cut the thing off, while hydroblasting. In hydroblasting you clean metal using water that is between 10,000 to 20,000 pounds per square inch of pressure. There were a number of other injuries, including a number of night shifters with the company I was working for.

On the second day of the job they had me working a vessel that had a strong smell to it. Though they tested it before I had to go in, I was still a bit concerned. They had me working on the outside of it and the chemical was burning my eyes. So I asked them what the chemical was and they said they did not know. I asked five times and asked for the MSDS on the chemical, which by law is my right to see. I wanted to know what the PEL (Permissible Exposure Limit) was so that I could understand their readings. Also, I wanted to make sure that I had the correct PPE (Personal Protective Equipment). Given the fact that it burned my eyes, I was concerned about what it could do to my skin.

Since they would give me no information and they had no chemical suits, which I requested, I was left with a decision. If I complained, went to a state agency or refused to do an unsafe job, that would mean I would get no more work from the agency. Or I could, from my own knowledge, put together my own PPE for that work using gear that I keep in my car. Given the fact that I could

not prove my case since the vessel would be cleaned before any state inspector could get there and the bossman would more than likely lie, and I needed the work I got from the agency, I used my own PPE.

They kept on opening up more and more vessels and never telling us what was in them. I did the best that I could to protect myself—hell, them damn bosses would not even give us hoods to place over our heads to protect

us from all that shit rained down on us—but I still got a few skin burns.

The vessels that made most of us slaves the most nervous were the narrow, very high ones. You climb up 120 feet to the top of a narrow vessel and the damn thing would sway in the wind. I don't normally mind heights, but when you are up that high and it is swaying, that does give you an uneasy feeling.

I don't normally mind heights, but when you are up that high and it is swaying, that does give you an uneasy feeling.

First we worked 9 hours, then we worked 14

In all turnarounds, the work must be done in the time given for the refinery to stay on schedule. We started with 9 1/2 hour days which soon went to 12-hour days, 7 days a week. They were talking about going to 14-hour days when I got out of that lousy job the old-fashioned way: I got injured.

We had this one 90-foot tall vessel that was wider at the bottom than at the top. There was nothing inside to climb on, so they lowered down a chain ladder from the top. A chain ladder is like a Jacob's ladder but has chain inside of rope. It was not secured at the bottom and since the lower end of the vessel was wider than where the ladder was secured to at the top, it was basically hanging there in midair. Given the fact that such a ladder is very flexible, it was hard to climb with all your stuff and even harder to work off of.

The only way I could find to work was to place my shoulders against the wall of the vessel which pushed the ladder out and left

my legs pointing out at about a 45 degree angle. Then I had to hold on to the ladder with one hand and work with my other hand. Well this put a strain on my lower mid back. That pulled some back muscles and knocked my hip out of whack from my spine. So here I am on painkillers, muscle relaxers and going to physical therapy three times a week.

Enviro-temps

Contract workers are basically temps who have to sign a contract in order to work. They are being used more and more often in industry, because they have no benefits and they have little to no recourse to do anything about the conditions of their work. By law you cannot be fired for demanding that safety laws be followed. But since most all the jobs are short term, if you complain about anything the agencies will not send you out on any more jobs after you finish the job in which you complained about.

As for the unions, first off there are few unions in the environmental industry. I know of only one company that is a union shop.

The reason that company has a union is that they are an old firm that does other work and got a union a long time ago. When they got into so-called environmental work, the union covered those workers too. Those workers have a piss-poor union, we temps make more money than they do and all I have ever heard from the workers are one complaint after another about their union. The only thing that union does that affects contract workers is that they have a rule that contract workers cannot work longer than 30 days at the company. So when there is work longer than 30 days, one group of contract workers have to be replaced with another group.

The unions don't like contract workers. They view us as an inferior life form. Over the years many of the business unions have developed an elitist image of themselves as being some type of a labor aristocracy. Only the superior workers are allowed to be organized. And since many of the business unions stopped organizing workers, that has left most workers without any union representation. In the skilled trade unions, even if you have learned your trade you may find that the union books are closed to you, sometimes even when you work a union shop. In that case you are forced to pay an agency fee, but you have no say in the union.

If you belong to some of the trade unions and there is no work in union shops, pure economics may force you to work a non-union shop. And there are many of those around since the unions will not try to organize them. If a union job opens up and you don't quit the nonunion shop some of the unions will fine you as much as \$1,000 a day. This really sucks because the nonunion job could mean much longer employment. In some cases this has forced workers to drop out of the union.

The labor movement needs to change. The days of the labor aristocracy must come to an end. We need a labor movement that actively tries to organize all workers, including contract and temp workers. We need a labor movement that actively protects workers' health and safety along with the environment, which we all are dependent upon.

The answer to the environmental industry is to organize the companies, and get rid of the agencies by having union hiring halls that can supply short-term workers when needed. We need union training and certification. We need free universal transfer between local unions, and also between locals in different regions, so that we are able to go where the work is without being penalized. And rather than fine union workers when they must work at nonunion shops, these workers should be used to organize those shops.

In all my working days, I have only come across one union that had the willingness to be open to the real needs and concerns of all workers. That union is the Industrial Workers of the World.

The Pacifica counter-revolution hits WBAI

BY EDWARD S. HERMAN

One of the most crushing series of blows to the U.S. left, and to democracy in this country, has been the gradual transformation of the five-station Pacifica Radio network from locally based and left-oriented stations into centrally controlled, mainstream institutions. Before 1990, all five stations in the network were locally oriented, locally managed with strong inputs from local audiences and employees, and both highly political and progressive. During the 1990s, however, three of the stations — Houston, Washington and Los Angeles — were pushed into the mainstream by Pacifica management, with only KPFA in Berkeley and WBAI in New York City remaining as holdovers of the earlier tradition.

On December 26, the Washington management seized control of WBAI, removing long-time manager Valerie Van Isler, firing Program Director Bernard White and producer Sharan Harper without notice, changing the locks on the doors in the middle of the night, and installing a new manager. Only people on an approved list, which did not include many staffers and even dissident members of the Board of Directors, were admitted to the station Dec. 27. There has been nothing democratic about any actions of the Pacifica management for many years, and with one of its board members a member of a law firm with a specialty in union-busting, the management has long mastered the art of using every trick in that trade.

It will be recalled that the Pacifica management had tried to remake KPFA in Berkeley several years ago, locking out the employees, firing many, bringing in security forces and strikebreakers, but meeting such resistance, with 10,000 protesters in the streets, and getting such negative publicity that the management had to retreat. The stalemate resulted in a tacit settlement that gave KPFA and WBAI temporary autonomy and led to the appointment of several new representatives of the audiences and stations to the Pacifica board.

But this settlement was only temporary, and the new board members quickly discovered that they were not listened to and were kept outside any decision-making process, sometimes by illegal actions (and two of the dissident board members have an ongoing suit against the board based on these illegalities). That the central management was on the march again, and that a takeover of WBAI might be in the works, was suggested by the sustained attack on Amy Goodman and her Democracy Now! program that escalated in September. Goodman has long been harassed by the Pacifica top management for her lack of sympathy with Clinton and general failure to stick with the approved media agenda. She was brought to Washington in September and told quite clearly that her focus on East Timor, capital punishment, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Lori Berenson (etc.) was excessive. Former board chair Mary Frances Berry called her "troublesome," and said that she had "embarrassed" the network. In October Goodman was once again brought to Washington and directly threatened with termination unless she refrained from using volunteers and cleared her programs in advance in Washington (among other demands). She immediately filed a grievance with the union for harassment and censorship.

A problem for the Pacifica elite is that Goodman's show heavily outdraws their regular news programs, and most other Pacifica programs as well. This makes it awkward for them as they claim to be reforming Pacifica in the interest of enlarging audience size, which they have been trying to do by substituting popular music for politics (and softening any politics that remains). But Goodman's show and its successes in draw-

ing audiences suggests that critical politics can be quite popular if done well. That she is regarded negatively by the Pacifica brass reflects political bias and a determination to defang and depoliticize the network in accord with the biases of the top management and their constituency. The constituency of the "old Pacifica" was the local audiences and employees and volunteers; the constituency of the "new Pacifica" of Bessie Wash and Mary Frances Berry is Washington power brokers, officials of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and the Democratic Party.

Even the New York Times notes that the Pacifica Foundation was initially based on "a lack of corporate control and its dedication to peace," and represented "grass roots, alternative broadcasting" (Jayson Blair, "Pacifica Foundation Locks WBAI Station Manager Out of Office," Dec. 28, 2000). The "new Pacifica" has changed course, and has abandoned both its grass roots base and alternative broadcasting. Its attack on Amy Goodman and the current takeover of WBAI are a part of this de-democratization and political neutering. This process has resulted from the capture of the Pacifica Foundation by a small group of liberal technocrats and Democratic Party-linked officials, who have added to their controlling board membership businesspeople in the real estate, construction, and corporate law fields to support them in their remaking of Pacifica. They have moved Pacifica's headquarters from Berkeley to Washington DC, in keeping with the shift in their constituency from audiences and employees to Washington power brokers.

We are dealing here with a kind of coup d'etat, and a systematic destruction of a major left institution in the wake of that coup. Given the importance of the media in hegemonic processes, and in contesting those processes, what is happening to Pacifica, and now WBAI, should be first order business for the left. This was our only radio network, and it is being destroyed! It is a horrifying fact that a chunk of the left actually signed Saul Landau's letter in 1999 which defended the Pacifica management and urged the left to stop its "Pacifica bashing," with "Pacifica" identified with the management group that was destroying the old Pacifica and picking off left journalists and stations one by one. Some of the signers are people trying, for example, to contest corporate globalization, a subject on which Amy Goodman and the old WBAI would give their contesting position extensive and friendly coverage, but which the emerging "new Pacifica" will ignore or treat perfunctorily. (The "new Pacifica" Washington station WPFW, formerly run by current Pacifica Executive Director Bessie Wash, has been notoriously uninterested in protests against not only the dominant political party conventions, but those against the World Bank and IMF.) The lack of left solidarity involved in signing the Landau letter is equalled only by the sheer short-sightedness and stupidity of helping destroy a media institution that was a natural ally, if not part of the left itself.

The battle over Pacifica and WBAI is not over. There are mounting protests against the WBAI takeover, and there are at least three legal suits in process against the Pacifica Foundation control group. I would urge people to get into action now.

This is the time to move into action with letters, phone calls, picketing, and contributions to the funding of legal responses to illegitimate authority. Information on the issues and names and actions under way can be obtained from these key sites: Hotline: 800-825-0055 Local WBAI sites: www.glib.com www.wbai.net General info and background: www.radio4all.org/freepacifica

Clinton pardons union-buster

In his final hours in office, outgoing President Bill Clinton pardoned fugitive union-buster Marc Rich, while refusing to free class war prisoner Leonard Peltier, whose health is collapsing after decades in prison on frame-up charges of killing an FBI agent who was part of an armed assault on Native American activists. (Even government prosecutors admit there is no evidence to indicate that Peltier fired the fatal bullet.)

Marc Rich controls a global financial organization with operations in more than 40 countries. His companies are estimated to trade in excess of \$30 billion worth of commodities annually. In 1983 Rich, his U.S. operating arm Marc Rich and Co. International, and a business partner were indicted by the Department of Justice on 65 counts of tax fraud and racketeering, charges stemming from their alleged rigging of an illegal oil-pricing scheme, failure to pay at least \$96 million in taxes, mail and wire fraud, and breaking the U.S. embargo on trading in Iranian oil. In an attempt to make his legal problems go away, Rich sold 51 percent of the company to an unindicted partner, renamed the company Clarendon Ltd., and fled to Switzerland to avoid a possible 325-year jail sentence on criminal charges stemming from the indictments.

By the early 1990s the company controlled more than one-third of the global aluminum and bauxite market, including Ravenswood Aluminum, which locked-out workers for 20 months after a Rich-financed buy-out. During the dispute, the Steelworkers union documented hundreds of serious safety violations (resulting in \$604,500 in OSHA fines), and launched an international campaign against Rich pointing out his nefarious past and persuading European unions to demand an end to the lock-out.

By the spring of 1992 the Steelworkers had organized sustained anti-Rich activities in 28 countries on five continents. Meanwhile, pressure within the U.S. persuaded many RAC customers to stop buying aluminum from the company. This forced RAC to reduce production from some 24,500 tons per month before the lockout to 15,600 tons and helped shrink its revenues from \$701 million in 1989 to \$491 million in 1991, leading the company to default on \$71 million in loans.

Facing the possibility the dispute might drag on indefinitely, the company finally capitulated, returning Local 5668 members to work with full seniority, dismissing the replacement workers, and granting wage and pension increases, but giving up some 200

jobs to speed-up and reclassification.

Now that "friend of labor" Bill Clinton has pardoned this notorious union-buster, we look forward to howls of denunciation from the AFL-CIO, which has funneled millions of dollars of its members' dues money to Clinton and his ilk.

Two workers killed at Bethlehem Steel

Two workers were killed Feb. 2 in an explosion at Bethlehem Steel's Burns Harbor, Indiana, plant that union officials say may have been caused by company negligence. Five other workers were injured in the blast.

Workers were doing repairs when gas from a coke line was apparently ignited by a flame from a portable heater, causing a furnace to explode and starting a fire. The heater should have been shut down before the work began.

"The steel mill is a terrible place to die," said Paul Gipson, president of United Steelworkers Local 6787.

Corporate Eugenics: Santa Fe Railroad says carpal tunnel syndrome is "genetic"

In the first federal case of its kind, the government has sued Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad for requiring genetic testing of employees who file claims for work-related hand injuries.

The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is demanding that the railroad end its testing of workers who make claims for carpal tunnel syndrome. At least one worker who refused to provide a blood sample was threatened with losing his job.

The railroad tests the blood samples for a genetic conditions some researchers have speculated may make people more likely to suffer carpal tunnel syndrome. Carpal tunnel and related injuries caused by repetitive hand motions are the leading workplace occupational hazard. The company claims genetic predisposition would mean injuries were not work-related.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration says that each year 1.8 million workers have musculoskeletal injuries related to working conditions.

Judge halts UP rail strike

A federal judge as ordered the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, representing more than 8,000 striking Union Pacific engineers, to halt their strike, called after the railroad unilaterally imposed new working conditions. BLE officials directed workers to comply with the order.

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Book excerpt:**Capitalism & its economics**

"Economists have joined Wall Street and politicians in proclaiming a new era of always rising productivity, low or no inflation, more jobs and falling unemployment, and prospects for a future without serious (or any?) recession. ... Such views are ominously reminiscent of almost identical positions uttered in the United States in the 1920s, against a very similar background..."

"There can be few who are unaware that a giant bubble has been expanding the most important financial markets of the world... Although the major stock indices ... have broken all records, there are two unsettling facts. First, price/earnings ratios have also broken all records in terms of the yawning gap between the value of stocks and the performance of their respective corporations... Second, more than half of all the stocks have had falling prices in recent years, as distinct from the "leaders," who have taken the indices up - an arithmetic phenomenon of the same sort that allows "average family income" to rise, while most families suffer from falling real incomes.

"The sustained growth of the "new economy" in the 1990s has many explanations. Fundamental among them is what may be called its "new exploitation." Wages were falling or stagnant from 1973 until about 1998, since when (in the United States) they have edged up slowly. Business cannot but be pleased with the much weakened unions of the recent past. The latter helps to explain the otherwise startling fact that the average U.S. worker works 260 hours more per year than in 1989, and additional six weeks of work without anything like a proportionate wage increase. The eight-hour day, 40-hour week is becoming a memory. ...

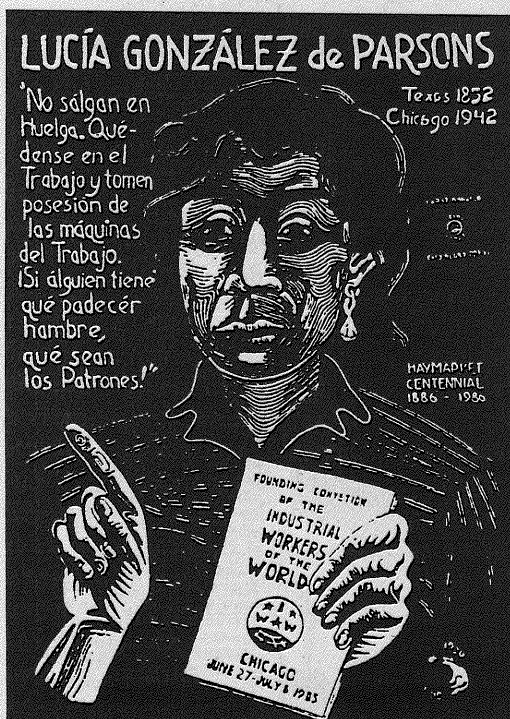
"For the average CEO, however, ... there has been a spectacular increase in income and wealth.... In the same years in which production workers' real hourly take-home pay was declining by 7 percent, after-tax CEOs' annual salaries were increasing by 66 percent (adjusted for inflation). In the years 1990-96, when the ratio of CEO incomes to production workers' wages was rising from 140:1 to 209:1, the same ratio began and remained at 7:1 in Japan... The data for 1997 show that average CEO pay rose by 35 percent - to \$150,000 a week - while average worker pay rose 3 percent - to \$424 a week: that's \$7.8 million vs. \$22,000 a year. And the CEO/factory wage ratio rose to 326:1. ...

"It is widely understood that most of the world's peoples are inadequately supplied with the basic necessities of food, clothing, shelter, education, and health care. Even in the very richest nation, the United States, that is true for a good third of the population. In the poorer countries, the World Bank reports, about a quarter of the world's population lives on less than one dollar a day. ...

"What we can and must work for if life is to become better for all and cease to become worse for most are changes in the structures of production that yield less in the way of frivolous goods and services and more in the way of those needed - and enjoyable - by all... That could not happen without a substantial lessening of national and global inequalities of income, wealth and power; as it happened it would constitute a movement toward economic, political and social democracy.

"All this can be put another way. Most of the people of all the rich countries now work very hard - even harder - to pay for things that add little to the meaning or satisfaction of their lives. In doing so they contribute to a socioeconomic global system that has already ruined countless lives and that threatens to end all life. Many thoughtful and decent people think there is no reasonable alternative. But there is. And if not now, when?"

Douglas Dowd, **Capitalism and its Economics: A Critical History** (London: Pluto Press, 2000), pp. 174-76, 180, 203, 215

IWW artist Carlos Cortez in Detroit

Reproduced from **Where Are the Voices? and other Wobbly Poems**, available for \$10.00 from the IWW Literature Department. (Use order form on page 11.)

contributing to the IWW press.

A conscientious objector to World War Two, Cortez served two years in Minnesota's Sandstone Federal Prison. "I told the FBI that if they guaranteed me a shot at Hitler, they wouldn't have to draft me, I'd volunteer. I just couldn't see the point of shooting at other workers who had no more to do with starting the war than I did."

"I guess I was what they used to call a 'red diaper baby,'" says the Milwaukee-raised Cortez whose father Alfredo, a construction worker who spoke seven languages, was an IWW organizer and whose German-American mother was a poet and socialist-pacifist.

"A worker, wise man, poet. That's the way I see Carlos," wrote IWW writer Eugene Nelson in a 1990 tribute. "His face is a poem, his whole being is a poem. His vivid, lively love of life and the whole world is so great that it overflows through his eyes and glows from his face."

Helen Keller: Why I joined the IWW

AN INTERVIEW
WRITTEN BY BARBARA BINDLEY

I asked that Miss Keller relate the steps by which she turned into the uncompromising radical she now faces the world as Helen Keller, not the sweet sentimentalist of women's magazine days.

"I was religious to start with" she began in enthusiastic acquiescence to my request. "I had thought blindness a misfortune."

"Then I was appointed on a commission to investigate the conditions of the blind. For the first time I, who had thought blindness a misfortune beyond human control, found that too much of it was traceable to wrong industrial conditions, often caused by the selfishness and greed of employers. And the social evil contributed its share. I found that poverty drove women to a life of shame that ended in blindness.

"Then I read HG Wells' *Old Worlds for New*, summaries of Karl Marx's philosophy and his manifestoes. It seemed as if I had been asleep and waked to a new world - a world different from the world I had lived in.

"For a time I was depressed" - her voice saddened in reminiscence - "but little by little my confidence came back and I realized that the wonder is not that conditions are so bad, but that society has advanced so far in spite of them. And now I am in the fight to change things. I may be a dreamer, but dreamers are necessary to make facts!" Her voice almost shrilled in its triumph, and her hand found and clutched my knee in vibrant emphasis.

"And you feel happier than in the beautiful make-believe world you had dreamed?" I questioned.

"Yes," she answered with firm finality in the voice which stumbles a little. "Reality, even when it is sad is better than illusions." (This from a woman for whom it would seem all earthly things are but that.) "Illusions are at the mercy of any winds that blow. Real happiness must come from within, from a fixed purpose and faith in one's fellow men - and of that I have more than I ever had."

"And all this had to come after you left college? Did you get none of this knowledge of life at college?"

"NO!" - an emphatic triumphant, almost terrifying denial - "college isn't the place to go for any ideas."

"I thought I was going to college to be educated," she resumed as she composed herself, and laughing more lightly, "I am an example of the education dealt out to present generations, It's a deadlock. Schools seem to love the dead past and live in it."

"But you know, don't you," I pleaded through Mrs. Macy and for her, "that the intentions of your teachers were for the best."

"But they amounted to nothing," she countered. "They did not teach me about things as they are today, or about the vital problems of the people. They taught me Greek drama and Roman history, the celebrated achievements of war, rather than those of the heroes of peace. For instance, there were a dozen chapters on war where there were a few paragraphs about the inventors, and it is this overemphasis on the cruelties of life that breeds the wrong ideal. Education taught me that it was a finer thing to be a Napoleon than to create a new potato."

"It is my nature to fight as soon as I see wrongs to be made right. So after I read Wells and Marx and learned what I did, I joined a Socialist branch. I made up my mind to do something. And the best thing seemed to be to join a fighting party and help their propaganda. That was four years ago. I have become an industrialist since."

"An industrialist?" I asked, surprised out of composure. "You don't mean an IWW - a syndicalist?"



"I became an IWW because I found out the Socialist party was too slow. It is sinking into the political bog. It is almost, if not quite, impossible for the party to keep its revolutionary character so long as it occupies a place under the government and seeks office under it. The government does not stand for the interests the Socialist party is supposed to represent."

"Socialism, however is a step in the right direction," she conceded to her dissenting hearers.

"The true task is to unite and organize all workers on an economic basis, and it is the workers themselves who must secure freedom for themselves, who must grow strong." Miss Keller continued. "Nothing can be gained by political action. That is why I became an IWW."

"What particular incident led you to become an IWW?" I interrupted.

"The Lawrence strike. Why? Because I discovered that the true idea of the IWW is not only to better conditions, to get them for all people, but to get them at once."

"What are you committed to - education or revolution?"

"Revolution." She answered decisively. "We can't have education without revolution. We have tried peace education for 1900 years and it has failed. Let us try revolution and see what it will do now."

"I am not for peace at all hazards. I regret this war, but I never regretted the blood of the thousands spilled during the French Revolution. And the workers are learning how to stand alone. They are learning a lesson they will apply to their own good out in the trenches. Generals testify to the splendid initiative the workers in the trenches take. If they can do that for their masters you can be sure they will do that for themselves when they have taken matters into their own hands."

"Don't forget the workers are getting their discipline in the trenches," Miss Keller continued. "They are acquiring the will to combat."

"My cause will emerge from the trenches stronger than it ever was. Under the obvious battle waging there, there is an invisible battle for the freedom of man."

Again the advisability of printing all this here set forth. And this finally from the patience-exhausted, gentle little woman: "I don't give a damn about semi-radicals!"

Gradually, through the talk, Helen Keller's whole being had taken on a glow, and it was in keeping with the exalted look on her face and the glory in her sightless blue eyes that she told me:

"I feel like Joan of Arc at times. My whole becomes uplifted. I, too, hear voices that say 'Come', and I will follow, no matter what the cost, no matter what the trials I am placed under. Jail, poverty, calumny - they matter not. Truly He has said, woe unto you that permits the least of mine to suffer."

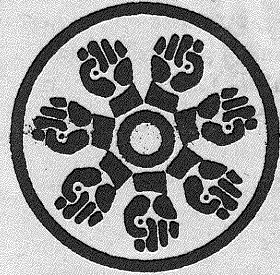
— *New York Tribune*, January 15, 1916

"The true task is to unite and organize all workers on an economic basis, it is the workers themselves who must secure freedom for themselves..."

BOOKS FOR REBEL WORKERS



New This Month: Cross-Border Organizing



Allies Across the Border: Mexico's "Authentic Labor Front" and Global Solidarity

By Dale Hathaway
While Wall Street pundits praise the global economy, workers find their jobs more pressured and precarious. Americans and Canadians are told that Mexicans are stealing their jobs, but workers in Mexico find themselves in dangerous plants where they are barely paid their daily bread. This first book on Mexico's pioneer independent labor federation, the Authentic Labor Front (the FAT), shows how activists are gaining strength in coalition with their "allies across the border."

It offers a description of the last 40 years of Mexican history, explaining how globalizing the Mexican economy undermined workers' wages and the authoritarian structures that had bound them to the PRI, the ruling party that had dominated Mexico until 2000. It celebrates the organizing tactics both within plants and across borders that have given new hope to workers throughout the continent.

A case study of how democracy - in workplaces and international structures - is the greatest source of power on both sides of the US-Mexico border. **288 pp \$19.00**

Unions and Free Trade: Solidarity vs. Competition

By Kim Moody & Mary McGinn
This book, brought out by Labor Notes, discusses economic reality in North America: capital can freely flow through borders, but workers are not allowed the same luxury. It examines the impact of free trade and the effectiveness of Canadian, American, and Mexican organized labor's response, with special sections on the auto, telecommunications, and airline industries. Also includes an excellent guide of organizations all over North America working on free trade issues.

84 pp \$7.00

The Maquiladora Reader: Cross-Border Organizing Since NAFTA

Ed. by Rachael Kamel & Anya Hoffman
This excellent handbook compiles writings of over 20 cross-border organizers. Easy-to-read discussions of the economics of the Maquiladora industry, women workers in the factories, environmental issues, and the international yet grassroots fight against NAFTA and similar schemes, lay a valuable foundation for labor activists looking for solutions to the many problems brought about by corporate globalization.

129 pp \$15.00

Limited quantities available of this book on a vital and historic example of unionism

The Making of a Strike: Mexican Silver Workers' Struggles in Real Del Monte, 1766-1775

by Doris Ladd
In the summer of 1766, Mexican silver miners rebelled against wage cuts, organizing the first strike in North America. This book is the story of their triumph despite imprisonment and attempts at forced labor; a social history of the process by which workers built their solidarity at a time when the world huelga (strike) had not yet entered the Spanish language.

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Rhythm Activism: More Kick

Thirteen songs are featured on this live album. The favorite in our office is "Coal for Mike," a churning rendition of Bertolt Brecht's poem about men who take care of the wife of a dead fellow worker.

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A New Union Vision by Arthur J. Miller A discussion of the present-day need for democratic, revolutionary unions. **\$2.00**

The General Strike by Ralph Chaplin The classic text - a call for organization. **\$2.00**

Labor History

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by Steve Golin
A discussion of the challenges faced in the relationship between workers and the radical bohemians of Greenwich Village. A good discussion of the "self-activity" of the workers involved in the strike. **\$17.00**

The Great Bisbee Deportation by Rob E. Hanson Wobblies so worried the authorities of Bisbee, Arizona, that the state ran them out of town. This comprehensive account brings the events of the day alive. **\$2.00**

Solidarity Forever by Stewart Bird, Dan Georgakis, and Deborah Shaffer Oral histories of IWW members. **\$10.00**

The Legacy of the Bunker Hill Mine by Arthur J. Miller Bunker Hill Mine's turbulent 100-year history is examined in this first-hand account of nightmarish working conditions, environmental devastation, and theft of indigenous lands. **\$2.00**

Strike! by Jeremy Brecher A classic text - a history of American workers' struggle from a working-class viewpoint, arguing that class upsurges are based in every-day life and rank and file initiative. **\$22.00**

Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology Compiled and edited by Joyce L. Kornbluh Culled from Wobbly periodicals from the movement's founding in 1905 to the present, Rebel Voices presents pamphlets, stories, songs, poems, courtroom testimony, skits, cartoons and illustrations that bring the story of the "minutemen of industrial unionism" to life in native accents. - Detroit Labor News **\$24.00**

Juice Is Stranger Than Friction: Selected Writings of T-Bone Slim. T-Bone Slim was one of the IWW's best-loved columnists. Working-stiff, hobo, and revolutionist, T-Bone created a language all his own to lambast the plutocrats, scissorbills and faddists of his day. This collection includes columns, aphorisms & excerpts from organizing pamphlets. Funny, dazzling, biting and lyrical, T-Bone Slim is as readable today as ever. **\$12.00**

Organizing Help

The New Rank and File

by Staughton & Alice Lynd. (Reviewed on page 10) **\$16** **NEW!**

The Couriers are Revolting!

by Des Patchrider
A lively and candid pamphlet on how the Dispatch Industry Workers Union organized English bike messengers from 1989 to 1992. Eventually this effort petered out but their innovative style of organizing provides an inspiration to all of us. **26pp \$3.50**

A Troublemaker's Handbook: How to Fight Back Where You Work-and Win! by Dan La Botz. An encyclopedic work on worker initiative and organizing on the job. Goes beyond business unionism as the latter cannot deal with today's climate of intensified corporate aggression. Shows that sitdown strikes still aren't dead and immigrant workers can be organized. **262pp \$17**

Union Democracy

Democracy Is Power: Rebuilding Unions from the Bottom Up by Mike Parker & Martha Gruelle. This book offers practical ideas of how the rank and file can run unions. Major discussion of Teamsters for a Democratic Union experiences in this area. **254pp \$17**

Democratic Rights for Union Members: A Guide to Internal Union Democracy by H. W. Benson. Useful guide (although it could use more discussion of direct action ideas) to the legal rights of union dissidents who are jerked around by local or international bureaucrats. **244pp. \$15**

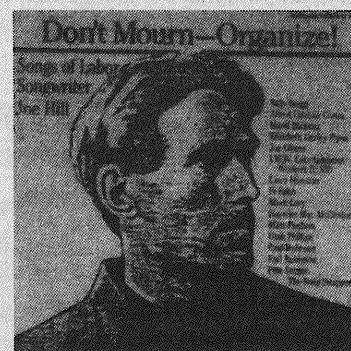
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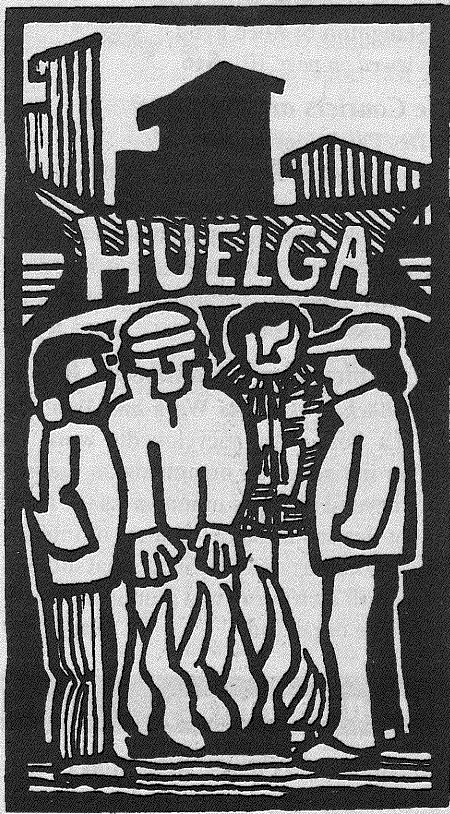
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Workers resist bosses the whole world 'round



General strike in Ecuador

After 10 days of civil disorder and the deaths of three Indian protesters, President Gustavo Noboa reached a settlement Feb. 7 with indigenous leaders, agreeing to reduce subsidized cooking gas prices 20 percent and freeze gasoline and diesel prices until year's end.

In addition, the government will release the dozens jailed during the strikes and compensate the families of those injured and killed by police. In exchange, thousands of indigenous protesters camped out at a local university agreed to go home.

"This agreement is a victory for everybody, not just the indigenous population," said march leader Antonio Vargas, president of the country's largest indigenous organization, CONAIE.

The government initially refused to even consider price revisions, instead issuing an emergency decree calling on the army to break up meetings and raid the buildings protesters had turned into their headquarters. Several protesters were killed and wounded during resulting clashes, prompting protesters to burn down an air traffic control tower to keep more troops from being flown in.

Hoping to defuse the situation and avert a national strike that labor unions had announced, the administration resumed talks.

The government has been trying to meet IMF demands for fiscal "restraint" in order to access a \$304 million loan. The price hikes which have now been reversed were an attempt to meet IMF terms.

Venezuelan teachers strike outlawed

The Venezuelan government has outlawed a strike by more than 140,000 school teachers, saying it did not recognize the union and refused to negotiate with it. The government is attempting to replace elected union officials with government appointees. The teachers strike is the first since the government announced that it had removed union leaders.

Unbearable truths

Microsoft-Poland recently discovered that in the Polish version of the thesaurus for Word 2000, the word "capitalism" gives synonyms like "exploitation" and "inequality." In the English version it's "free enterprise" and "entrepreneurship." Currently the bosses are looking for those who are guilty of this "mistake."

Workers prevent plant from moving to Mexico

BY BRIAN OLIVER SHEPPARD

A federal judge has ordered Quadrtech, a jewelry company operating near Los Angeles, to cease plans to move to Mexico. The company announced plans to close American operations and transfer facilities to Tijuana the day after its workers voted for union representation through the International Union of Electronic Workers (IUE - now the Communication Workers of America's Industrial Division).

The pro-union vote from Quadrtech's approximately 118 employees came on June 29, 2000. When owner Vladimir Reil realized he would be legally bound to respect the new union he decided to lay off the majority of the workforce and move operations to Mexico. The IUE sought action from the National Labor Relations Board, which succeeded in getting US District Judge Carlos R. Moreno to issue the injunction after two truckloads of equipment had already been sent to Mexico. Judge Moreno called for a Dec. 11 hearing to hear both sides of the issue. Rather than fight the case in court, Quadrtech then agreed to settle and remain in the US. It promised to rehire fired employees, pay employees for two days during which workers were locked out of the plant, and bargain "in good faith."

The court case is believed by many to be the first of its kind in US history. The Associated Press reported that the injunction halting the closing and transfer of a plant could be "the first of its kind in the Los Angeles area and perhaps the nation."

Businesses increasingly use the threat of plant closures to deter workers from organizing for better conditions. Corporations have been encouraged by the passage of NAFTA and other "free trade" legislation to relocate wherever workers are paid least and are afforded the least legal protections. The threat of plant shutdowns is hinted at regularly in captive-audience meetings during unionization campaigns.

Kate Brofenbrenner, director of labor research at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations, noted that the decision to "freeze" the company in the US was "incredible." Given the recent impetus towards the "globalization" of capital, the outcome of this case points to the potential effectiveness of worker organization.

"The courts have always weighed the employer's right to make a profit against the workers' right to unionize," Brofenbrenner added. And in this instance it appears that the right of workers to collectively bargain "is a right of greater value than business decisions and profits," she said. "This says to other employers, 'Maybe you ought to think twice if you try to blatantly avoid a union,'" she added.

Quadrtech's employees decided to unionize after experiencing deteriorating safety conditions that management did not seem concerned with. Work speed-ups, an increase in injuries, 10-hr day shifts worked while standing up, a hot and stuffy work area, and being paid the state minimum wage were among some of the reasons given that prompted unionization.

Workers were especially galvanized when an employee who had injured her foot was refused a chair, even when a doctor's note was provided suggesting the worker be able to sit, the Associated Press reports. When other employees complained to supervisors about this they were reprimanded.

Jaime Martinez, organizing director of the Industrial Division of the Communications Workers of America, said, "This goes to the core of organizing the unorganized. ... The order is very strong. Now we just have to stay on top of it."

Russian teachers strike for schools

State authorities decided to abrogate responsibility for the state of affairs in education — first and foremost for the provision of education for needy citizens. This is what many teachers thought of changes proposed by the government of the Russian Federation concerning the status of educational organizations and funding mechanisms.

In response, the union of workers in popular education and sciences declared its intention to conduct a nationwide strike February 27 in defense of the state system of education and the material security of the educational workers and students.

The government's attempts to carry out an experiment in education is already provoking indignation. In Vladimir oblast (regional division), despite 10% increases, the salary of teachers between amounts to just 51% of the average for industry. Debts were unpaid for reimbursement of publication expenses and travel expenses.

Teachers showed their readiness to take an active part in the job actions in Volgograd oblast, where salaries have not yet been paid for December of 2000 in 11 of 33 regions, and in Volgograd itself, only in two of seven districts did teachers receive payment for December.

The national action will take the form of all-out strikes, short work stoppages, meetings, marches, collecting signatures on petitions with the demands: full satisfaction of all due payments for work, supplemental increase in salary of the educational workers of not less than 50%, retention of existing procedures establishing pensions for years of service until a local union pension system is established, and restoration of the responsibility of the government for timely payment of wages for educational workers.

Translated by Mark Harris

Working homeless in Canada, Oregon

Employers are luring workers to Edmonton, Alberta, with promises of plentiful jobs and easy money. But the work turns out to be temporary, the hours uncertain, and the paychecks meager.

Now workers are turning up in homeless shelters, no longer to afford even the SRO hotels they once called home. One shelter estimates that more than a third of its residents are working at full-time or temporary jobs ranging from janitors to construction work, but can't afford a place to live.

Wages are so low that many workers can not afford to pay more than C\$500 a month for an apartment, while a booming rental market means that most apartments cost much more.

Meanwhile, U.S. officials report that record numbers of employed workers in Oregon are going hungry, often living in their cars because they can not afford rent.

Nearly 6 percent of Oregon households regularly go hungry, the USDA reports, despite a booming economy that has created plenty of low-paying jobs. Between 1978 and 1998, the proportion of Oregon jobs paying less than \$25,00 increased from 30 percent to 35 percent.

Similar stories could be told across the continent. Average house size has nearly doubled, more people are taking luxury cruises, and the yacht sector is doing well. For many people, including some workers, times are good.

But the gap between rich and poor is widening, and growing numbers of workers find themselves stuck in low-paying jobs in an economy oriented toward meeting the needs of the wealthy. The result is growing homelessness and poverty amidst plenty.

Iranian teachers demand pay hikes

Iranian Workers' News reports that Iranian teachers who have been pressing for a 25 percent pay hike are increasingly being forced into conflict with the Islamic regime. While the pay demand was originally supported by the government-imposed teachers' "union," union officials quickly joined forces with the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government (normally locked in struggles with each other) to declare the proposal "mad."

Two hundred teachers in central Iran demonstrated outside provincial education offices Jan. 17 to protest low salaries. Teachers are increasingly dissatisfied with their salaries and intolerable working conditions, but so far have been unable to build independent organizations that would enable them to struggle for better conditions. They work in an atmosphere in which Darwin's theory of evolution is banned from textbooks, and each school has an official charged with monitoring students and teachers and identifying nonconformists to the government.

In Iran's private sector, nonpayment of wages is a growing problem. Javaherian Co. workers closed a main road in southern Tehran Dec. 9 for three hours, demanding payment of their back wages (now more than two years in arrears). Shoe workers protested outside the offices of Kafsh-e Shadan Pour Dec. 13 to demand payment of four months' back wages and re-opening of the plant.

Three days later, hundreds of workers from Jamko (clothing) protested in Tehran, having gone unpaid for more than a year. Similar protests are happening across Iran.

Strike closes largest Colombian brewery

Some 6,000 workers at Colombia's biggest brewing company, Bavaria, have been on strike since Dec. 20. Their union, Sinaltrabavaria, is demanding job guarantees and 25 percent wage increases. The union fears Bavaria will cut jobs and wages following its acquisition of 45 percent of brewing competitor Leona, which pays workers far less. The strike has shut down 18 factories making beer, malt and juice. It has also halted work for 20,000 vendors and truckers.

Strikers have blocked off the entrance to Bavaria's main brewery in Bogotá, and have set up an open-air food kitchen to feed pickets. "These monopolies like Bavaria want to cut our salaries to get in good graces with the International Monetary Fund, which is trying to get Colombia to pay off its foreign debt," complained striker Orlando Puentes.

Sweatshop workers starve in US colony

Factory workers in American Samoa who made clothes for J.C. Penny Co. and other retailers were beaten, poorly fed, underpaid and spied on while they showered. Some 300 workers at the plant were fed meager rations of rice, chicken broth and cabbage and resembled "walking skeletons" according to a Dec. 14 US Labor Department report. The plant closed in January.

The factory, owned by Korean manufacturer Daewoosa, employed mainly Vietnamese women flown to the US Pacific territory and paid below the Samoan minimum wage of \$2.60 an hour. Most federal labor standards are supposed to apply in U.S. territories. The women lived 36 to a room, and were slapped or kicked if they were late for work. An investigator likened the factory compound to a prison. Workers say their wages were withheld and they were charged up to \$200 — almost half their salary — for accommodation that had been promised for free.