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Craft unions conflict railroad workers

BY BALTIMORE RED, X341189

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters are now conducting merger talks. At first glance, this is not that surprising, considering that many smaller unions (like the BLE) are amalgamating into larger ones these days. From an industrial union standpoint, this merger is not simply a hodge-podge amalgamation like some of late. A merger between workers in the rail industry and those in the trucking industry in theory makes some sense. These workers are all in the freight transportation industry, after all.

However, when courted by the United Transportation Union, the BLE has rejected, not once, but twice in the last few years, attempts by the UTU to form a single union in the railroad operating craft. Even more curious is the fact that the UTU, while representing tens of thousands of switchmen, brakeman and conductors who work daily alongside their engineer co-workers in the locomotive cab, also represents a substantial number of engineers itself! Why, then, the failure of these two organizations to form a single union?

Back in November 1998, the leadership of the BLE and the UTU agreed to merge. The two were very close to concluding an agreement when a rebellion broke out in the BLE. A recall election saw President Monin removed from office by a razor-thin margin. Just over half of the rank and file voted, and of these 50.03% voted to oust Monin. The merger was off. Granted that only a quarter of the membership voted to remove the president, but the nagging question remains – why were so many engineers so adamantly opposed to a UTU-BLE amalgamation that they took the unprecedented action of recalling their president?

Despite the success of the recall, the logic of a merger between craft unions of workers who share such an intimate workspace continued to be compelling. Ironically, BLE and UTU members probably have a closer relationship than any other two sets of union members in the country. Since 1985, the ranks of engineers have in most cases actually been drawn from those of the conductors. The two crafts work very closely together. Their safety – literally their lives – is in each other's hands. There is deep camaraderie, solidarity, friendship and respect between them.

Merger talks quickly resumed in 2000, this time under the leadership of new BLE President Ed Dubroski. The merger question was put to a rank-and-file ratification vote, and in November 2001 the UTU ballot count resulted in a 6-to-1 ratio in favor. Three BLE officers challenged the process and had the first set of BLE ballots impounded. When the ballots were finally counted in December 2001, the BLE membership voted down the proposed merger by a 5-to-2 margin.

The opposition was led by disaffected BLE officers who stood to lose out under the terms of the merger. In addition, rank-and-file engineers were angered over what they saw as exorbitant golden parachutes provisions whereby all top officers of both unions would make out handsomely. Some feared the merger would require a dues increase; others that the UTU, the larger of the two unions, would dominate the smaller BLE. Still other engineers felt that the BLE has a more democratic

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Workers' direct action can stop war drive

Workers around the world are organizing against the threat of war as we go to press. By the time you read these words, our solidarity may have forced the warmongers to back down – or bombs may be raining down on the heads of our Iraqi fellow workers.

The European Trade Union Confederation called short warning strikes across the continent March 14 and 21, transport workers are refusing to move war cargo, and many unions have promised general strikes if war breaks out. Such actions not only offer the best hope for preventing this war (or bringing war to a quick stop), they also serve to remind us of the enormous power in our hands, should we organize to use it.

Unions to block war supplies

British union leaders have promised massive walkouts and industrial action to block military supplies going to the Gulf in the event of war. Rail workers have pledged to refuse to load and drive trains with military materials and port workers say they would halt war shipments. Crews of four freight trains carrying war supplies to ports have already walked off the job.

The heads of five powerful British unions warned of their members' opposition to unilateral military action at a Feb. 10 press conference. Bob Crowe, of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union, said: "My members will not support or help military strikes against Iraq without a proper UN mandate." Mick Rix, general secretary of the rail union Aslef, said that "if war breaks out, many rail workers will refuse to transport supplies."

Union leaders also warned that massive strikes could break out in factories and industries around Britain within hours of troops being sent into battle.

Meanwhile, U.S. planes are being di-

verted to Frankfurt Airport in Germany after activists organized a series of incursions at Ireland's Shannon Airport to protest its use to refuel U.S. military aircraft, including a March 1 protest that saw hundreds of activists tackle a new security fence.

Italian general strike

Italy's largest union federation, the CGIL, has added its support to calls for a general strike in the event of a military attack on Iraq, even if war was backed by the United Nations. It would seem difficult to me that if there is a war on Iraq we would not call a general strike to protest the war," said Marigia Maulucci of the union's executive council. CGIL dock workers have announced their refusal to "board or disembark" ships carrying material for the war in Iraq.

In Tuscany, the CGIL has put management on notice that "Our member workers do not intend to loan their jobs to the war," and published train schedules into Camp Darby, a U.S. army transport facility.

Protesters vow to block all movement of U.S. arms by rail between American bases in Italy, dubbing the convoys "trains of death." Demonstrators began blockading railway tracks in mid-February, forcing police to clear the tracks all along train routes. Trains were held to a walking pace, forced to alternate routes, and delayed by several hours.

After a day of blockades, rail workers declared they would boycott military trains' operations and began supplying demonstrators with logistical information on routes and schedules. While Italy's Defence Ministry has given the U.S. clearance to use military bases and ports for the war, polls show 70 percent of Italians oppose war even if sanctioned by the United Nations.

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British IWW in dispute at SMSR survey firm

In the face of an IWW organising drive at SMSR – a social research agency based in Hull (a port in East Yorkshire) which undertakes postal, telephone, face-to-face surveys and focus groups for the local government, health, and education sectors – the bosses decided to sack all union members at the firm.

SMSR, founded 11 years ago and employing about 20 workers, mostly telephone interviewers, had tolerated a small IWW presence (three members) for a year before a new director, Karen Hogarth, who had invested in the company, assumed a prominent position in October. Due to her bullying attitude, IWW membership soon grew to 11 – a majority of the workforce. The secretary of the Hull IWW General Membership Branch, Jim Young, wrote Hogarth asking for a meeting to discuss recognition, but she refused any such meeting and two days later sent a memo to all employees announcing a redundancy programme.

The secretary of the IWW's British Isles Regional Organising Committee, Guy Cheverton, who had worked for five years at SMSR as marketing manager, was threatened with the disciplinary procedure for "bullying people" into joining a union. At this point management began bullying the new union members; they were told that if they left the union they would keep their jobs

and would not be made redundant. Five resigned whilst one original member left the company. On January 17th the remaining five IWW members who refused to leave the union were made redundant.

Those made redundant were some of the longest serving and most skilled employees.

Currently the IWW in the British Isles is undergoing a referendum to see whether we should seek certification with the government as an independent union. When the IWW members at SMSR applied to an industrial tribunal to take SMSR to court they realised that as an uncertificated union they had no access to or protection under the law. This process will be complete by early April.

On March 3rd the IWW picketed outside SMSR. SMSR's clients are all to be found in the public sector, the most highly unionised sector in the UK. The company agreed (after the picket) to negotiate with the IWW on March 14th (after we go to press). The IWW is seeking a one-off payment to each of its members to end the dispute; if this is not forthcoming it will write to approximately 500 local government, health and education clients explaining that SMSR is in dispute due to persecution of union members. Already Welsh authorities have cancelled SMSR contracts worth £40,000 after contact with IWW members.

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A voice for the workers

As the Federal Communications Commission ponders whether to limit corporate ownership of media, one can but question the extent of the power of corporations in controlling the voice of the workers. If anything, workers should begin to value the newspapers that have escaped capitalist control, especially the *Industrial Worker*, which has served the workers' cause for over 93 years.

Through WW I, the Palmer Raids, the Depression, and even the McCarthy era, the *Industrial Worker* continues to bring news and opinion directly from the struggle of workers around the world. What other expression from the public media has consistently reported on strikes, worker disputes, grievances and international solidarity?

Not only does the *Industrial Worker* bring workers the news, the paper has served as an instrument for criticism of unions that have capitulated to management interests – boss unions. Where other labor papers and web pages represent the hidden interests of associations and organizations that exploit issues of concern to working people, or fulfill the limited scope of self-interested union bureaucrats concerned with workers' rights, the *IW* has been a critical vehicle in telling the story of the daily struggle of union and non-union affiliated people who must often-times exchange labor for sustenance.

As the dominance of corporatism further controls mass media and continues indoctrination of the working class, we must support what we have left to help us organize and express our opposition – to create a barrier, a space for expression of the worker's true voice. Let's take this opportunity to show appreciation for the defender of free expression and workers rights!

A Fellow Worker

Against war

What clinches everything for me, in my opposition to Gulf War Two, in the moral sense, is that before Turkey cancelled its approval to let the U.S. use her soil to help us launch Gulf War Two, we had promised the Turkish government that the Kurds of Iraq would be disarmed!

What moral duplicity! When Bush speaks of Saddam Hussein having used weapons of mass destruction against "his own

people," he is speaking about the gassing of Iraqi Kurds. The United States supported Saddam Hussein during the time he was gassing the Kurds. And we betrayed the Kurds in 1991. Is this how we are going to build democracy in the Middle East?

Raymond Solomon, editor, *Free Voices*

Airline workers

In "Airline Workers Under Attack" (February) you missed a point. Management mistakes were, indeed, one of the things that took United Airlines into bankruptcy, but the main thing was Bush Sr.'s rush to war in Iraq.

The Gulf War brought the retaliatory attacks of Sept. 11. The men who attacked the World Trade Center chose United and American Airlines for obvious symbolic reasons. Subsequent statements by Al Quaida made it clear that the main reason for the attack was the Gulf War. Now United employees are paying for the Bush rush to war.

Lane Anderson, Santa Barbara

Political song

The Center for Political Song, based in Glasgow Caledonian University, houses a collection of political song material. It started, I think, about two years ago and exists to promote an awareness of all forms of political song, including material from throughout the globe, across the political spectrum and from all musical genres. Examples of material include Tibetan songs opposing Chinese occupation, South African Freedom Songs, the political songs of Zimbabwe and Nigeria, Calabrian Mafia songs, patriotic songs of the Revolutionary Association of

Women of Afghanistan and the Save Our Pool Campaign songs of Glasgow. The songs span the political spectrum and can be found in almost all genres: popular music, folk, hip hop, reggae, opera, world music and jazz.

Many of our members are composers of political songs and might want their songs to become a part of the collection. Contact Janie McNair, Center for Political Song, Glasgow Caledonian University, Cowcaddens Road, Glasgow G4 OBA, UK. <http://politicalsong.gcal.ac.uk>

Faith Petric

International Women's Day

Today, the 8th of March, is International Women's Day. SAC, the Central Organization of Swedish Workers, wants to take this opportunity to send a message of solidarity to our sisters and brothers in the struggle throughout the world.

We wish you strength in the feminist struggle, both today and tomorrow. We find ourselves in a situation of increasing repression against both the working class and its union organizations. It is in times like these that it is so important that we stand together as one – united in the struggle for a just society and a world without oppression, and united in the struggle for a society where complete equality exists between women and men. SAC encourages all of our sisters and brothers to continue our common struggle against patriarchy and capitalism.

In International Solidarity,

Lars Hammarberg,

SAC General Secretary, Stockholm

May Day Greetings

It has for some years been tradition to run in the May *IW* greeting ads in honor of International Workers Day. Ads must be received by April 10th to run in the May issue. Suggested donation levels are \$10 for a 1 inch tall ad (1 column wide); \$35 for 4 inches by 4 7/8 inches (2 columns); or \$80 for a quarter page. We can set it up from your message, or you can send it in camera-ready. Non-commercial greeting ads only.

We can also provide extra copies of the May issue at normal bundle rates.

Boston Wobs sign up DARE workers

The Boston General Membership Branch has organized workers at two residential facilities for mentally retarded adults operated by DARE Family Services – a social service agency operating under state contracts.

Workers decided to organize after months of dealing with an increasingly abusive manager and deteriorating working conditions, and chose to organize with the IWW after hearing from IWW and SEIU representatives. After management refused to respond to our request for voluntary recognition, a certification petition was filed with the National Labor Relations Board. As we go to press, management has withdrawn its objections to the unit and the Board is issuing a mail ballot which will be counted March 31.

Since a solid majority of workers hold paid-up membership, and we spend several months organizing the job, we are looking forward to a decisive win – and preparing for what are likely to be difficult negotiations.

Ontario antipoverty activists face trial

What is expected to be a lengthy trial against three members of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty – Stefan Pilipa, Gaetan Heroux and John Clarke, who spoke at last year's IWW General Assembly – began in early March. The charges stem from their role in organizing a June 13, 2000, march which demanded that six homeless persons be permitted to address the Ontario legislature. Instead, riot police attacked the protesters, many of whom have already been convicted on lesser charges.

The charges are part of a systematic attempt to silence OCAP, a direct action organization which has spearheaded resistance to the government's attacks on the poor and homeless. OCAP's website (www.ocap.ca) will include regular updates on the trial, as well as information on where to send letters to the Ontario government protesting this attempt to criminalize dissent.

Industrial Worker

The Voice of Revolutionary Industrial Unionism

- ★ ORGANIZATION
- ★ EDUCATION
- ★ EMANCIPATION

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Providence Wobbly arrested for walking picket line

PROVIDENCE, RI – When USWA workers at Union Paper went on strike in February, local IWW members immediately leapt up to lend a hand. Acting on the belief that an injury to one is an injury to all, several Wobs joined the picket line when their schedules allowed. The third night of the strike the entire General Membership Branch came out to deliver hot coffee and solidarity.

One of our members works at a non-union shop that uses Union Paper. This Wob berated the delivery driver for scabbing on his fellow workers and refused to receive their shipments. So the employer agreeing to cancel their orders from Union Paper.

The Wob who's spent the most time on the picket line is a young fellow worker named Alex. He's gone to more of his fair share of the brutal 3 - 5 a.m. shifts on the picket line. On March 3rd he braved sub-freezing temperatures to show his solidarity with the strikers. From 3:00 a.m. until 4:30 a.m. the strikers mainly stayed huddled in a makeshift shelter constructed with 2 by 4s and tarp.

At 4:30 the scabs arrived and the steelworkers threw up their picket line. The owner of Union Paper, Harley Frank, saw that someone who was not one of his employees was walking the picket line. He became enraged and screamed that he was going to have Alex arrested. "Get out of the way! Who are you? You're trespassing! Take his picture! I want him arrested! Now! I'm going to arrest you! What's your name?" he yelled. Alex merely replied that his name was "Joe Hill" and kept walking.

The police, for some reason obeying the orders of a business owner who has not paid his city taxes, followed Alex and arrested him as he was walking home. The cop started asking Alex questions and Alex refused to answer without a lawyer. He was told he was being a "smartass" and denied a lawyer because he wasn't under arrest – just being detained in the back of a police car. He asked if that meant he was free to go and was told no. The police became angry that Alex was asserting his constitutional rights, and finally cuffed and illegally searched him.

Alex stated that he did not consent to the search and asked to see a warrant and the cop told him he didn't care. The police took his wallet and chortled when they found his ID, telling him "now we know your name." They gave Alex his wallet back but he later found that they had stolen his money, his ATM cards, and his state ID. This was their way of punishing him for wanting a lawyer when he was wrongfully arrested.

The cop then drove around with Alex in the back of the car, trying to figure out if there was anything they could charge him with. Unfortunately for the police, solidarity is not a crime. So the officer decided he would commit the Wob for psychological examination instead. Our fellow worker was driven to the hospital and held for four hours in the emergency room until his doctor's office opened.

There was, of course, nothing wrong with Alex aside from a mild subservience deficiency and an inflamed desire for social justice. But to a cop angry because he can't throw you in jail without reason, I guess those things look like insanity.

New Direct Action

Direct Action #177 (the newspaper of the IWW down under) features reports on Australian IWW activities, a discussion of the IWW's role on jobs where the trade unions are well established, extensive material on maritime disputes around the world, workers' poetry, and the world's only Wobbly sports page. Copies are available from IWW General Headquarters, or from *Direct Action*, PO Box 78, Bellingen 2454 NSW, Australia (overseas subscriptions AUS \$15).



Philadelphia Wobs picket Taco Bell

More than 50 activists, hoisting a giant killer tomato puppet and chanting we "want justice, not a talking dog," descended on a Philadelphia Taco Bell February 28, to show solidarity with the Florida farmworkers who harvest tomatoes for the fast-food behemoth. IWW members were joined by Mexicanos Juntos, CATA (a farmworkers group that supports organizing efforts in the mushroom industry in nearby Chester County, and has spun off two unions at area mushroom companies), Jobs With Justice, ACUP and other groups.

On Feb. 24, around 100 members of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, which represents the migrant farmworkers who pick many of Taco Bell's tomatoes – joined by small farmers, students, and other supporters – began a ten-day hunger strike outside Taco Bell headquarters in Irvine, Calif. "The tomatoes that Taco Bell buys are produced in what can only be described as sweatshop conditions," says CIW organizer Lucas Benitez. Pickers currently earn an annual average of \$7,500, despite their long hours, and receive no overtime pay, health insurance, sick pay, vacations or pensions.

Workers are calling on the company to pay one penny more per pound for tomatoes picked so that farmworkers can receive a living wage. The union has asked the company to enter into three-way negotiations with them and with the growers, similar to the negotiations conducted in the 1980s between the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, Campbells soup, and the growers who provided Campbells with tomatoes and cucumbers. Taco Bell has refused, claiming it can not influence pay or conditions on the farms that supply its tomatoes. However, while Taco Bell claims to be unable to ensure that the humans who pick its tomatoes are treated fairly, it recently began requiring farmers to treat the animals it buys for meat humanely. (One CIW organizer has commented that now Taco Bell just needs to set standards for treatment of two-legged animals.)

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers began organizing a nationwide boycott against Taco Bell in April 2001. Since then 14 colleges and high schools have cancelled their contracts, and students at many other schools are organizing boycott campaigns. During the hunger strike, supporters organized almost 100 solidarity actions. In Ottawa, Canada, the IWW's International Solidarity Commission distributed leaflets at the Rideau Centre Taco Bell Feb. 28. Wobblies in Lawrence, Kansas, picketed at two Taco Bells, and IWW members in Lancaster, Penn., have been publicizing the boycott at other social justice events.

For more information on this struggle, visit the CIW online at: www.ciw-online.org

Stella's bosses throw crumbs at fired worker

BY PATRICK MCGUIRE, X348100

On March 4, the IWW and Stella's met for negotiations in the offices of lawfirm Filmore Riley in the Commodore Exchange Tower in downtown Winnipeg. High above the banks of marble in a prestigious office, one lawyer and two co-owners of Stella's Cafe & Bakery represented the employers and Gord Fischer (Canadian Union of Postal Workers grievance officer) and I represented fired Wobbly John Stillwell.

Stillwell was fired by Stella's January 12, once they got wind of his attempts to organize their hip urban eatery. The IWW filed an Unfair Labour Practice January 31st and Stella's suggested negotiations as a method of settling more quickly outside of court.

After only one hour it became perfectly clear that Stella's and the IWW are miles apart. The IWW offered a settlement option which was reasonable and less than what we requested of the Manitoba Labour Board. Stella's countered with an offer so low that it was insulting. Namely: \$750 damages, no return to work for John and no union meeting for Stella's workers. Both sides walked out of negotiations as clearly no settlement could be reached.

The Winnipeg IWW has decide to focus on building public pressure and preparing for John's hearing in front of the Manitoba Labour Board on May 8th.

Stella's management would like this issue to blow over but the IWW refuses to back down. Another rally and information picket took place March 9 in front of Stella's during their peak weekend brunch rush.

Wobblies and all friends of labour are encouraged to call Stella's co-owner Tomas Sohlberg at 204-284-1686 or 204-453-8562 and tell him to negotiate in good faith and give John Stillwell his job back.

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 capitalists, 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.



With the official unemployment rate rising world wide, it would appear that this would be a good time to remind all wage-slaves to practice some on the job solidarity and call in sick. Taking sick days makes us feel healthier. We get direct health improvements, tops among them lowering our stress. Stress is connected to all kinds of disorders, most dangerously, heart disease. So, taking time off work is a form health insurance as it leads to a more relaxed lifestyle.

The direct action of calling in sick does indeed get satisfaction. And believe you me, these personal health improvements have class-wide benefits as well. Just think of the dent such a practice places in the supposed oversupply of our fellow workers' skills, especially as it might grow to a classwide action. Proles don't have to be subscribers to the *Wall Street Journal* or the *Financial Times* to understand how the law of supply and demand operates when there are fewer of us at work each day.

To increase the demand for and price of our various and sundry know-hows, it is incumbent on already employed workers to show solidarity and call in sick more often. After all, gaps have to be filled to keep the wheels of whatever industry you are in turning, don't they? And nobody is going to turn those wheels, if we don't, are they?

Come to think of it, May Day occurs on Thursday this year. Now speaking of turning, I'll bet it turns your stomach to think of going to work on May Day! And if, you're off on May Day then why not make a weekend of it and really relax. Yes, take Friday off too!

"Jobs, jobs, jobs," you say. Just another typical leftist, you say. No, it's not exactly that. I'm as aware as you are that most jobs are useless. Recent surveys have shown that as many as 60% of workers feel their work is of no use to society. And, it's true. Bucky Fuller once said that useful work was that which "nurtures and accommodates human life." Most of the jobs which capitalists and State bureaucrats hire us for these days are useless and pointless.

So why feel guilty, call in sick on May Day.

But that brings up the question. Why do we bother going to work at all?

Well, that's simple enough. We're doing it for the money. It's because we're wage-slaves and we haven't got anything other than our skills to sell on a daily basis, in that grand "free" marketplace of commodities. We can starve or we can eat.

As some wag once said, "a poor person forced to work a job they despise because of economic necessity is a slave." It's that simple. So, we choose to work for the money and eat and enjoy at least a few of the good things in life. Ah wage-slavery, love it, leave it, or, if you care to, organize and abolish it.

★ ★ ★

And then there's the war... Did you hear the one about Donald Rumsfeld's German relatives disowning him? On a recent visit to Germany, Rumsfeld was confronted by demonstrators – more than 60% of the people who live and work in Germany oppose war with Iraq. And amongst those most opposed to this war are Rumsfeld's own relatives. They hail from Bremen. "We think it is dreadful that Donald Rumsfeld is out there pushing for a war against Iraq," Karin Cecere (nee Rumsfeld), 59, said from her two-up, two-down home in February. "We are embarrassed to be related to him," she told a reporter during the Defense Secretary's visit to Germany.

★ ★ ★

We were talking about carrots on sticks. He said that management has made the sticks so long that nobody can tell the carrot is fake.

★ ★ ★

I'm going to all the anti-war demonstrations I can find. Workers have no interest the wars their ruling classes are planning for them to fight. If class struggle leads to class war, well that's another matter. Hell though, these anti-war demos are great outings and good way to meet people who might actually be interested in building the new society within the shell of the old. Even if they haven't reached that point of class consciousness yet, they must have something upstairs, so when all's said and done, you still might meet some interesting folks.

As the old anti-warrior of the Vietnam era, Hunter S. Thompson said to some reporters at a demo he was attending in Aspen, Colorado recently, "I've been to a few of these things. I've become almost homesick for the smell of tear gas." And then there was Kurt Vonnegut who was quoted in *In These Times* recently, "And those now in charge of the federal government are upper-crust C-students who know no history or geography, plus not-so-closeted white supremacists, and plus, most frighteningly, psychopathic personalities, or Pps..."

Won't it be grand when we actually have the power to institute a self-managed society? The "Pps" could have an equal voice with everyone else on the planet, as opposed to the amplified pulpits and power thrones they enjoy today. As FW Harry Siitonen was fond of saying when he was signing off, "Bosses, who needs 'em?"

So, get with it, Fellow Worker. If you're not an member of the IWW yet, get wise, organize. We need each other. The more of us there are, the closer we'll be getting to the four hour day and even better, abolition of the wages-system. Then, we can well and truly say, "Workers of the world relax!"

Frank Brill wishes his fellow workers throughout the world the merriest of May Days. You can return the merriment by writing him c/o IWW, 616 E Burnside, Portland, OR 97214 USA or e-mail: fnbrill@yahoo.com

IWW in dispute at SMSR...

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SMSR will be given a choice by the IWW: settle or face the possible destruction of its business.

We urge our fellow workers to help in the following ways:

Telephone SMSR and let bosses Ian Mills and Karen Hogarth know that your organisation demands a just financial settlement for the workers. Telephone 1482 211200 or 1482 221975 (the latter number is for Select Train-

ing, another company owned by Hogarth).

Please send plenty of messages demanding a just settlement to SMSR fax 1482 211201 and Select Training fax 1482 221976.

Please send lots of e-mails to SMSR asking the same at info@smsr.co.uk and to Select Training at sales@seltrain.demon.co.uk

Please send messages of support to Hullgmb@iww.org.uk

We also need cash to drive this dispute forward – cheques to Hull IWW, c/o IWW PO Box 591, Hull HU5 2WZ, England.

"Shining a light" on anti-labor bosses won't convince workers to join unions

BY HARRY KELBER, LABOR TALK

It's become an AFL-CIO ritual that every June *Voice@Work* exhorts central labor councils and local unions to "shine a light" on anti-union employers to show how mean, unfair and immoral they are in denying their workers the legal right to join a labor organization. Each labor group can devise its own method of conducting the boss-bashing campaign: mass rallies, parades, public forums, picnics, religious sermons, picket lines, candlelight vigils and anything else they can come up with.

Here are some of the messages they've been sending the public the past four years:

- An estimated 10,000 workers are fired each year simply for wanting to join a union.
- In one-third of the cases where workers vote for a union, employers never agree to a first contract.
- Employers spend \$300 million a year on consultants trained to stop workers from forming unions.
- At least 50% of businesses threaten to shut down if workers decide to form a union.
- 91% of employers force employees to attend "captive audience" meetings designed to indoctrinate them against unions.
- 75% of employers use supervisors to hold one-on-one meetings with workers to discourage any pro-union sentiment.

At the June rallies, workers who have been fired or abused for their pro-union views tell their horror stories. The implied lesson is clear: what happened to them can happen to any unorganized worker who tries to join a union. Is that supposed to help a union organizing campaign?

There is no evidence that the "shine a light" campaign has shamed any employers to tell their workers, well, it's okay to join a union. Even people who become aware of the injustice to workers are offered no practical way to implement their sympathy.

By advertising the raw power of a majority of employers, *Voice@Work* is not helping union organizing campaigns. Why should workers want to join a union, knowing the risks they would face? And why must unions always find themselves in a defensive position?

The task of unions is to show that they are stronger than the employer at any given work site, and that they will fight tooth-and-nail to prevent any pro union worker from losing his or her job.

A union contract is worth plenty in terms of wages, benefits and having a voice in the workplace. There are ample reasons why some 18 million workers have chosen to belong to labor organizations, despite persistent resistance from employers.

If organized labor is to regain its former strength, it won't be done by timidity or defensiveness. It will require a new militancy, based on a strong conviction that the social injustice that afflicts America's working people must be rectified.

In the 1930s, millions of workers were inspired to join unions at a time when the U.S. was in the throes of the Great Depression. Today, millions of unorganized workers need unions, but we have yet to win their confidence.

Union ranks hit record low

U.S. union membership fell to the lowest level since the government began collecting data in 2002, as union workers were laid off at rates dwarfing new organizing.

The Labor Department reports that 13.2 percent of U.S. workers now belong to unions, down from 13.4 percent in 2001, despite the fact that half of all workers tell pollsters they would join a union if given a chance. The unionization rate is lower for private sector jobs, where only about one in 12 workers is represented by a union.

AFL to avoid NLRB in organizing drives

The leaders of five of the American Federation of Labor's largest affiliates pushed a proposal through on the final day of the AFL-CIO's annual winter meeting (in a Florida resort financed by the Plumbers' union) Feb. 27 that creates a new governing body to run the federation.

The AFL's new Executive Committee – which includes the heads of the AFL-CIO's ten largest affiliates (which include two-thirds of AFL membership), its three top officers, and seven other union heads appointed by President John Sweeney – will meet monthly, and is charged with restructuring the AFL-CIO.

Business Week says the goal is "to reinvigorate the AFL-CIO and refocus its agenda on recruitment and politics – and ditch almost everything else. It's a bid to fundamentally overhaul the house of labor by slashing the AFL-CIO's bureaucracy, orchestrating mergers of small unions, and mounting national recruitment drives."

"The AFL-CIO can't afford to be everything to every union anymore; it needs to focus more on a growth strategy," says SEIU President Andrew Stern, whose union has floated proposals to restructure the AFL into 12-15 sectoral unions and centralize power.

The meeting also discussed the need to revitalize its organizing efforts, which last year failed to keep pace with members lost through lay-offs and plant closings. AFL Executive Council members focussed on recent efforts to organize through card-check agreements, community solidarity campaigns and other tactics that avoid the National Labor Relations Board.

"We can't grow the labor movement through the NLRB," AFL-CIO Organizing Director Stewart Acuff said. "It takes three years to resolve an organizing campaign through the NLRB. It's just a meat-grinder."

According to NLRB statistics, unions won about half of traditional organizing votes during 2001, compared with 78 percent when card checks were used.

"We're trying to do a much better job of making organizing campaigns public fights," Acuff said. "We have a goal that every organizing campaign has to be a referendum on human rights in America, and every fired worker has to be a poster child, and every employer has to be held accountable."

In addition to the controversial restructuring plan, many officials were angered when U.S. Labor Secretary Elaine Chao seemed to deliberately insult them during a tense exchange over Bush administration proposals to require unions to submit far more elaborate financial reports to the government. Instead of responding to the concerns, Chao read off a list of recent criminal indictments of Machinists union staffers and officials – most of which resulted from the union's own audit process.

AFL-CIO President John Sweeney called Chao's 30-minute meeting with the executive council "pretty unbelievable ... She was angry at points. She was insulting at points. In all my years, I have never seen a secretary of labor who's so antilabor." The AFL has a long tradition of inviting political hacks to speak to its meetings.

The council apparently did not discuss the continuing scandal at union-owned Ullico, an insurance firm whose board of directors (all current or former union officials) profited handsomely from insider trading. Ullico's chief financial officer recently stepped down, criticizing top management for an "unwillingness to face the financial crisis" confronting the company. The company has seen substantial losses over the past two years, and is facing federal criminal investigations as well as shareholder lawsuits.

Craft unions conflict railroad workers...

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structure and constitution. Some members believed – with good reason – that instead of one big union of the operating crafts, the merged union would simply usher in one big(ger) bureaucracy.

Finally, (and unfortunately, not insignificantly), the old elitist craft union attitude of the most reactionary BLE members led them to oppose the merger.

One of the nation's oldest and historically most conservative unions, the BLE has a long history of elitism and exclusivity. As traditionally the most "skilled" craft on the railway, engineers have often relied on their knowledge and skilled position rather than intercraft solidarity to defend their interests. (Joe Hill's song "Casey Jones," written nearly 100 years ago, is a parody of such reactionary thinking on the part of the "hoggers" and their union.) To this day, some engineers feel they are more important than other railroaders, and believe that an engineers-only union is the best hope to preserve their craft and their livelihood.

Despite the dramatically different votes, the two unions are in fact very similar. Both operate from a similar paradigm, one which accepts the parameters of the Railway Labor Act with its myriad web of restrictions on the right to take self-help (i.e. strike). Both unions know from recent history that any industrial action will be immediately quashed by the White House and Congress, regardless of which party is in control (yet lacking any alternative vision or strategy, both continue to put the resources of their respective unions at the disposal of the two corporate-sponsored political parties).

Neither union is willing to defy the law, court injunctions, and congressional or presidential decrees. And neither union bureaucracy is interested in mobilizing its ranks to take action. Both have a fatalistic view toward the future, accepting their weakness in the face of the combined power of the carriers and the federal government.



However, the UTU believes that the crafts which it represents are more vulnerable to downsizing and outright elimination. Over the past two or three decades now, train crew size in North America has been shrunk drastically. Firemen were eliminated, followed by switchmen, flagmen and brakemen. Today most train crews are conductor-engineer only. In general (but not always) the UTU represents the conductor, and the BLE the engineer.

Here is the crux of the matter. The carriers would like to move forward with even further job elimination. After years of decimating train and enginemen's ranks – leaving the U.S. with the "most productive railroaders in the world" – rail companies now want to operate with single-person crews. As the union representing the "driver," the BLE has felt that the role of its members is relatively secure. The UTU, representing the less

secure of the crafts (the "helpers"), has been more favorably disposed toward a merger.

Of course, there are many other good reasons to form a single union in the "operating crafts," or for that matter a single industrial union of all rail labor. These include increased solidarity, heightened power at the bargaining table, an end to the carriers playing one off against the other, an end to union scabbing and petty inter-union conflicts, and a whittling down of duplicate union bureaucracies (currently 14 unions represent workers on the nation's railroads).

The BLE's go-it-alone strategy appears to have failed. In the last year the UTU has wholeheartedly embraced remote-control technology and one-person operation of yard jobs across the country. Beating the BLE to the punch in the "race-to-the-bottom," the UTU agreement has the potential to eliminate thousands of engineer positions. Conductors receive only minimal training for their new duties. For a few dollars more per shift, they continue to perform their own work in addition to operating the locomotive via a remote control belt pack.

Besides eliminating countless union jobs, the implications for health and safety are obvious. On February 17, a CSX trainman was killed in a remote control accident in Syracuse, N.Y. Ironically, back in 2000, UTU then-President Charlie Little derided the BLE for its support of remote control technology on regional railroad Montana Rail Link. The BLE, he said, planned "to put more union employees out of work in favor of unsafe and deadly black boxes (remote belt packs)... They (remotes) are a danger to every operating employee."

The UTU's action has added fuel to the fire in the ongoing BLE-UTU war. As the UTU trumpets its new-found adoration of remote control, the BLE pickets and files lawsuits against it. In addition, the remote control debacle has outraged a number of the UTU's own rank and file, some of whom are themselves engineers.

The carriers, of course, are laughing all the way to the bank. They are hoping to force the next round of job consolidations on the road trains, where the companies would no doubt love to eliminate conductor positions. Given their handiwork on remote control in the yard, the UTU can hardly look to the BLE for support when thousands of road conductor jobs face the axe.

The "craft war" is in full swing on the nation's railroads. While the craft unions wage total war on each other, the bosses are having a field day. The tragedy which has beset the operating trades on the nation's railroads is a prime example of the utter futility and failure of craft unionism. In fact, the BLE-UTU war is the logical culmination of over a century of organization along craft lines. We are witnessing a similar spectacle with the fratricide in the building trades.

But there is, of course, an alternative to this destructive path – one espoused 100 years ago by the American Railway Union and its brilliant founder, Eugene Victor Debs, former general secretary of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen. The ARU was a union of all railroaders from all crafts. It did not wait passively for politicians, lawyers or the union bureaucracy to take up the cause of rail workers. Instead, it relied on the solidarity, direct action, creative tactics, mass participation and mobilization of its rank and file to defend the interests of its membership.

In the face of automation and down-sizing, job consolidation and elimination, increased harassment of employees, deterioration of safety, and attacks on the union contract, the need for united action by all of rail labor is more imperative than ever.

The bankruptcy of the craft unionism of the traditional brotherhoods should finally be glaringly obvious to all workers in the rail industry. The need for one big industrial union on the railroad has become imperative for our very survival as union railroad workers. Let's once and for all remove the albatross of the "craft war" from around our necks, and refocus our attention where it belongs – on the class war!



SOLIDARITY UNIONISM

The power in our hands

BY ALEXIS BUSS

I think the "Minority Report" columns generated more interest than anything else I've ever written for this paper. So, go figure, I'm not going to be writing them any more. It's not because I've become disinterested in minority unionism; it's just that it's a crummy name, and minority unionism alone isn't going to get the labor movement on the right track. We need to understand the model's strengths and limitations, so I'll continue to look for examples to share with you, while I also talk about some other ideas that I hope you'll find interesting. I asked Staughton Lynd if I could borrow the title of one of his books for this column. Happily he said yes, sparing me the pain of coming up with something original or clever.

So, now you're reading the Solidarity Unionism column. I'd like to talk a little about the ideas that I'd like to add into the mix.

Direct unionism: One of the disturbing things to me about the more mainstream discussions of minority or open-source unionism is the reliance on service unionism. By service unionism, I mean that the union functions as a service-giving agency, instead of a group of workers engaged in organizing. Suggestions like those made by Barbara Ehrenreich and Thomas Geoghegan (in their "Letter to Labor," published in *The Nation*) that members who aren't represented through a contract should experience the union mainly as a set of services such as access to lawyers are, I think, pretty dangerous to the long-term direction of the labor movement.

I think we ought to avoid like poison enticing people to join a union to "get" things. That doesn't mean that membership

comes without benefits of any kind. But one of the things I think is so terrific about organizing is that the line between service provider and service recipient becomes blurred. We learn to help one another out, we seek the advice of people who have different skills than our own, and give others access to the skills we have. This is the kind of world I want to help make.

The Ehrenreich/Geoghegan article figures that the membership of a service union can be mobilized on election day to vote in candidates who will make better labor laws. (Indeed, it sometimes seems almost as if they believe this is the main reason to organize unions.) Why would any politician make labor laws that are more advantageous to working people if those working people aren't mobilized and shaking up the system? Because politicians are nice?

If unions are to exist as vehicles for working people to make our own lives better, we need to be able to articulate that as such. What you "get" is a meaningful bond of solidarity with your fellow workers, and you learn and teach others to organize to improve your lives together. I've heard the Wobblies in Portland call this concept "direct unionism," what do you think of that name?

Industry-wide organizing: Industry-wide campaigns seek to raise the floor of conditions in an industry, or a segment of that industry, by direct action, public exposure and other tactics. In Boston, a coalition of part-time faculty and their supporters has organized picket lines and agitational campaigns at area colleges that are particularly abusive exploiters of part-time faculty, and published a "Report Card" grading local colleges on their pay and benefits. This is a work

force that moves from job to job quite often, often holding several positions at the same time, so COCAL has looked for ways to draw on these work patterns to build nuclei of supporters on different campuses and build campaigns around broader issues that transcend the individual workplace.

Part-time teaching is still poorly paid work, but the campaign has led several colleges to raise their rates by hundreds of dollars a course, and a few to institute health coverage for at least some of their adjuncts.

Some Wobs in the restaurant industry have tried public agitation for paid sick days and shift meals – issues that seem quite reasonable to many customers. This sort of campaign takes the focus off of any one boss, and unifies workers in high-turnover situations who might stay in an industry even though they change individual jobs a lot.

An individual boss might be more willing to make some concessions if he knew he wouldn't be the only one bearing the costs, or might just want to divert campaigners' attention to more intransigent operations. Some Wobs have also been involved in an informal network of dish washers, who draw on their informal networks to salt jobs with class-conscious workers, and to make it clear through timely action that in the long run it doesn't pay to abuse workers.

Community labor organizing: There have been a number of initiatives in recent years, including Workers Centers where people can go to get training, learn how to organize, or respond to needs within their communities. Some centers focus on a particular immigrant group, offering information on legal rights and helping workers with grievances. Others target a particular indus-

try, such as an ongoing effort by high-tech workers in Washington state fighting deteriorating work conditions through a variety of tactics. The Youngstown Workers Solidarity Club was formed by union activists interested in building more effective ways to organize picket line support, and later developed into a network of labor activists who can share ideas and strategies to address problems on their jobs.

Cross-border solidarity. In an age when bosses continually threaten to ship jobs overseas, we need to explore ways to share information, develop joint campaigns, and support each other in our struggles. We've seen some union efforts in this direction, notable the United Electrical workers (UE) alliance with the FAT union in Mexico; we also need to develop direct worker-to-worker communication and solidarity that can transcend the limitations of the legal structures that seek to constrain us. This is especially urgent now that we're looking at war. A global economy requires a global working people's movement. Part of this must involve an understanding of the relative privilege Americans have in the world; rather than falling back on protectionism, we need to find ways to promote the equality of all working people around the world.

These are just a few of the ideas I hope to explore in this column over the coming months. As always, I'd love to hear your suggestions, your tales of solidarity in practice, your concerns, and your questions.

Is the Industrial Worker available in your bookstore? Why not take a bundle?

Groundswell of dissent encircles globe

From Auckland to Amsterdam, from Rio to Rome, millions of workers poured onto the streets Feb. 15 to voice their opposition to war on Iraq. Europe's demonstrations began that day in sub-zero temperatures in Russia and spread to dozens of cities across the continent. In Rome, up to three million workers swamped the city, marching to the Piazza San Giovanni where a giant banner proclaimed "Stop the war," above a blow-up of Picasso's *Guernica*.

In Mostar, Bosnia, Muslims and Croats united for an anti-war protest – the first such cross-community action in seven years. In Cyprus, Turks and Greeks marched together, briefly blocking a runway at a British airbase. In Tel Aviv, too, Israelis and Palestinians marched side by side against war.

In Berlin, the biggest peace demonstration seen for 20 years brought much of the

capital to a standstill. In France hundreds of thousands of workers marched through Paris and 50 other cities.

Around the world, protest organizers and police were swamped by unexpectedly large numbers. In Montreal, the turnout was so immense that thousands had not yet begun to march as the first contingents arrived at the rally point three kilometers away.

In New York City, where authorities refused to issue march permits, hundreds of thousands tied up midtown Manhattan as they struggled to find ways around police barricades to reach the rally site.

In London, a million demonstrators cheered the head of the Aslef rail union for his members' refusal to haul war cargo. International Longshore Workers Union activist Jack Heyman reminded the crowd that workers have the power to stop the war.



Hundreds of thousands through the streets of New York City. PHOTO: BRIAN BASGEN

Workers can stop war drive...

continued from page 1

A March 15 general strike of public sector workers is being organized as we go to press. The CGIL's call noted that peace is a precondition for eliminating economic disparities around the world. "Peace is therefore a choice, a responsibility taken up by the international community, a commitment which must be defended by unions, by the world of labor, by every working man and woman. This is the reason, for our no, with no ifs or buts, to the war in Iraq and to state our need instead for a policy of peace and justice in the Middle East, above all between Israel and Palestine."

Building workers to strike

While a growing number of Australian unions have pledged strike action in the event of war, the ACTU federation has said that its members will supply and transport ammunition and other supplies. In a series of statements, several state and federal labor leaders reiterated their unions' firm opposition to military action, but insisted they would take only symbolic actions against war – accepting government claims that such action would endanger soldiers' lives. Protecting these lives (and the lives of countless civilians) by refusing to transport them or their equipment to a war zone evidently is too practical a measure for such labor statesmen to contemplate.

However, other unions have pledged

more militant action. Western Australian unions have pledged industrial action across the state in the event of war, while the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union has said its members will immediately stop work on all Sydney building sites and join antiwar actions if the U.S. launches a war against Iraq.

130 million against war

As we go to press over 200 unions, from 53 countries on all five continents, representing more than 130 million members, have endorsed a joint statement rejecting a war in Iraq and calling on unions to organize opposition in every country. The appeal was initiated by US Labor Against the War, a growing coalition including at least five major national unions, three state labor federations, and many locals and labor councils.

So powerful has the movement become that the AFL-CIO has approved what the press is characterizing as its first-ever antiwar resolution, declaring: "The president [Bush] has not fulfilled his responsibility to make a compelling and coherent explanation to the American people and the world about the need for military action against Iraq at this time."

Unfortunately, that's about as good the resolution gets. The rest of it makes it clear that the AFL objects not to making war on our Iraqi fellow workers, but only to doing so without broader international support.

We can stop this war

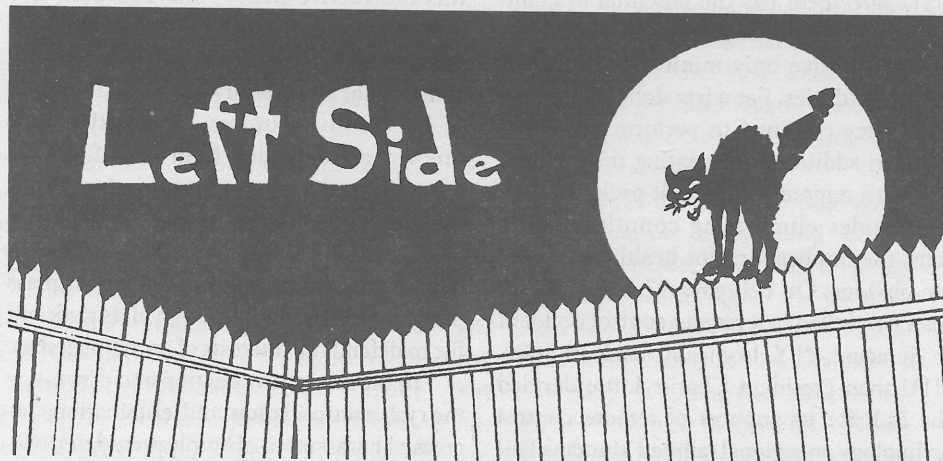
Clearly mass opposition has slowed the start of a war that has been in the works for months. But it seems clear that the Bush administration's determination to go to war is unshaken.

What can we as workers do to prevent this crime? Our ultimate weapon lies in the fact that it is we who do the world's work. If our fellow workers simply organized to refuse to manufacture or transport munitions and other war material for the bosses, they could not pursue their mad schemes.

Where workers are not sufficiently organized to wage a general strike, or to refuse war work, on-the-job actions could range from wearing buttons to distributing information at lunch to short stop-work meetings. In Monterey Bay, Calif., for example, activists are meeting with unions and other community organizations to build support for a community-wide strike in the event of war.

Such actions could offer an opportunity to exchange views with our fellow workers, and a sense of the possibilities inherent in our labor and our organization. From small steps we could build to larger ones, developing our realization of our own power as we deliver a powerful weapon to the employing class. As IWW songwriter Joe Hill wrote in "Workers of the World, Awaken":

If the workers take a notion,
They can stop all speeding trains;
Every ship upon the ocean
They can tie with mighty chains;
Every wheel in the creation,
Every mine and every mill,
Fleets and armies of the nation
Will at their command stand still.



"Throughout the twentieth century, the nineteenth century taboo on targeting and killing civilians has been eroding," according to Avishai Margalit, writing in the *New York Review of Books*. "In World War I, only 5 percent of the casualties were civilians. In World War II, the figure went up to 50 percent, and in the Vietnam War it was 90 percent." One of the principal objectives in any war is to demoralize the civilian population. To verify this simple little truth, one has only to read the Old Testament to see that terrorizing noncombatants has been a practice for centuries. Just ask any Lakota, Cheyenne about Wounded Knee or Sand Creek, for just two examples.

While Bushy Tail is chomping at the bit to have a go at Iraq, you know damn well that a lot of innocent Iraqi civilians are going to be bombed into Kingdom Come while the oil fields will be left unscathed. The excuse for dropping atom bombs on two Japanese cities was to bring the war to a close, but Japan was already throwing in the towel. The real reason was that Freedomland wanted to show the world that it had a brand new toy and nobody better mess with Uncle.

Freedomland's top spokesman for the global commercial interests is constantly mouthing off about human rights around the world, but upon closer scrutiny such concern is conspicuously selective. Where was he or any of his predecessors when Turkey invaded Cyprus, when Idi Amin was killing thousands in Uganda, or when Indonesia invaded East Timor – to mention just a few? Instead of intervening, Freedomland furnished all these depredations with armaments.

The truth is that not so long ago in Freedomland's glorious history, this great bastion of liberty was furnishing weaponry to 43 cruel dictators around the world. Talking about democracy, Freedomland was instrumental in deposing the duly elected president of Guatemala, who had nationalized the holdings of the United Fruit Company; the prime minister of Iran, who nationalized the British oil holdings; and the democratically elected president of Chile when he nationalized the copper mines. These heads of state were replaced with brigands like Agosto Pinochet, the Shah of Iran, and such – murderous cut-throats indeed – not to mention having at one time given support to Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. Birds of a feather indeed flock together! So much for all their mouthing about democracy. Small wonder that one wag of a bygone century quipped, "If elections changed anything, they would be made illegal."

As long as we who constitute the majority of this planet's population through our apathy permit the insignificant minority of our species to run the show, we shall keep enjoying more of the same.

Saddam recently challenged Georgie the Tush to a televised debate, but Georgie wisely would not have anything to do with the idea. Can you imagine Georgie without his speech writers standing up to a fast-talking Arab? Too bad... it would have been an interesting spectacle, and oodles of tension could have been alleviated in the process.

Perhaps Saddam would have put his foot in his big mouth as well. The entertainment potential would have been endless. Instead of armies destroying each other, if the heads of state would blather off at each other, the rest of us would be exposed to the reality of what pompous asses they are. Organize right and such a day, so long overdue, may come!

Recently some of our withholding taxes went down the drain when the Columbia spacecraft blew up upon entering the atmosphere, along with seven erstwhile astronauts. The mass media were awash with eulogies for the seven brave heroes. While I may sympathize with their families, your scribe could not take part in the mourning. After all, these seven should have been aware of the obvious risks entailed, as well as the questionable quality of government-contracted equipment.

So you will pardon me for sounding a bit callous, but I have been weeping for the millions of my fellow two-leggeds who around this globe are starving to death while each space probe spends billions of dollars shooting hardware into space. How much food would those billions buy? If Uncle Sammy, instead of dropping bombs on Baghdad, would drop food packages instead, things could be a little different. Instead of an embargo around those who Unkie didn't like, the Iraqi populace would laugh Saddam out of Iraq. He would probably unobtrusively make his exit, maybe even buying a yarmulke and migrating to Israel. The collective potential of our species could bring that about.

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

— C.C. Redcloud



Police herd protesters behind barricades; New York City. PHOTO: BRIAN BASGEN

New York City IWW Branch resolution against boss wars

We, the members of the New York City General Membership Branch of the IWW, condemn and oppose the continuing war against Iraq, as we condemn and oppose all the wars of capitalism.

We urge all workers to take peaceful action to protest and thwart the murderous policies of the US government and its allies, and we pledge our moral and material support to all workers who suffer for such action at the hands of the capitalist class.

And further, so that warfare may be abolished for all time, we invite all workers of the world to unite with us in One Big Union for the establishment of industrial democracy and the abolition of the wage system.

Our unbridled power

Snapshots of New York's Feb. 15 protest

BY BRIAN BASGEN

They walked gravely, arms carrying dead bodies. Trudging behind, a procession of the well-dressed, bulging white heads, blood covering pale hands pointing forward. Cymbals clashing announce our unity, as we hold for cars to pass at intersections.

Delegated to the sidewalk, this peaceful march contained, our steps sing our resolute refrain. Those standing to the side, we look at them eye to eye – asking for their hearts and minds. The rhythm begins seeping in, and the smiles paint the way. Hips moving, legs carry the load, and our movement enlists the bellboy and the tourist.

The sidewalks begin to creak and groan as we pass by small parks filled with marchers in overflow. The bicycle paths are the first subsumed – soon intersections know only one sign of stop and go: our feet coming or past. We find that these streets are ours to divide, and wave upon wave washes around cars in wait. Rolling down the windows, and we convince from frustration to exhalation,

the passengers of this great disturbance.

As we flow onto First Avenue, singing cheerfully, speaking warmly, our breath visible in the air, we notice barricades to either side – but what is up front? More barricades, and soon they pull in the steel behind us. We face the steely arms of barricade and cop, barking orders to leave the area. Standing becomes illegal. Move on, or be arrested.

As far as the eye can see, from 61st to our convergence on 51st, and backwards to the urban horizon, the streets are full – cops at every intersection in clusters of tens; the people in the six lanes between, penned up by the thousands. One thousand to one, and the police have full control.

But running around I see, our ranks are larger than their capacity! Off first, running to any road between, trying to join the mass at different points – but the cops have complete control of all roads inward. None shall pass. Sneaking by one contingent of cops, I'm caught. "What of freedom of assembly, the freedom to go as we please in a public

"Labor's Enemy is in the White House & Boardrooms, not in Iraq"

Hundreds of unionists, including Wobblies from across the Northeast, gathered at Grand Army Plaza with New York Labor Against the War, listening to speakers and joining FW Jim Crutchfield in song before marching toward the rally site a few blocks from the United Nations.

Marchers strained against police efforts to corral them onto sidewalks and behind steel barricades, eventually spreading out to fill streets for blocks in every direction.

PHOTO: JON BEKKEN

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PHOTO: BRIAN BASGEN

Merchant seamen face new blacklist

BY LIAM FLYNN

Merchant seamen have played a very progressive role in the struggle for democracy, even before the United States was formed. Seamen were shot down in the streets of Boston for protesting the Stamp Act in 1770. Seamen organized themselves to fight the slave-like conditions on ships and the exploitation they endured on land. The collusion of the ship owners and the government has always served in their mutual profit. Those who spoke out against those interests were, and still continue to be, eliminated from service.

Anti-fascist activists like Bill Bailey volunteered in the Spanish Civil War and rode the Liberty Ships during the World War II to carry arms to fight Hitler & Mussolini. Merchant Marine sailors lost more lives crossing the Atlantic and the Pacific than any military service. Their unprotected ships were easy prey for Nazi submarines. Nonetheless, the media often portrayed these courageous sailors as saboteurs and communist agents. Merchant Marines did not receive any benefits as veterans of WWII until the Fairness Act of 1997. Bailey survived the war only to be blacklisted from ever sailing again.

During the Korean War, anti-Communist hysteria helped U.S. Senator Magnoon push a bill calling on the Coast Guard to issue new seaman's documents to all U.S. sailors. Right wing leadership in the various seafarers' trade unions secretly turned over a list of left wing members.

In Bailey's words, "When you came to the Coast Guard for your new seamen's documents, if your name was on the list you were denied your new documents and handed a slip of paper stating that you were suspected of belonging to an organization whose program was not considered favorable to the best

interests of the United States." This blackballing of progressives best served shipping by destroying effective union organizing.

After the September 11 attacks, U.S. Senator Hollings used anti-terrorist hysteria to push a bill called the Port & Maritime Security Act. The Act calls for new background checks on sailors and for the issuance of a new ID card for all maritime workers. Labor organizations capitulated to the government with very little protest.

Recently, I was fired from my position as a Boatswain on a US Navy Merchant Marine ship. After almost three years, the Military Sealift Command has deemed me a security risk. I have been blacklisted from working any military vessels because of my past arrest record (without any convictions). President Bush must still be angry with me over yelling obscenities at his father during the last war with Iraq.

Given the U.S. aggression against Iraq, being laid off by the MSC is probably not the worst thing for me. Even though the number of progressive seaman has never been the same as before WWII. The ones who remain will be under close scrutiny for the sake of Homeland Security. Shipping companies are graciously accepting Port & Maritime Security grants from the government while reaping huge profits. The ship owners are also benefiting from unions being kept under the thumb of the government.

The continual loss of U.S. flag commercial shipping, has led my trade union, the Sailors' Union of the Pacific, to hope for any government-contracted ships. The fact that my union has signed non-strike contracts "in the name of national security" has damaged not only the integrity of international seafarers, but that of union workers worldwide. This has also muzzled any opinion within

place?" "No one can pass – public safety." But the street is totally empty. Public safety for the asphalt? For the trash on these tired streets? The cops push me out – safety from them, no doubt.

Running fast down to 68th, I manage across to 2nd Avenue. Can you believe my surprise – barricades there too, blocking more brothers and sisters from me! Holding them back from joining the procession down First, dividing our numbers to blind us from our awesome balance of power. We've filled this street too, neither sidewalk can hold! Caught within this DMZ of freedom's brutality; slipping past another barricade; claiming free press to a cop with ears concave.

Somehow, though, they have us marching in the opposite direction of our rally! Running through our great tidal wave, I weave by one hearty union procession, then children spinning antiwar propaganda and song, just past a troupe of dancers in play – finally to see a line of cops, shoulders together, preventing us from our assembly.

Up to 3rd Avenue I beguile my way, again to see we've completely filled the streets. En-

terprising fellows climb aboard newspaper stands, lampposts – anything at all – to see how gloriously we span! Many dispersed among our ranks start powerful slogans when tensions raise. We are packed into a corner, unable to pass; the cops refuse to let us through to our brothers and sisters awaiting – our solidarity.

"Whose streets?" a young woman near me asks. "Our streets!" we tell the cops. They've barricaded us up at 3rd and 57th, and we are packed in – immobile. The left wing here can be seen, briefly at times, scurrying about to sell newspapers. Papers in a press days old, papers for events already told. No one to speak – this awesome body, this great workers' mass, without mouth or eyes or collective mind. It is no time for words to win people over – actions only will create our victory.

The cops control us, preventing movement from one avenue to the next. While we fill one block, they bar us from the street of the next, allowing only the sidewalk to pass. There stepping onto the street is a criminal offense. A thousand to one, and we are herded like sheep away from our collective endeavor!

Enduring the depths of the cold, the threats of the police, the illegal action in whole – out onto the streets of New York we've come. The great range of humanity between us represents ideals throughout our nation, from artists to assembly line workers, students with professors to grandparents alongside teenagers. We surprised the world with our strength and diverse voice in a place worn cold with tragedy and patriotism. Today we stood a thousand to one, and this can be just the beginning.

our industry. Every worker's livelihood is vulnerable to a bellicose U.S. regime.

With the unstable economy, monetary necessity has most of us gripped to something we doubt every day. As marine transport workers, we face losing our livelihoods in the name of security – or losing our ability to organize the security of our livelihood.

Dockers clash with police

Hundreds of striking dock workers clashed with police outside European Union headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, March 7 during a protest against EU plans to permit shipping companies to replace union dock workers with their own employees.

The Associated Press reported that workers hurled fire crackers and stones at police guarding EU buildings, while police shot water cannon and tear gas to disperse more than 3,000 protesters, most from the northern seaport of Antwerp.

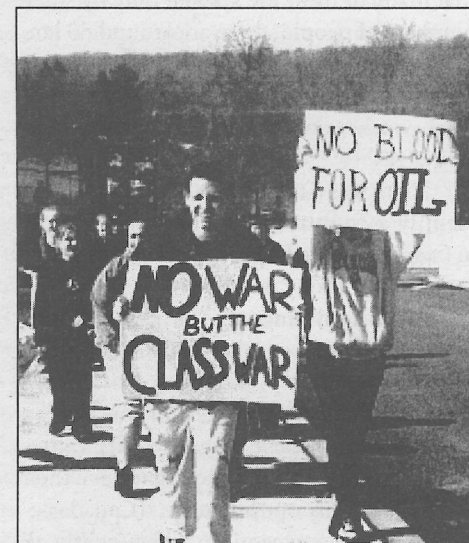
The Antwerp workers' day-long strike shut down Europe's second-largest port, in an advance taste of actions scheduled to hit ports across Europe.

Azteca scab hospitalized

An Azteca Foods scab was seriously injured Feb. 20, when his hand got caught in a narrow space between two conveyor belts.

The belts pulled Rodrigo Mina's arm in up above his elbow, and ground at his arm for several minutes before the belts were shut off. Workers had long complained about the lack of a safety guard around the belts to prevent this sort of accident.

UE representatives and strikers have visited Mina, who will never regain full use of the arm, to ensure that he knows his rights and extend him the solidarity he trampled underfoot by crossing their picket line.



Students walk out

Students walked out of hundreds of high schools and colleges across the United States March 5, holding marches and antiwar rallies outside government buildings and along busy streets.

Walk-outs were held at large universities, small liberal arts colleges, and rural high schools, including Great Valley High School in Frazer, Penn., where over 50 students joined the National Student Strike against the bosses' war. IWW members helped organize the event (pictured above), which included a boisterous march through school hallways.

Learning Organizing Lessons in Portland

INTERVIEW BY MORGAN MILLER

The IWW in Portland continues to be active despite recent stumbles. Portland has been focusing on two areas. First, building infrastructure, which lagged behind our rapid growth of the last year or two. Second, building solid Industrial Union Branches with a focus on industrial rather than one-shop organizing.

I sat down recently with two of the more active IWWs, FWs Little Pete and Ryan, and talked about workplace organizing, problems with NLRB certification elections and the need for new tactics in organizing workers.

M: Both of you are members of Industrial Union Branches which have had a great deal of activity in the last year. And despite union election defeats, branch and workplace activity continues. Pete, what's happening with IU540 right now?

Pete: IU540 is the Municipal Transport Workers' union and we have had a presence in the industry for well over two years now, primarily with bike messengers, some with drivers in the same day service industry. We also have an informal relationship with some cab drivers, some of whom involved in a cab strike a year ago.

There was a (IWW) strike at a company called Transerv Systems about six months ago. At this point we are working at building an industrial foundation across as many sectors of the local transportation industry as we can. We're approaching it by trying to build small groups of members within each shop, dealing with things such as independent contractor status, high turn over, to address the problems which has caused the mainstream labor movement to flounder.

Understand that this is an industry that organizing on a shop to shop basis through the National Labor Relations Board may be really hard to do. So we are drawing together strategies that approach the industry with strength and a "minority" unionist presence

and build to a majority. We are currently working on a magazine that we plan to plan to distribute to other courier, driver and cab drivers in the community in which we work, downtown, and to workers such as sympathetic receptionists, people we serve everyday. We hope to bring visibility to the working conditions of couriers and drivers and bring awareness and build alliances from the very people who pay the bills of the companies we work for.

Ryan: I'm a member of Industrial Organizing Committee 660, organizing in Retail and General Distribution Workers. Our membership is spread across three natural foods grocery chains and also some membership at a large bookstore chain. What we've been doing is establish contacts in natural foods stores, something that Portland has probably more per capita than any other city. We have the presence of national chains, Wild Oats, as well as some larger local chains. We are trying to get folks together and talk about what's going on in the industry and how that affects them...

Tonight we're having a meeting where we are voting on our by-laws and then in the next couple of weeks we will be doing more aggressive recruiting in the industry and in our shops. So it's not a lot of really hot activity or organizing in the job branches, but we are happy it's going that way because it has given us the time to focus on building a really strong committee amongst smaller groups of folks in different shops. So we're looking at retail from a larger perspective rather than focusing where the iron is hot.

M: Both of you were key to two NLRB elections, Transerv and Natures. The IWW lost both of those elections, if you had to do it over again, what would you do differently?

P: The National Labor Relations Board is the biggest obstacle that we had to recognition. I don't mean that with disrespect to well-intentioned workers who staff that



Portland Wobs celebrating the opening of their new union hall last year.

agency, I think it's a matter of the system itself. In my mind, I think that when we begin to approach organizing especially in that shop and this industry, the best way to approach tactics would be to lay out all the options to the workers and say "OK, this is the reality of these situations. You choose..."

The experience I had at Transerv leads me to believe that people are most likely to follow the established route even if they know its going to be less effective. That's because it sounds easier and in the end that failed us. I would approach the presentation of those options a little more strategically and with more clarity as to what it really means to go to the Board. And I also feel like I've learned a lot about strategies outside of the Board process, because the entire time that we were having any contact with the NLRB and the elections process, we were also engaging in shopfloor struggles which won direct benefits. I think if we had not been so diverted by the election, our efforts could have been much more effective...

What is important to note about our election is that we successfully organized a

majority within our shop, but the NLRB patched together a bargaining unit which included contractors throughout the state, most of whom only worked part-time for Transerv and many owned their own businesses. There were as many of these contractors as workers in the main shop and they diluted the vote.

Basically the NLRB is becoming obsolete in union recognition and we can see that in declining union membership in the U.S. We see it in industries such as ours where workers have attempted to organize through that process repeatedly and have continually failed. So we are now having some success organizing on a broader strategy focusing on industrial demands, starting with small committees which can grow into majorities in the industries.

R: Pete said my experience with the NLRB. If we hadn't gone to elections so quick, somewhere around four months after people had first met, we would have been able to win immediate gains in the store because we were already on that path...

We called management to an all-store meeting and produced our own agenda for the meeting. And as a result of numerous safety violations that were raised at that meeting management came up with a list of over 200 safety issues and began to deal with them on a systematic basis.

IU 660 was already doing things collectively; I feel that if we kept going with that energy we might have been able to look at things on an individual basis, issue by issue, and make progress there. Instead we went into an election and, like Pete said, all the energy went into the campaign. It's sort of like it was a promise that we were working for rather than something concrete that people could see working for them on a day to day basis.

It's really hard to sell retail workers on that (an election) because for the most part they aren't planning on staying in one particular job site for the remainder of their lives... (The problem) was that the election had been presented as a free ticket to get what we wanted. So I would say I wish we had never gone through the NLRB process. I think it is irrational to completely rule it out, but I think it should be at the very bottom level. We need to build the industry first.

M: Would you care to tell about what things you won? I thought both campaigns were quite amazing winning a lot of important demands outside of the elections.

P: I think this ties well into some of Ryan's comments. It's really important to recognize that beyond the obstacles of high turnover, potential independent contractor status or residency status, there is a problem when power is taken out of the hands of the workers.

Something I saw happen was we were building energy and momentum. People knew what the union was by doing it, by joining and struggling together. As soon as you are waylaid into that election process that energy stops. Then one side says one thing and the other side says the other and every-

continued next page

Organizing, language and the web

BY ERIC LEE

If we want our unions to grow, we have to recruit thousands of new members. Many of those new members will not speak English as their native language. If we want to use the web as a tool for organizing, we have to build web pages in languages other than English. That seems obvious, doesn't it?

We know that there are around 6,000 spoken languages in the world. While it's true that many of these are spoken only by small numbers of people, there are around 80 languages that are spoken by ten million people or more. A union movement that wants to reach workers needs to speak the workers' languages.

There was a time, once, when you could identify a country with a language. People in England spoke English, in France French, and so on. Today, nearly every industrial country is multilingual. The U.S. has millions of Spanish speakers, Canada has its French-speaking population, Britain has huge populations of speakers of South Asian and Eastern European languages. Yet unions in most countries continue to produce their web sites in only one language. (Canada being the notable exception, where nearly all the national web sites of unions are in both English and French.)

Even some important international web sites of the labour movement, such as global-unions.org, which is supposed to be the official web site of all the unions in the world, appear in English only. The web site of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions appears in only three languages (English, French and Spanish).

Often the languages chosen reflect the organization's funding rather than the actual number of speakers – hence the rather large number of international union web sites which include Swedish as one of a handful

of languages. A study done by a team headed by Art Shostak, author of the book *Cyber Unions*, found that only one U.S. national union – AFSCME – had created a Spanish-language section of its web site. (It appears that the UAW is about to launch such a Spanish-language web site as well.) At a recent conference I attended in Chicago, the question came up as one local unionist pointed out that his union had created some pages on their web site in Vietnamese and Bosnian.

A century ago, the IWW did pioneering work in multi-lingual union organising. Many of its greatest moments came in building coalitions of workers who spoke a wide range of languages – such as during the great Lawrence strike, when no two speakers at a rally would address the crowd in the same language. At its peak, the Wobblies were producing newspapers in many different languages spoken by immigrants, thereby reaching out far beyond those skilled, English-speaking workers who were already organized in the craft unions of the AFL.

With their willingness to speak to workers in their own language, the respect they showed to different cultures and traditions, the Wobblies were able to reach out to Scandinavian mine workers in Minnesota and Italian textile workers in Massachusetts. That tradition is reflected today on the IWW web site which contains material in at least a dozen languages.

Maintaining union publications in more than one language can be incredibly expensive. Holding conferences in more than language is probably out of the question for all but the richest of unions. But running a web site in more than one language, particularly if volunteer translators can be found, is actually feasible. To test this idea, we discussed at LabourStart the possibility in early 2001 of moving beyond an English-only global



online news service.

Initially, Dutch and Norwegian sites were set up and a certain pattern began to emerge. These web sites were maintained by committed activists who did not translate from the English, but instead maintained their own autonomous sites. Within a few months, seven other languages were added – and today LabourStart also appears in Spanish, French, Portuguese, Italian, Swedish, Turkish and even Esperanto. (The last of these is made up of material translated from other languages, done by a team of volunteer translators in the U.K.) Meanwhile, web sites of much larger and better-funded bodies continue to appear in only one language, usually English.

How do unions move beyond single-language web sites? First, use volunteers. People are often eager to help get material out in their own languages, if only we ask them to do so. Second, want it to happen. If you believe that all languages (and peoples) are of equal value, demonstrate this in your publications and web sites.

Unions have been slow to follow LabourStart's example, leaving open a gap for innovative unions that would dare to take up the challenge of creating websites that could be read by people for whom English is not their mother tongue. In this, as in so many other things, the IWW can once again fill a gap and set an example.

Eric Lee is the editor of the LabourStart web site, author of *The Labour Movement and the Internet: The New Internationalism* (Pluto Press, 1996), and an IWW member in the United Kingdom.

Australian unions revive shorter hours campaign

Victorian unions once led the world on reasonable hours, but now have the second longest working hours in the OECD. The VTHC is calling on unions to mark Labour Day by reviving the fight for a shorter work week. "We should remember that this day commemorates the struggles of Victorian workers in the 1850s to achieve the 8 hour day," VTHC secretary Leigh Hubbard said, urging unions to demand "a balance between work, recreation and rest."

Construction workers have presented a claim for a 36-hour work week, in the form of six additional holidays each year. Currently, construction workers often put in six 10-hour days a week; the CFMEU union says workers have said their key objective is winning weekends off.

A recent study found that nearly 40 percent of Australians work overtime, and more than 700,000 work in excess of 50 hours a week. Meanwhile, productivity gains in the last month were large enough to finance an additional month's leave for all workers.

While the government claims workers need the extra money from working over-

time, a union-sponsored study found that many families received no real increase in income from the extra hours worked, as growing numbers of workers are forced into unpaid overtime.

Twenty years ago, Australian workers officially won the 38-hour week. "Two decades on and we have millions of workers in

FIGHT for SHORTER HOURS



the country spending more like 48-60 hours a week at work, with more than a third of the workforce spending more than 45 hours a week at work," Hubbard said. "It is time for a new campaign to bring about a balance between work and leisure time."

On April 21, 1856, stonemasons working at the University of Melbourne marched to Parliament House to press their claim for an eight hour working day, ultimately winning a 48-hour week. A victory procession was held May 12; the first of what became annual Labour Day celebrations.

about management issues. So someone politely raised their hand and observed that when we agreed to come to this meeting we agreed to discuss our issues first. So we're not going to stay. The boss said "No, no, that wasn't the agreement. We feel it would be a gesture of good faith if you would let us talk about our issues first, then we'll get to yours."

We replied that our gesture of good faith was showing up, like we said we would. That's what we agreed to, and that's what we negotiated for. So you have a gesture of good faith from us. The Boss said, "So are you saying that you're going to leave if we don't talk about your issues first?" Somebody else said, could we have a minute to talk about it? With you outside of the room?

The bosses looked a little perplexed and threw little glances at each other, said OK and left the room. We talked for a couple of minutes and then management came back. They said "So are you all going to leave if we don't talk about your issues first?" They were met with dead silence. Management said fine and started talking to us. We came out of there with an agreement to get commission reports.

We came out of that room knowing that, after them dominating us and always having the last word, the workers finally stood together and it was very clear how effective that really was. After that, people saw the largest paychecks they had ever seen in their entire working history there. There was a guy who had been there for eight years who had never made the amount he made after the agreement. Some folks saw \$1-2 more an hour on their commissions. Suddenly everybody's wages jumped.

R: The meeting we held at Natures was much the same. Everybody came out of it feeling much stronger. At one point the store manager couldn't even speak, he had to let the regional human resources director stand up and try and field everything.

And when people realized that yes, they could bring things to the table, more than just passive concerns, and that management had to listen to them right then and there. I think that was one of the most strongest union activities that we had at Natures.

Natures' workers won a 50% discount on products, as compared to 20%, which is the industry norm. Other folks who had been overdue on raises got them. While this might seem like management was trying to butter up people who might be pro-union, to win them over, at the time people realized that was what was going on, but they were gains we won none the less...

We came up with a list of around 200 safety violations... 80 to 90 percent of those

Take Back Your Time Day

A news conference is being organized to formally launch Take Back Your Time Day on April 6th, the 70th anniversary of the passage of the 30-hour workweek bill by the U.S. Senate. 30 Hours - 70 years ago! And now, most of us can't get it down to 40.

Several unions are joining the IWW in endorsing this campaign. The AFL-CIO is contributing material on labor issues to the TBYTD handbook, and a high-ranking staffer sits on its steering committee.

The Central Labor Body of Duluth, Minnesota, endorsement resolution notes "the vital importance of time as it relates to workers. The past 20 years have witnessed serious time erosion among working people. The 40 hour week, for which our brothers and sisters struggled in the early 20th century, is quickly becoming a rarity."

For information on this coalition, including an endorsement form, visit them on the web at www.timeday.org.

Industrial Worker editor Jon Bekken will be among the speakers at an April 19 forum for activists in Boston's low-income community. The Boston Area Shorter Worktime Network is also preparing a campaign against U.S. Labor Department proposals to slash overtime protections.

complaints were dealt with in a pretty prompt manner. These were things people had been complaining about all the time, through the normal channels, through the safety committee and through direct contact with management, but had been set aside...

You can imagine how management felt when all of a sudden there are 20 workers wearing IWW buttons (out of 80 workers) in the store and they are calling meetings and setting agendas. And we got a lot of safety issues taken care of, no OSHA (U.S. federal safety commission), no Bureau of Labor, just a bunch of people standing together in one room.

M: Any other recommendations for IW readers? The IWW is doing a lot of organizing right now, what would you recommend to people?

P: The things in the front of my mind right now are build Industrial Union Branches and build them strategically. Build them with people who are responsible and committed, who understand what they are doing and can view building a working class union in the long term. Build them across workplaces. That's where I see us being effective in Portland.

Being strategic, I mean not bringing in everyone you can, but find the people who are going to be effective and are going to be a solid core. You build from there. A big piece

Slaver Ready

Temp agency Labor Ready has sued the Anti-Displacement Project in Springfield, Mass., after the A-DP accused it of subjecting workers to "modern-day slavery." Labor Ready claims the "Slaver Ready" web site (www.slaverready.com) infringes its trademark and is likely to confuse customers unsure whether they are renting temporary workers or buying slaves.

The "Slaver Ready" site gives temp workers a space to voice their grievances, including unpaid hours, transportation fees, and discriminatory hiring practices. The A-DP is also working with unions to open a center for low-wage workers which would provide work force development opportunities.

Stephen Dondley, the A-DP's jobs organizer, said that Labor Ready is using "bully tactics" to try and get the Anti-Displacement Project to take the site down. "This is what happens when you go to battle with corporations which have deep pockets."

"Labor Ready boasts that it employs 16,500 people in Massachusetts," adds LR worker Archie Arguello. "But it's not much to boast about when you realize that these jobs result in the gross exploitation of the people who hold them."

of that is looking to view things industrially, look at building a floor of industrial demands that you can start organizing around. I think that's an especially effective way of looking at it. Setting basic demands and gathering committees in workplaces to fight for those demands.

R: I would say the same thing, build strong committees and branches within an industry with people aren't necessarily so focused on going in and starting organizing in a particular job right away. We need the discipline to put together a good committee that is representative of many different voices and different aspects of their industry to build industry wide demands. Then you go into the organizing in the workplace. So folks know there is a network of people behind them who not only can offer support but can also offer education and different viewpoints as well.

I also believe that as a union we need to start talking more on some level with people throughout the union about the kind of organizing we are doing. Because we are learning a lot of things here in Portland and folks are learning things elsewhere. And it seems only natural that we should be sharing them. So on that end, we are setting up a IU660 Retail Workers e-mail list serve. If anybody reading this is interested in getting on this list send me an e-mail at iu660@riseup.net.



Portland Municipal Transport Workers (IWW) members picketing Transerv.

body tries to be more convincing and charming than the other. It's not empowering, it's not encouraging. At the same time the people who just coming into contact with the union for the first time, they are not seeing the reality of what you're creating... As opposed to seeing that culture of solidarity where there is a point where all the boss' lies can mean nothing... because they see the reality of what's happening.

Some of the most fun we had at Transerv was at a point of real struggle in the shop. We had been butting heads with management for a while over commission reports, something management refused to acknowledge. We had been engaging in brief work stoppages, we would shut them down for 15 or 20 minutes. We petitioned them and we pushed them in all sorts of ways we thought were reasonable. We were aggressively talking to all the workers in the shop who were not involved, as to what was going on, what we were up to. And the commission reports were really a unifying thing. In an industry in which you work on commission and don't get any accounting from management, it certainly became suspicious. Especially when we started tracking the work we did and workers were repeatedly coming up short. When we could document it of course there would be no problem being reimbursed because it was there on paper. Management told us it would be a cold day in hell before that would ever change.

So we began to put some pressure on them. And finally we came to them and said we refuse to come to any of your staff meetings unless you hear some of our issues. They said fine and quit having the meetings. They then had to have a meeting and we said fine. We'll come to your meeting, if our issues are discussed first, then you can have the floor as long as you like.

So the silver-tongued boss comes into the meeting the next morning and starts to talk

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Steel retirees losing health benefits

During World War II, CIO unions made the decision to seek benefits rather than wage increases. Wage hikes were prohibited by wartime regulations, health care and pension benefits were not. Soon after the end of the war, the NLRB legitimized this strategy by characterizing bargaining over pensions as a mandatory subject of bargaining.

In this way the union movement ended up abandoning the idea of national health insurance and committed itself to obtaining health care and pension benefits only for its own members.

What union leaders overlooked was that this strategy assumed endless prosperity and U.S. domination of world markets for products such as automobiles and steel. When imported autos and steel began to take away market share from companies headquartered in the United States, a crisis presented itself. Declining market share meant shutdowns and layoffs. Shutdowns and layoffs meant that the number of retirees relative to the number of workers currently employed increased steadily.

Today there are six retirees for every steel worker still producing surplus value. This is the heart of the present steel crisis. The so-called unfair advantage enjoyed by foreign steel companies is that they function in civilized countries that provide publicly funded national health insurance.

Now 95,000 Bethlehem Steel retirees have lost their health and pension benefits as part of a buy-out by International Steel Group. While United Steelworkers President Leo Gerard denounced the cut-off as a "disgrace," the union actually supported the deal.

As *Business Week* put it, Gerard "has put into motion a drastic industry restructuring almost entirely on the backs of his members. He is allowing the merged companies to dump most of the enormous pension and retiree health-care costs that weigh down an industry with 600,000 retirees — and only 124,000 active workers. It's the ultimate

irony that after a long history of bitter clashes with management, it has taken a labor leader to salvage what's left of Big Steel."

The cutoff of retirees at Bethlehem is a repeat of the collapse of LTV Steel, which eliminated pension and medical benefits for 85,000 retirees, widows and dependents in December 2001.

ISG then bought up LTV plants in Indiana and Cleveland — signing union contracts that allowed it to axe nearly half the work force, eliminate retiree benefits, and abandon pensioners to the bankrupt federal government bail-out program.

The Steelworkers union supported ISG's Bethlehem buy-out, arguing that the alternative was to see the plants go non-union.

USWA President Gerard has been travelling the country fulminating about foreign steel stealing American jobs. But ultimately the USWA has no one to blame for the present crisis but itself.

The so-called unfair advantage enjoyed by foreign steel companies is that they function in civilized countries that provide publicly funded national health insurance.

Janitors fired for wobbling job

BY CURTIS VAUGHAN

Seven janitors were fired Feb. 14 for holding a one-day protest by Allied Building Services, which contracts janitorial services at Placer Center in downtown Bellevue, Washington.

The janitors were fed up with the abuses to which they were constantly subjected by management. So they decided to walk of the job for one night Feb. 13, promising to renew work the next evening. The next day they were informed that they were fired and given final pay.

Allied Building Services is the largest non-union janitorial service in the Puget Sound area, employing some 500 janitors. ABS employees make \$7 to \$8.50 per hour with no benefits; union janitors in the region make \$8.95 to \$10.25 with full benefits.

SEIU local 6 has taken up weekly picketing of Placer Center and other ABS jobs, getting a decent response from passersby.

Placer Center is owned by Equity Office Properties — one of the nation's largest owners of commercial real estate. The picketing has upset Equity, which has called in the police on several occasions. But the police have found that their hands are tied as picketing is still legal.

Day laborers seek job rights

Day laborers from across the U.S. recently participated in drafting proposed federal legislation to end many of the industry's worst abuses. The Day Laborers' Fairness and Protection Act, developed through the work of grass roots organizations rather than special interests or lawyers serving them, seeks the creation of day laborers centers, along with protections of worker's rights.

Day laborers often get harassed as they wait on street corners and parking lots until potential employers hire them on for the day. Worse, they often don't get paid, are asked to work in unsafe conditions, or receive wages far below prevailing wages for the work. Day laborers hired through agencies or other intermediaries risk similar abuses, vulnerable as all temporary workers are to exploitation. Among the worst culprits is Labor Ready, which often pays substandard wages, does not pay for all working hours, refuses overtime pay, and, like other day labor rackets, blacklists those who complain.

The act would prohibit day labor agencies from charging for transportation to the job, deducting fees for health and safety equipment from workers' pay, or charging fees for cashing paychecks. Informed consent would be required from day laborers asked to work with hazardous materials.

The legislation would also restrict agencies from sending a day laborer to a site where

there's a labor dispute underway.

The National Day Labor Organizing Network held discussions at 35 locations across the country where day laborers discussed abuses they encountered and revised the legislation. Among the proposals from laborers were workers centers that would initially be set up in five states, in which services such as legal support, job training and English language classes would be offered.

Bread and Roses

Reclaiming the soul of the labor movement

BY GARY COX

Bodies were in desperate need of "bread" in January 1912, when the IWW was called to help the workers who walked out of the cold, dusty textile mills in Lawrence, Mass. James Oppenheim was inspired to write the poem "Bread and Roses" when he saw young mill girls carrying a banner in a parade which read, "We want bread, and roses too." In Oppenheim's poem he writes, "Hearts can starve as well as bodies; give us bread, but give us roses!"

When Mother Teresa came to the United States to receive an honorary degree, she was asked her general impression of this country. She replied, "This is the poorest place I have ever been in my life." She was not talking about material wealth, obviously. She was observing what corporate capitalism has done to our soul. Corporations sell us "roses," plastic roses made in China.

I grew up in the '30s and '40s, just as the smell of real roses was dying. The majority still made a living on 80-acre farms, mom-and-pop groceries, hardware, drug, candy, ice cream and clothing stores. As a young man, I worked with my wife's uncle. He and I built houses from the foundation up and watched young families move into them and make them homes. We built houses to the best of our ability and put our creative mark on each one. I still feel good when I drive by one.

When the corporations began building tract houses, I left the trade. The "roses" were gone and my craft AFL union didn't have enough vision to protest. The mom-and-pops and the family farms are gone, bulldozed by mega-corporations and chain stores. The concept of work as an expression of creativity, of producing needed goods and services with our labor, was bulldozed along with them. Corporations have fouled the word "work" as they have fouled the air, water and

Farewell, Fellow Worker

MICHAEL MCLAUGHLIN

Clydeside Wobbly Michael McLaughlin recently passed away suddenly. Fellow Worker McLaughlin, aged 34, a computer technician at Caledonian University, was a committed unionist, season ticket holder at Parkhead, and AF member, as well as a member of Clydeside IWW Branch.

The Clydeside branch, with Michael as one of its keenest instigators, has experienced problems getting established. Hopefully, together with the more stable Edinburgh IWW, we can continue to create an alternative for workers and trade unionists in Scotland.

As a tribute to Michael, the branch sent a wreath to his family, who conducted the funeral February 8th in Donegal. A big loss for the IWW and for the anarchist movement in Scotland. It is up to us to organise more effectively as the best way to remember Michael and what he believed in.

Debra Bernhardt memorial

Debra Bernhardt was a life-long activist, former head of the Tamiment Library labor archive, co-author of *Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives, A Pictorial History of Working People in New York*, and a leader in preserving and disseminating workers' history.

Plans are afoot to place a bench dedicated in her name near the newly installed plaques about labor's history in Union Square, New York, this May; in honor of Debra's democratic organizing style, contributions of no more than \$5 are being solicited to cover the cost. Checks payable to Rachel Bernstein ("for Debra bench" in the memo line) can be sent to her at Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, 70 Washington Square South, New York NY 10012.

"hearts" of this country.

In my opinion, we become more fully human when we are able to contribute freely to our community with whatever talent we have to offer and that contribution is appreciated. It was no accident that the concept of "bread and roses" came from a workers' movement, or that the IWW, the only union to demand industrial democracy, understood the significance of that banner in Lawrence. Corporate capitalism understood it also, and

tried desperately to bulldoze the IWW.

The demands of the AFL-CIO for ever more wages left me cold 35 years ago, and I joined the IWW — the only union that understands that "hearts can starve as well as bodies."

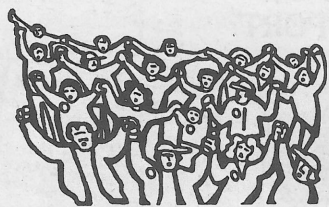
How can the AFL-CIO, which has billions invested in Wall Street, concern itself with "roses" for workers? A real dilemma, eh what? How can they

protest when your job gets shipped to China? Stock goes up when workers get screwed.

The only democracy corporate America will tolerate is to "allow" us to choose one of two candidates it has chosen for us once every four years.

A real democracy could make the "roses" grow. We would have a voice in what gets produced and how it gets produced. We would have a voice in clear cutting, strip mining or drilling ourselves out of existence. We can only be fully human if we are self-directing.

If we want to become a factor in our own futures, we should reread the banner of those young ladies from Lawrence. Many of us have so much material junk we have to rent storage sheds to hold it. Then why do we feel so unfulfilled? It is time to drag out that old banner and kindle fire in starving hearts. We don't need more junk. We need to gain control of our lives.



ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF WORKER ORGANIZING

June 27 - June 29, 2003 in New York City

Join us for a conference on alternative forms of labor organizing in New York City! What do we mean by alternative forms of labor organizing, and why talk about it now? It is no secret that the American labor movement is facing a crisis. Labor law makes it difficult to organize, even in the most ideal conditions. Entrenched bureaucracies dominate too many of our unions. Even when a workplace is successfully organized, too often the contracts leave intact the bosses' ability to reorganize work and shut down the workplace.

We need to think about alternative forms of worker organizing — forms that do not rely on NLRB certification and that build workers' power on the job. In recent years, we have seen the emergence of workers centers, minority unions, community-based organizing and other attempts by workers to organize themselves outside of the traditional framework.

We see worker self-organizing as the best way to build a strong labor movement. We think that many groups of workers around the country have been experimenting with these new ideas. The purpose of getting together in New York at the end of June is to share the experiences of groups of workers who use alternative models of organizing, please join us!

In solidarity,

Staughton Lynd, Manny Ness & Alexis Buss

For more info: juneconference@iww.org or 215-222-1905

Books for Rebellious Workers

You Have No Country!

Workers' Struggle Against War by Mary Marcy. This book collects *International Socialist Review* editor Marcy's penetrating analysis of the consequences of war, and her perspective on the struggle against World War I. The *Review* was suppressed by the U.S. government in 1918, largely as a result of these writings.

77 pages, \$5.00



May Day: A Short History of the International Workers' Holiday 1886-1986

by Philip S. Foner

This is the story of May Day! -- a holiday born in the USA a hundred years ago and since 1890 celebrated by working people the world over. In this short history, Philip Foner clarifies the dramatic origins of labor's May Day and recounts many highlights of May Day celebrations through the years. Here is a story with a multitude of heroes and heroines who protest the injustices of their time as they unite to demand shorter hours of labor and a world

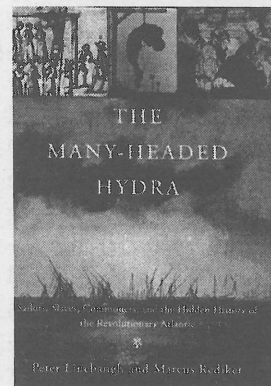
free from imperialist war. In a stirring panorama, labor's May Day banners affirm the struggle for a better life now and the bright promise of a future still to be won.

183 pages, \$7.00

Comrades and Enemies by Zachary Lockman

Comrades and Enemies explores the evolution of the Arab and Jewish labor movements under British colonial rule, showing how these communities interacted and helped to shape each other. While there were always tensions in the relationship, Lockman shows that the conventional story of unremitting conflict is a myth and that there is a history of labor cooperation that must be reclaimed and built upon.

440 pages, \$15.00



The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic

by Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker

With the explosion of trade and colonization in the early seventeenth century, a vast landless workforce was born to labor in the emerging global economy. They were a rebellious class, with their own dreams of freedom. Howard Zinn describes this as "a marvelous book, ... recaptur[ing] the lost history of resistance to capitalist conquest on both sides of the Atlantic."

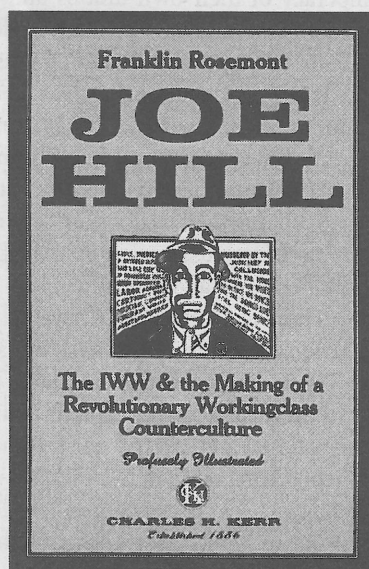
433 pages, hardcover, \$18.00

Joe Hill: The IWW and the Making of a Revolutionary Workingclass Counterculture

by Franklin Rosemont.

"In Franklin Rosemont, Joe Hill has finally found a chronicler worthy of his revolutionary spirit, sense of humor, and poetic imagination. This is no ordinary biography. It is a journey into the Wobbly culture that made Joe Hill and the capitalist culture that killed him. But as Rosemont suggest in this remarkable book, Joe Hill never really dies. He will live in the minds of young rebels as long as his songs are sung, his ideas are circulated, and his political descendants keep fighting for a better day." — Robin D. G. Kelley

639 pages, \$17.00



Labor History

Strike! by Jeremy Brecher. A history of American workers' struggle from a working-class viewpoint, arguing that class upsurges are based in everyday life and rank-and-file initiative. While this edition is somewhat less optimistic than the original, it still provides rich detail of workers' rebellions throughout American history, and abundant evidence for the proposition that workers are fully capable of making our own history, should we set our minds to the task. \$22.00

The CIO's Left-Led Unions Edited by Steven Rosswurm. In 1949 and 1950 the CIO expelled several left-wing unions. This collection explores the history of eleven of these unions, addressing the role of race and government policy in shaping unionism, the impact of anti-communism on race relations and working conditions, and the impact of the expulsions on the labor movement. Several of these provided an important counterpoint to more bureaucratic tendencies. \$10.00

Books for Kids

Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type

by Doreen Cronin with illustrations by Betsy Lewin. Farmer Brown thinks it's odd when he hears typing sounds coming from the barn. Click, clack, MOO. Click, clack, MOO. Clickety, clack, MOO. But his troubles really begin when his cows start leaving him notes. First they demand better working conditions...and then they stage a strike, engaging in concerted activity with the chickens.

Recommended Age Range: 3 to 8 \$15.00

Writings by Wobblies

Upon the Backs of Labor: Unruly Working Class Essays

by Arthur J. Miller

A compilation of 18 essays by Arthur J. Miller, editor of *Bayou La Rose*; a miner, pipefitter, trucker and berry picker; and one of the most prolific writers of the present-day IWW. Themes include working class environmentalism, revolutionary unionism, and shorter work hours. Miller writes in the introduction, "If working people are to liberate themselves from the exploitation of the employing class, one of the things they must do is to relearn the art of self-expression. For to depend on others to completely speak for us workers, means to limit our needs to the interpretation of those that cannot truly understand the realities of our lives." 80 pages, \$8.00



Harlem Glory

by Claude McKay.

This semi-autobiographical novel by the renowned Jamaican poet and novelist evokes the life of Harlem in the Great Depression and New Deal, capturing the exuberant clash of social movements and ideologies, acutely sensitive to the vitality and diversity of Black culture and drawing on McKay's experiences in the IWW and the socialist movement. 112 pages, \$10.00

IWW Literature

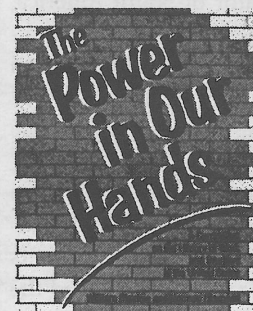
Little Red Songbook 36th Edition

103 labor songs to fan the flames of discontent from around the world, with music. Includes songs by Joe Hill, Billy Bragg, Anne Feeney, Utah Phillips, and more. \$10.00

One Big Union An introduction to the structure, methods and goals of the Industrial Workers of the World. \$2.00

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

Labor Education



The Power in Our Hands

by William Bigelow and Norman Diamond. Curriculum materials for middle and high school teachers on the history of work and workers in the United States,

including units on workers rights, exploitation, scientific management, the Homestead and Lawrence strikes, racial conflict and the labor movement, labor songs, and more. Includes lesson plans, hand-outs for students, and other resources. 184 pages, \$18.00

Organizing

The New Rank and File

by Staughton and Alice Lynd

With this inspiring collection of interviews with working class organizers from many facets of the international labor movement, the Lynds demonstrate the type of grassroots approach that we need if we are to build the strength to win against a global, wealthy and well-armed foe. Directed at two groups — rank-and-file workers and young people entering the labor movement — this book directly takes on the ideology of business unionism and offers hope and ideas for democratic, solidarity unionism. 262pp \$16.00

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Venezuela: Why the General Strike and Regime Change don't fit

BY PETER S. MOORE

The failure of the Venezuelan general strike after three months and the aborted coup in April 2002 show why unions should think twice before they become politicians.

For the past four years, the Venezuelan labour movement has fought Venezuelan President Chávez Frías, elected in December 1998 with 56 percent of the vote.

Assuming the mantle of Simon Bolívar, the legendary Liberator of South America, he convoked a National Constituent Assembly to rewrite the Venezuelan constitution which, in turn, gave him the right to issue 49 decrees (and counting) that bypass the National Assembly.

Chávez was re-elected for a six-year term under the new constitution in 2000. He admires Cuba's dictator Fidel Castro and Brazil's leftist president "Lula." He also revived the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries to get a better price for oil exports. Some of the additional revenues went to necessary social programs, such as health and education, targeted at his strongest supporters, Venezuela's urban poor. Meanwhile, the Venezuelan economy is shrinking, despite additional oil revenues.

At the same time, the middle and upper classes, including the well-paid workers of the petroleum workers union and the Venezuelan workers' federation (CVT - Central Venezolana de Trabajadores) began to object to his rule. Strictly speaking, Chávez is no friend of organized labour. He has decreed against public service workers' right to union representation, restricted the right to organize and bargain collectively, founded a government-controlled union federation, hired scabs and laid off more than 3,000 striking petroleum workers. The American Federation of Labor, backed by government National Endowment for Democracy money, denounced Chávez as a strongman, abusing his power to sweep aside independent organizations capable of challenging his rule.

"This response should bring the head of state to make the decision he needs to make about Venezuela's crisis - and that is none other than to leave, quit, so Venezuela can restore confidence, peace and calm," said Carlos Ortega, president of the Venezuelan Workers Confederation and spokesperson for the opposition umbrella group, the Democratic Coordinator (la Coordinadora Democrática).

The Venezuelan political climate is polarized and the language is harsh, bordering on the hysterical. Chávez minces no words when he speaks of the opposition, especially when they attempt to recapture national symbols such as the words of his hero, the Liberator Simon Bolívar, to further their cause. In his speech marking the fourth anniversary of his political brainchild, the Bolívar Plan, Chávez said: "I repeat it once again, and above all I repeat it today, 'Damned be the soldier that turns his gun on his people!'"

Belgian managers seized to protest plant closing plans

Union activists held six Cockerill Sambre managers captive for several hours Feb. 17 to protest a decision by parent company Arcelor to freeze investment at the steel plant, a move which threatens over 2,000 jobs.

Some 50 activists rushed into a company meeting in eastern Liege, Belgium, and refused to let top managers leave. Arcelor, the world's largest steelmaker, announced Jan. 24 that it is freezing investment at four of its least-profitable blast furnaces in Europe. The Cockerill Sambre plant is expected to shut down its blast furnaces by 2006.

Before the occupation, 6,000 workers staged a one-day strike against the plans. Anger increased after Arcelor CEO Guy Dolle said in a newspaper interview that plans to close the Liege furnace were "irreversible."

I repeat once again, and above all I repeat it today, given that a group of insurgents, of saboteurs, of civil and military terrorists have wanted to use this phrase as they wish to defend their bastard interests that go against the interests of the Republic."

The opposition's rhetoric is equally fierce. "Faced with this new aggression, we will further deepen and radicalize our struggle, making the social mobilization even more active and combative as well as redoubling our strength to avoid the worsening of the social, political and economic ruin of the country and to drag the government toward an electoral, peaceful, and democratic end to the now unbearable crisis of governance affecting Venezuela. Let no one mistake: these arrest orders, these persecutions, these bombs and assassination attempts are not demonstrations of strength by officialdom. On the contrary, they are pathetic evidence of their weakness," declares the opposition web site, Coordinadora Democrática.

The opposition nearly won their war on Chávez April 9-14, 2002. The state monopoly oil company's employees and the national chamber of commerce called a general strike to protest Chávez's replacement of the oil company's board of directors. A violent clash on April 11, which killed 10 opposition protesters and injured 110 others, led to a military coup, backed by the strikers, both business and labour. But the coup disintegrated when the inexperienced new president, Pedro Carmona, dissolved the National Assembly, frightening his moderate and military allies, who forced him out and returned Chávez to power. This reversal embarrassed the U.S. government into retracting their swift recognition of the usurper, further souring relations between the two countries. Venezuela provides the United States with an estimated 13 percent of its oil imports.

Naively, the workers and the business elites thought they could try the same tactic twice. On December 2, the petroleum workers launched another general strike to demand early elections. The chambers of commerce and financial sector backed the strike, sending their workers home. Chávez hung grimly on as oil exports fell from over three million barrels per day to barely 400,000.

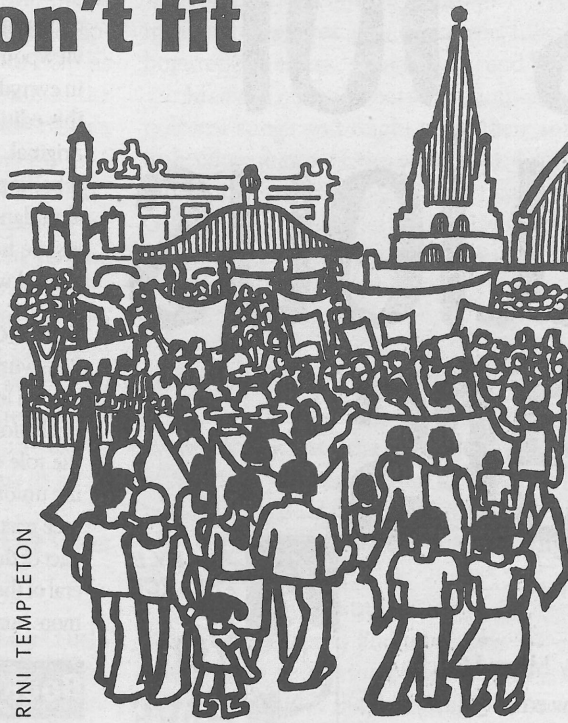
One reason he has been able to resist the strike is that the informal sector, believed to be about 40 percent of the Venezuelan economy, is where many of his supporters work. They live day-to-day already. The jitters the middle class and elite are feeling as the economy slows down is what poor Venezuelans face every day. More important than support from the poor, though, is that this time Chávez has strong military support.

The general strike has polarized the country and damaged the economy. The poor are creating organizations known as Bolivarian Circles to make demands, orga-

US boss guilty of slavery

The owner of a clothing factory in American Samoa has been convicted of what prosecutors called "modern-day slavery." Kil Soo Lee was found guilty of abusing more than 200 workers from Vietnam and China and other crimes including money laundering and extortion. He was accused of ordering beatings for disobedient employees, starving workers or threatening them with deportation if they complained.

Lee owns the Daweooosa Samoa company, which made clothes for the JC Penney chain and other retailers before it closed. Workers paid thousands of dollars to gain employment at the factory, but once there, they were effectively enslaved.



nizing marches to defend Chávez, convoking constitutional study groups and generally mobilizing. Chávez eggs them on in his weekly television shows, most recently claiming, "We shall rule for 500 years!" an allusion to 500 years free from colonialism. The genuinely independent character of these organizations of the poor has yet to be proven. According to the Venezuelan president's web site, he is the ultimate authority for Bolivarian Circles.

The general strike has also discredited and divided the opposition as capitalist interests deserted the strike, leaving the workers on the line alone. On January 29, the National Banking Council and the Venezuelan Banking Association restored their services to full hours. The retail and restaurant sectors followed suit. Street protests continue as does a petition drive to recall the president as per the new constitution. However, the government says the earliest election could be in August.

By supporting the business elite, the petroleum workers and the CVT have shown their aspirations to be allies of capital, rather than a voice for workers and their communities. Their allies in the AFL-CIO and the NED encouraged them in this betrayal. Their actions demonstrated a lack of political awareness and analysis: no union can ally itself with capital and long expect to be seen as a legitimate representative of the working class nor an ally to the poor or any other marginalized group. The results of the 2002 general strikes - both disasters - is a graver disconnect between organized labour and the working class and poor of Venezuela.

Venezuelan labour faces a critical choice: Continue with a failed strategy to be the lesser and more vulnerable partner, the cannon fodder, of capital, or chart its own course, independent of capital and of President Chávez and his so-called Bolivarian movement. Workers should recognize that the key poles of the struggle is between workers and capital, not between Chávez and the business elites.

Venezuelan workers need to test the democracy of their own unions and demand an immediate review of their leaders. The labour unions and federations must reveal all funding from domestic and foreign sources, including the AFL-CIO and NED, in order to ensure accountability and transparency. Union leaders who took the risks of involving their unions in two coup attempts now must accept responsibility for their decisions and errors.

There is no question Chávez represents a serious threat to labour and human rights in Venezuela. An equal or greater threat is Venezuelan and foreign capital's control over the national and international economy. An independent, militant Venezuelan workers' federation can chart a course between these two threats, fighting for workers' rights, without pretending to be politicians.

Police and death squads continue onslaught against Colombian unionists

CENTRAL UNION FEDERATION - CUT

Juan Antonio Bohorquez Medina of the FECODE-CUT union executive for the municipality of Bituima was kidnapped Feb. 20. Three days later his body was found. He had been horribly murdered in the jurisdiction of the municipality of Alban.

On 21 February, Fredy Perilla Montoya, a worker for the EMCALI Telephone Company (EICE) and a SINTRAEMCALI activist, was intercepted by individuals travelling in a white van with polarized windows. They tried to force him into the vehicle. He resisted, and when they saw they were not going to succeed in taking him with them, they shot him six times and fled.

On 19 February, in the night, the home of comrade Rafael Palencia Fernandez was raided. He is an active member of the SINTRAMINTRABAJO union, which has been taking legal action on behalf of the freight workers against the transnational Coca Cola. At present he is in detention in the cells of the SIJIN in Cartagena, accused of belonging to the urban militias of the insurgency. However, he is the victim of a vile montage by the forces of the State.

On the same night, the home of teacher FECODE member Samuel Reyes was raided. He was a victim of the same montage as comrade Palencia.

On 22 February members of the secret police detained in suspicious circumstances Robinson Beltran Herrera, president of the union at the Regional Autonomous Corporation of the Atlantic Coast, Otrora Corelca.

On 17 February, a letter arrived at the Colombian Association of Graphic Reporters containing threats against the president of the union, Gladys Barajas and her family.

On 20 February, Elber Alberto Granja, former president of SINTRAMUNICIPIO YUMBO, and currently president of the Communal Action Committee for the Municipality of Vijes, Valle del Cauca, was on a footpath outside his house when an individual with a firearm started to shoot at him.

On 22 February, Wilson Casto Padilla, a member of the union SINALTRAINAL, was threatened by an anonymous letter made up of letters cut from a newspaper. It was found by his wife when she went to open the door of the house and now he has to choose between his life and his family or whether to carry on in the organization.

The above acts of barbarity reflect the real situation in Colombia where there is no respect for human rights and where the main responsibility for the barbarity lies with the State and with the government headed by Dr Alvaro Uribe Velez - all against a background of 100 percent impunity for more than 3,800 assassinations of our fellow unionists in the 16 years the CUT has existed. We are asking for solidarity from the international community, from human rights NGOs, unions and other organizations to denounce these crimes and demand from the Colombian government real guarantees for us to continue our union activities.

Unions Boost Economy

A new World Bank study examines data from more than 1,000 studies from around the world on the effects of unions and collective bargaining on the economy, concluding that unions tend to have a stabilizing and beneficial effect on the economy. Union workers in both rich and poor countries earn higher wages, work fewer hours, are better trained, and have more job security.

In releasing the report, the World Bank pointed to unions' critical role in cutting poverty through growth and better distribution of income. However, it did not indicate that it would change Bank policies which requiring developing countries to eliminate worker protections, privatize jobs, and slash workers' buying power in order to maintain access to World Bank loans.