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Starbucks living wage strike hits 10 New Zealand stores

Workers from Starbucks stores across Auckland walked off the job Nov. 23 to join what they billed as the world's first Starbucks strike, held on Auckland's counter-culture café strip on Karangahape Road. (Canadian Starbucks workers have conducted "un-strikes" where they continue work but picket during off-duty hours.)

The one-hour strike was originally to include only the Karangahape store, but spread to 10 outlets across the city when workers learned that managers would be brought in from other stores to cover the shifts of striking workers.

"What began as an event to highlight the poor conditions of low pay and minimum wage workers turned into a show of solidarity and strength between Auckland's Starbucks workers," said Simon Oosterman, campaign coordinator for the Unite union's SuperSizeMyPay.com project.

Customers and pedestrians were offered free fair trade coffee during the picketing. Internationally, Starbucks has low union representation, with only 300 union members out of 80,000 workers globally. One third of these union members are in New Zealand, where Starbucks workers start at NZ\$10 an hour, only fifty cents above the minimum wage. In Australia, Starbucks workers earn almost NZ\$5 more per hour than their New Zealand fellow workers.

Unite is a small community-based union, with nearly 2,000 members in the fast-food industry, and is taking on the world's largest multi-national fast food brands in a campaign for a NZ\$12 minimum wage, an end to lower pay for young workers (who can be paid as little as \$7.13), secure hours, and basic workplace benefits. Other actions have included a Dec. 17 strike by predominantly immigrant workers at Pizza Hut and a Dec. 2 action against a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet in Balmoral that drew 150 strikers and supporters to the picket line. Unite has been in negotiations for several months with Restaurant Brands, which operates Starbucks, KFC and Pizza Hut in New Zealand.

Meanwhile, in the United States, the National Labor Relations Board has issued a massive complaint against Starbucks, charging 15 local and regional officials with a systematic campaign of illegal practices intended to discourage workers from unionizing.

For example, according to the NLRB complaint, a regional director of operations posted a message in one store in May 2004 threatening "employees with loss of wages and benefits if they voted for the union." At the same store, in May and July 2004, a store manager and an assistant store manager gave employees free baseball tickets and gym passes as part of efforts to bribe workers into dropping their support for unionization.

The Board complaint, which is set for a hearing **Starbucks: continued page 6**



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WTO delegates huddle behind police lines

Huddling behind police lines and a barrage of tear gas, trade ministers representing most of the world's governments agreed in principle to eliminate agricultural subsidies and cut tariffs on manufactured goods as their annual meeting drew to a close Dec. 18.

However, the *New York Times* reported, "the declaration ... papers over differences that could prove troublesome later," by calling for "substantial" (but unspecified) reductions in agricultural subsidies in the lead-up to 2013, barring subsidies that lead to overfishing (also not defined), and repeating calls for increased aid to developing countries that thus far have failed to materialize.

"If we didn't make the [WTO] conference a success," said European Union trade commissioner Peter Mandelson, "we certainly saved it from failure."

Meanwhile, in the streets outside the Hong Kong convention center, police fired tear gas and water cannons as protestors — including South Korean farmers, Southeast Asian groups and activists from Europe and America — tried to reach the convention center and confront the delegates.

"We would just like to march to the front of the convention centre so that we can express our opinion," said Lee Chang Eun of the Korean Federation of Trade Unions.

When a rumor spread that the protestors had broken through police lines and entered the building, security guards fled their posts leaving checkpoints unmanned for a brief time. Security forces locked all the doors to the WTO venue, and dozens of police were stationed in key areas throughout the conference building.



ence building.

Filipino labour activist Norman Uy Carnay said the WTO's free-trade policies allow the dumping of agricultural products in developing country's markets. This bankrupts farmers and forces them to move to cities, where there's not enough work.

"Our governments' involvement in the WTO has brought a lot of displacement to our people, and it's forcing us to migrate abroad," said Carnay, program coordinator for the Filipino Migrant Workers Society.

Korean farmers tried to break through police lines with wooden poles and battering rams made from steel security barriers. At one point, protestors smashed their way through police lines and entered the outer buildings of the convention centre. However, they were quickly driven out by police. Dozens of protestors were injured, and nearly a thousand were taken into police custody.

Roads were cordoned off, preventing delegates from entering or leaving the conference hall. "The enemy have gathered near here," explained a policeman. "There are hundreds of them, so we have blocked the roads."

Big break for defense in Mumia Abu-Jamal case

BY DAVID LINDORFF

In a startling new development, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia has agreed to hear arguments on three claims by Pennsylvania death-row prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal that his 1982 trial and state appeal were tainted by constitutional violations.

Any one of those three claims, if ultimately upheld by the three-judge panel, could lead to a new trial for one of America's most famous and long-standing death row prisoners, a Philadelphia-based journalist and former Black Panther activist who was convicted of the 1981 shooting murder of a white Philadelphia police officer.

The decision came as a surprise because the appellate court was only required to consider an appeal from the defense on a single guilt-phase issue — the claim that the prosecution had illegally removed qualified jurors from the case on the basis of race. That claim, while rejected in 2001 by Federal District Court Judge William Yohn, had been certified by the judge for appeal. Appellate courts do not have to even accept arguments from defense attorneys on claims that have not been certified for appeal by a lower court, so the fact that the judges agreed to accept the other two claims is a major victory for the defense.

The first additional claims is that prosecutor Joe McGill improperly sought to weaken any sense of responsibility and accountability among jurors considering the case, and undermined the constitutional requirement of "beyond a reasonable doubt," when he told them in his final summation that they need not worry overmuch about voting for conviction since Abu-Jamal would have "appeal after appeal." The second claim is that the judge in the case, the late Albert Sabo, who also sat at the 1995 Post-Conviction Relief Act hearing, where determinations of fact and crucial new evidence were presented (or where the defense attempted unsuccessfully to present it), was biased against the defense.

Abu-Jamal's claim of racial bias in jury selection is well documented. In his habeas appeal to the Federal District Court, his then attorneys, Leonard Weinglass and Daniel Williams, submitted four academic studies of jury selection practices by both the Philadelphia district attorney's office and of assistant DA McGill himself. Both demonstrated clearly that the DA's office under then DA (and now Pennsylvania governor) Ed Rendell and McGill in the murder trials he prosecuted rejected roughly three out of four potential black jurors who had already agreed that they could vote for capital punishment.

This was a rate of peremptory rejection of qualified jurors three times higher than for potential white jurors, and is prima facie evidence of illegal racial bias. But Judge Yohn, in a serious judicial error of fact and judgment, rejected that evidence. As I exposed in my book (*Killing Time: An Investigation into the Death Penalty Case of Mumia Abu-Jamal*, Common Courage Press, 2003), Yohn had confused the studies and incorrectly assumed that they did not cover the time period of Jamal's trial, when in fact the studies even included his trial in their data sets. If the appellate court looks at that evidence, the judges would be hard-pressed to find it fair,

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Working for Wal-Mart

I was having some beer and watching the Steelers-Colts game last night with some fellow workers, and we were going over the latest issue of the *Industrial Worker*. One of them noted that the story on Wal-Mart states Wal-Mart's wages are less than \$19,000 a year. We remarked (in between head-shaking during the game) that to be fair the paper should have given Wal-

Mart's wages as much less than that. We could not see how the average worker there pulls in even close to that amount (especially with all the part-time workers), unless the earnings of the high-salaried parasites were included in the figure. Could you please inform us of the source of this information?

X353983, Pittsburgh

Editor's Note: The article meant to refer to average wages for full-time workers, as reported by the New York Times. This seems plausible to me. While many full-time workers make significantly less, in many markets Wal-Mart pays more per hour than competing unionized retail outlets (many of which slashed starting pay to around minimum wage in the past two decades), although it offers much less in health and other benefits.

A wage averaging about \$9 an hour (clerks and stockers will make less; auto repair staff and 'assistant managers' more) remains a poverty wage, not enough even to pay the rent in many cities, let alone to feed a family. Wal-Mart's record is criminal enough without exaggerating the increasingly meager advantages of working under UFCW contract.

Poisoning workers

The December issue included a story with a statement by Beth Kedd, Wal-Mart's director of international corporate affairs, to the effect that "China actually has very good environmental and safety standards on the books."

Yes, perhaps "on the books." Whose books? Here are other sources to consider about worker health and safety in that state capitalist paradise:

The rate of acute poisoning accidents in Beijing has doubled between 1994 and 2001, according to the city's health bureau. About 2.1 million workers in the Chinese capital are exposed to toxic dust, chemicals and other airborne hazards at work. (Julia Han, "Law introduced to fight work-related diseases," *South China Morning Post*, April 13, 2002).

In the year 2000 at least 50,000 fingers, hands and arms were amputated in Chinese factories. (Elaine Kurtenbach, "Workers Pay Dearly Producing Goods 'Made In China,'" *Associated Press*, Dec. 25, 2001).

According to Steven Levine (*The Synergist*, June/July 2000) there is the possibility that 35.2 million Chinese workers were permanently or temporarily disabled at work in 2001.

China's Ministry of Health survey found that between 1982 and 2002 more than 20 million township businesses were created and 60% of these had "minimal safety measures" (*Xinhua New Agency* 4/1/02).

Isn't it grand that Wal-Mart execs have been bought off to promote the idea that China's government and economy may be showing the way forward?

For the cause that never dies,
Len Wallace

Editor's Note: This was an ironic reference, immediately followed by a note that "respect for workers' rights [is] also written into [China's] statutes." Wal-Mart moved production to China, we noted, "knowing that any worker who agitated for better wages, safer conditions or less pollution faced arrest and imprisonment."



Hospital closing a crime

In 1997, I and other Wobblies protested the closure of the St. Louis Regional Medical Center. Now the politicians involved in this atrocity are admitting that the closure was a "mistake." Why?

The Regional Medical Center served a large number of working people and persons of color. Its closure showed that the St. Louis power structure had no real interest in the health care of the general population.

When Regional was being closed, St. Louis unions offered to help keep the hospital open by sending members with union health insurance there, providing the income needed to keep it open, if the hospital allowed workers to unionize. This proposal was rejected despite the fact that workers had sought union representation.

But the private hospitals carried the day with their argument that by keeping Regional open the city was funding "surplus" hospital beds and "wasting tax dollars." Now we're suffering a shortage of hospital beds in urban centers across the country, especially during natural disasters and other emergencies.

Robert Rice

2006 IWW officers elected

Mark Damron of the Cincinnati GMB has been elected General Secretary-Treasurer, and will move IWW headquarters to that city. Elected to the General Executive Board were Patrick Brenner, Jeannette Gysbers (acting chair), Adam Lincoln, Ted Nebus, Scott Satterwhite, Richard Seymour, and Evan Wolfson. Nathaniel Miller will be first alternate.

Paul Bocking, Eric Chester and Todd Goodenow were elected to the International Solidarity Commission. William McLaughlin will be first alternate. Sam Morales, Jr. was elected General Defense Committee Central Secretary-Treasurer. The 2006 General Assembly will be held the first weekend in September in San Francisco, California.

Salt Lake Wobs remember Joe Hill and IWW martyrs

BY JAMES MOURITSEN

The Salt Lake City GMB and friends gathered for the annual culmination of "In November We Remember" observances November 19. Wobs took turns reading names printed on slips of paper and remembering many martyrs, political prisoners, and stalwarts in the fight for workers' rights and social justice.

One name stood out with special significance, of course, as it was on the very same ground, in what is now Sugarhouse Park in Salt Lake City and had been the Utah State Penitentiary, where the state of Utah shot Joe Hill on this day ninety years ago.

This year's event was well attended, with a handful of local Wobs and an equal number of friends (two of whom took out red cards at the next monthly IWW meeting - welcome to new fellow workers Eileen Olsen and Keisha Davis).

In addition to reading names of martyrs past and present, the group sang songs, from classics by Joe Hill and Ralph Chaplin to the creative efforts of some local fellow workers, as well as readings of "The Two Bums" and other rousing pieces.

Wobs and friends stayed warm in the frigid Utah night with a fire in the park's gazebo fireplace and with the sharing of a bottle of homemade "Pink Lady Mead" contributed by FW Olsen.

After the singing and reading of names, the group made a candlelight procession to the spot in the park where a section of wall from the old prison still stands. There we all recited Joe Hill's Last Will together before leaving a row of candles in cups glowing on top of the old prison wall.

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- ★ EDUCATION
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Labor Caucus joins drive to close School Of Assassins

BY SCOTT SATTERWHITE,
PENSACOLA GMB

Over the weekend of Nov. 19 and 20, the School of the Americas Watch hosted one of the largest gatherings of labor and peace activists in its history to protest what many call "The School of Assassins." The gathering, held annually for over a decade, protests the U.S. Army school which has been documented to have graduated some of Latin America's most vicious dictators and war criminals.

The victims of School of the Americas graduates include many union activists in Central and South America who, in recent years, have been attempting to organize against Coca-Cola and Nestle. At this year's gathering, several delegations of unionists from Colombia and Argentina spoke at the SOAW's Labor Caucus about struggles in their countries.

The Labor Caucus was set up as a forum for rank-and-file union organizers from around the world to discuss how the School of the Americas has directly hurt workers and what the international community can do to fight back. This year's event was kicked off by Wobbly folk singer Charlie King and introductions from around the room.

While most of the participants were from the United Auto Workers, who sent a large delegation to protest the SOA, several members of other unions were present including the Steelworkers, Postal Workers, IWW and Colombian union Sinaltrainal.

After brief introductions, two representatives of Sinaltrainal, the union that has been organizing against Coca-Cola and Nestle in Colombia, spoke to the largely North American crowd about the deadly working conditions for unionists in their country.

"Things have gotten worse. The world is witnessing a genocide of working people in Colombia," Gerardo Cajamerca of Sinaltrainal said. "Coca-Cola wants to do away with the union by intimidation and murder."

Cajamerca went on to tell about several murders of fellow union organizers in recent years by paramilitaries, with the support of Coca-Cola. He said Coca-Cola has gone so far as to give paramilitaries Coke products to help fund their activities against unionists, leftists and other human rights activists.

Sinaltrainal Vice President William Mendoza said that paramilitaries have used threats against workers and their families. His 4-year-old daughter was recently kidnapped because of his international accusations against Coca-Cola. She was later returned physically unharmed, but the threat to his life and his family's lives is real. To carry on his organizing, he must have two bodyguards with him at all times and ride around in an armored vehicle so he is not assassinated by these Coca-Cola funded paramilitaries.

The Sinaltrainal delegation said they are urgently requesting international support. "We need more solidarity, concrete solidarity."

Students United Against Sweatshops have been vocal on their behalf, getting Coca-Cola machines removed from several campuses across North America. Several unions have also joined Sinaltrainal in their call for solidarity, most notably the Steelworkers who have started legal action against Coca-Cola on the Colombian union's behalf. Coca-Cola then filed a counter-suit claiming that the unions were "violating the morale of the company," Cajamerca said.

As the speakers were winding up, they reminded the audience of their determination and dedication. "We are absolutely confident that in the struggle for social justice, we will win," Mendoza told the crowd. "An injury to one is an injury to all."

In the closing remarks, the 4,000 dead of Colombia's "Dirty Wars" – mostly unionists, human rights activists, indigenous persons and Afro-Colombians – were remembered.

"Our fight is not one of economics," said Cajamerca. "It is one of life. We say no to death."



Tommie Gallie cuts the cake.
photos: Jeannette Gysbers

Edmonton Wobs celebrate centennial in grand style

BY SEAN M. BOOMER, EDMONTON

The Edmonton (Alberta) GMB did its best to celebrate the 100th birthday of the Industrial Workers of the World in grand style Nov. 12 with live music, a birthday cake, games and cheap drinks.

Primarily organized by Fellow Workers Kirsten Mayoh, Geoff Loken, Jeannette Gysbers, Steve Nixon and Gordie Thomas, the affair took a great deal of planning. The committee displayed creativity in its efforts, and all agreed that they created an event worthy of the union's one-hundredth year.

The event took place in a lavishly decorated hall. Posters laboriously hand-stenciled by members of the Centennial Committee were on display; IWW candle holders, also made by committee members, were set at each table. Festive red and black balloons and streamers lent a jolly air to the proceedings. (The balloons were hand tied by Aaron Wilson and Sean Boomer.)

Two copies of a beautiful portrait of Wobbly songwriter, organizer and martyr Joe Hill were up for raffle. A Greedy Capitalist piñata complete with a jagged grin and lustful leer, paunch swelling with all the good things of life (decked out in tux, top hat and tails no less), stared hungrily at our delicious cake. For once, the rich man did not get his slice! Our ancient bugbear was, in fact, the papier-mache creation of Fellow Workers Mayoh and Loken. His swollen belly, filled with candies, alas remains imperforate, waiting for another union event to be burst open to the joy of the workers and the confoundment of our enemies. A "Pin-the-Tail on Ralphie" game displayed the branch's feeling toward another swollen member of the ruling class (Alberta's prime minister), alas less amenable to the ministrations of a wooden pole.

Excellent music was provided by Guy Smith and the Revtones (Guy's voice, victim of a bad cold, lent a punk rock edge), and by a few brave open-mike takers. Members of the Edmonton GMB and some guests added to the general entertainment by leading a Wobbly sing-along. In particular, the spirited anthem "Solidarity Forever" enlivened the



Singing are (L-R) Fellow Workers Sean M. Boomer, Nick Driedger and Eugene Plawiuk.

evening several times. Lighting and sound were provided by Bill Carley, and the fiercely committed Fellow Worker Mayoh.

Last, but certainly not least, Fellow Workers Gordie Thomas and Steve Nixon used courtesy, fortitude and discretion as they bartended for the throng of revelers. In this they received occasional help from Fellow Worker Gallie, who appeared, like the cavalry in an old western, at crucial moments.

Huge thanks are due to everyone who made the party a success. It was an event for the ages, an event for one hundred years. Happy Birthday, fellow workers! Let's raise our glasses to another one hundred years of fanning the flames of discontent.

Scottish Wob on trial for Trident missile protest

IWW member Rosie Kane, an elected member of the Scottish Parliament facing criminal charges for an anti-Trident nuclear missile protest outside the Parliament building, told Edinburgh Sheriff Court that direct action was an important part of the democratic process and that people have to act when they see international laws and rights being violated by the government.

She is one of 10 demonstrators facing charges of blocking the road and obstructing police March 10. The 10 were sitting outside Parliament in a huge mock-up of a submarine; it took police hours to remove them.

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.

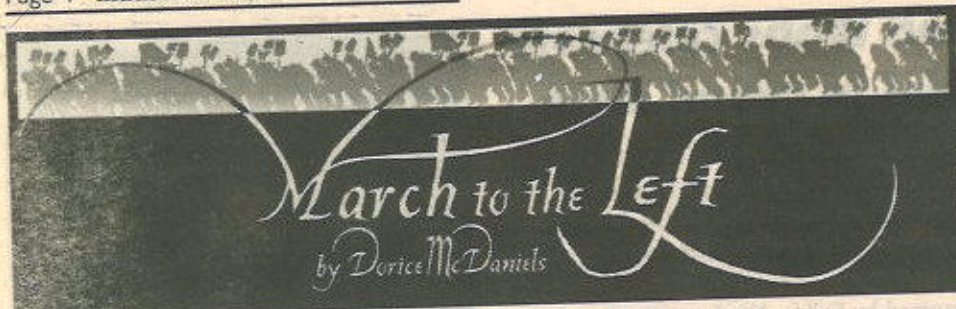
Initiation is the same as one month's dues. Our dues are calculated according to your income. If your monthly income is under \$1,000, dues are \$6 a month. If your monthly income is between \$1,000 - \$2,000, dues are \$12 a month. If your monthly income is over \$2,000 a month, dues are \$18 a month.

- ☐ 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.



"Everybody in this country gets a fair trial. The law judged them guilty, so that's the end of it."

"But there's a grave doubt about the guilt of those men. They'd made themselves obnoxious to the establishment. Even so, nobody is so evil he deserves to burn in the electric chair."

The first speaker was a hard-shell fellow who'd been a Democrat since way before he was born. The second had an inconveniently active social conscience for a Republican. Table talk can be traumatic for an 8 year old. I could not swallow my bread.

The year was 1927. Sacco and Vanzetti had just been executed.

★ ★ ★

For James Lee Beathard, execution was not only a personal tragedy but a travesty of justice. Convicted of murder in 1984 because of perjured testimony, defended by a lawyer who later confessed to conflict of interest, Beathard consistently protested his innocence until his very end on Dec. 9, 1999.

All during those long years his wife, his mother, his small daughter suffered and struggled to space the life of their innocent dear one. All please for clemency crossed the Texas governor's desk, unheeded.

A few months after the execution another man confessed to the murder for which Beathard had paid the price. Is there not blood on the hands of that callous governor?

Can you guess who was governor of Texas in 1999?

★ ★ ★

What a great show for the audience, a drama lasting 24 minutes! As is customary on such occasions, the gruesome affair enacted in California's San Quentin execution chamber was performed with dignified ceremony. So the audience was unprepared for the brash utterance not in the script. Just before lapsing into unconsciousness, the central character of this drama raised his head to proclaim, "I am an innocent man."

Labour web site of the year

BY ERIC LEE

For the ninth year in a row, LabourStart is once again organizing the Labour Web site of the Year competition.

The history of that competition reads like a history of union use of the Internet.

Back in 1997, the competition involved around seven web sites. All of them were based in the USA or the UK except for the winner, the Brussels-based International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions. I think enough time has now passed to admit that very, very few people actually voted in that year's competition. But a tradition was born.

Two years later, the IWW's own site won – and this time it was competing against 41 other web sites. There were a lot more unions with sites, but it was still possible for a relatively small union to win the competition. (The IWW followed up on its 1999 victory by making the list of runners-up in 2004.)

By 2001, everything had changed. Now the winner was the health and safety web site, Hazards, whose candidacy was backed by Britain's powerful Trades Union Congress. Over 3,000 votes were cast. Some 200 web sites were now in the competition. With 755 votes, Hazards won easily – and that record has not been beaten since.

In last year's competition, new records were set for the number of voters (8,343) and the number of sites in the running (525).

Union use of the net has vastly expanded in these last eight years. There are now many more web sites and many more users. And the web sites are far better than the ones which

Did Stanley Tookie Williams commit those four murders? Only he really knew. But guilty or not, it appears this man experienced a redemptive change during his long prison confinement, a transformation from his wild gang-bang Cripps days that prompted him to harness the tremendous energy of violence to productive good works.

The state as executioner is not troubled by philosophical speculation. Conventional legal policy dictates the devil still lingers in the wings.

Lethal injection, administered by a doctor, is clinical and precise. Yes, who is better prepared to do the job of killing than a professional who has taken the Hippocratic oath?

— Dorice McDaniels

U.S. strikes rebound

The Nov. 15 Wall Street Journal reports that U.S. workers are increasingly fighting back. Strikes are spreading, as are lockouts. These are mostly defensive battles against management efforts to cut wages and benefits, but they are an important indication that growing numbers of workers are fed up.

The number of private sector work stoppages rose 14 percent last year, according to Bureau of National Affairs statistics showing 231 work stoppages initiated through the end of August, compared with 202 in the same period last year. While the Labor Department tracks "major" work stoppages – which it defines as actions involving 1,000 or more employees, and which are down slightly – the BNA tries to track everybody.

Strikers seem to be getting results, too. Boeing machinists got a better health-care package after striking. At Northwest, the mechanics' strike is not faring well, but neither are the unions that agreed to deep concessions and crossed picket lines. Philadelphia transit workers were forced to pick up part of health care premiums, but a much smaller share than management had demanded.

Goes to show, you have to fight to win.



competed back in 1997. (Even the IWW's site has hugely improved over the years.)

On 15 December 2005 we announced the launch of this year's month-long ballot, which closes on 15 January. To vote, go here: <http://www.labourstart.org/lwsoty/>

This year's competition will be different from previous years in a few ways.

First, when voting for a web site, you'll see the web site displayed on your screen. That way, if you're typing in a web address and you've made a mistake, you'll immediately catch it. (Try typing in iwww.org or iw.org instead of iwww.org and you'll see what I mean.)

Second, for the first time ever, we're requiring voters to confirm their votes by email. This is to prevent the persistent attempts by some overenthusiastic webmasters in previous years. (In one case, a union webmaster keyed in the email addresses of hundreds of union staffers, in alphabetical order, in a blatant attempt to stuff the ballot box.)

Third, we've gotten rid of the idea of nominated sites. LabourStart itself doesn't nominate sites, and participants can vote for any site they want – and always could anyway.

Running a competition like this is a lot of work, and you might be asking yourself why do it? What's the point?

Workers' rights are human rights

BY X351621, BOSTON

In conjunction with Human Rights Week, several thousand Boston area trade unionists took to the streets December 8th in a march and rally for workers' rights to organize. Ignoring the late afternoon cold, a loud and enthusiastic mass of carpenters, teamsters, electricians, hotel employees, teachers, social service workers and other union members rallied at Boston Common and marched through the Downtown Crossing area with banners displayed and flags flying.

Main streets were shut down as the demonstrators made several stops at the offices of anti-labor employers and a local union-busting law firm to demand basic rights for working people. Many in the rush hour crowds responded positively to the chants of "Walmart Sucks" and calls for human rights as the marchers ascended Beacon Hill to the State House, joined by the Jobs with Justice group and tenant organizations.

There officials of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO pledged to actively aid tenants unions forming across the city, and to renew the fight for affordable housing. If carried forward, such support would mark a major step in the transformation of organized labor into a broad-based social movement.

Coming on the heels of the janitors' contract victory at Harvard University and the SEIU's organizing success at a major social service agency in Somerville, this rally was a shot in the arm for local union militants and a clear signal that the labor movement in the Bay State is alive and on the move.

Labor rights protests at White House, across U.S.

The Boston demonstration was one of more than a hundred nationwide called to protest the systematic violation of U.S. workers' rights. The AFL-CIO took out full-page advertisements in several newspapers in which 11 Nobel Peace Prize winners – including the Dalai Lama, former president Jimmy Carter, Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa and Lech Walesa – protested violations of the right to form independent unions in Burma and China. Then the Nobel laureates added, "Even the wealthiest nation in the

There are two points, really.

The Labour Web site of the Year does recognize excellence in union use of the new communications technology. That's important for a lot of reasons. The web site that wins, and the nine runners-up, get a lot more traffic in mid-January than they normally would. Often unions that make the top 10 issue press releases. All this is good if you want to see unions moving forward, embracing new tools.

There's another reason too. Voters are given the chance to sign up to LabourStart's mailing list. Many of them do. In the last year, that mailing list has grown from around 20,000 names to over 31,000 names. The Labour Web site of the Year competition contributes a chunk of that growth, as do the various campaigns we run.

The bigger the mailing list, the bigger the online campaigns. If we can bring a few thousand more people onto the mailing list each year because they want to vote in this competition, it means that our campaigns in support of workers on the picket line will be that much more effective.

Having largely eliminated the element of fraud in this year's voting for the first time, we will get a real sense of which web sites have generated the kind of enthusiasm among members that might get them included in the top ten.

Are these the best union web sites, or just the most popular? It's an interesting question, and I'm not completely sure that the two are opposites. In any event, we will all know on 16 January 2006 the results of the voting. Good luck to all of you.



world, the United States of America, fails to protect workers' rights to form unions..."

Hundreds of workers marched from AFL-CIO headquarters to the White House Dec. 8, but were not allowed to deliver a petition addressed to President Bush urging him to protect workers' rights.

"George W. and his buddies have turned the government into America's number one union buster," AFL-CIO Vice President Linda Chavez-Thompson told the rally.

She and other speakers urged Congress to pass the "Employee Free Choice Act," which would require employers to recognize unions once they demonstrate majority support, provide for arbitration of first-contract disputes and establish penalties for unlawful efforts to prevent workers from exercising their right to organize. The federation has been pressing for such legislation for decades, but has been unable to secure passage even when labor-backed candidates occupied the White House and Congress.

The percentage of U.S. private sector workers in unions has fallen to 7.9 percent, the lowest rate in a century and down from 35 percent in the 1950s. Union membership is slipping even though surveys show that more than half of American workers say they would vote to join a union if they could.

A new study shows that nearly one-third of companies facing unionization campaign fire union supporters and one-half threaten close work sites. The report from the University of Illinois at Chicago's Center for Urban Economic Development is based on a survey of 62 organizing campaigns conducted in the Chicago metropolitan area during 2002.

It found that in 91 percent of campaign solid majorities of workers supported unionization when election petitions were filed. Unions won NLRB elections only 31 percent of the time.

Why? Employers hire union-busting consultants who use an of tactics, both legal and illegal. Employers promise to improve wages and offer bribes or special favors if workers will abandon unionization. They threaten close or relocate all or parts of the business. 49 percent of employers used the tactic, the report found. That mirrors the 48 percent of employers found nationally to do so in a study done five years ago. If employers convicted of unlawful labor practices, they typically required to post a notice promising to obey the law in the future, or to pay monetary back pay settlements to workers.

Widespread union-busting and ineffectual labor laws result in more than 23 U.S. workers being fired or penalized each year.

Appeals Court blasts NLRB

A federal appeals court recently joined a growing chorus of critics of the NLRB. Three Republican appointees on the Seventh Circuit issued a harsh assessment of the Board in overturning its finding that an employer's partial lockout of union workers was illegal.

After a failed strike in 2001, Michigan Generation instituted a partial lockout, returning workers in order to coerce members into accepting its final contract offer. The NLRB majority argued that the "economic pressure" rather than discrimination against union members. On Oct. 1, the court reversed, noting that by allowing discrimination against unionists the Board flouting four decades of established law.

Christmas is a Class Act

Got those "morning after" blues now that Christmas is over? Were you a good little consumer and have you maxed out your credit cards? Right after Thanksgiving – or was it Labor Day in your neighborhood? – the hype begins. Guilt trips about being selfish, TV scenes of crowds breaking down the doors at Wal-Mart stores, predictions by the manufacturers and retailers that if we don't spend more than we did last year, they'll all go bankrupt and join us in the soup line.

On and on goes the same old sob story every year. The ruling class is upset that you may have actually saved a little for yourself, in spite of all the other holidays it has manufactured to get you to donate your wages to the less fortunate stockholders of the world: Mothers' Day, Valentine's Day, birth, father's, Labor, Thanksgiving, wedding, anniversary, Easter and Earth Days, and they keep inventing new ones equally superficial to empty your savings accounts of any excess wages.

Giving is great, but the ruling class has convinced you and me that giving material things is the only path to satisfaction. They don't sell love, good-will, friendship or compassion in their super-boxes, only junk made in sweatshops that won't survive New Years Day, when, by the way, you can buy their booze to try to forget how empty Christmas was.

Then, about this time of year, you will hear, "What is wrong with working people today? They have no savings and what is even more troubling, they are too far in debt." That old recording will play on every major news outlet. The ruling class had to rewrite the bankruptcy laws last year, so that workers cannot escape the debt we have on our credit cards. Debtor's prisons anyone?

Is it only greed that drives the ruling class? No, my friends. They know from experience that when the working class is free from debt we grow independent and begin making demands. When we are deep in debt, living from paycheck to paycheck, we are much more subservient. What they crave even more than money is control.

Free yourselves. Make up your own holidays. Screw the advertising industry, whores of the ruling class. Which holidays mean something to you? What do you feel that you want to share on that day that has real value for you? What about tomorrow? Take the kids sledding. We have minds of our own. Use them. Reject ruling class values. That would be a class act.

Defining Class is a Class Act

What do I mean by "class"? Seems everyone has a different definition. And, why do I feel the "class" concept is so damn important? I can only give you my definition and my reasons. When I say "my" ideas, I mean the thoughts and ideas I have come to agree with from patient mentors like Carlos Cortez, U. Utah Phillips, the *Industrial Worker*, books, friends, etc., that seem to correspond to my own life experiences. I do not believe that any one political party or philosophy has all the answers. We should think things through for ourselves and cull the wheat from the chaff as it meshes with our own life experiences, and be ready to think a little further when new information is introduced. Don't try to put me in a box. I will not remain there.

First of all, I believe that the "class" concept is the only salvation from slavery for those of us who don't like bits in our teeth. To organize and fight as a class is the only power equal to the international corporate capitalism that exists in 2006 with its power to buy armies, police, politicians, labor fakers and courts. Ruling class power can only exist if the majority of workers cooperate. If the transportation industry alone found the workers refusing to cooperate, ruling class power would melt as fast as snowballs in Guatemala, if other workers supported them. When the Palmer Raids had done their fascist work in the early 19th century, the word "class" was removed from all business union literature. Why do you suppose removing



the word "class" from all union literature the first demand of the bosses? The IWW never complied. We should make it a point to re-introduce the word, and especially its meaning, into our everyday conversations.

The ruling class media will howl, "You are promoting that old communist crap about class war." Damn sure are, because we are up to our shoulders in class war. The ruling class is fully aware that class war is in progress; but they want the workers to remain asleep long enough for them to complete our enslavement. War in Iraq is a nice distraction while they wage all-out "class war" at home.

Think how our attention would have to shift if all the troops now employed by the pentagon (with your tax dollars) were suddenly dumped back on the labor market as unemployed workers. Wouldn't that make clear to us the real shape of our economy? While the bosses ship 250,000 jobs a year out of the U.S., steal pension funds that workers thought were theirs by law, reduce wages to the lowest we will tolerate, and take away our health insurance, they send our sons and daughters to Iraq, not only to confiscate Middle Eastern oil, but to distract you from the fact that they are taking back everything the working class has gained through bitter struggle over the past century, little as it is, and moving out.

Over the years, I've tried asking the workers in the oil fields the question, "What does the word 'class' mean to you?" It didn't take long to discover that I rarely got the same answer twice. Makes sense since the word has been rarely used since 1920. So I began asking, "What does the word 'solidarity' mean to you?" After all, everyone who belongs to any union uses that word. The answers, for the most part, depended on their past experiences in the labor movement. Let me tell you how I arrived at my present definition of "class," through my experiences.

I grew up in a white, working-class neighborhood. Peoria, Illinois, was a very solid union city at that time. Almost every worker in my neighborhood belonged to a union and was glad to brag about that fact in the '40s and early '50s. The biggest union in Peoria was the UAW at Caterpillar Tractor Co., with 30,000 employees. By the time I left grade school, I understood and supported the union movement.

It didn't dawn on me at the time that few unions accepted black workers. Growing up, I knew that blacks lived down over the hill by the Illinois River, but gave no thought as to why I rarely met any of them. We were taught that they were "different." I quit high school my freshman year because it was boring and I was anxious to leave the nest.

Soldiers were heroes to a 17-year-old in 1952. Most of my neighbors were veterans of WW2 and I looked up to them. We were fed a steady diet of heroic war films during the '40s. Korea looked like an exciting escape to a young high school dropout. By September of that year, I was one sorry 17-year-old on the front line in a very cold Korea. In combat, I found out blacks and whites aren't all that different. You don't choose who you can depend on to be at your back by color or religion. You spend long nights talking about girlfriends, home, dreams, race relations and fears while manning a machine gun, hoping that bush you swear is moving out there in the pitch black is an illusion and not a Chinese soldier sent to take you out.

When I got home, I went to work in the foundry at Caterpillar Tractor. Caterpillar had increased the number of blacks they were hiring; but most blacks ended up in the 120-degree heat of the foundry. I was put on

a crew that shook red hot castings out of the sand and moulds that imprison them on a large vibrating screen. There were six of us on this crew; five were black who had been on this same job for years. My rudimentary education from Korea in racial tensions and saving your own ass by protecting your mates came in handy here. This job was extremely hot and physical, and I couldn't take it at first. Without saying much, the other five covered for me until I caught my breath long enough to toughen up.

Solidarity formed for me at this level into a reality. We spend more time with our work mates than we do with our families most of our lives. From this point forward, my understanding of solidarity was a process of shedding layers of exclusivity and adding layers of inclusiveness – from unions of white workers to industrial unions of all colors; from union workers to the whole community which included those who couldn't work or weren't needed in a factory. Who says the guy or gal playing a guitar on the corner making everyone's life a little brighter isn't productive?

Someone gave me a copy of the *Industrial Worker* in 1968 and I became aware of the "working class" concept for the first time. Actually, my own experience confirmed what I was reading, but expanded my vision from my home town to a limitless horizon. This was an exciting idea. We need each other, not for any do-gooder reasons, not because we always agree – we may not even like one another – but we need one another to save our own asses when confronting powerful odds. From that point until now, this idea of "class" has expanded daily to include anyone on this earth who doesn't own the tools of production. The concept of class even includes all non-human life on this planet for me, simply because the ruling class exploits all life for its own profit and if any of us are to survive we must bring all living things under our umbrella of protection.

It has been a slow process for me and

it still goes on. I have watched the left for years, and I've decided that I am not the only one who has trouble with the concept of class. Some can accept women into their class concept but not people of color; some are glad to accept people of color but can't accept people with incorrect politics or other human failings; some can accept everything but religion or nationality. A slow process of shedding exclusivity and learning inclusiveness has been my experience. Nothing is more important than that we defend our class when they are under attack, or, preferably, when they take the offensive. We don't have to like them to know it is in our own best interest to defend them. Or is there some quirk in our genetic makeup that creates a need in us to feel superior to others – intellectually, racially, physically, or by gender – that prevents us from pulling our load together?

The history of my ancestors is a case in point. The Irish (Celtic) clans would not settle minor differences long enough to work together for their mutual defense when attacked by the Viking marauders or when the Romans arrived. A history of domination has followed. Tecumseh, the great leader from the Shawnee tribe, pleaded with all Indian tribes to form a confederacy to resist their mutual destruction at the hands of invading Europeans. One of Tecumseh's methods of communication (IWW organizers borrowed this method later) was to invite a young girl to stand next to him. "Could you break this small stick for me," he would ask. She did it for him easily. Then he would hand her a bundle of a dozen small sticks. She could break them only by separating them and breaking them individually. We all know they did not resolve their petty squabbling. Will we?

In my next column, I want to talk about a union battle that came as close to class warfare as any that I have witnessed. This battle took place during a very important turning point in U.S. labor history. The seeds were planted during this struggle that brought George W. Slick's clique to power 25 years later.



Quebec: Wal-Mart workers illegally fired for unionizing

The Quebec Labour Board has ruled that the closing of a Wal-Mart store in Jonquière amounted to illegal reprisals against unionized workers and has ordered the company to compensate employees.

Wal-Mart officials also hired undercover security guards to spy on union workers, according to a Radio Canada investigation. The guards said surveillance centred on union activists. Such spying on union sympathizers is illegal under the Quebec Labour Code.

Yiddish children confront Wal-Mart in Boston suburb

A group of fifth grade Jewish Sunday school students from Boston Workmen's Circle, along with 150 other people, attempted to hand a letter outlining criticisms of Wal-Mart to managers at its Framingham, Mass., store. Protesting sweatshop labor and low wages, the children refused to leave the store entrance until managers agreed to take the letter and send it to Wal-Mart's chairman.

Real Foods workers win ULP

A National Labor Relations Board administrative law judge has ruled in favor of 31 workers at a San Francisco organic grocery store who were fired when they began organizing with the IWW.

The judge ruled in November that Fresh Organics Inc. and parent company Nutraceutical International violated labor laws when they suddenly closed the Noe Valley Real Foods store in 2003 and fired all workers. The company claimed the closing was for remodeling, but the judge ruled that the "closure was motivated by anti-union factors rather than due to a neutral business decision."

Nutraceutical is a Utah-based maker of nutritional supplements that bought four San Francisco grocery stores in 2002. In April 2003, workers in the Noe Valley store began meeting to form a union. The company fired two workers who led the IWW drive before closing the store. It has been ordered to reinstate 31 workers, including the two union activists, and to pay back pay from August 2003. Nutraceutical says it will appeal.

Starbucks workers organizing across the world

WWW.STARBUCKSUNION.ORG

Starbucks baristas and supporters wearing union pins and hats surrounded the manager at the Union Square, Manhattan, store Nov. 24 to announce their membership in the IWW Starbucks Workers Union. The workers, joined by union baristas from two other New York Starbucks stores, demanded a guaranteed minimum of 30 hours of work per week and an end to Starbucks' unlawful anti-union campaign.

One worker, 23-year-old Tomer Malchi, served the store manager with a document detailing the demands while several other workers directed comments at the boss to be relayed to more senior management. Suley Ayala, a mother of four who has worked at Starbucks for three years, was one of the workers who spoke. She explained after the event: "It should go without saying that we can't live on ten, eleven, or twelve hours of work some weeks. The 30 hour guarantee is absolutely necessary to make ends meet and Starbucks knows it."

The workers were motivated to organize in part because of Starbucks' status as one of the few companies in the world with no full-time employment for non-managerial employees. An initiative of Starbucks Chairman Howard Schultz, the part-time scheme forces workers to contend with a constantly fluctuating number of work hours, and therefore, constantly fluctuating income. For example, a Starbucks barista could receive 35 hours of work one week, 18 hours the week after, and as low as single-digits in the following week.

The world's largest coffee chain sacrifices employees' financial security in the name of cost control and "flexibility." This comes from a company whose mission statement talks of "provid[ing] a great work environment."



Unite supporters picketing outside an Auckland, New Zealand, Starbucks

Starbucks barista Mike Velasquez spoke of the personal reasons underlying his decision to join the Starbucks Workers Union. "My daughter is my first priority, period," he said. Anything that comes in the way of that is going to have a problem. Starbucks falls into that category."

Myth versus reality

Given the reality of working at Starbucks, the company's creation of a socially responsible image is testament to its public relations prowess. The company boasts of providing health care eligibility even for its part-time workers (never mentioning that all of its retail hourly workers are part-time). The fact is that an employee must work 240 hours each quarter to become eligible for

health insurance.

Because of the lack of guaranteed hours, meeting the quarterly hour requirement is far from assured. For workers who do qualify there are still the premiums, co-pays and deductibles – costs that are extremely difficult to manage for employees making \$6, \$7 or \$8 an hour. Incredibly, Starbucks, the self-proclaimed leader on the issue of employee health care, will not release the number of hourly workers who actually receive company health benefits. Even Wal-Mart releases that number. In fact, the recently leaked memo from Wal-Mart that advocated increasing part-time employment to cut health insurance costs is ancient history at Starbucks. Howard Schultz made that move years ago, but he degraded all jobs to part-time.

The workers demanded respect for the

right to organize in the face of a relentless union-busting campaign launched by the company in 2004 after the formation of the Starbucks Workers Union. The company has already been hit with a complaint from the National Labor Relations Board for threats, bribes, and surveillance in their attempt to defeat the union.

"I am so pleased to welcome the Union Square East baristas to the Starbucks Workers Union," said Pete Montalbano, a union barista at an East Village Starbucks and himself a recipient of anti-union discrimination. "Given the widespread discontent at the company, it comes as no surprise that more and more workers are making the decision to go union."

Starbucks, known for inundating neighborhoods with its stores, is an extremely profitable company. On November 17, the company announced that quarterly earnings had jumped 21 percent to \$124 million. Chairman Howard Schultz, who also owns the Seattle Supersonics, is doing well too, with an estimated net worth of \$700 million.

The IWW's unique solidarity union structure allows any Starbucks worker to join at anytime and begin the fight for a better life at work. Since its founding, the Starbucks Workers Union has pressured the company into a 50 cent an hour wage increase, an unprecedented holiday bonus, and steps toward alleviating rampant repetitive strain injuries among baristas.

"Companies like Starbucks, Borders, Wal-Mart, the Gap and McDonald's have gotten a free pass from the labor movement for far too long. Retail workers at some of the world's most profitable companies deserve better than a poverty existence for our hard work," said Daniel Gross, an IWW member and Starbucks barista. "The only solution is a fighting union."



PHOTO BY STANLEY W. ROGOUSKI

Starbucks workers picketed the 9th Street and 2nd Avenue store Dec. 17 to protest an IWW organizer's being fired by management for his activities with the union.

Starbucks... continued from page 1

February 7, also charges the company with illegally firing IWW supporter Sarah Bender in retaliation for her union activity. Harassment of union supporters continues despite the NLRB charges. On Dec. 12, IWW member Joe Agins Jr. was fired from the Starbucks at 2nd and 9th, ostensibly for arguing with someone about the union while he was off duty.

The IWW has sought union recognition at three New York City Starbucks operations, and is actively reaching out to Starbucks workers across the city and the country. The coffee giant operates some 200 stores within 10 miles of downtown Manhattan where it offers a starting wage of \$8.50 an hour. (Wages are lower in many cities, and were raised in New York by 50 cents in response to IWW organizing.)

Wobblies picketed in front of a Starbucks at New York City's Union Square Nov. 25, singing and chanting "No latte, no peace," while urging passers-by to boycott the shop.

One demonstrator dressed as a giant latte.

The IWW-affiliated Starbucks Workers Union is demanding that the company guarantee 30-hour work weeks to its employees so they can get health benefits. In an effort to bolster profits, Starbucks has been cutting back workers' hours below the threshold needed to maintain their eligibility for health benefits. In New York, many workers now average just 16 hours a week.

Profits top \$123.7 million

Starbucks Corp. owns more than ten thousand stores around the world (6,900 in the U.S.), under its own and the Seattle's Best Coffee names. Nearly 4,500 of these are part of coffee stands in airports, groceries, and Barnes and Noble and Borders bookstores.

Despite its low wages, the company remains highly profitable. Starbucks recently reported that fiscal fourth-quarter profits were up 21 percent to \$123.7 million on \$1.66 billion in sales for the three-month period.

Katrina survivors evicted by notorious Boston landlord

Tenant rights activists in Boston are protesting a notorious landlord's eviction of several people in New Orleans. According to the *Jamaica Plain Gazette*, a management company directed by Leonard Samia has told victims of Hurricane Katrina to vacate their homes at the Louisburg Square Apartments in Gretna, La., upriver from New Orleans.

The Common Ground Collective, a progressive hurricane relief group, and their legal support say tenants of the 180-unit apartment complex are being evicted so that the owners can get federal funds for the hurricane fix-up and then charge higher rents.

In the aftermath of the hurricane, tenants in flood-damaged areas are facing mass evictions. Witnesses describe streets with piles of families' possessions on the curbs. Louisiana law permits landlords to remove personal property from abandoned dwellings.

During Katrina Gretna police prevented evacuees from crossing a bridge to safety; now landlords are claiming damage from the hurricane in order to get FEMA funding.

Louisburg tenants wrote Samia demanding the right to stay in livable apartments and to be relocated should their unit need repair. A harassment campaign began immediately with threats by local police. Samia's LJS management has already lodged construction workers and contractors in the emptied units.

Almost twenty years ago City Life/Vida Urbana in Jamaica Plain issued a "wanted" poster with Leonard Samia's picture, and has been staging protests on behalf of tenants at his properties in Boston ever since.

Tenants organizations rallied outside his Fordham Ct. property in Jamaica Plain Dec. 20 protesting the evictions outside New Orleans and singing Christmas carols "Leonard the Greedy Landlord" and "¡Feliz Navidad, Prospero año y avaricia!" Members of the Boston GMB carried banners in solidarity with the exploited workers.

Day care staff not employees?

The Superior Court of Rhode Island has ruled that 1,300 home-based child care providers are neither state employees nor independent contractors. Overturning a decision by the Rhode Island Labor Board that authorized formation of a bargaining unit for the day care providers, the Court blocked an election for union representation by SEIU Local 1199.

The case began in October 2003, when New England Health Care Employees Union (SEIU) filed a petition to represent day care providers who work for state human service agencies. In April 2004, the state labor board ruled that the home care providers were state employees based on factors such as the state's right to control providers and to assign additional projects, the method of payment, the providers' role in offering state services, and provisions for employee benefits.

Rhode Island contended the Board lacked jurisdiction because the creation of state employee positions is regulated by statute. However, the Board concluded that the lack of a classification such as "Family Day Care Provider" in the state's personnel system did not mean the employees did not exist.

The state appealed to the state Superior Court in November, arguing that the day care providers were neither state employees nor independent contractors, but rather individuals required to adhere to state regulations required to conduct an at-home business.

On appeal, SEIU argued that the state controls providers' work routine and compensation, requires an application, provides health insurance, tell applicants how to become providers, maintains records on each child serviced, and monitors performance.

The decision follows a national trend in which growing numbers of workers are being held to be exempt from labor protections under a variety of pretexts, including independent contractor, temporary and student status.

SEIU says it will appeal.

New York City transit workers strike, rejecting MTA giveback demands

As we go to press, nearly 34,000 New York City bus and subway workers are on strike, after Metropolitan Transportation Authority officials demanded cuts in their pension plan and other concessions. Pension benefits are set by state law, and the MTA is not legally allowed to bargain over them with the union. Nonetheless, a state judge was quick to issue an injunction prohibiting the strike even before transit workers took to the picket lines with signs reading "We Move NY. Respect Us!"

The strike began Dec. 19 with a walk-out against two private Queens bus lines that are in the process of being brought into the MTA. The 750 workers at those lines had been working without a contract for three years. When transit officials remained intransigent, the union extended the strike to the entire MTA system, affecting some 7 million daily riders. Suburban commuter lines, ferries and private bus lines continued operations.

The city urged limousine and taxi drivers to pick up much of the slack, but they refused. "We won't be scabs for the city," said Bhairavi Desai of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance. "We consider it more of a lockout than a strike, with the way the MTA has conducted itself. We won't participate in bringing down the wages of another work force."

Julio Alvarez, president of the United Drivers Group, which represents limousine drivers, noted that his members face fines of \$350 for picking up a street hail and suspension of their license for picking up multiple passengers. Now the city is asking the drivers to violate those rules. "We're going to do our normal routine work, ... we're not going to just do something different just to break the strike," Alvarez said.

City officials have sued the union, seeking \$22 million in damages per day to cover lost revenue and the cost of police overtime, and at the request of New York state Attorney General Eliot Spitzer (who is seeking the

Democratic nomination for governor) a state judge has issued two injunctions barring the strike and picketing. Under one injunction, strikers could be fined \$25,000 a day and the union \$1 million a day, with fines doubling as the strike lengthened. That formula would mean initial fines of more than \$800 million a day, although on the first day of the strike the judge assessed "only" the \$1 million daily fine on the union.

In addition, under New York state's infamous Taylor Law – passed in 1966 after a 12-day strike by NYC transit workers with the support of many labor officials because it also provided for union recognition for public sector workers – workers could lose two days' pay for every day of work they miss. The so-called Public Employees-Fair Employment Act bars workers and unions from striking, and also from encouraging or "condoning" strikes.

Transit workers have successfully demanded that fines be waived in past strikes.

The MTA is demanding that the retirement age for new employees be raised to at least 62 after 30 years of service (from 55, after 25 years) and that new employees be required to contribute to their health care and pension coverage. The Authority is also demanding work rule changes that could combine job titles, requiring station agents to do cleaning work, cleaners to operate and maintain machinery, and train operators to walk the aisles (displacing conductors).

Workers reject "broadbanding" and other concessions, and are demanding stronger safety measures and more respect on the job. A survey of bus drivers, station agents, subway conductors and train operators conducted by Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations found that transit workers regularly face serious health hazards. Workers also report being harassed by supervisors and passengers on a frequent basis, and ordered to release unsafe vehicles



NEW YORK INDYMEDIA PHOTO

in order to meet schedules. The MTA issues more than 15,000 disciplines a year to workers; the union has offered to scale back its wage demands if the MTA agreed to cut back on disciplinary write-ups against workers.

Workers are outraged that the MTA is demanding concessions, particularly because the Authority has a billion dollar surplus. Transport Workers Union Local 100 President Roger Toussaint accused the MTA of bad-faith negotiations, demanding arbitration even before beginning negotiations, and using book-keeping tricks to conceal its surplus. As picket lines went up, he said the union had tried hard to avoid a strike: "This is a fight over whether hard work will be rewarded with a decent retirement. This is a fight over the erosion, or the eventual elimination, of health-benefits coverage for working people in New York. This is a fight over dignity and respect on the job, a concept that is very alien to the MTA. Transit workers are tired of being under-appreciated and disrespected."

Toussaint repeatedly warned that the union would not capitulate to threats. "There's a calling that is higher than the law, and that's the calling of justice."

There is some division with the union over the strike, with some rank-and-file workers saying officials are too prone to compromise and the president of the Transport Workers Union of America, Michael O'Brien, who has long opposed TWU Local

100 officials, saying he could not support a strike. Although the Local 100 executive board overwhelmingly voted to strike after talks broke down, the vote was not unanimous and some media are reporting that the TWU is considering placing the local into receivership in order to force a surrender pact on workers.

Other unions pledged support to the transit workers as the strike approached, and while many commuters expressed frustration several told reporters that they supported the strike. "I'm disappointed that it's happening," Manhattan commuter Matthew Higgs told the *New York Times*, "but I try to put myself in their shoes. The only way you can get what you want is to take a stand."

"These guys work every day," Higgs added. "Why shouldn't their kids have good health care? Why shouldn't their kids be able to go to college?"

Rail workers seek industry-wide union

BY RON KAMINKOW

Since it was founded last spring, Railroad Operating Crafts United has spread the message of cross-craft unity to thousands of engineers and trainmen across the United States. Responding to growing infighting between the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen (Teamsters) and the United Transportation Union, railroaders from the operating crafts are proposing a merger agreement that would unite the existing entities into a more democratic organization.

For well over a century, crafts have bargained separately, undercut each other, crossed each other's picket lines, and cut deals with the carriers. In the last five or six years the conflict between the BLET and UTU has escalated, largely over the implementation of new technology. Without a joint strategy, unions were completely unable to ward off Remote Control Operation, which has eliminated thousands of yard engineer positions since 2002. Now the carriers are demanding to replace the crafts of engineer and trainman with a generic "transportation employee" title and reduce standard over-the-road crews from two to one, saving billions of dollars. Potential costs to workers in job loss, diminished bargaining power, health and safety, and quality of work life are staggering.

ROCU has called for an immediate end to the war between the BLET and the UTU. ROCU Steering Committee member Jeanette Wallis of BLET Division 518 says, "As a working mother, I can't afford to see job safety and wages deteriorate because of infighting and petty bureaucracy... we need to see that the future of this industry depends on us coming together and creating it for ourselves."

P.J. Connors, a switchman from Wilmar, Minnesota, and member of UTU Local 1177, says, "We work on the same job together, sit on the same locomotive, we help each other out, look out for each other, share our food... We work for the same company. We should all be part of the same union together."

For more information, call 312-924-1437 or visit www.ROCUtoday.com.

Pensacola transit workers strike

BY LAUREN ANZALDO

Pushed by their boss' uncompromising stance at the negotiating table, 23 transit workers in Pensacola, Fla., went on strike on Nov. 1. As of this writing, the strike was in its 45th day with some hope for a resolution by the end of the year.

The striking drivers belong to the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1395, and are employees of Pensacola Bay Transport Inc. which has a county contract to provide transportation to elderly and disabled residents.

The workers were negotiating a new employment contract with Pensacola Bay owner Margie Wilcox when they hit an impasse. Wilcox wanted to double the amount workers pay for health care benefits from about \$300 a month for family coverage to about \$600. She also offered a 10-cent pay increase over three years instead of the \$1 yearly raise the workers asked for.

"When she mentioned 10 cents, it was off the chain," said Mary C. French, a driver for Pensacola Bay and a member of the union's negotiating committee. "This woman cannot be serious. This is adding insult to injury. She might as well not even have offered us anything. It was a slap in the face."

Starting pay for a driver at Pensacola Bay averages \$6.50 an hour. Top pay is \$8 hourly. Florida minimum wage is \$6.15 an hour and will rise to \$6.40 in January.

Drivers must be certified by the Department of Transportation and must pass a background check. They must also have no more than five points for traffic violations on their license, according to the contract in

force when the union went into negotiations. However, Wilcox revealed during talks that she had struck a deal with her insurance company that would require drivers to have no more than three points on their license.

"She was trying to institute three points, in violation of our contract," McDonald said. "We might have been able to negotiate, but she was not negotiating in good faith."

Wilcox wouldn't compromise, and the 36 union members voted unanimously to go on strike beginning Nov. 1. However, only 23 workers walked out. The bosses intimidated the rest, many of whom were junior employees who were threatened with termination if they went on strike. Scabs have been keeping Pensacola Bay running ever since.

Besides picketing outside the Pensacola Bay offices five days a week, the ATU has tried other tactics to pressure Wilcox. Because Pensacola Bay has a county contract and receives government subsidies, workers have appealed to local elected officials to intervene.

Besides the Pensacola Bay workers, ATU 1395 represents public bus drivers and blue-collar county employees. Escambia County has an agreement with the ATU that no county employees will be paid less than \$8 an hour.

"Why wouldn't you make sub-contractors do the same thing? What? Do you want us on welfare?" asked McDonald.

This line of reasoning may have convinced county administrator George Touart, who on Dec. 12 ordered Pensacola Bay to open its books for a full county audit. ATU 1395 President Mike Lowry, a county bus

driver, hopes that the county will charge Pensacola Bay with unfair labor practices if the audit indicates that the company can afford to pay the workers what they are asking.

Members of the Pensacola General Membership Branch of the IWW have supported the Pensacola Bay workers throughout their strike. Wobblies have regularly joined workers on the picket line and provided food boxes. End of the Line Café, a collectively run restaurant where five Wobblies work, has donated daily pots of coffee to the workers, who start picketing at 5 a.m.

The media has virtually ignored the strike. An attempt by the Pensacola GMB to place a classified ad discouraging scabbing was refused by the local daily newspaper, the *Pensacola News Journal*. The Branch then brought the same ad to another publication, which ran it without question.

The ad, which appeared for two weeks in the employment section, reads: "Attention Cabbies and Drivers! Don't be a scab! Crossing union picket lines hurts workers. Unite and win. Sponsored by the Pensacola IWW."

On Dec. 3, the Pensacola GMB and End of the Line Café hosted a benefit for the strikers in conjunction with the Traveling Wobbly Art Show. Folk musician Rymodee and poet Mike Racine – both Wobblies – performed at the event, which brought in \$300. The Boston GMB also raised \$250 for the ATU Strike Fund. Anyone interested in contributing to the fund for the striking transport workers can contact the Pensacola GMB at iwwpensacola@yahoo.com.

OSHA values workers' lives at \$2,500

Half of all fines employers paid after the Occupational Safety & Health Administration found they had committed serious violations of safety laws killing or seriously injuring workers were \$2,500 or less, according to a report in the Dec. 11 *Kansas City Star*.

When 25-year-old Les James was killed while working on a window-cleaning crew in July 2000, OSHA fined his employer—which had another fatal accident just four years before—\$2,700. When James' mother learned of the amount, she wept. "That's nothing for taking my son's life," said Donna Frailey.

The *Star's* examination of the agency's inspection database found that in 80 such fatal and injury accidents, half of the fines Kansas City-area employers paid were \$3,000 or less. Regulators and OSHA lawyers reduced employers' initial fines by nearly 60 percent. Adjusted for inflation, fines last year averaged less than they were in 1972.

Nationwide, fines were even lower. OSHA regional administrator Chuck Adkins said this was because the agency was more interested in improving safety than in collecting money. "As far as we're concerned, the amount of the penalty is incidental to the accomplishment that we get as the result of that inspection."

OSHA policies state that penalties should be "sufficient to serve as an effective deterrent to violations." But the agency is limited by law to maximum fines of \$7,000 for each serious violation and \$70,000 for each willful violation. OSHA policy is to reduce fines for companies with fewer than 251 employees and for other factors.

Susan Baker, a professor of public health at Johns Hopkins University, said higher OSHA fines would prompt many companies to correct serious safety hazards faster. "Until the fine for ignoring a hazard is bigger than the cost of fixing the hazard, a lot of employers won't do anything," she said.

Even the puny fines assessed by OSHA sometimes go unpaid. When Guy Beller Jr. died in 1996 on an Allied Hydro-Blasters job because the company was too cheap to provide a \$300 safety harness, OSHA proposed a \$1,500 fine. The debt went uncollected because the government couldn't find the now defunct company, but *The Star* found its president with a single phone call.

In the accident that killed Les James, OSHA cited Quality Window Cleaning Inc. for three serious violations, including a failure to provide safety lines or a guardrail, which carried maximum fines of \$21,000. But the agency proposed a fine of only \$4,500, which OSHA lawyers later reduced.

Two years after James' death, another Quality Window worker died from a fall. OSHA found no violations in that accident.

ASARCO copper miners win

International solidarity between the United Steelworkers, the Mexican miners union SNTMMSRM, and the Federation of Workers of the Mine and Metal Industries of Peru FETIMAP helped copper workers maintain their strike against ASARCO, Minera Mexico, and Southern Peru Copper, owned by conglomerate Grupo Mexico.

USW members have now approved a 14-

month contract without Asarco's health care and pension cuts and including the guarantee they demanded that despite Asarco's Chapter 11 bankruptcy any buyout would include negotiation with the union.

The three unions participated in a Global Solidarity Day against the transnational before the strike and Mexican unions conducted work stoppages to pressure Asarco.

Florida labor scandal points to McDonald's supplier

The lead story in the Dec. 9 *Ft. Myers News Press*, "Former smuggler, slaver back in business—legally," reports on an Immokalee contractor who spent 33 months in prison for enslaving migrant farm workers in 1999.

"Today he's back in business furnishing labor to farmers in Florida and New Jersey. And it's perfectly legal. He can't own a gun or vote, but the law says he can work as a labor contractor five years after his conviction."

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers helped federal prosecutors develop the case against Abel Cuello and his brother in 1999, one of six such cases the CIW helped investigate and prosecute since 1997. Laura Germino, coordinator of the CIW's Anti-Slavery Campaign, is quoted in the same article, asking, "Regardless of the loophole allowing him to get a license, what kind of company hires someone with a criminal record—particularly a criminal record of egregious labor abuse—to oversee their employees?"

The answer to that question is Ag-Mart, recently fined nearly \$300,000 by Florida and North Carolina for repeatedly violating rules designed to protect workers from dangerous pesticide poisoning.

Ag-Mart, of course, doesn't operate in a vacuum—someone buys the tomatoes Ag-Mart produces. And so the question begs to be asked: What kind of company buys tomatoes produced by a grower that, by all accounts, shows such disregard for its workers' rights, health, and safety? According to the *New York Times*, McDonald's is a major buyer of Ag-Mart's grape tomatoes for its salad line.

ILO complaint: North Carolina violates workers' rights

Members of UE Local 150, North Carolina Public Service Workers Union, have filed a complaint with the United Nations' International Labor Organization charging the state of North Carolina and the U.S. government with gross violations of worker rights.

International law protects the right to free association and collective bargaining, both of which are denied to public sector workers by North Carolina law. Workers from Canada and Mexico joined UE members and supporters to serve the ILO complaint on North Carolina Governor Michael Easley (D) December 9, as part of nationwide actions commemorating International Human Rights Day. www.ranknfile-ue.org/dec10.html

NWA mechanics voting on 'worst contract in history'

As we go to press, striking mechanics at Northwest Airlines are voting on what the head of their union calls "the worst contract in the history of airline labor." The contract would move striking members of the Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association to laid-off status, making them eligible for four weeks of layoff pay and payment of accrued vacation time. A handful might eventually be rehired as positions opened.

AMFA officials decided to send Northwest's proposal to a vote on the 115th day of their strike, which has been undermined by scabbing by members of other Northwest unions, outsourcing of maintenance and cleaning jobs, and some 480 scabbing Northwest mechanics (most of whom had been laid-off well before the strike) and another 400 scabs hired for the strike.

Some 4,100 AMFA mechanics, cleaners and custodians struck August 19, rejecting a proposal that would have saved up to 2,750 mechanics' jobs, but cut wages by 25 percent and eliminated all cleaning and custodial jobs. The airline had already eliminated nearly 6,000 AMFA jobs in the four years leading up to the strike.

Union scabs seek unity

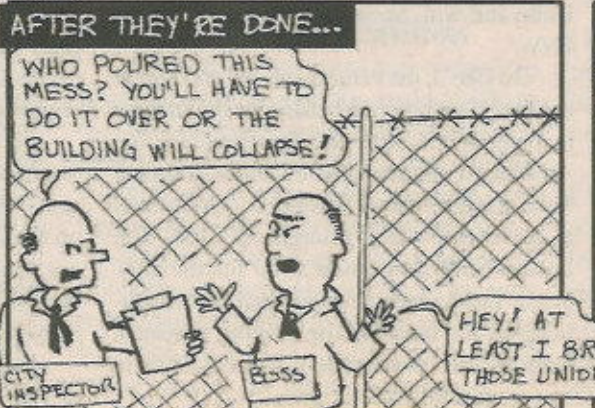
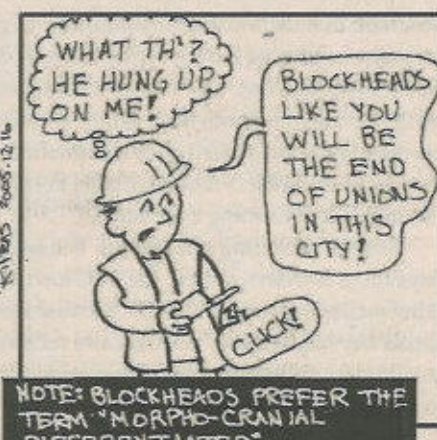
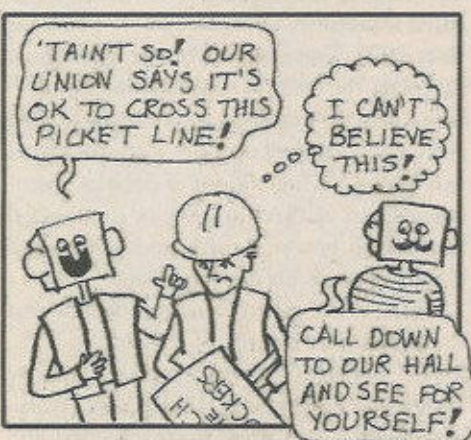
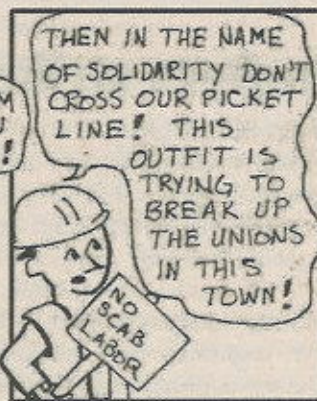
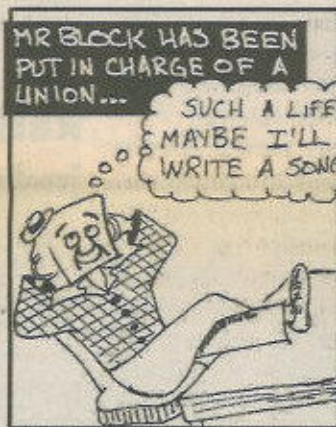
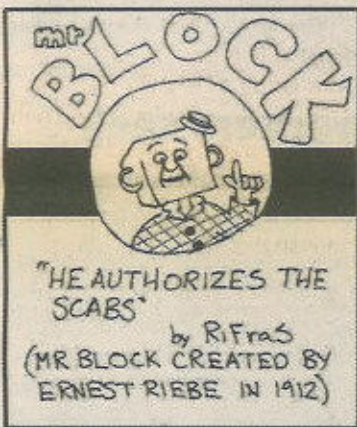
Meanwhile, leaders of scabbing Northwest unions are threatening strike action of their own if the airline does not scale back its concessions demands. Northwest is demanding massive pay cuts and the elimination of thousands of jobs, many of which would be shifted to a new nonunion subsidiary.

"The union movement here at Northwest is alive and well," roared Bobby DePace, president of the Northwest ground workers union, at a Dec. 7 "unity rally." DePace referred to Northwest's CEO as "Doug Stealin," accusing Steenland of trying to steal jobs from veteran employees.

An Associated Press report said "No one could remember the last time these three Northwest unions stood together like this. More recently, their relations have been characterized by bickering with the pilots after the pilots negotiated pay cuts in an effort to keep Northwest out of bankruptcy and urged other unions to do the same."

Northwest says it will seek unilateral changes in its labor contracts from a bankruptcy judge January 17 if the scabbing unions do not accept its terms. The Machinists union says they will strike if their contract is thrown out.

Striking AMFA members were barred from the rally, but leafleted outside pledging support for other Northwest workers.



How can union members protect themselves?

BY HARRY KELBER

Every union member, whether in the AFL-CIO or Change to Win coalition, is experiencing growing anxiety about their economic future. And their problems are getting worse. The announcement that General Motors is eliminating 30,000 jobs may be just the tip of the iceberg. During 2004, U.S. employers laid off 4,197,000 workers, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, who called them "job losers."

Neither the AFL-CIO nor the unions in Change to Win challenged the layoffs, accepting them like a natural disaster, similar to Hurricane Katrina or a tsunami. In virtually every instance, unions allowed employers to cut as many jobs as they desired, without consulting their workers. Thus, even companies that were rolling in profits took part in the layoff epidemic to lower their labor costs still further, while expecting the remaining workers to take up any slack in production. We're not sure where the ax will fall next, but what if you become one of the victims?

With rare exceptions, unions pay almost no attention to the plight of laid-off workers. Those who can't keep up with their dues payments are dropped from the union's rolls. About 20 percent of these workers are still looking for a job more than six months after their layoff. And if they find one, the odds are that it will pay significantly less than the one they lost.

Union leaders are no longer concerned about fighting for jobs for the unemployed, since the official jobless rate is down to 5 percent, but that digit represents 7,433,000 workers who can't find employment. That number is larger by far than the population of every U.S. city except New York.

Unions have no plan

Nor are unions and their leaders doing anything about the continuing exodus of tens of thousands of good-paying American jobs to cheaper overseas labor markets. The outlook for good jobs in the United States is not very reassuring. Here are some grim statistics of what we can expect in the years ahead:

American employers are expected to export about 3.3 million white collar service jobs to low-wage countries within the next 15

years. That will cost American workers \$136 billion in lost wages, according to Forester Research Inc., a corporate consulting firm. Is it any wonder that workers are worried that they may be next in line to lose their jobs to the outsourcing mania?

Looking at the future, BLS says that seven of the 10 occupations expected to experience the greatest job growth are in such low-wage occupations as retail sales, customer service, cashiers, janitors, waiters and waitresses, and nurses aides. Among professional occupations, the fastest growing jobs will be for RNs and college teachers, which require education degrees and special skills.

If you're lucky enough to have a job, you are probably finding that your paycheck, even with a union-negotiated wage increase, doesn't cover your family living costs, especially with the rising prices of gas and heating oil. In specific terms, the average wage increase for the year is 2.9 percent, compared with consumer inflation, which rose 4.7 percent in the latest annual reading.

But that tells only part of the story. Under strong pressure from employers, many unions made serious concessions in their contracts. They had to increase premiums and co-payments in their members' health-care insurance. They accepted painful adjustments in members' retirement plans and in the benefits that had been promised their retirees.

In contrast to their tight-fisted attitude toward their workers, American companies have showered shareholders with a record windfall of more than \$500 billion in dividends and buybacks, as stated in the Nov. 28 *Wall Street Journal*. "That's up more than 30% from last year's record – and equivalent to nearly \$1,700 for every person in the U.S.," the newspaper said. How many jobs had to be cut to provide that huge profit windfall?

What can union members do to protect themselves?

For years, most union members have remained passive about their unions. They paid their dues and expected their officials to deliver contracts that contained higher wages and improved benefits.

That situation no longer holds. We can't rely on our leaders to fight for our interests,

either because they don't know how or because they feel too weak to try. If we don't want to be treated like "road kill" by aggressive anti-union employers, each of us – for our self-interest – must become involved in a campaign to save our unions and our jobs.

The labor movement, representing a total of about 18 million members, is, potentially, the most powerful economic and political force in American society. Its members are at work in virtually every city and town in the country, supplying the goods and services that Americans depend on. It's our urgent duty to awaken our sleeping giant to rectify the injustices that working people are enduring.

Here is what we propose: Whenever a company of 50 or more workers, whether union or not, announces a layoff, a committee of union officials and employees should demand a meeting with management. It should insist on knowing why the layoffs were made and how those figures were arrived at. It should ask whether company executives have been included in the layoffs, and whether any alternatives had been suggested in place of the job cuts. It should try to negotiate the best possible deal under the circumstances.

Taking the offensive against abusive treatment

If the company refuses to meet with the committee or goes ahead with the layoffs, a mass rally should be held in front of its headquarters and a picket line set up at the company's entrance and maintained until executives agree to a meeting. The issue should be pursued until a just settlement was achieved. If we did that consistently, companies would think twice before instituting layoffs to increase their stock price.

The same procedure should apply to corporations planning to outsource their operations to low-wage regions. In addition, there could be a boycott of the company's products. Unions should also demand that Congress pass a stiff tax on corporations that relocate their production facilities abroad.

These proposals do not require setting

up new structures. These would be ad hoc committees that allow for spontaneity; they would help create a bond of solidarity among workers from different industries.

Most employers, even in unionized companies, have come to believe they own us. They dictate our lives on the job, setting rules that work to their advantage, without regard to how we feel about them. They want us to work harder and longer. They pay us as little as they can get away with. They consider us disposable. And when we can't provide them with the profits they expect, they get rid of us and look for cheaper labor they can exploit.

Our union leaders have shown an unwillingness to defend us against attacks on us except by waging a paper war against them through press statements and e-mails. But what about us? If we continue to do nothing, the advantages we still enjoy as union members will erode even more; we'll be drawn into "the race to the bottom," in a losing battle in the global job market.

Are we angry enough?

If we are really angry about the contemptuous treatment we receive from employers and politicians, then we should be ready to fight back. Each of us should become part of a resistance movement that will react quickly and energetically to any injustice to working people. We should join hands with co-workers in our local unions and in our central labor councils to defend our rights. We should appeal to unorganized workers who share our concerns. If we build sufficient rank-and-file strength, we may inspire our leaders to stand up and fight with us for the needs of working families.

We're not going to change the attitude and behavior of ruthless employers and right-wing politicians by trying to shame them with words that expose their unethical practices. If we expect them to treat us with respect, we'll have to demonstrate that we deserve it.

This is part of a continuing series on the future of the labor movement. Other installments have been posted at www.iww.org.

Eroding a day of rest

Results of a Swiss national referendum on Nov. 27 erode the country's oldest time-off protection for workers: retail workers may now be required to work on Sundays.

In a narrow vote in which 42 percent of eligible voters participated, 50.6 percent voted in favor of increasing open hours and the variety of products that can be sold at large railway stations and airports.

In Switzerland, it is illegal to open for business on Sundays (with the exception of transportation, health care and tourism jobs). The referendum conducted in November was placed on the ballot by Swiss Federation of Labour Unions, which hoped to head off a legislative effort to ratify a legally shaky practice of a growing number of Swiss retailers – opening outlets of large stores in rail stations, where it is legal to sell "necessary items" for travellers. The new law allows all stores to open Sundays at any railway station that has income of more than \$16 million per year. Business analysts claimed that voting against Sunday shopping would cause the loss of 150 retail operations and 2,000 jobs.

Migros, far and away the largest retailer in Switzerland, opened seven mega stores in rail stations and airports in Switzerland in recent years. Migros sells almost a quarter of the country's food through its chain of supermarkets and other goods through a variety of affiliated outlets. In addition it owns a bank and two newspapers, controls a major political party, and is Switzerland's foremost sponsor of cultural events.

"Nothing will change, apart from a few more non-food stores opening in some railway stations," Migros group lobbyist Martin Schlepfer told the BBC. Migros is operated as

a consumer cooperative, reinvesting a majority of profits either back into the business or in community projects. Over one million Swiss families are members. The chain has a reputation for union-busting, using the Swiss system of works councils to cut the legs out from under the unions, paying low salaries, and creating a hostile atmosphere when workers try to join a union. Presently, only 3 percent of Migros employees belong to unions, in contrast to the approximately 20 percent unionization rate in the entire private sector.

Churches, some political parties, and trade unions organized against the measure. Unions believe ratification of Sunday shopping will eventually lead to the loss of premium pay for Sunday work in other sectors.

Eleven days after this vote, the Swiss House of Representatives voted down a measure nearly two-to-one that would have allowed for general opening of all retail establishments on Sundays.

Roll the Hours Back

In April 1976 the *Industrial Worker* published a song to the tune of Rock Around the Clock (you can find it in the current *Little Red Songbook*) proclaiming it was time "to roll the hours back again."

But times change; here's a version for today's longer hours and shorter pay:

Once we worked eight hours,
then we worked ten;
Now they want 12, is it ever going to end?

Chorus: Time to roll the hours back again,
Time to roll the hours back again,
We've gotta roll, we're gotta roll,
We're gotta roll the hours back.

Left home this morning, moon in the sky,
Won't see the sun 'till lay-off time. (ch)

Four workers, three workers,
two workers, one
Tryin' to get the same pile of work done...

Jobs went to China, or so they say,
So why do we work these 12 hour days?...

Boss says to be glad, for the overtime,
but I've got a life, I need my time. Chorus

Kids at home, all by themselves,
While I'm at work my life's on the shelf...

Hundreds of the hungry,
thousands of the poor,
Millions of workers marchin' on the door,

Shoutin' roll the hours back again,
We're gonna roll the hours back again,
We've gonna roll, we're gonna roll,
We're gonna roll the hours back.

Fight for shorter Hours

Overtime shows in waistline

A recent University of Helsinki study found that exhausting work and long hours puts workers at risk of gaining weight, because of exhaustion, the lack of time for exercise, and poor eating habits.

Eight Hour Day anniversary

March 13 marks the 150th anniversary of the Eight Hour Day in Victoria, Australia, and as part of anniversary celebrations unionists will march in the Moomba parade. Historically, Eight Hour Day processions were the largest public events in Melbourne until the mid-20th century, with workers parading through the streets to celebrate the achievement.

Greece: 24-hour general strike against longer hours

The General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) held a 24-hour general strike Dec. 14 to express its opposition to a new law for more "flexible" work hours and reduced costs of overtime. This followed a national strike July 26 against the law's passage, and a strike by construction workers demanding a 35-hour week.

Business interests say the new law "improves cost competitiveness and lifts impediments in creating employment."

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Film Review: Good Night, And Good Luck

BY JOHN GORMAN

This film has just about finished its theatrical run, but it will reverberate with those who have seen it for many years to come. A look at the credits shows such a concatenation of producers, distributors, editors, etc. we can wonder that the story ever got on the screen at all. But this time, the movies got it right.

The plot is simple: The year is 1953, Eisenhower is president, the Korean War is winding down, and America is rapidly losing the hegemony it had earned with its victory in World War II. The Soviets have got the bomb, and communism seems on the march everywhere. We have "lost" China, and communist regimes are in power throughout Eastern Europe bolstered by the Red Army, and elections threaten to bring much of Western Europe into the Soviet orbit at well. What happened? What's going on?

Senator Joseph McCarthy has the answer: The government, he proclaims, is riddled with "subversives" who are selling America out, if not by outright espionage, then at least by spreading defeatism on the stage, on the screen and throughout the media. Academia is a hotbed of communist sympathizers and fellow travelers. Even the State Department and the armed forces are not safe from this insidious blight.

Convening a Senate panel to investigate the nature and extent of communist influence in the United States, the senator proceeds to ride roughshod over the careers and the lives of those who displease him. Accusation is tantamount to guilt, and there is no defense against this modern Inquisition. Since the senator is acting within his official capacity, the laws against libel offer no protection, and he can say what he likes without fear of the courts.

Institutions can hardly wait to get on board this juggernaut. Most churches look on with approval, and reactionary clergy even offer public prayers for success of the senator's crusade. Hollywood, with a few noble exceptions whose careers are promptly terminated, postures bravely but caves in quickly. Academia and the State Department hasten to purge themselves of the un-American, blighting, if not ending, countless careers, while the armed forces rush to remove the disloyal from their ranks.

Navy pilot Milo Radulovitch is just one such target. Denied promotion and expelled from the military based on evidence he is never allowed to refute or even to see, his family appeals to CBS News and Edward R. Murrow, moderator of "See It Now," a national news program. The manifest unfairness of what happened to Radulovitch raises Murrow's hackles and leads to a CBS investigation and a subsequent broadcast that greatly embarrasses the Navy, leads to Radulovitch's reinstatement, and arouses the wrath of the senator from Wisconsin.

While Murrow is portrayed by actor David Strathairn, McCarthy is shown only in his TV clips from that era, where he speaks for himself quite well, exposing himself as both a coward and a bully. His attacks on Murrow are purely personal, and he makes no attempt to refute any of the factual statements made in the newsman's reports. The end follows swiftly, with McCarthy finally bringing down upon himself the wrath of his fellow senators and being censured by that august body. He fades into obscurity, and Murrow continues his career in the newsroom.

"Good Night, and Good Luck" is more than a modern morality play, however. While Wobblies will be interested to hear the reference to the IWW and Murrow's possible participation, there are at least two critical lessons that anyone can take away from this film. The first is the cowardice of contemporary institutions. The Senate did not have the nerve to stand up to McCarthy until well after Murrow had shown them that "the emperor has no clothes." Even the president had nothing to say in public until Murrow had spoken. Many other organizations only decided to oppose McCarthy when they were convinced it was safe to do so. Then they closed in like a wolf pack on a sickly moose.

The second lesson involves the critical role played by CBS in this struggle. Had his network not stood behind him, Murrow would have been just one more "voice crying in the wilderness" of professional Siberia, and he would have ended his career in some media backwater, if he had been able to find employment at all.

We can only hope that this story helps those responsible for our social and cultural institutions today to understand that, without institutional support, the most likely result of individual courage is personal martyrdom, an edifying tale for future generations perhaps, but no help in facing down tyrants now.

NYU strikers face blacklist

Nearly 1,000 New York University graduate workers and supporters rallied Dec. 5, protesting NYU Pres. Sexton's ultimatum that striking graduate workers to return to work by that day or be fired. Teaching and research assistants struck Nov. 9 when administrators refused to negotiate a new contract.

Over 200 full-time NYU faculty held a "funeral procession" for academic integrity. The full-timers, calling themselves "Faculty Democracy," said administrators were interfering with faculty rights and warned of possible actions in solidarity with the strikers.

The administration claims that most teaching assistants abandoned the strike in the face of its ultimatum; the union disagrees, saying the NYU count includes only sections where courses are taught solely by teaching assistants — many of which are language courses taught by international students particularly vulnerable to the college's threats.

Chicago: The Chicago Couriers Union and Casa de la Cultura "Mestizarte" presented an exhibit celebrating the life and works of Carlos Cortez at ACME Art Works through Dec. 9, with a Dec. 2 "Messengers at the Mic" benefit featuring musical and video performances and a Dec. 9 Tribute to Carlos Cortez with poetry, stories, music and art.

Millville, New Jersey: Portraits of Workers Movement by Morel Pagano. High Street Design, 16 East Pine St. Dec. 16 - Feb. 11, 2006. Pagano was a union bricklayer and artist. This exhibit marks the IWW centenary, and includes portraits of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Eugene V. Debs, and others active in labor movements.

IWWn 100-vuoteis juhla: Greetings from the IWW 100 year anniversary in Hertoniemi Dec. 3. I showed up for a couple hours in the middle. It was a good, well-organized event.

There were at least a couple dozen people there when I came and there was a talk going on about syndicalism, followed by a great documentary about the Butte strike in 1917, the Irish and Finnish Wobblies there, Frank Little, good interviews and lots of vintage footage, and music by Wärtinä. Then a meal break and a talk about the IWW and the possibilities of starting a branch in Finland. There definitely seems to be interest. — Bill Hellberg, Helsinki

Mumia appeal...

continued from page 1

in a city 44 percent black, that the jury selection process in Abu-Jamal's trial resulted in his having just two black jurors ruling on his guilt and sentence.

Equally compelling is the claim that McGill's summation was unconstitutional. Right from the outset, McGill tried to convince the jury that, far from following the dictum "innocent until proven guilty" and making sure that they didn't convict an innocent man, they should be careful not to free a suspect who might well be guilty. Appellate courts, including the Pennsylvania Supreme Court (in a case, ironically, involving McGill saying the same words), had already held that telling a jury in a summation that their verdict would not be final was grounds for a mistrial.

McGill probably calculated that the politics of this case — a black radical convicted of killing a white police officer — would make another such reversal unlikely. That calculation would prove to be correct. He tried the tactic again, telling them, "If your decision of course were to acquit, to allow the Defendant to walk out, that is fine. There is nothing I can do and there is nothing that the judge or anyone could do that would affect that in any way. If you find the Defendant guilty of course, there would be appeal after appeal and perhaps there could be a reversal of the case, or whatever, so that may not be final."

Finally on the judicial bias claim, there are so many examples of Sabo's bias, particularly at the PCRA hearing, where he was the one making the rulings regarding the validity of evidence and the admission of new evidence, that the appellate judges' decision in favor of the defense claim should be clear. Again, though, there is bound to be enormous political pressure brought on the court.

After a lengthy delay, the Third Circuit has put Abu-Jamal's appeal on a "fast track," setting January 17 as the date for the defense to file its brief on the three claims. At that point, the DA would have 30 days to respond with its own brief, after which the defense would have another 30 days to respond. The DA would have a final 14 days to file a final brief responding to the defense's last arguments to the court. At that point, the Appeals Court judges would decide whether to hold a public hearing on the case, or simply decide based upon the submitted briefs.

Major League sweatshops

BY KENNETH MILLER

Pittsburgh has one of the first SweatFree Purchasing laws in the U.S. The ordinance requires complete disclosure of factory locations where apparel purchased by the city is sewn. But the city is not in compliance with our sweatshop ordinance and is executing contracts with suppliers sourcing from known sweatshops, including New Era, Gilman and Superior Uniform Group.

A big thank you to those who downloaded the City of Pittsburgh sweatshop petition from www.sweatfree.org. This petition will be presented to City Council January 10 and throughout the month of January members of the Pittsburgh Anti Sweatshop Community Alliance will be reviewing the status of our City of Pittsburgh sweatshop legislation.

The best Major League Sweatshop Education in America is kicking off the 2006 baseball season at Pirates Fest January 27-29 at the Lawrence Convention Center. The Pirates are gearing up for season ticket sales, group sales and the 2006 All Star Game. Check out all the sweatshop promotional items, the new labels and licensing agreements.

Interested in what the players and Pirates management have to say about sweatshops? Ask them at Pirates Fest 2006. What do the most serious baseball fans and young people have to say about sweatshops? We are dressing up like Pirates, making special signs for inside the convention center and talk talk talk about sweatshops at Pirate Fest 2006. Direct Action Gets the Goods, Bucco!

Plan to attend the SweatFree Communities annual conference in Minneapolis April 7 -

There are a number of possible outcomes in the Third Circuit. The worst-case scenario would be for the appellate court to reverse Judge Yohn's ruling on the death sentence, and to reject all the guilt-phase claims, which would put him back on track for execution.

On the guilt-phase claims, there are a number of things that could happen. If the jury-selection race-bias claim is upheld, the court could order a new trial or could send the case back to Judge Yohn for reconsideration based upon the evidence he wrongly dismissed as irrelevant. Yohn could then order a new trial if he found evidence of race-based selection of jurors.

The claim of prosecutorial error in the summation to the jury could also lead to an order for a new trial, though again another option would be to send the matter back to Yohn's court for a rehearing.

Finally, the judicial bias claim, because it involved the PCRA hearing in 1995, not the 1982 trial itself, might not lead to a new trial but rather to a new or reopened state court PCRA hearing. There the defense would likely have the opportunity to bring back key trial witnesses as well as call new witnesses. That, in turn, would give the defense new avenues of appeal, in both state and federal courts, and possibly another chance for a new trial.

Robert Bryan, who took over Abu-Jamal's case as lead attorney over a year ago was clearly elated about the Third Circuit decision. He said, "Today we achieved a great victory in the campaign to win a new trial and the eventual freedom of Mumia."

Bryan said all three claims "are of enormous constitutional significance and go to the very essence of Mumia's right to a fair trial, due process of law, and equal protection of the law under the Fifth, Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution."

Asked for comment on the Third Circuit's decision, a DA's office spokeswoman initially said, "We haven't heard about their decision yet." Later that morning she called back and said, "We have no comment."

The next day, Hugh Burns, the assistant D.A. handling the Abu-Jamal case appeal for the district attorney, told the *Philadelphia Daily News* that the appellate court's decision was a "major blow."

Lindorff is an independent journalist whose web site is at www.thiscantbehappening.net



9. Listen to workers from five continents discuss their global organizing plan for the apparel industry. Hear about violence and fear of plant closings used to crush organizing drives. Discuss what does solidarity looks and feels like with some of the most experienced international solidarity activists in North America. Let's talk about how we are going to use our power.

We are struggling for our union rights in Pittsburgh. We are fighting to keep and expand our health care and transportation and education. We are fighting to keep the politicians from shoveling our tax dollars in the mouths of the super rich. We need more than anything to be in solidarity, not competition, with workers throughout the world. We want to make Pittsburgh a welcoming place to people from all over the world and to live up to Pittsburgh's rich heritage of solidarity and free speech struggles.

We are throwing out the leaders who want Pittsburgh to be an entertainment complex for the rich instead of a home for working people. We are moving forward — building the Civil Rights Bridge between Pittsburgh and the floor of the global sweatshop.

Workers in Pittsburgh and workers in the global apparel industry need each other.

No Sweatshops Bucco!



1905-2005:
Celebrating
a Century of
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BOOKS FOR REBELLIOUS WORKERS



Solidarity Forever: The IWW's Labor History Calendar

Historic photos and commemorative dates are combined in this edition of the IWW's annual labor history calendar.

\$10.00 (postage included) • \$5.50 each for five or more to the same address.

This year, our calendar theme is workplace occupations. In an era when bosses seem to embrace strikes as an opportunity to clear out union workers, we might do well to look to our past—or to the example of our fellow workers in other countries. By taking control of our workplaces, if only for a few days, we implicitly challenge the bosses' "right" to control industry, and by extension, our lives. Seizing a factory or occupying a store is a declaration that our rights as workers are more important than the bosses' "right" to own the workplaces we and our fellow workers built and maintain and operate.

The images in this year's calendar commemorate factory occupations and other workers' direct actions in Argentina, Mexico, Poland, and the United States. They document instances where workers seized a shipyard to protest the suspension of union delegates; a direct action campaign where 50,000 IWW lumberjacks burned the lousy bed rolls they had been hauling from job to job forcing the bosses to provide clean bedding; occupations of factories in Argentina and Chicago to block the bosses' efforts to shut down production and throw workers on the street; a picket line that followed scab cargo across the globe; shipyard workers in Poland whose occupation of their workplace began the process that toppled the Stalinist regime that had oppressed them for so long; and occupations by immigrant miners in Arizona, auto workers in Flint, and retail clerks in New York City who won their demands by taking over their workplaces and refusing to be budged.



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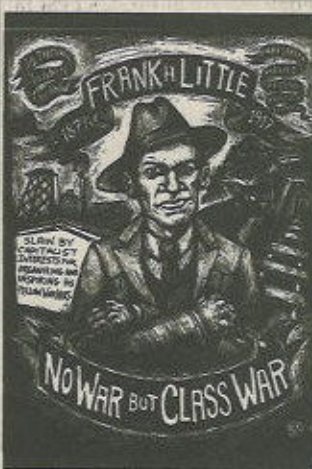
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Wobblies! A Graphic History Edited by Paul Buhle and Nicole Schulman

The stories of the hard-rock miners' shooting wars, young Elizabeth Gurly Flynn (the "Rebel Girl" of contemporary sheet music), the first sit-down strikes and Free Speech fights, the Pageant for Paterson orchestrated in Madison Square Garden, bohemian radicals John Reed and Louise Bryant, field-hand revolts and lumber workers' strikes, wartime witch hunts, government prosecutions and mob lynching, Mexican-American uprisings in Baja, and Mexican peasant revolts led by Wobblies, hilarious and sentimental songs created and later revived—all are here, and much, much more.

"Tell the bosses to go to hell and buy an extra copy of this wonderful history. Give it to an exploited friend or just leave it in a public place. On the centenary of the IWW, we should be replanting the seeds of rebellion."

—Mike Davis, author of *City of Quartz* and *Planet of Slums* **306 pages, \$25.00**



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British Air sacks worker for solidarity

British Airways has dismissed one of the three ground crew workers it had disciplined for their part in the wildcat strike at Heathrow airport last summer in solidarity with Gate Gourmet catering workers. BA said the dismissed worker had been "found guilty of gross misconduct for playing a leading role in the walkout."

A second worker was issued a final written warning and suspended without pay for one month. Disciplinary proceedings continue for the third employee, who remains suspended from duty with pay.

All three workers are from the airline's ground support unit at Heathrow, which consists of baggage handlers, loaders and bus drivers. One thousand workers took unofficial strike action August 11 and 12, in solidarity with fellow T&G members who had been discharged by the airline's Heathrow-based in-flight catering supplier, Gate Gourmet, when they objected to the introduction of temporary staff hired to take their jobs.

The strike caused the cancellation of 900 flights and cost the airline up to £45 million. While it disciplined the workers involved, BA rewarded Gate Gourmet with a contract extension at increased rates, while allowing the caterer to suspend provision of hot meals for many months while it replaced its work force.

Gate Gourmet blames the interruption on a core of militants who refused to sign agreements accepting compensation in exchange for giving up their jobs. Many workers are pressing unfair dismissal claims. Gate Gourmet has refused to reinstate any worker who continues to challenge the mass firing.

While the company reached an agree-

ment with the Transport & General union to take back 400 of the 700 workers it dismissed, only 13 have been returned to their jobs. The company will unilaterally impose what it calls "21st century" working conditions.

Meanwhile, in Germany Gate Gourmet workers have been on strike for decent wages and working conditions at Düsseldorf airport since October 7, but management remains intransigent – even taking two weeks to respond to the government arbitration agency's offer for mediation.

Since Gate Gourmet bought the company three years ago, there have been no wage increases. Now management wants to increase weekly work hours from 38.5 to 40 hours, slash five of 30 annual holiday days, reduce extra pay for night shifts and Sundays, and demand even more flexible work hours.

Gate Gourmet has paid a high price for its refusal to compromise with the strikers. Every day they pay for scabs and security measures. It would be cheaper to accept workers' wage demands, but the company is clearly determined to send a message to workers in other cities. While union workers at other facilities have sent solidarity messages, they have kept on working, in some cases even sending pre-packed food to supply the planes.

On Nov. 18, 70 strike supporters blocked airline gates for an hour before they were cleared by police.

Local managers finally negotiated a settlement with the union Dec. 7. But before workers could vote on the deal Gate Gourmet's European headquarters renounced it. The Düsseldorf workers are appealing for solidarity from other air transport and Gate Gourmet workers.

Haitian Free Trade Zone workers double their pay

BY BATAY OUVRIYE

A final agreement was signed Dec. 13 between management at the Codevi Free Trade Zone (Grupo M) in Haiti's Ouanaminthe Free Trade Zone and the SOCOWA workers' union, affiliated with the May First Batay Ouvriye union. The base salary of 432 gourdes weekly (US\$10.16) will increase to 900 gourdes, with wages increasing by another 45 percent over the next three years.

Other issues relating to union recognition, labor rights, working conditions, health and safety, pregnancy and sexual harassment were also settled. The agreement follows the reinstatement of more than 150 workers sacked for belonging to the Socowa union who were reinstated after an international solidarity campaign targeting Grupo M contractor Levi Strauss.

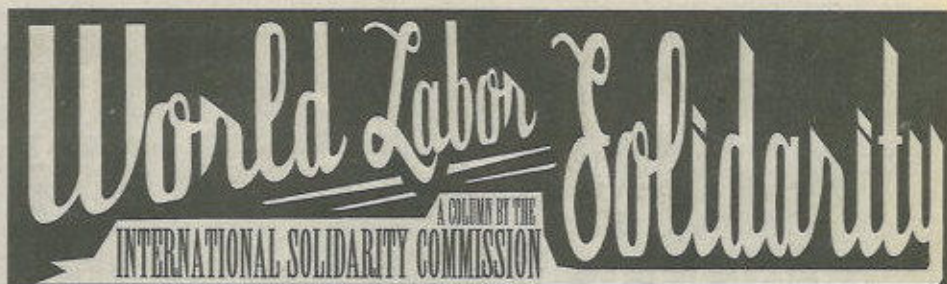
45,000 African textile workers lose jobs

An estimated 45,000 workers in the textile, clothing, footwear and leather sectors in South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland have lost their jobs over the past year as global contractors have shifted production to lower-cost countries. Pottery and ceramics workers are also being affected.

An ICFTU report issued on the eve of WTO talks, *Stitched Up!*, presents a stark picture of hundreds of thousands of job losses internationally, mainly in the textile and clothing sectors, accompanied by a manic "race to the bottom" in terms of wages and working conditions.

Nepal: 100 unionists arrested in democracy protests

The Nepalese GEFONT union joined other union federations to mark international Human Rights Day. Thousands of unionists and activists from the Dalit movement marched to the heart of the City Basantpur chanting slogans demanding peace and democracy. Over 100 activists were arrested when they tried to enter a park in the city center which authorities have declared off limits, and other demonstrators were dispersed with water cannons and batons.



Support Iranian workers

The IWW's International Solidarity Commission wrote Iran's government to protest violations of workers' fundamental rights. One letter condemned the recent conviction of five labor activists in connection with 2004 May Day actions in Saqquz, and demanded their immediate release. A second expressed support for several hundred textile workers of the Kurdistan Textile Company in Sanandaj, who struck Sept. 24 to protest the firing of 38 workers working under temporary contracts. That letter demanded an end to persecution of workers' representatives, reinstatement of the fired workers, release of all political prisoners, and an end to violence against workers and their organizations.

International Migrants Day

The ISC issued a statement supporting International Migrants Day (Dec. 18) and condemning the illegal jailing of union officials in South Korea in retaliation for their efforts in behalf of migrant workers.

"The South Korean government's crack-down on immigration [is] a shortsighted and repressive tactic directed at those who only seek the most basic rights of refuge and sustenance. When these most basic of all human rights are allowed to be threatened in South Korea, they become threatened everywhere. As a union which historically has grown from the ranks of immigrants such as those in South Korea today, we see through the veil of unreasonable authority over populations vulnerable to the worst forms of exploitation and remember now and forever that an injury to one is an injury to all."

Building solidarity in Mexico

An ISC representative recently met with the Frente Autentico del Trabajo's national

committee in Mexico City, introducing the IWW and discussing the possibilities for coordinated action. The FAT is an independent union with its strongest base in auto parts, other metal working sectors, textiles and garments in central Mexico and the northern maquiladora regions. The FAT also has some members who work within official unions in order to democratize them. The FAT focuses on providing support in the form of advice and resources to help emerging independent unions and workers' groups.

Alternative Social Forum

The Sixth World Social Forum will take place in Caracas and other parts of the world from January 24 to 29, alongside the second Social Forum of the Americas. Arguing that the host committee is not taking the steps necessary for "a pluralistic, independent, open, self-managed" dialogue, activists are organizing an Alternative Social Forum as "a space for gathering, debate and the rebuilding of social networks; ... for the debate of the movements' agendas and not the ones imposed by those at the top... and critical of the ... contradictions in the Bolivarian government, a space for meaningful debate on the revolution and the traditional political categories in times of globalization, where the diversity, identity and autonomy of the participants are honored, that would transcend a week-long forum to become an open permanent network for dialogue ... a counter current to the blackmails, manipulations and false polarizations that have characterized the current situation in this country."

In contrast to the World Social Forum, the Alternative Social Forum rejects state and corporate funding and is opening the agenda to proposals from interested groups. For information: www.fsa.contrapoder.org.ve

Amsterdam firefighters act to save early retirement law

Firefighters in Amsterdam held two days of unofficial industrial action Dec. 7-8, leading to chaos on the region's roads. Many fire brigade members called in sick, while fire engines slowly crawled along main roads causing traffic delays.

The actions, which are not supported by the firefighters' union, are a protest against a proposal scrapping a regulation that states that firefighters may retire at age 55.

Irish Ferries ships seized

More than 70,000 union members marched across Ireland Dec. 9 to protest plans to replace Irish Ferries workers with low-paid Eastern Europeans. The line had introduced new workers, most from Latvia, working for less than half of Ireland's minimum wage. Workers responded by seizing two of the company's four ships, bringing ferry operations to a complete halt.

Irish Ferries offered its 543 unionized workers on its Britain-Ireland routes \$30 million if they would give up their jobs. It insists it is legal for an international shipping company to ignore Ireland's minimum wage and has applied to re-register its ships in Cyprus. Under a settlement reached Dec. 14, the ships will be reflagged but staff will work under union-negotiated pay and conditions.

Sixth general strike in Italy protests Berlusconi gov't

Italian labor unions CGIL, CISL and UIL, representing 55 percent of Italian workers, shut down factories, offices, train stations and airports Nov. 25 to protest spending cuts in social programs by the conservative government of Silvio Berlusconi.

In the sixth general strike since 2001, government workers struck the whole day, bank workers took off the morning, and school teachers walked out for one hour. Musicians across the country performed Verdi's "Requiem" to protest deep spending cuts in the arts. Air traffic controllers stopped work for four hours. Alitalia cancelled 105 national and 125 international flights. Buses, trains and other public transportation halted for about four hours. At hospitals, only emergency services were offered.

Firestone using slave labor

The International Labor Rights Fund has filed suit against the Firestone conglomerate for their use of slave labor, including children, at their rubber plantations in Liberia. Filed with the U.S. District Court in California, Firestone is charged with exposing poverty-stricken and illiterate workers, who have lived on the plantations since childhood, to hazardous pesticides, fertilizers and inhumane working conditions.

Firestone, which has utilized the West African plantations since the 1920s, exploits the Liberian peasants to extract latex from rubber trees with simple tools. The workers, descendants of families trapped in the plantation society, many of whom have never been off the manors, have little knowledge of the world outside these settlements. They are dependent on Firestone for all their needs – food, health care and education.

Of the 6,000 people working on the 240-square-mile plantation, the lawsuit charges that 4,000 must endure extremely inhumane conditions. For \$3.19 for a 20-hour day, they must fulfill an almost impossible quota to satisfy the overseers or risk starvation.

Bulgarian teachers' strike

Two teachers' unions in Bulgaria ended their strike Dec. 16, after 25 days fighting for increased education funding and a 15 percent wage hike. A third union, the Union of Bulgarian Teachers, said it would sign an agreement only if the government guarantees that the third installment of wage hikes in fall 2006 will fulfill the 15% rise.

The government has offered a 4 percent hike in January, another 6% in July and a third pay hike in October depending on the availability of funds. Teachers who participated in the strike will be paid for the period.

International Tea Day

Tea workers and small growers from 11 tea producing countries observed International Tea Day Dec. 15 with a call for an International Tea Commission to strengthen the industry and protect workers' interests.

A New Delhi Declaration on the rights of tea workers and small growers was adopted at the conclusion of a two-day international conference. Hundreds of workers on tea plantations in West Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu and representatives of workers from Africa and Asia sought a "living wage for the workers and a fair price for small growers."

Tea workers are facing unemployment, under-employment and food insecurity due to closure of plantations forced by falling world tea prices.

Palestinian Workers Advice Center Ends Slave Trade

In Palestine, Arab workers are represented by the Worker's Advice Center or WAC. Since 2002, the "A Job to Win" project to train 3,000 construction workers has been central to WAC's efforts. The organization has also pressured the Israeli courts and the Knesset to end the slave trade importation and exploitation of Chinese and Turkish workers, and instead allow Arab workers into the construction industry with decent pay and workers' rights.

The WAC has struggled with contractors who have tried to hinder its role in stopping the use of exploited, unorganized workers. Now the Association of Builders and Contractors in Israel has recognized the WAC as the representative of Arab workers in Israel, and has asked the WAC to be part of the government plan to train construction workers. Contractors will receive a subsidy for each local worker they hire to train.