

Industrial Worker

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International solidarity is the key issue facing unions
In today's global economy, unions need to build global cooperation and solidarity to survive **4, 7, 12**

Remembering the IWW 1916 Iron Range strike
Immigrant metal miners waged bitter fight against unsafe conditions, exploitation **8**

It's No Silver Screen *Shattuck Cinema workers go IWW*

BY DEAN DEMPSEY
Landmark Shattuck Cinema workers are fed up. Years of bad hours, poor pay, a hostile work environment and demoralizing treatment from theater management has led the Berkeley, California, cinema workers to push for a union – for the One Big Union of the Industrial Workers of the World.

Approximately 80 Wobblies and supporters gathered at 4 p.m. on May 12 in one of the largest IWW gatherings in recent Bay Area history, next only to the May Day contingent earlier this month. Theater workers, union organizers and locals from the community attended the rally to demonstrate their solidarity for the union effort, carrying signs that read “An injury to one is an injury to all” and “Union Now.” A drum team kept the crowd enthused, as they sang union songs and recited pro-worker chants.

Some employees were still on the clock, but joined the rally during their breaks, wearing their IWW pins and showing support for the union. Shattuck Cinema organizer Harjit Gill said: “I think what we see here today is a great success. There has been the participation of IWW members from the past and the present, and those who haven't been recently active. Ultimately, we're very excited about this campaign.”

On May 8, 23 out of the theater's 28 workers turned in authorization cards to the National Labor Relations Board, requesting representation with the IWW. The union would represent all workers in the cinema,



although projector repair and maintenance is handled by IATSE members.

The Shattuck Cinema's revoking of workers privileges, unfair raise policies and insufficient breaks, are aggravated by management's lack of accountability for its actions, and as Cinema employee Lauren Grady says, “When the theater management has a problem, rather than dealing with the worker directly they take our shifts away and cut our hours. ... [They need] to start listening to our concerns and valuing workers. We need our voice to be heard. It's time we had a union!”

Employees receive no health benefits and their hourly pay is three dollars below the city of Berkeley's standard for a living wage. Shattuck Cinema is part of the Landmark chain owned by Mark Cuban, billionaire owner of the Dallas Mavericks. Landmark is a well-known art-house chain with a reputation for supporting progressive film.

As the workers remain hopeful and dedicated to organizing their workplace with *continued on page 5*

Millions strike, march in massive May Day protests

BY ADAM WELCH
From California to the northeastern seaboard and the deep south, May 1st was marked by massive demonstrations. People poured into the streets of over 200 U.S. cities in support of immigrant workers' rights as part of the “Grand Paro Americano de 2006,” or the Great American Boycott of 2006. With between two and three million participating, it was largest single day of protest ever in the United States.

But the day was far more than a movement of mass demonstrations, as nationwide restaurants were shuttered, meat processing plants were idled, ripe fruit laid waiting to be picked and the nation's largest port stood at a near standstill. Classrooms were empty in some cities as well, as students, often joined by teachers and staff, skipped school in support. Many of those participating in the “Day Without An Immigrant,” both documented and undocumented immigrants along with their supporters, heeded the call by some groups to not work, buy goods or attend school. The tactic is a traditional one called *paros civicos*, borrowed from social movements in Mexico.

“People will look back at May Day 2006 as a historic moment,” says John Baranski, an IWW member and professor of American history at Fort Lewis College in Colorado. He draws connections between today and the 1886 strike for the eight hour day. “Both were mass worker mobilizations, led largely by immigrants.”


Although it is impossible to peg the exact number of those who joined the work stoppages, as participation rates varied by region, neighborhood and industry, the sectors most affected were agriculture, food service, food processing and construction. They also tended to be in workplaces with high concentrations of Latino immigrants. While many stayed away from work, others were confused by mixed messages as many unions and larger advocacy non-profits opposed the calls for boycotts and strikes.

New York IWW organizer Bert Picard, who organizes among immigrant warehouse workers and is involved with the community center Make The Road by Walking, says standard pay for immigrant workers there is \$300 for 65 hours a week. “There is no effective minimum wage in New York for immigrant workers and the Labor Department is doing nothing.” But he has noticed a change. Referring to the workforce of immigrant Latinos in Bushwick, New York, who Make the Road By Walking organizes, Picard says: “Before all these marches we used to say we were a union **May Day: continued page 6**



New York Wobblies picketed Amersino produce May 1. Five workers have been fired for organizing. See story page 6.

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Organizing Dept. proposal

The ODFC is looking for comments on our draft proposal for the creation of an Organizing Department. A portion of the draft proposal was published in the March *GOB* and the rest of the proposal will be published in the next issue. The draft proposal has been circulated on the general executive board and iww lists.

It is also available for members on-line at www.iww.org. To find the draft proposal go to Groups (located on the left menu), selected All Members and look for the forum topic titled “ODFC Proposal.”

We look forward to hearing what you have to say about the proposal. Our final proposal will be released June 30 and it will reflect the comments that we have received from the membership.

Colin Bossen, ODFC Chair

Marx in Soho

The Pensacola Branch recently hosted a production of the play “Marx in Soho” written by Howard Zinn and starring Bob Weick.

We had a crowd of over 150 people who were all handed literature on the union and info on the upcoming May Day protests.

The event worked well as a fundraiser for our branch. So well in fact, that it was suggested that we let other branches in the union, or other community organizers who read the *I.W.* and are in need of a fundraiser, to consider hosting this play. It's also a great cultural event that beats the heck out of another documentary.

You really can't go wrong with Howard Zinn and the actor was great.

Just thought we'd let you know.

If anyone wants to know more, email us at iwwpensacola@yahoo.com

Pensacola GMB

May Day in Tampa

Aggressive police profiling of Mexican immigrants driving pick-ups from work and turning them in to “La Migra” during county-wide crackdowns along with coordinated media attacks failed to diminish a massive

May 1 turn-out of immigrant workers and their supporters.

Local Wobs watched flags from all the hemisphere and beyond march and form a line along a main Tampa artery (running beside the sports arenas) packed with cars and big trucks. By tens of thousands, students abandoned classes and workers their jobs to the chagrin of bosses and their media mouth-pieces in this “right to slave” state.

The overwhelming support of most truckers fiercely sounding their approval, from heavy rock-haulers from the surrounding phosphate mines and construction to big haulers from nearby farms and groves, along with tankers in our port city, was a clear indication of who needs to be more careful about treading on workers’ rights this day of international labor solidarity.

For a change, May Day is back in fashion for workers in this land that started it all. ¡Hasta la Victoria Siempre!

Fellow Worker Lee, X332751

Torn to shreds by this system

I really liked Dorice McDaniels’ May article about the criminalization of the Los Angeles Catholic Workers and those fellow workers amongst us who are “down and out.”

Even in my little town of 60,000 people I see people whose lives have been torn to shreds by this rotten system of ours. It is

so sad, watching people put up half-million dollar condos, driving their Porches – no one seems to give a damn.

I know it's against Wobbly principles, but I don't give a damn about the \$30-an-hour labor aristocrats who love politicians who fight like hell to keep the minimum wage from going up, whose every move seems carefully calculated to inflict misery on those most powerless in this country.

Joe Randell, Bellingham

– Farewell, Fellow Worker –
Reino Erkkila

BY HARRY SIITONEN, BERKELEY

Reino J. Erkkila, a leading figure in the San Francisco Finnish community and in the maritime labor movement, passed away at his home April 5, at age 93.

Born Oct. 2, 1912 in Oulainen, Finland, he immigrated to the United States with his parents a year later. Reino spent the next ten years in Butte, Montana, where his father worked in the copper mines. Many of the Finnish miners were involved with the IWW, including his father who was an avid reader of the IWW daily *Industrialisti*.

In June 1917, 190 miners died at Anaconda Copper's Speculator mine in Butte, many of them Finns. The miners struck over safety conditions and in July IWW organizer Frank Little came to help out the strikers. In the middle of the night on August 1, suspected copper company vigilantes broke into Little's boarding house room next to the Finnish Wobbly hall, where he was nursing a broken leg, dragged him out, tied him to the rear of a car, and dragged him through the streets several miles out of town to the Milwaukee Railroad trestle where they hung him.

Incensed by the brutal murder, thou-

Atlanta organizer training

The Atlanta IWW Group and IWW Organizer Training Program are hosting a weekend training on practical skills to organize your workplace and strategic campaigns in your community. Members from throughout the Southern region are invited to attend.

The training will be June 3 and 4. For details or to register, call Keith at 404-992-7240 or email ignatz_1369@yahoo.com.

sands of miners and their families walked in a funeral procession from downtown to the cemetery, the largest ever seen in Butte. Reino Erkkila, then 5, distinctly remembered walking with his parents in that demonstration, replete with union banners.

The Erkkilas moved to San Francisco in 1923, where Herman worked as a longshoreman and was active in the 1934 strike. Reino Erkkila joined his father on the docks and in the ILWU in 1935. In 1943 he became chief dispatcher in ILWU Local 10, and was later elected president of Local 10.

Reino was proud of his Finn Wobbly family background and it motivated his own years of activity in the labor movement.

He was one of the people on my *IW* “paper route” here and always enjoyed reading the paper. I recited two bilingual poems at his memorial. He was a great, generous-hearted guy. I'll miss him.

Correction

A page 7 photo of hotel workers marching for immigrant rights in our last issue was incorrectly captioned. It is of hotel workers marching in Boston, not San Francisco.



IWW directory

Australia

IWW Regional Organising Committee
PO Box 241, Surry Hills NSW 2010. phone: 0408 219663. email: roc@iww.org.au
www.iww.org.au

British Isles

IWW Regional Organising Committee:
PO Box 74, Brighton, E. Sussex, BN1 4ZQ, U.K., www.iww.org.uk, www.brightoniww.org.uk, email: brightoniww@yahoo.co.uk

IWW London: c/o Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX. londoniww@iww.org

Scotland

Clydeside GMB: iwwclydeside@mahost.org; web: iwwclydeside.mahost.org.

Edinburgh: Eddie Murray, c/o ACE, 17 W. Montgomery Place, EH7 SHA, edinburghiww@yahoo.co.uk

Canada

Alberta

Edmonton GMB: PO Box 75175, T6E 6K1. email: edmonton@lists.iww.org
<http://edmonton.iww.ca>

British Columbia

Vancouver IWW: PO Box 4755, Stn. Terminal, V6B 4A4. 604-682-3269 x8493. email: gmb-van@iww.ca <http://vancouver.iww.ca>

Manitoba

Winnipeg GMB: IWW, c/o WORC, PO Box 1, R3C 2G1. winnipegiww@hotmail.com. Garth Hardy, del., garth.hardy@union.org.za.

Ontario

Ottawa-Outaouais GMB: PO Box 52003, 298 Dalhousie St. K1N 1S0, (613) 241-0382. ott-out@iww.org French-language del: Mathieu Brûle parti_hardcore@yahoo.com

Toronto GMB: c/o Libra Knowledge & Information Svcs Co-op, PO Box 353 Stn. A, M5W 1C2. 416-925-7250. torontogmb@iww.org

Finland

Helsinki: Reko Ravela, Otto Brandtintie 11 B 25, 00650. iwwsuomi@helsinki.fi

Germany

IWW Kontakts: Lutz Getzschmann, IWW c/o RMB-Infoladen, Hamburger Allee 35, 60486 Frankfurt am Main. iww-germany@gmx.net

Japan

Hokkaido: Braden Cannon, delegate, emak_bakia@hotmail.com

United States

Arizona

Phoenix GMB: 1205 E. Hubbell St., 85006-1758. 602-254-4057. Aaron Rothenburger, del., 480-303-9580.

Arkansas

Fayetteville: PO Box 283, 72702. 479-200-1859, nwar_iww@hotmail.com.

California

Los Angeles GMB: PO Box 65822, 90065.

North Coast GMB: PO Box 844, Eureka 95502-0844. 707-725-8090. BST Angie Hart: angstink@gmail.com

San Francisco Bay Area GMB: (Curbside and Buyback IU 670 Recycling Shops; Stonemountain IU 660 Job Shop) PO Box 11412, Berkeley 94712. 510-845-0540. Meetings 1st & 3rd Thursdays at 7 p.m. (2022 Blake St., Berkeley)

San Jose: Adam Welch, del. 408-795-9672. email: adam_freedom@yahoo.com

Santa Barbara GMB: PO Box 23008, 93121. 805-689-3086, sbgmb@iww.org

Colorado

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

Four Corners (AZ, CO, NM, UT): delegate: 970-903-8721. 4corners@iww.org

Florida

Pensacola GMB: 610 E Wright St., 32501. 850-429-0336. www.angelfire.com/fl5/iww
iwwpensacola@yahoo.com

Hobe Sound: Peter Shultz, 8274 SE Pine Circle, 33455-6608, 772-545-9591, okiedogg2002@yahoo.com

Georgia

Atlanta: Keith Mercer, del., 404-992-7240, iwwatlanta@gmail.com

Hawai'i

Honolulu: Tony Donnes, del., 808-547-2042. donnes@hawaii.edu

Illinois

Chicago GMB & General Defense Committee Local 3: PO Box 18387, 3750 N. Kedzie, 60618. phone: 312-638-9155.

Carbondale: Jason Leonard, Southern Illinois delegate. chachieldiablo@hotmail.com.

Champaign: David Johnson, 217-356-8247.

Waukegan IWW: PO Box 274, 60079. waukeganiww@iww.org

Iowa

Iowa City: Seamus Mulryan, del., 319-248-3589. iowacityiww@riseup.net

Maine

Norumbega: Barry Rodrigue, del., 75 Russell St., Bath 04530.

Maryland

Baltimore IWW: c/o Red Emma's, 800 St. Paul St., 21202, 410-230-0450, iww@redem-mas.org.

Massachusetts

Boston Area GMB: PO Box 391724, Cambridge 02139. 617-469-5162.

Western Mass. Public Service IU 650 Branch: IWW, PO Box 1581, Northampton 01061.

Western Massachusetts GMB: 43 Taylor Hill Rd., Montague 01351. 413-367-9356.

Michigan

Detroit GMB: PO Box 08161, 48208. detroit@iww.org

Grand Rapids GMB: PO Box 6629, 49516. Chuck Neller, Secretary.; Cole Dorsey (del.) 616-881-5263. griwww@iww.org

Central Michigan: David Finet, 5007 W. Columbia Rd., Mason 48854. 517-676-9446, happyyhippie66@hotmail.com

Minnesota

Duluth: Laverne Capan, 1522 N 8th Ave E, 55805-1115. 218-724-2647.

Twin Cities GMB: PO Box 14111, Minneapolis 55414. 612-339-4418. jpila@iww.org

Missouri

Kansas City GMB: c/o 5506 Holmes St., 64110. 816-523-3995.

Montana

Construction Workers IU 330: Dennis Georg, del. 406-490-3869, trampius330@aol.com

New Jersey

Central New Jersey GMB: PO Box: 10021, New Brunswick 08904. 732-979-9973 xaninjurytoallx@yahoo.com

Northern New Jersey GMB: 60 Martha Ave. Apt. 3, Elmwood Park 07407. 201-873-6215. northernnj@iww.org

New Mexico

Albuquerque: 202 Harvard SE, 87106-5505. 505-331-6132, abq@iww.org.

New York

NYC GMB: PO Box 7430, JAF Station, New York City 10116, iww-nyc@bari.iww.org. Jim Crutchfield, I.U. 650, classify@iww.org.

Upstate NY GMB: PO Box 235, Albany 12207, 518-833-6853 or 861-5627. www.upstate-ny-iww.org. secretary@upstate-ny-iww.org, Rochelle Semel, del, PO Box 172, Fly Creek 13337, 607-293-6489, rochelle7@usadatanet.net.

Ohio

Ohio Valley GMB: PO Box 42233, Cincinnati 45242.

Oklahoma

Tulsa: Karl Howeth, 4510 W. Archer, 74127. 918-282-7348. vaneigem25@hotmail.com

Oregon

Portland Industrial District Council: 616 E. Burnside St., 97214, 503-231-5488.PDXIW-Whall@riseup.net.

Pennsylvania

Lancaster GMB: PO Box 796, 17608

Philadelphia GMB: PO Box 42777, 19101. 215-222-1905. phillyiww@iww.org
Union Hall: 4530 Baltimore Ave., 19143.

South Street Workers Union /Workers Rights Hotline 215-990-8250. southstreet@iww.org

Paper Crane Press IU 450 Job Shop: paper-cranepress@verizon.net, 610-358-9496.

Pittsburgh GMB / Education Workers Organizing Committee: PO Box 90315, 15224. pittsburghiww@yahoo.com

Texas

Austin GMB: PO Box 650011, 78765. 512-320-8427, waterloowob@monkeywrenchbooks.org

Utah

Salt Lake City GMB: PO Box 520835, 84152-0835. slcgmb@iww.org.

Washington

Bellingham: P.O. Box 1793, 98227. BellinghamIWW@gmail.com 360-920-6240.

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

Olympia GMB: PO Box 2775, 98507. 360-956-9256. olywobs@riseup.net

Seattle GMB: 1122 E. Pike #1142, 98122-3934. 877-815-5684, www.seattleiww.org, seattle@iww.org. John Persak, General Distribution IU660: bp172@scn.org.

Spokane: Tim Hill, 509-218-9622.

Wisconsin

Madison GMB: PO Box 2442, 53703-2442.

Lakeside Press IU 450 Job Shop: 1334 Williamson, 53703. 608-255-1800. **Madison Infoshop Job Shop:** 1019 Williamson St. #B, 53703. 608-262-9036. **Two Degrees Cof-**

feeshop Job Shop: 307 W. Johnson St., 53703. 608-257-7888. **General Defense Committee Local #4:** P.O. Box 811, 53701. 608-262-9036.

Railroad Workers IU 520: Ron Kaminkow, PO Box 3010, Madison 53704, 608-358-5771. eugene_v_debs_aru@yahoo.com.

Milwaukee GMB: PO Box 070632, 53207. 414-481-3557.

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P. O. Box 23085
Cincinnati, OH 45223
USA, 513-591-1905
email: ghq@iww.org
<http://www.iww.org>

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General Executive Board:

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Editor: Jon Bekken

4530 Baltimore Avenue
Philadelphia PA 19143
email: iw@iww.org

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Madison IWW organizing downtown workers

BY JOHN PECK, MADISON
On April 22nd, Madison Wobblies kicked off the public phase of an organizing drive targeting restaurant and service workers in downtown Madison with a concert featuring musicians David Rovics and Alistair Hulett.

The Madison Downtown Workers Union is working to unite thousands of workers in hundreds of taverns, restaurants, cafes and retail shops across the city into One Big Union that crosses job classifications to build real on-the-job power.

“We’ve been active in Madison for a number of decades, and have built the union up over the years to where, after many years of thought and planning, we’ve decided to go ahead with the organizing drive” said IWW organizer Ron Kaminkow.

“This is a really exciting campaign for us, it is the largest of its kind in the country and it’s a great opportunity right now, especially in light of the organizing going on in the Latino community that makes up a significant portion of the workers behind the scenes downtown,” said organizer Amy Mondloch.

Known as “non-majority unions” and “corridor campaigns,” this IWW effort breaks with traditional union tactics. Rather than rely on the National Labor Relations Board, certification elections, contracts and formal bargaining sessions, arbitration, etc., the Madison Downtown Workers Union will focus on the direct action of the workers themselves. “Workers from workplace to workplace can use direct action to support one another more than using a contract,” Mondloch explained.

Hayley Spohn explained the significance of the kick-off. “We chose to ‘go public’ with the campaign now to remember and connect with the victory of thousands of textile strikers in Lawrence, Massachusetts, during the spring of 1912. Known as the Bread and Roses Strike, some 25,000 strikers, representing 15 nationalities and speaking a dozen different languages, came together from dozens of workplaces to demand better wages and working conditions in the various mills.”

Organizers are hoping that Madison workers will fight for “bread, ... but roses too!” That is to say, not only for better material conditions, but for beauty, dignity, meaningfulness and democracy in the workplace.

UW student and downtown worker Vera Varlamov expressed the concerns of many workers. “I have worked in various service industries in the downtown area and know from personal experience the hazards and problems that can arise in the workplace. The average hourly, even if slightly over the minimum wage of \$5.25, does not provide nearly enough income.”

Anders Irland, who works at Ians Pizza, says the locally owned company is supportive of its workers, but still believes the union is necessary. “I believe it is important for people to get involved with the Madison Downtown Workers Union, even if their work experience in Madison is as positive as mine,” Irland said. “It is more than the assurance of good pay, but also the chance to improve the overall quality of life for countless people... Every person who contributes their part to society deserves to be treated with respect and gratitude.”

This is “a very interesting approach,” said David Newby, president of the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO. “There have been attempts in the past, going back to the ’30s, to organize this way. They’re organizing workers that many people say can’t be organized.”

Hayley Spohn said downtown workers face low wages, no benefits and discrimination. “Many of these things we simply cannot achieve alone. But together, united into a strong union, we have the potential to affect change in our workplaces and in our city.”

Organizing immigrants

On June 1, a half-day conference will explore organizing immigrant workers. 8:30 - Noon, 16 East 34th Street, 6th floor, Manhattan. RSVP by email to gc32@cornell.edu

Fabric store workers make gains with new contract

BY X345292

After six months of preparation and negotiation eighteen workers at Stonemountain and Daughter Fabrics in Berkeley, California, ratified a renegotiated agreement with store owners Suzan and Bob Steinberg.

The road to the final agreement was bumpy, twisting and fraught with peril. For example, a small group of workers tried to decertify the union. They worked steadily to build support among their coworkers. When they missed a legal window of opportunity (between 90 and 60 days prior to the expiration date of the contract) they red-baited and attempted other smear tactics.

As with most retail business, Stonemountain hires mostly part time workers, pays low

wages with no benefits and turn-over is high. The union has changed these conditions somewhat. Still, most of the workers who voted for the union in 2003 have left or were fired. By the time meetings began to discuss proposals for a new contract the shop was in disarray. One of the new workers, Holly, agreed to be shop delegate replacing Wayne, who was one of the original core of union organizers but needed a break. In the meantime several of the new hires had not been signed up. As time went on they formed the core of the anti-union workers. Included among them was a long-time employee who likes to play boss. In the middle were several workers who repeatedly shifted sides.

FW Harjit of the Bay Area GMB agreed

Around Our Union

address and revue open to the public. Free housing is available on a limited basis, so please register early. Food will be provided at the bonfire and between discussions on Saturday. Registration for Wobfest will be \$20.

Additional festival details and an electronic registration form will be posted on the IWW web site. Questions on the weekend’s events can be directed at the Twin Cities GMB at twincities@iww.org or (612) 339-4418.

Bread & Roses magazine

The British Isles Regional Organising Committee published a May Day edition of its *Bread & Roses* magazine, available for two quid or \$4 each.

Education workers organize

The Pittsburgh Education Workers Industrial Organizing Committee is planning a conference of IWW education workers for July 2006. For information or to help with plans, email pittsburghiww@yahoo.com.

Boston organizer training

The Boston GMB will host an organizer training session the weekend of June 10-11.

Midwest Wobfest

It’s time to line up for the Midwest Wobfest, which will be hosted by the Twin Cities Branch July 14-16. IWWs from around the country will converge on Minneapolis and St. Paul for a weekend of music, history, and discussion around how we build community and solidarity in our union.

The festival schedule begins with a bonfire of discontent on Friday, July 14th with food, song and soapboxing.

On Saturday, there will be discussion forums throughout the day on topics including Wobbly communication structure, industrial classification, regional organizing, dual card direct action, Solidarity Brigade or One Big Union? We’re honored to have Brother Staughton Lynd with us for the keynote afternoon address on Saturday. A large revue will close out Saturday, with several musical acts, a comedian, and a slide presentation showcasing photographs and art of the IWW.

Sunday will offer a chance to take a labor history tour of the Twin Cities. We’ll also visit with some old-timers involved in past struggles and others engaged in present actions.

Certain events will be limited to card-carrying IWW members, with the keynote

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.



to get involved in negotiations. We delivered an intent to bargain letter to management on January 20, and began working with a core of pro-union workers.

Management expressed willingness to sign a one-year extension on the spot when we delivered our intent to bargain letter. Management was hoping to give nothing more to the workers.

At that point it became clear that management had given raises to some workers in violation of the contract, particularly those who comprised the anti-union block. Additionally, management got caught up in union-busting efforts and committed several unfair labor practices.

Workers met in a bar after work and unanimously agreed to file charges. From then on the dynamic shifted. Management, alarmed by the charges filed by the Labor Board, decided to be more generous in negotiations. The negotiating committee comprised of FW Harjit and three workers won immediate pay raises, doubled the annual raise, more paid time off, a higher fabric bonus and additional money for the health care fund. Contract language was cleaned up and improved.

How would the workers vote? Of 18 workers, 14 cast ballots. Ten voted to ratify the new contract with substantial gains and no give backs. Four voted no, they don’t care if their coworkers get better pay. Two abstained. Two never joined the union and were considered ineligible. Without much fanfare we signed the new agreement while several of the union busters looked on.

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 23085, Cincinnati OH 45223, USA.

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.

Workers march against war

On April 29, nearly 200,000 people joined a New York City march co-initiated by Labor Against the War and led off by a delegation including TWU President Roger Toussaint, who had just been released from jail for refusing to cancel December's mass transit strike. As many as 10,000 unionists joined the labor contingent, with large showings by health care, hotel, municipal, teachers and transit unions.

"Union members are connecting how Iraq is part of a larger foreign policy that destabilizes people's countries and economies and forces people to immigrate to survive," says Michael Eisenschier, national coordinator of U.S. Labor Against the War.

March 18th marked the third anniversary of the start of the war. Hundreds of thousands of people joined more than 700 demonstrations across the United States, and many more across the world.

The Grand Rapids IWW branch organized a March 18 march and rally with the West Michigan Justice and Peace Coalition.

Over 200 people showed up to voice their anger at the current world situation and the U.S. role in that.

Police used their vehicle and loudspeakers to disrupt the march and force people onto the sidewalk. But a core of 50 people stood strong and maintained their position in the streets until reaching the rally site.

Speakers represented groups including El Vocero Hispano/Grand Rapids Committee for the Defense of Immigrant Rights, Justice and Peace Coalition, Grand Rapids Hip Hop Coalition and the IWW.

The rally was well received and built relationships with people and groups that may not have encountered each other otherwise. The Grand Rapids Branch had the opportunity to promote the One Big Union, build a broader coalition, and address our local campaigns by sponsoring the march.



Grand Rapids (Michigan) Wobblies marched against the war in Iraq March 18. Above, the Labor Against the War contingent in New York City April 29.

NYC transit union sues to make bosses accept concessions

Transport Workers Union Local 100, which represents New York City bus and subway workers who went on a three-day walkout in December, went to court May 1 seeking a ruling ordering transit officials to accept the concessions-ridden contract that the union's members had rejected in January. The contract passed in April on a second vote, after TWU officials made it clear they had no intention of fighting for better terms.

Sensing the union's weakness, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority refused to honor the agreement, instead seeking even deeper concessions from a state arbitrator.

MTA officials have already won \$2.5 million in fines against Local 100, an end to deductions of union dues from worker pay checks, and the jailing of union president Roger Toussaint for five days for refusing to call off the strike until its third day. (He had

been sentenced to 10 days, but was released early for good behavior.) Striking workers have also been docked several days' pay.

The union's lawsuit asks a state judge to rule that the union fulfilled the ratification provisions and the agreement is now in force. That contract would require that workers pay toward retiree health benefits, shaving off half of the three-year wage increase, which at 3 to 4 percent per year, already lags behind inflation. The MTA projects this would save the agency \$31.5 to \$37.4 million a year.

The contract would also preempt another pre-holiday strike by pushing the renewal date from mid-December to mid-January.

New York's Democratic attorney general, who is the leading candidate for governor, joined the transit bosses in court demanding the massive fines, an end to union dues collection, and jail time. The state suggested in

court that the union sell its offices in order to pay the fine. A union appeal is pending.

Scabbing Northwest pilots yield to concessions

Sixty-three percent of 4,800 Northwest Airlines pilots agreed to pay cuts in a 66-month pact that will save the airline \$358 million a year. The contract will not take effect until other Northwest unions agree to their own concessions. Baggage handlers voted down theirs May 4. Flight attendants have until June 6 to vote on wage cuts. If approved, pay cuts will range from 11.5 percent for ground crews to 24 percent for pilots.

Pilots may also be affected by a Court of Appeals ruling dismissing US Airways pilots' lawsuit against the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corp. to protect their pensions against bankruptcy maneuvers by the airlines.

is often used to indicate the international dialing prefix. Many sites currently block such characters, or require phone numbers to be put into fixed-size fields which are not appropriate outside the USA.

6. If you're using any measurements on your site, make sure you have them in their metric equivalents. In most of the world, people have no idea what an "inch" means. This is particularly important when discussing health and safety issues. Imagine the confusion if a reader outside of the USA reads that Americans are allowed to work outdoors when the temperature is, say, 40 degrees. In Celsius, that's very hot.

7. For dates, spell out the name of the month. In most of the world, 9/11 is the ninth of November.

8. Where possible, make your site available in multiple languages. Even if your site is only aimed at, for example, residents of the USA, you will want it to be available in Spanish as well as English.

Some of this admittedly sounds trivial, and of little concern to those of you who are not union webmasters.

But think back to our examples. If USAS had followed these guidelines, it would have more people from around the world sending off protest messages in support of those workers in El Salvador. And Wal-Mart Watch would begin to get people active who live outside the United States – even Canadians – and who want to campaign against the company.

As for "Buy union" and "Buy American" being used interchangeably – well, Jakob Nielsen's guidelines don't help much there. Convinced trade unionists that their real allies are their fellow workers in all countries (and not their employers at home) is what it's all about, isn't it?

Eric Lee's web site is at www.ericlee.info/

AK Steel lock-out in third month

BY TERRY, X360160

The Armco Employees Independent Federation has been locked out by AK Steel in Middletown, Ohio, since March 1. Our monthly meeting was held May 11. About 600 of our 2,400 members were in attendance. We have been experiencing a heavy loss of members due to retirements since this lock-out began. Easily 300 have retired hoping to avoid threatened changes to retirees' health insurance. Current retirees pay nothing. The company wants future retirees to pay upwards of \$600 per month for insurance.

This proposed treatment of our retirees and surviving spouses, coupled with the demands that current employees accept health insurance "cost-sharing," a two-tier wage system designed to split the membership, combination of all jobs into five classes, no job security, and an ineffective grievance procedure were only rumored until recently.

Until this week we had nothing in writing laying out where our demands stand in relation to the company's proposal. We can not get our leadership to show us a comprehensive "global" contract proposal, either what the company has demanded or what we are holding out for. The union executive board posted a one sheet "summary comparison" of some important issues, but without explanations of individual items. Anyone reading this would still not know where we stand.

This of course led some at our meeting to ask for clarification of our position. This was not going to be forthcoming as we have always been governed by a closed clique of officers. They tell us what we want and that is that. This should have become clear to everyone in attendance after members' concerns were expressed from the floor microphone.

The executive board had not consulted the general membership on what we want in a new contract and they weren't about to do so at this late date. From the lips of our president, "If we negotiated right here, today, we'd be in big trouble." So give and take amongst the general membership in search for a consensus on what we want is a bad thing. I guess they figure we aren't smart enough to know what is important to us.

Negotiations continue haltingly. One executive member quit this week. The new trustee wasn't chosen by an election, and wasn't even the next highest vote recipient from last Fall's election. No, he was appointed by the board. Cronyism at its finest!

Negotiations are presently scheduled at the whim of the company. Our executive board is planning a trip to New York City to present our side to industry analysts. Another trip, to Chicago, is planned to coincide with the company stockholders meeting. This will cost the membership several thousand dollars and throw negotiations into turmoil should the company choose to schedule a meeting while most of the board is on hiatus.

When one member took the mike to complain about union scabs crossing our picket line, the president said he would look into it. This, after being locked out for 10 weeks. It should have been addressed on the first day. This union does not understand the class struggle. And so, we muddle along.

Wanted: docile workers

Australia's Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union is outraged at a Perth construction company's application to import 53 foreign workers. The union notes that there are thousands of unemployed construction workers throughout Australia.

Hanssen Industries says it needs Filipino and Chinese workers not because they are cheaper, but because they "do as told." Manager Dick Smith says, "We could show them what needed to be done and they'd just follow it and do it the way we wanted. They wouldn't put ... their own influence on how they thought it should be done." He said they also had trouble finding Australians willing to work at the government-set wage.

Workers of the world have nothing to lose but their Zip Codes

BY ERIC LEE

Workers of the world – okay, it's too much to ask for you to unite. But at least try to understand that there are some workers who do not live in your country.

If that sounds like it's a little bit harsh, maybe you haven't visited some union web sites lately.

Here are three examples, all taken from the United States:

- Wal-Mart is the world's number one anti-union employer, with around 1.7 million employees. One third of its stores are currently located outside the USA, with that number rapidly expanding.

Unions have correctly thrown massive resources at global campaigns targeting the company. At the center of one of those efforts is the wonderful Wal-Mart Watch web site. At the very top of every page, it (correctly) reminds visitors that they can "Receive updates and local alerts on how you can take action against Wal-Mart" – asking them for their email addresses. And ZIP codes. But people outside of the USA don't have ZIP codes. (There's no indication on the site that putting in your ZIP code is optional, which it is.)

- The United Students Against Sweatshops – a very worthwhile organization which I hesitate to criticize – is running an online campaign in support of workers in El Salvador. I'd love to send off a message, but I can't. Their online form requires me to select which US state or Canadian province I live in.

- If you're looking to buy union products, you can visit the AFL-CIO's web site, click through to ShopUnionMade.org (this is sounding promising), and you wind up at a web site called 'America@Work' offering you



'100% American-made' things to buy. As on so many U.S. union web sites, "Buy union" and "Buy American" seem to be synonyms.

The corporate world is increasingly becoming aware of these issues. Web usability guru Jakob Nielsen has written some guidelines suggesting the minimum that companies should do to ensure "that international users can use your site."

What applies to companies applies equally well to us. Does your union web site meet all (or any) of these guidelines?

1. On your web-based forms, make the field for name a single field – not separate fields for first and last names. Why not? In many countries, people only have one name. And in some countries, the first name is the family name. (Think China.)

2. Use Unicode on your site to correctly display – and receive – non-Latin characters, or even Latin characters with accents. If you don't know what Unicode is and you're responsible for a union web site, it's time you learned.

3. Don't use the expression 'ZIP code' if you want visitors from outside the U.S. to use your site. If you are collecting postal addresses, use something like "Postal/ZIP code" instead.

4. Don't require state or province on a form if you want people from outside of the USA and Canada to be able to sign up.

5. For phone numbers, allow for international numbers containing a varying number of digits and a country code – and allow people to key in the plus (+) character which

1,000 activists at Labor Notes meet

LABORTALK BY HARRY KELBER

About 1,000 labor activists attended a conference in Detroit on May 5-7 under the auspices of *Labor Notes*. Attending this unusual educational forum were local union leaders and active rank and filers from several unions, but not a single national leader of the AFL-CIO or Change-to-Win federations.

There were workshops on just about every problem confronting working people and their unions: from organizing immigrant workers, fighting Wal-Mart, and ending the war in Iraq to health care reform, independent labor politics and the pension crisis. An important feature of the conference were the well-attended rank-and-file caucuses in the airline, auto, building trades, transportation, longshore and other industries.

Considering the apathy and passivity that exists in the labor movement, why did AFL-CIO and Change-to-Win leaders cold shoulder the conference? The obvious answer is they will not support any labor group they cannot control. They are especially hostile to the kind of grassroots movement represented at the conference, whose theme was “Building Solidarity from Below.”

Neither of the two rival labor groups has shown any interest in keeping their members informed about complex economic and political problems and what they are doing about them. It's worth noting that when the AFL-CIO had to tighten its budget, one of the first cuts it made was to completely eliminate the education department. Change-to-Win also operates without an education department. That might explain why they do so poorly when they try to mobilize their members.

The conference revealed that hundreds of young activists are receiving on-the-job training in organizing, collective bargaining and political action, while maintaining close ties to the rank and file in their communities.

If the labor movement is to regain its former strength and influence, we'll need articulate, knowledgeable and well-trained leaders who also believe in and practice union democracy.



Landmark cinema workers...

continued from page 1

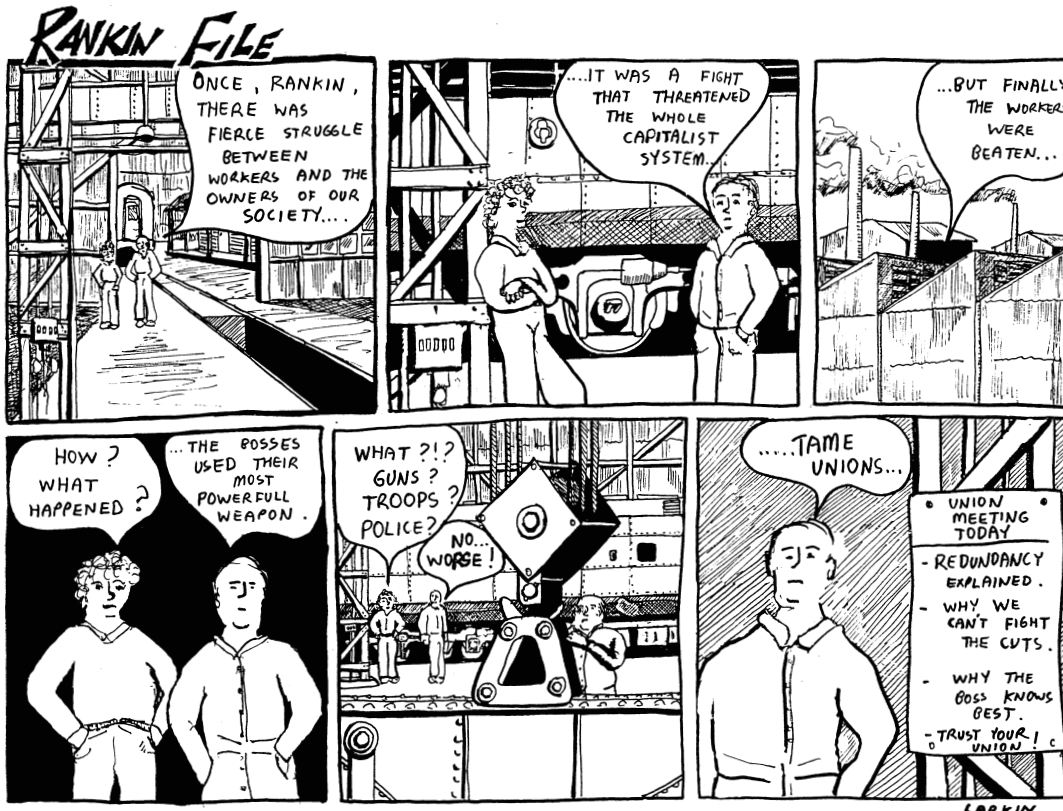
the IWW, Shattuck Cinema management has conversed only with their lawyers, repeating “No Comment” to all media inquiries on their employees’ push for a union.

The NLRB has set June 16 as the Cinema’s union election day. Gill says, “The workers have organized themselves so well that they should be able to win this election without much trouble, with draft proposals for contracts already developed.”

“The cinema industry is not organized and is ripe for it, Fellow Worker Bruce Valde notes. “I think that we’re going to see other workers at other theaters definitely become interested.”

Ultimately, a sort of domino effect could occur as the virtually unorganized cinema industry sees the example that has been set by Shattuck Cinema. This theater is comprised mostly of workers who were not initially involved in the union, and now with their new interest and dedication new doors have opened for the IWW.

“For us to be treated like cattle and without consideration of our livelihood is absolutely unfair,” adds ex-employee Jeff Charest. “It’s time Shattuck Cinema workers went union.”



Air transport workers form industrial network

BY JOSHUA DEVRIES

Members from six unions, four crafts and seven airlines came together at the Labor Notes conference in May to craft a broad strategy to fight the attacks that have decimated airline union contracts since September 11.

Airline workers, like those in rail and construction, are represented by many unions with a history of hostility between crafts and between unions. Management has taken advantage of these divisions and of the hits to the industry by 9/11 and rising fuel prices to demand deep give-backs. So far, union resistance has been minimal and largely ineffective at stopping concessions.

Airline Workers United, a group formed by airline union members early this year to build solidarity in the industry, called these meetings to build an industrial network. Those attending agreed on several basic principles and some concrete goals.

Many expressed anger and frustration at the betrayal of the Northwest mechanics’ strike by the AFL-CIO. So the most important agreement was that you do not cross strike lines. Another position of AWU is that the

power of unions comes from first and foremost from the rank and file. These will be central points of the pamphlet being drafted by a ramp agent for Northwest Airlines in Minneapolis. It will be a tool to explain the vision and strategy of AWU to help with recruiting.

The first campaign AWU will focus on is at Mesaba Airlines. A coalition of the pilots’, flight attendants’ and mechanics’ unions at the regional carrier is setting the example of cross-union strategy and solidarity. A flight attendant from US Airways in Philadelphia will put out a press release announcing AWU’s formation and emphasize the Mesaba coalition in the fight against the bankrupt airline as a model to be copied and supported.

A mechanic from United in San Francisco built the web site (www.airlineworkersunited.org) and is creating an online petition to put pressure on union leaders to build the coalitions and the will to stop the concessions and win back what has been lost.

Finally, activists from all over the industry committed to road shows across the country to build solidarity and AWU membership.

“My Son Was Killed” – Workers Memorial Day, Philadelphia

Every day, more than 15 U.S. workers are crushed in trench collapses, shot in convenience stores, mangled in machinery, killed in vehicle accidents, or fall to their deaths from scaffolds and cell towers. And the problem is getting worse. The number of workplace fatalities has risen in each of the past two years and the national workplace fatality rate rose in 2004 for the first time since 1994.

Their deaths are commemorated each year on Workers Memorial Day. Below are excerpts from a speech by Irene Warnock:

My 22-year-old son, Chuck Carpenter, was killed instantly at work July 2, 2005. It was not an “accident,” “unfortunate incident,” “terrible tragedy,” or any of those other politically correct words. My son was killed.

My son was electrocuted at work. He was a mechanic, not a licensed electrician.

My son worked for William Major who owns and operates Funtown Pier in Seaside Park, New Jersey, which is an amusement park at the Jersey Shore boardwalk. It was two days before the big July 4th money-making weekend. It was hot and humid at the Jersey Shore. My son was sweaty and overtired. He had already worked approximately 16 hours that day.

We have not received OSHA’s report as of this date; but, from what little I understand, two employees were electrocuted that single day on the Arctic Circle ride, killing my son instantly with 440 volts. Bulgarian work-visa ride operators and patrons were complaining of being shocked. ...

The operative cause of my son’s death was that the owner of a company using dangerous

machinery powered by *high voltage* electric power, allowed that these machines be maintained by an unlicensed worker untrained in that field. It should have been obvious that such power installations required the employment of a trained and licensed electrician. Sadly, my son’s work ethic contributed to his death. Young, ambitious men are likely to get out of their depth, and sometimes must be prevented from doing so, by their employer and by government regulation.

Even the best-regulated operations, well-trained workers will sometimes be injured or even, sadly, killed. But, it is the job of OSHA and other government agencies to reduce those cases to the absolute minimum. How hard would it be for such an agency to declare that *high voltage* power must be maintained by a licensed electrician, to determine that a company uses such power, and to demand to see a copy of the license?

It would seem to me that allowing untrained and unlicensed personnel to work with *high voltage* power should be illegal, and probably is, but why was there no mechanism to ensure compliance?

Is it because OSHA positions are politically appointed that the majority of the time OSHA does not impose a jail sentence in a work-related death or impose stiff fines and penalties because of pay-to-play political party donations? Is it possible that such regulations and reporting requirements already exist, but that unscrupulous business owners might gain immunity from them through political influence? ...

In New Jersey a hairdresser or barber must be licensed! Why can we not do so for

Delphi, unions nearing concessions deal?

A bankruptcy court hearing on Delphi Corp.’s attempt to escape from its labor contracts ended abruptly May 12 when Delphi said its next witness was too busy negotiating with unions to testify. The hearing was adjourned until May 24.

General Motors, which spun off Delphi in 1999 and remains its biggest customer, is also involved in the talks.

Delphi witnesses have testified that their production workers make twice as much as blue collar workers across the United States, and argued that they should be allowed to slash their union workers’ wages from \$27 an hour to an average \$12.50 or so. The company also wants to slash health and pension benefits.

Union lawyers pressed back, forcing Delphi to concede that their figures did not take into account regional variance in pay rates, and did not compare wages for comparable skill categories.

Delphi executives also admitted plans to give \$98 million in extra pay to managers this summer even though the auto parts maker says it’s broke. Delphi executive Kevin Butler said the bonuses will likely go to managers and salaried workers because the company is exceeding its financial projections. Union lawyers say Delphi’s operating income for the year is about \$500 million higher than the company previously projected, largely because of its overseas operations.

Although the Auto Workers, IUE and other unions have threatened a strike if Delphi is allowed to throw out its labor contracts, they have long been negotiating for buy-outs and other concessions. Earlier this year they agreed to buy-out offers to veteran employees covered by job guarantees. Earlier deals provided for lower wages for new hires.

Many rank-and-file workers have been pressing for strikes or other industrial action at Delphi and other spun-off parts makers, arguing that concessions will only embolden the companies to increase their reliance on outsourcing, subcontracting, and two- and three-tier pay schemes, while leaving tens of thousands of retirees without the health care and pension benefits they have relied upon.

more dangerous workplace environments?

My son’s work-place death began as a crime scene. Is it going to conclude as a criminal investigation? The reality is, probably not. The crime is that right now, probably right at this moment, another family just lost a loved one to a work-place death, which, more than likely, could have been prevented.

In conclusion, per Donald Coit Smith, whose 22-year-old son was also electrocuted in a meat packing facility in Texas last year ... “Employer negligence is all about money ... elect legislators who will take the public’s best interest at heart and make these law changes to protect the common man. Too much employer PAC money is given to elected officials to (make) employer favorable laws.”

[OSHA’S web site reports this case as closed, without citation.]

Immigrants lead job deaths

A study by the Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health reports that immigrant workers account for a disproportionate number of workplace fatalities. Twenty-two of the state’s 78 workplace deaths last year involved immigrants

“Immigrants, quite frankly, are falling into the highest-risk jobs. And they find themselves without the training and safety precautions necessary,” said Ali Noorani, executive director for the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition.

Nancy Lessin, health and safety coordinator for the Massachusetts AFL-CIO and author of the study, said OSHA’s average fine of \$14,065 for safety violations is “pocket change for these companies.”



Five Amersino IWW members fired after rigged NLRB election

IWW and Make the Road by Walking supporters are walking intermittent picket lines at Brooklyn’s Amersino produce distribution warehouse, after the boss provoked a short walk-out by firing two IWW activists. One, Eliezer Maca, was fired for challenging the boss’s attempt to rig a union representation election by bringing in voters who did not work at the facility.

A majority of Amersino workers joined the IWW in March, and demanded union recognition, reinstatement of fired workers, and an end to company violations of minimum wage and overtime laws. While workers won some immediate gains, the boss demanded a National Labor Relations Board election and pulled out all the stops to win it.

Throughout April, the boss made threats to fire workers and close the warehouse. He reportedly bribed workers to vote against the union. And on April 28, the day of the election, he brought in managers and workers from other facilities to vote against the IWW while challenging several workers’ votes by falsely claiming they didn’t work there. Twenty

of the 35 ballots cast were contested. On April 29, a day after the rigged election, two workers’ leaders were suspended without just cause. IWW workers walked out declaring that they would not work unless the two were returned to the job. The boss quickly brought in scabs to replace the union workers, although almost all the scab workers were talked out of working that day.

On May Day, New York Wobblies mounted a spirited picket line outside Amersino as work began at 5:30 a.m. before joining the immigrant rights actions later that day.

On May 2 workers arrived ready to work but were locked out. Later that day the boss agreed to take back all but five workers. As the Department of Labor and the National Labor Relations Board take their time reviewing documents, five fired workers are searching for new jobs.

To get assessment stamps for the IU460 organizing drive contact Benjamin at baf1111@yahoo.com. Also check out www.indypendent.org/?p=232 for an article on efforts to organize Brooklyn’s immigrant workers.

Open Letter: Where were you, big labor, the day workers moved a nation?

Pittsburgh’s organized labor community should be embarrassed by its lack of presence at the May 1st march organized by Pittsburgh Friends of Immigrants.

In a city with a long and rich immigrant labor history and dozens of unions, only one union – the IWW – was visibly present to actually march and stand in solidarity with Pittsburgh’s immigrant workers.

Why was Pittsburgh’s organized labor missing in action? The immigrant workers of this community – many of whom risked their jobs and deportation to stand and be counted – deserve an answer. The IWW stood with immigrant workers and supported the general strike based on our long-standing principle of solidarity with all workers, regardless of legal status or nationality.

We did what we could, but big labor had the opportunity on May Day to seize the hearts and minds of millions of workers and recast the impotent union movement as a powerful working class movement. It was labor’s first big chance in decades to reach multitudes of workers across cultural, national, racial, linguistic and industrial lines.

It was a chance to reframe the world of work along class lines and to reassert the humanistic value of labor. It was labor’s big chance to actually lead a national social justice movement. This was an event not to be missed; so why couldn’t labor unions at least show up and spend some of their resources on this fight in the streets instead of squandering assets on political wrangling and legal maneuvering in the corporate suites?

When will another moment provide labor with such an opportunity to advertise the union movement as a place for all workers? Workers remember such slights, whether

from company bosses or union bosses. The IWW’s long memory goes back a century, despite castigations from our more “modern” labor comrades for being throwbacks to some by-gone era. For us, the power elite’s uneasy reaction to the May Day strike and massive grass-roots protests demonstrates the viability of a new working class movement – one with real leverage at the point of power: the workplace.

However, big labor seems not to be interested in empowering workers as a class; Samuel Gompers of the AFL didn’t care in 1905, nor did George Meany. Sadly, the leaders of today’s AFL-CIO-CTW do not seem to care either. If they did, their unions would have shut this country down for a day (or maybe for an hour at least in symbolic solidarity with the general strike) and let the corporate lawyers and politicians file all the complaints they want.

After witnessing years of big labor’s misleadership and decline, it’s no wonder so many immigrant and non-immigrant workers were willing to act on their own behalf, ignoring labor’s warnings to obey their bosses, keep the labor peace, stick with the “plan.” By their actions, many labor unions simply underscored their own irrelevance in the lives of the most vulnerable workers.

At least in Pittsburgh there was one union with its banner flying high on May Day. The IWW was the only union literally standing in solidarity and marching with our fellow workers on this historic day of action. We showed support because an injury to one is an injury to all. Besides, we find it repulsive to scab on fellow workers.

In solidarity with workers everywhere,
Kevin Farkas, Pittsburgh IWW

Millions march on May Day

continued from page 1
of fired workers. Only after folks lost their job would they be willing to fight over unpaid wages. But within the last year, whole shops have come to us with their issues saying they want to fight, they want to organize. We hadn’t seen this before.”

As part of the larger movement, IWW branches and members in nearly a dozen cities participated by joining the demonstrations often in contingents or marching in coalition with other groups. Wobblies also organized support for workers retaliated against for participating in demonstrations and mobilized their co-workers to strike, call in sick or take the day off in numerous workplaces. The IWW General Executive Board approved a resolution encouraging all members to participate in the called-for strike and protest as their circumstances allowed.

Chicago

Joining the 750,000-strong demonstration on May Day was a contingent of IWW members with banners and thousands of business cards promoting the Workers National Defense Committee. The group is a loose collaborative of organizations across the country supporting workers who were fired or retaliated against for participating in the May 1st and previous immigrant rights demonstrations. Over a month ago the Chicago GMB formed a committee of members who trained themselves in providing support for workers involved in the May 1st movement, later discovering and joining the Workers National Defense Committee which was already working on the issue.

“This is a real struggle for workers. Here in Chicago, we’re working with factory workers in the area, assisting them with unemployment and pressuring the companies to rehire them,” says Matt Zito, who is chairing the committee of IWW members working around the issue. A machine shop worker who attended the demonstrations and met IWW members who supported him around a severe hand injury he recently received on the job has joined the branch.

According to Zito, the Workers National Defense Committee is supporting an unprecedented class action Unfair Labor Practice charge brought by the Change to Win union grouping on behalf of all workers fired for participating in the recent immigration marches. The *San Francisco Chronicle* report-

ed on May 2 that some trade associations and union busting law firms even advised their members and clients not to fire their workers as it could be covered as concerted activity under the National Labor Relations Act.



IWW members marching in San Francisco.

San Francisco Bay Area

In the Bay Area two large marches were held, along with smaller rallies in surrounding cities – a day of action and march of about 100,000 in San Francisco and an afternoon march of over 150,000 in San Jose. About 45 Wobblies and supporters marched as a contingent in San Francisco carrying the red and black flags and a large IWW banner.

A number of members took part in strikes, including the majority of the Spanish-speaking Wobblies at the Community Conservation Centers Inc., commonly known as Berkeley Buy-Back recycling, which is a shop under an IWW contract. While most attended the nearby Richmond protests, one recycler, who had never attended a demonstration before the recent immigration protests, joined the San Francisco contingent. He noted that many of the African-American workers supported the effort. “No questions asked, that’s how it was going down,” he said of the African American workers. “They’re taking their day on Malcolm X Day too.” The next day everyone in the yard was talking about how big the rallies were, he said.

Also leading a workplace action was Tristan Bunner, working at the Foothill Dining cafeteria on the UC Berkeley campus. He organized his shift of 5 workers, saying, “I talked with my Fellow Workers at work, they were supportive and so we worked out that we would all call in sick for the day.”

Bay Area members, such as Samantha Levens, are also working as part of the Workers National Defense Committee around a case of eight fired Chevy’s restaurant workers

Intransigent in Illinois: Hey Electri-Flex, Show your workers some Respect!

BY RIK HAKALA AND MATT ZITO
Three workers were fired from Electri-Flex Corporation, a manufacturer of electrical conduit in Roselle, Illinois, after participating in the May 1 Gran Paro in Chicago.

According to the workers, they and their co-workers notified the company on repeated occasions of their intention to attend the march, explaining the importance of the march to Electri-Flex supervisory and human resource personnel. The company’s response to their appeals was to intimidate the approximately 100 employees with threats of firings if they attended.

Electri-Flex has a four-day production schedule, and – as many companies did – could have rescheduled May Day production on a different day to avoid any hardship.

The three fired workers consulted with the Chicago Workers’ Collaborative, an immigrant and day laborer organization, who placed numerous calls to the CEO of Electri-Flex. Since the calls went ignored, a flying picket was scheduled for Friday, May 12.

On a chilly and rainy morning, 15-20 people held picket signs and chanted outside the offices and factory of Electri-Flex. Initial attempts to contact management were rebuffed, and the picket moved to speak with client company Callas/Kingsley Electrical Sales in nearby Wood Dale. After briefly



PHOTO: DICK REILLY, INDYMEDIA
Chicago Wobblies joined other unions in the largest labor demonstration in the city’s history on May Day.

occupying the office, police swept in and relocated the picket outside.

While attempting to speak with George Callas, a report went out over WBBM radio that CEO Jason Kinander of Electri-Flex was willing to negotiate with the workers. The picket returned to Electri-Flex and met with the parasite representative of the boss class. He would meet only with the workers, without legal or union representation, to discuss their reinstatement demands.

The Chicago IWW continues to assist the CWC & National Workers’ Defense Committee by filing unemployment compensation claims and putting pressure upon the owners of Electri-Flex and their client companies.

in Stockton, Calif. “We are working to target the franchise owner,” who owns several restaurants, Levens says.

New York

“It was a whole day of struggle,” says New York IWW member Bert Picard. Members started at 5:30 in the morning to picket in front of Amersino warehouse workers who faced a lockout after threatening to strike in response to the suspension of worker leaders. Later in the morning members took buses with other groups to Chinatown, where they met up with Chinese, Polish, Latino and other immigrant workers groups in a feeder march to the larger Union Square rally. The feeder march was organized by the Break the Chains coalition, which included the Chinese Staff and Workers Association and the National Mobilization Against Sweatshops among others, whose message was “Equal Rights for All Workers.”

The New York IWW was part of the pre-existing May Day Coalition made up of Make the Road by Walking, Million Worker March and United Electrical union. But leading into May 1st, the coalition expanded rapidly and formed networks with numerous other worker centers and working class immigrant rights and church-based groups. “It was definitely a catalyst for our organizing efforts,” said IWW Starbucks organizer Sarah Bender. “People were holding their heads high.”

Portland, Oregon

In Portland, May Day demonstrations were part of an ongoing tradition that the IWW branch, along with leftist groups and



Above: The New York IWW contingent, gathered after their May Day rally. Right: Madison Wobs celebrating May Day.



The Boston march ended in a rally on the Boston Common, across from the State House.

rank-and-file members of business unions, participated in. This year immigrant groups merged together with this coalition for the largest march ever of 10,000 mostly immigrant families.

IWW members focused on outreach to service workers in the downtown area and at bus stops with a flyer asking workers to see the common cause between native-born and immigrant workers on May 1st. They held a contingent within the march and hosted their usual social event afterwards at the Portland



General Strike hits employers in pockets

Thousands of businesses across the country closed their doors May 1st – some because there were no workers, others because managers preferred to avoid a fight with their employees that they could only lose. Many more worked short-staffed.

In Latino barrios throughout Los Angeles, Washington, Chicago and Miami, thousands of restaurants, warehouses, newsstands, and money transfer services were closed. Many McDonald's outlets cut hours or shut down.

In Los Angeles, hundreds of sweatshop garment factories were closed. The strike paralyzed construction sites and industrial food production plants across the country.

“It was one thing to march,” said Armando Navarro of the California-based National Alliance for Human Rights, referring to the earlier wave of immigrant protests. “Now we’re going to hit ‘em where it hurts – in the pocketbooks.”

Cargill, the country’s second-largest beef producer, closed seven meat-processing plants employing 14,000 workers. Tyson, Perdue and other meatpackers followed suit. Tens of thousands of farm workers stayed out of the fields, and the American Nursery and Landscape Association estimated that 90 percent of the half million workers in its industry took the day off.

According to Jack Kyser, an economist with the Los Angeles Economic Development Corp., the economic impact of the strike could total \$200 million just in Los Angeles County. No one has done similar calculations for the rest of the country, but the total would have to run more than a billion dollars.

While several companies threatened to fire or discipline workers who took off work for the day, and some carried out those threats, many employers’ associations urged

caution – warning that such actions could lead to further actions.

“Law firms have been advising their clients that the immigrant labor boycott is protected by the National Labor Relations Act, even though it isn’t specifically a union action,” reported the May 2 *Wall Street Journal*, which had real-time coverage of the May Day actions in its online edition.

Troqueros Huelga: LA port truckers 90 percent solid

A May Day strike by troqueros shut down 90 percent of operations of the Port of Los Angeles, causing backlogs that took the rest of the week to clear. On any given week day up to 12,000 truckers are working at the port. On Monday, May 1 the ports looked empty. Many troqueros rallied in nearby Banning Park on the Pacific Coast Highway, enjoying the view of the highway emptied of the trucks that normally mire them in traffic.

Once again the port truckers demonstrated that they are indeed a union and have the power to strike. While the mass media was focused on the millions pouring into the streets of downtown Los Angeles something even more amazing was happening at the ports: Nothing. And on the North bound Harbor Freeway, normally packed with trucks also: Nothing.

The business press covered the strike closely, quoting shipping interests conceding that something must be done if the troqueros on whom they depend are to survive. Of course, none of these parasites offered to actually begin paying the troqueros a living wage, or organizing the work so that they are not forced to spend hours each day waiting in lines. That will take continued organization, and more industrial action.

IWW Hall.

Philadelphia

In Philadelphia members of the IWW’s South Street Workers Union participated in a May 1st rally and community meeting in support of immigrant rights. Spanish-speaking members, who are part of a larger network of immigrant organizations across Southeastern Pennsylvania, had also previously organized work stoppages and larger rallies on April 10 and February 14, Valentine’s Day.

Boston

In Boston members of the local branch organized small contingents within multiple neighborhood feeder marches that met up at a larger rally at the Boston Common. They were joined by several workers in the grocery stores that members are organizing in.

“When I stopped by work to pick up a co-worker [for the demonstration], there were only five out of 20 people there,” says Boston IWW member Mike Bell who described how the May 1st march suddenly opened up many conversations between co-workers who didn’t talk before at the workplace.

Los Angeles

In Los Angeles two separate marches merged together with over 500,000 participants crowding the downtown area. At the LA harbor IWW members were part of a loose coalition that worked to support an independent truckers’ strike. Port traffic was brought to a halt with about 90 percent of the mostly Latino truckers honoring the strike call.

IWW members also joined demonstrations in Arcata, Calif., Denver, Madison, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Pensacola, Fl., Pittsburgh, Santa Barbara, Calif., Tampa and many other cities. Internationally, the IWW participated in May Day actions across Canada and in Australia, England, Germany and Mexico.

Euro Mayday protests casualization

In Austria, IWW members joined demonstrations called by the Euro May Day Network to protest the growing casualization of labor across the continent. Contingents of temporary, part-time and other precarious workers marched in 22 cities “against precarity, the most crucial and burning social issue in Europe today, as the gigantic demonstrations in France of a whole generation against precarity and the CPE are proving. Precarity is a widespread work and life condition for millions of Europeans.

“We demand social equality for all, the end of labor precarization and all forms of flexploitation, after two decades of labor market deregulation which have caused diffuse poverty and NOT reduced unemployment. We demand *freedom of movement* for migrants and *income security for all* as fundamental steps toward a truly social Europe. ...

“We will parade on Mayday to reclaim

The machines stand idle, producing no wealth

BY STEVE KELLERMAN

Among several Boston area May Day marches in support of immigrants’ rights was one which went from East Boston to the neighboring city of Chelsea. Both areas contain large immigrant populations. When a contingent of IWW members joined the crowd at the East Boston assembly area it initially appeared that the march would be a small one, numbering perhaps 200 people.

However, after the march stepped off at approximately 2:30 with flags and banners waving, it was augmented by increasingly large numbers of participants. Motorists, pedestrians, and residents leaning out of windows waved, honked, and applauded the marchers along the route.

By the time the parade reached its final destination in Bellingham Square, Chelsea, the crowd numbered about 2,000 people, making it probably the largest demonstration in Chelsea’s history.

Community leaders and politicians addressed the assemblage, mostly in Spanish, giving voice to the participants’ determination not to be pushed around and criminalized by nativist demagogues and their yahoo acolytes. The class dimension of the day was muted.

In spirit the demonstration was friendly and positive, but marked by unshakable determination. One of the IWWs present remarked that it was a glorious May Day, made so by the first general strike in which he had ever participated. He commented on how good it felt to think of his machine standing cold and silent all day, producing no wealth for the boss.

Almost all the businesses we passed in East Boston and Chelsea were closed and shuttered. It was a great demonstration of the power we have by virtue of the fact that it is we who do all the work. The gross national product took a big hit that day.

At the conclusion of the rally the IWWs present returned to Boston to join up with the large demonstration on Boston Common.



Pensacola, Florida, IWW members joined the city’s first May Day march in years.

our lives and fight against workfare or other authoritarian solutions to mounting inequality and welfare crisis. We want to give flesh with our conflicts a new welfare system and a more horizontal, democratic society, where immaterial, service, affective, flexible work is not subjected to pitiless exploitation, black-mail flexibility, and existential impossibility. Nobody wants to be sentenced to the same job for life. But nobody wants to spend her whole day wondering how to pay the next bill, while juggling three jobs.”

Workers around the world held May Day rallies, protesting government policies and exploitation. Governments in Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Turkey outlawed the holiday and attacked demonstrators.

Tens of thousands marched across Indonesia, protesting labor “reforms” that would make it easier to fire workers. In Greece, marchers demanded an end to the war.

“We’ve been robbed long enough. It’s time to strike”

Remember the 1916 strike on Minnesota’s Iron Range

BY JEFF PILACINSKI,
TWIN CITIES GMB

On Saturday, June 3, we remember the valiant struggle of over 15,000 fellow workers and through our continued agitating in 2006 carry their fighting spirit forward. This date marks the 90th anniversary of the great mine workers strike on Minnesota’s Mesabi, Cuyuna and Vermillion Iron Ranges – a strike that threatened the economic grip of the U.S. Steel war profiteers and strained relations between several prominent Wobbly organizers and the union’s general headquarters.

After a large uprising was crushed with the help of immigrant strike breakers in 1907, Minnesota mine workers were posed to confront the steel trust once again. In a report to the Minneapolis headquarters of the IWW’s Agricultural Workers Organization dated May 2, 1916, one organizer had “never before found the time so ripe for organization and action as just now.”

The appeal from one Minnesota miner in the May 13, 1916, issue of the *Industrial Worker* summarized the workers’ discontent best: “The spirit of revolt is growing among the workers on the Iron Range,” and there was a need for “workers who have an understanding of the tactics and methods of the IWW and who would go on the job, and agitate and organize on the job.”

Less than a month later, an Italian worker at the St. James underground mine in Aurora opened his pay envelope and raged over his meager earnings under the corrupt contract system, whereby wages were based upon the load of ore dug and supplies used, not hours worked. By the time other miners arrived at the St. James for the night shift, production at the mine was halted. All pits in Aurora were soon shut down, as the strikers proclaimed: “We’ve been robbed long enough. It’s time to strike.”

40 striking workers from Aurora, along with their families, then marched through other mining communities on the Iron Range and discontent spread like wild fire. By month’s end, almost 10,000 mine workers

were out on strike.

Frustrated by previous experience with Western Federation of Miners and having been ignored by the Minnesota State Federation of Labor, the disorganized strikers appealed to the Industrial Workers of the World for assistance. Wobbly organizers, including the likes of Carlo Tresca, Joe Schmidt, Frank Little and later Joe Ettor and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn arrived to help local strike leaders draw up a list of demands. IWW membership in the Metal Mine Workers’ Industrial Union swelled amongst the strikers, with the following list of demands crafted: an 8 hour working day timed from when workers entered the mine until they were outside; a pay scale based upon the day worked; pay days twice a month; immediate back pay for hours worked upon severance; abolition of the Saturday night shift; and abolition of the contract mining system.

With a majority of the strikers being non-English speaking European immigrants, IWW and local leaders conversed with the workers in their native language – from Polish, German and Croatian to Finnish and Italian. This commitment to engaging workers in the language of their homeland was sustained through IWW publications and the Work Peoples College well into the 1940s.

Without asking for union recognition, the strikers closed the mines that shipped vast quantities of iron ore to plants producing the highly profitable materials of the great European war – iron and steel. This direct threat to wartime profits led the employing class to mount an all-out attack against the striking workers. U.S. Steel companies on the Iron Range deputized 1,000 special mine guards and strike breakers to keep the picket lines open. Bloodshed soon followed.

As the workers paraded through the town of Virginia, Minnesota, (where the strike was headquartered) with signs reading “One Big Union, One Big Enemy,” armed company thugs confronted them and opened fire on a group of strikers. When the gun smoke cleared, a Slovenian striker by the name of

Somebody Has Got to Get Out of The Way!



Solidarity, August 19, 1916.

John Alar was dead from a slug in the back.

Despite city bans against mass marches, several thousand mourning workers marched from Virginia to the fairgrounds in Hibbing where speeches in many different languages urged the strikers to maintain the struggle and fight back in spite of company repression. With this show of boldness by the workers, the U.S. Steel bulls struck back and raided the Biwabik home of a Croatian miner in search of a “blind pig” or illegal alcohol still. Violence ensued, leaving one deputized strike breaker and a bystander dead. Nick Masonovitch and his wife were arrested along with three immigrant boarders in their home. Within a day of the incident, a number of IWW organizers (who were at strike headquarters in Virginia during the scuffle) were also jailed on the grounds that they were accessories to murder. It was claimed that their impassioned speeches against the bosses encouraged chaos. Despite violent repression and with strike leaders locked up, the miners’ struggle pressed forward.

The mining companies refused to recognize any of the strikers’ demands and instead red-baited the workers by calling them IWW revolutionaries and vile anarchists in the

newspapers. After futile negotiations between U.S. Steel and local businessmen/public officials in support of the strikers, the workers looked to the federal government to mediate. Mediation broke down, and with winter approaching, the Iron Range locals of the IWW voted to end their strike on Sept. 17, 1916.

Though heralded as a defeat for the workers, their bold confrontation struck fear in the companies, who by mid-October granted a few of the strikers’ primary demands. In November of 1916, only two months after the strike’s end, large wage increases were introduced by all of the mining companies. The bosses claimed these increases were meant for workers to benefit from wartime prosperity, but the IWW and even the otherwise hostile local papers realized what prompted this action. The Duluth *News Tribune* accepted that the concessions by the bosses were an “answer to the threat of a renewed IWW strike on the ranges next spring.”

Attention then turned to defending those still jail from the Biwabik episode. A large defense campaign was mounted, with support coming from the IWW’s AWO office in Minneapolis and other workers from around the country. Shortly before the murder trials were to begin, a settlement was reached between prosecutors and attorneys speaking on behalf the IWW whereby Masonovitch and two of his immigrant boarders would plead guilty to manslaughter, and all others would be released. Masonovitch and the two immigrants accepted the offer with the understanding that they’d serve about three years. However, the three were handed terms up to 20 years with parole eligibility after 1 year served.

This outcome angered Bill Haywood, the IWW’s General Secretary-Treasurer for what he saw as a betrayal of the workers in exchange for the freedom of the Wobbly organizers. Haywood lashed out at Gurley Flynn and Ettor, who in turn criticized the IWW’s leader of withholding much-needed defense funds for the case while transforming the organization into a top-heavy bureaucracy. Some say this tension led Tresca, Ettor and Gurley Flynn to withdraw from IWW involvement. Whatever the organizational fallout from the legal settlement, workers on Minnesota’s iron ranges continued to participate in IWW agitation, with many of the 1916 strikers involving themselves in the great lumber workers struggle the following year.

With the 90th anniversary of the strike upon us, Twin Cities and Duluth IWWs will host public events and renew organizing efforts on Minnesota’s iron ranges. Fellow Workers, we’ve been robbed long enough. Let us remember the struggles of those who came before us, for it is their fight that we honor today through direct action and industrial organizing. We must continue to bite the hand that robs us of the products of our labor.

GSOC blockade at Washington Square

NYU graduate assistant strikers held a sit-in occupation of Washington Square North at NYU, blocking traffic. Drumming and chanting “What do we want? Contracts! When Do We Want Them? Now!” they were joined by Cary Nelson, president-elect, and Jane Buck, former president, of AAUP along with Julie Kushner of UAW. Along with the union reps, grad assistant protesters from the Univ. of Penn, Yale, and Columbia were among the 57 arrested by the New York Police for participating in the blockade.

GSOC members left a conference held by their local UAW 2110 at which the American Arbitration Association reported that they still had the support of a majority of teaching assistants, to march across Washington Square Park with placards and banners. Part-time faculty from NYU and the New School represented by UAW Local 7902, and faculty represented by CUNY Professional Staff Congress joined the rally that culminated with speeches and civil disobedience.

The arrests marked the end of the academic year. While the NYU strike will continue into the fall unless the administration backs off its refusal to negotiate, it will have little effect unless other unions begin to honor picket lines and ostensible strike supporters such as *The Nation* stop renting NYU facilities for their programs. AAUP President Cary Nelson’s declaration that he would refuse to serve as a reviewer for NYU faculty decisions or to speak at the campus until the strike is begun is a small first step in the direction of effective labor solidarity.

Prairie State adjuncts win

Part-time faculty at Prairie State College in Chicago Heights, Ill., have won a 12 percent pay hike in their first union contract, with 6 percent hikes for the next three years. While administrators rejected their demand for health coverage, adjuncts will now be permitted to buy into the college’s flexible spending plan.

Faculty salaries lag inflation

An annual study by the American Association of University Professors found that full-time professors’ pay fell behind inflation for the second year in a row in 2005-06. Faculty salary increases lag well behind inflation, college budgets, administrative salaries, endowments, and college tuition – the rising cost of which is typically blamed on faculty.

The number of part-time faculty continues its steady increase, and is now just under half of all faculty. The AAUP reports that median pay for adjuncts ranges from \$1,675 at two-year colleges to \$3,000 for doctoral universities – an amount so small that often a single student’s tuition pays the teacher’s salary.

Ironically, the federal government’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education has released an “issue paper” blaming the rising cost of higher education on faculty salaries and tenure, and “the extraordinary power of the faculty” (who presumably use that power to strip themselves of jobs, cut their income, and turn over ever more power to administrators).

Ontario subs strike

High school substitutes in Ontario, Canada, have gone on strike in order to force the Rainy River District School Board to increase salaries according to the salary grid increases that other ‘occasional teachers’ in school districts receive.

Members of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation began the job action after April 7 demands to align salaries with regular teachers’ increases of 21 percent failed. Secondary occasional teacher’s wages have increased by only 5 percent. Of the 31 OTBU affiliates in Ontario only a quarter of school boards have linked substitute salaries to teacher’s increases. Local occasionals have been out of contract since August 2004, and have been eligible to strike since December.

Vermont teachers strike

Teachers in Chittenden East Supervisory Union representing Bolton, Huntington, Jericho, Richmond and Underhill Vermont struck May 4, resulting in the cancellation of classes for 3,000 students. High school seniors joined the pickets showing support.

Unable to reach an agreement in contract negotiations, the union refuses to pay more than 10 percent for health care coverage. The NEA-affiliated union’s latest offer was refused May 3 when the school board demanded members pay 15 percent of their health care costs and blamed them for the strike.

The union’s proposal for a two-year contract with raises of 4 percent each year and no change in the premium share was rejected by school board members who complained of increasing health care costs.

Remembering the Coors strike

In the March issue, I left off with the Coors Brewery saga in 1963. Sorry for the break, but the wonderful groundswell of immigrants fighting for their dignity as workers broke my train of thought. Carlos Cortez, my old friend, howled his joy outside my window one moon-lit night. We shared a shot of Wild Turkey and a roll-your-own. For you, Carlos—

Much of the information for these articles comes from my own views as a strong supporter of the Coors strike during the ’70s and a long friendship with both David Sickler and Ken DeBey, but most of it comes from the excellent book written by Dan Baum in 2000, *Citizen Coors*. Every worker should read it as the Coors mentality guides our nation today and this book will help explain where that mentality would like to “lead” us. Let’s return to Golden, Colorado, in the mid-’50s.

In 1956 Brewery Workers Local 366 refused to cross the picket lines of a Coors Porcelain workers strike. Bill Coors, who managed the Coors Brewery, and Joe Coors, who managed the Coors Porcelain plant, were shocked. The fact that workers, for the first time, had shown more loyalty to one another than they were showing to the Company was treasonous in their judgment and must be punished. Both unions had to go.

In 1957 Coors posted “take it or leave it” rules in the brewery, which included a refusal to hear union grievances any longer and barred the union’s business agent from company property. In March 1957, Local 366 went out on strike. One week later, Coors became the first union brewery to hire replacement workers during a strike. The strike crumbled as the Coors brothers knew it must. Local 366 was humiliated and emasculated. In short order, Joe got an “open” shop provision in his contract with Porcelain workers and their union withered. Brother Bill lost in a bid to decertify Local 366 but amused himself defying any and all provisions of his contract with the local, knowing the union’s huevos hung on the wall in his office.

The Coors brothers understood that the craft union system in the building trades was inherently weakened by the fact that they rarely supported one another, so one by one they also disposed of: Asbestos Workers Local 28, Boilermakers Local Union 101,

Brick Layers Local 1, Cement Masons Local 57, Electricians Local 68, Glaziers Local 930, Iron Workers Local 24, Lathers Local 68, Linoleum Layers Local 419, Millwrights Local 2834, Painters Local 79, Pipe Fitters Local 208, Plumbers Local 3, Roofers Local 41, Sheet Metal Workers Local 9, and Tile, Marble and Terrazzo Helpers Local 85 over the next few years. I could never understand why this last union didn’t divide itself into three unions.

In addition to the ridiculous “take it or leave it” rules which caused the 1957 strike, Bill Coors added 22 more rules in the brewery which could result in immediate discharge, such as “conduct on company premises which violates the common decency or morality of the community” and “any words or deeds which might discourage any person from drinking Coors beer.” Later, all employees were required to visit with a team of company psychologists “to help them with personal problems.” Bill’s increasing paranoia about worker loyalty became an obsession. He ordered pre-employment polygraph tests to screen out thieves, radicals and homosexuals. The leading questions were: have you ever stolen anything; have you ever participated in “revolutionary activity” or known anyone who did; are you a homosexual; how often do you have sex with your wife; did you have sex last night? The Coors family is a perfect example of the superiority of the ruling class and why we should all be content to allow this class to govern our lives and manage our factories.

When Dave Sickler, 19-year-old son of a union carpenter, hired on in the fall of 1963, these questions embarrassed him but Coors paid good wages, he was single, and he only planned to work there until he saved enough money to buy a small place to raise and train horses. Later he was to discover, as many had before him, that the most submissive slaves are the slaves with the most privileges. Slaves with nothing to lose will revolt. Highly privileged slaves will lower themselves to unconscionable levels if they must in an effort to retain or gain these privileges.

One day Dave got something special in his pay envelope. It was a newsletter published by the ultra-right John Birch Society full of crude articles viciously attacking



blacks and homosexuals. He couldn’t believe the Coors family would stoop to this level. Shortly after this, Kenneth DeBey sat down next to him in the company cafeteria. Ken is a large man and he is union from his butt both ways. He was vice-president of Local 366. “We’re looking for someone to run for shop steward from your department,” Ken said bluntly. “Why me,” Dave responded, “I’ve never been to a union meeting.” Ken had the instinct of all good organizers to sense the fire that was beginning to smolder in the belly of this young man. “Because you seem to be pissed off,” Ken replied. They spent some time discussing lie detector tests, forced overtime, mandatory swing shifts, cancelled vacations at the whim of your boss, arbitrary rules that could get you fired on an instant’s notice, “and they are racist sons of bitches. See any Negroes here? Any Mexicans? Nada,” Ken concluded. And so began a long career in the labor movement for this team.

Ken was not the only one to notice that there were few workers of color at Coors. Rudolfo “Corky” Gonzales was trying to rally the Hispanic population in the Denver area to form their own civil rights movement. He had been watching Cesar Chavez creating a movement in the West through the boycott of grapes and lettuce and understood that this movement was about a lot more than just wages. Corky also understood that Cesar wanted this movement to spread to other Hispanic communities. Corky did an investigation of Coors’ hiring practices and found only nine Hispanic surnames amongst the 4,500 employees.

About this time, Joe Coors was drifting further and further into neo-fascist politics and, as a regent at Colorado University, was making a spectacle of himself with speeches that branded him as a right-wing crackpot and painted a big target on his nose, especially for minorities. Corky would use Joe’s crackpot image as a catalyst to organize one of the most successful civil rights organizations Denver has seen to date. He began mobilizing this movement by initiating the boycott of Coors beer in Denver which gave every Hispanic an easy way to fight back against Coors’ racist hiring policies and their insults. Dave was curious about the Chavez boycott strategy. He knew that Local 366 and Coors would lock horns some day and he also knew

British teachers demand parent vote on ‘trust’ schools

The National Union of Teachers is pressing the government to modify its education “reform” legislation to give parents the right to a vote before their children’s schools are converted into “trust schools” – roughly equivalent to U.S. “charter schools.” The Blair government wants to create a new agency separate from the Education Ministry to work with corporations and churches to further expand “trust” and specialist schools, which are exempt from most standards.

Teachers defend right to play

Delegates at the National Union of Teachers conference also protested an increasingly standardized curriculum which is denying children the ability to learn through play. One teacher blasted the present uniform curriculum as “state-sponsored child abuse.”

The resolution also complained of pressures for more formal teaching from age five, playing fields being sold off, lack of space in schools for play areas, lack of after-school opportunities, and “the lack of a proper work-life balance.” The resolution concluded that play “has a crucial role for all, children and adults alike.”

Coors would hire replacement workers again if the union went out on strike. Maybe the boycott tactics had merit if one took them seriously. He watched the Farm Workers movement grow and took notes on that movement and on Corky’s growing Chicano movement in Denver.

The support that the Brewery Workers gave to the Porcelain Workers in the 1957 strike struck a fear in the hearts of the Coors brothers from which they never recovered. Worker solidarity would not be tolerated. When Bill Coors found out that Local 366 was walking picket lines at grocery stores in Denver in support of the United Farm Workers boycott, he went ballistic. “I have a whole damn cellar full of grapes,” he told Sickler, “and I’ll break that boycott single-handedly.” He tried. A Coors semi returning “empty” from California rolled over near Grand Junction, Colorado, and spilled a trailer full of non-union lettuce all over Interstate 70. The ruling class has always understood class warfare and fights as a class; while we continue to clumsily stumble over 15 craft unions in one factory; unions that rarely make any effort to come to one another’s aid.

Meanwhile, Bill was flying high, divorcing his stay-at-home, alcoholic wife so he could marry his more interesting secretary, and Joe had decided he wasn’t much of a politician. He hadn’t been able to rid Colorado University of the SDS or the constant anti-war demonstrations, so he traveled to Washington, D.C., to invest millions of Coors profits in an organization that would serve the cause. He put the first \$250,000 into the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank that he hoped could compete with the liberal Brookings Institution.

While the Coors brothers were financing the growth of the fledgling Christian-Conservative coalition, and flirting with Nazis in Europe and Moonies in Asia, many union members were deserting the Democratic Party because it had defended the rights of minorities, hippies and homosexuals in the ’60s and were finding welcoming, if skeptical, arms awaiting them in the mostly white, heterosexual Republican Party. Union members were also growing fond of the term “middle class” and telling their children to go to college to “become somebody.” These were the exact words my father, a truck driver, said to me when I was in high school. Many young people were learning to be ashamed of their working-class roots, of getting their hands dirty. Making something useful, something beautiful from raw wood, stone or steel was no longer a source of pride with many workers. Many were searching for the “middle class” life, whatever the hell that was, and feeling ashamed to be labeled working class. Approach the son of a carpenter at any university and you will see what I mean.

Out in California, beer distributors had decided to break their contracts with the Teamsters for hauling beer and hired non-union drivers. Eventually, after many days of picketing, all the distributors settled and signed contracts with the Teamsters; all but the Coors distributors, that is. The Teamsters began looking seriously at the Coors boycott going on in the Chicano communities. Big changes were afoot in the United States and unheard-of coalitions were building. Dave Sickler and Ken DeBey were watching and taking notes.

To be continued

Nurses still fighting mandatory overtime

Nurses rallied at the state capitol in Albany May 2 to protest mandatory overtime and inadequate staffing in New York hospitals. Nurses are often told they’ll have to work an extra shift a few minutes before they’re scheduled to go home.

The rally was organized by four nursing unions, which are pressing for a law barring employers from forcing nurses to work more than eight hours in a day or 40 hours in a week. The unions say working double shifts threatens patient safety.

Eleven states limit the number of hours health care workers can be required to put in, but in the rest of the country employers can demand they work essentially unlimited shifts, just like any other worker. (Only Maine has a law protecting most workers against mandatory overtime, and it sets the bar at more than 80 hours.)

Although hospitals claim mandatory overtime is rare, a 2002 survey of registered nurses found that nearly two-thirds were forced to work overtime in the prior year.

On May 11, nurses rallied in Scranton, Penn., against mandatory overtime. Already scheduled to work eight to 12-hour shifts, nurses say they are often ordered to put in another four or more hours to cover for short staffing. Pennsylvania is considering legislation prohibiting employers from forcing nurses to work more than 12 hours a day or 60 hours a week. Republicans have been blocking the bill from coming to a vote.



Longer hours, less pay for U.S. working mothers

Joan Blades and Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner’s *The Motherhood Manifesto* (excerpted in the May 22 *Nation*) points out that two-parent families spend 500 more hours a year at work than they did 25 years ago, with women picking up much of those extra hours.

The result is stressed-out mothers, fatigued from putting in long hours and paying a heavy price in their pay checks as well. (While younger nonmothers make 90 cents to every man’s dollar, moms get only 73 cents to the dollar and single moms about 60 cents – and the gap is growing. This family penalty is a direct consequence of U.S. labor policy and the steady growth in expected work hours which working mothers are simply unable to fully accommodate without abandoning their children.)

We’ve lost so much ground that they conclude by calling for “fair wages” set so that two parents working full time can earn enough to support a family, as part of family-friendly reforms such as health care, child care and after-school programs so they have somewhere to stash the kids while working the 50- to 60-hour weeks that workers condemned as inhuman 120 years ago.

Review: The Bread & Roses strike

BY LEN WALLACE

Bruce Watson, *Bread & Roses: Mills, Migrants and the Struggle for the American Dream*, Viking, 337 pages. Available from IWW Literature Department, \$24.95 U.S.

“It is the first strike I ever saw which sang. I shall not soon forget the curious lift, the strange sudden fire of the mingled nationalities at the strike meetings when they broke into the universal language of song. And not only at the meetings did they sing, but in the soup houses and in the streets.”

— Ray Stannard Baker, *May 1912*

“Now, what are my social views? I have stated some of them. I do believe – I may be wrong, but, gentlemen, only history can pass judgement upon them. All wealth is the product of labor, and all wealth being the product of labor belongs to labor and no one else.”

— IWW strike leader Joseph Ettor’s testimony to the jury

In the past few years bookstore shelves have presented a host of social histories, historical/political non-fiction and fiction dealing with working class history. Add Bruce Watson’s *Bread & Roses* to the list.

Watson, an award-winning journalist, recounts on a week-to-week basis the tale of the massive 1912 Lawrence, Massachusetts, strike in which 25,000 textile workers walked off their jobs in a massive display of disruption and disobedience to the powers of King Capital, the authority of the mill bosses, official society and the forces of state Law and Order.

The Lawrence strike was a big strike. It was massive in the number of workers who rallied and walked off jobs, massive in the emotions it raised, in the forceful prominence of the great numbers of young women workers who participated and played driving roles, and big in the spread of immigrant nationalities and languages. It was big in the personalities of its leadership, the prominent

radical and revolutionary figures such as Joseph Ettor, Big Bill Haywood and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. It was big in its organization, the Industrial Workers of the World, known then as the One Big Union.

The dimensions of the strike grew quickly from the moment Polish mill workers shouted down the lines of the mill that their paychecks were short on pay. Watson describes the momentum as an explosion and Lawrence as a powder keg ready to blow. These were immigrant workers – Jewish, Polish, Russian, Italian, Syrian, German, French Canadian, Irish and more – experiencing the brutal reality of the “American Dream.” The supposed high wage jobs and promises of freedom and wealth were elusive to the impoverished great majority.

Despite the false calmness of Lawrence as a productive, well-maintained, peaceful, progressive and state of the art industrial centre, the working class was seething against a thousand oppressions from poor pay, poor living conditions, unsafe work, the vast inequality of societal wealth, caste and class, and a diet that featured bread, molasses and beans (just good enough to fill their bellies, have them work exhausting hours and to reproduce the next generation to do the same).

One of the amazing elements of the strike, as Watson shows, is the growing solidarity amongst a working class striated by national and ethnic difference. This was no homogeneous working class which stood side by side, even their solidarity translated into more than 30 languages. Tensions existed, and Irish and French-Canadian workers were sometimes reluctant to participate. Clerical workers were often forced by strikers to leave work. Such workers often identified with their bosses (not uncommon for the time). The leadership of skilled workers belonging to the craft unions of the American Federation of Labor actively worked to subvert the

radical strikers who they saw as unkempt, uncouth, dirty and uneducated foreigners.

Watson pulls no punches in revealing the manipulation of textile bosses, the deliberate hate campaign of lies vilifying the IWW. The slander was then taken up by powerful religious leaders fueled by the fear of a ruling class that saw in this strike the makings of a possible social revolution, that moment when workers supersede immediate wage demands and begin building alternative structures and sources of self-authority, recognizing in their own power the ability to change the world.

Most interesting is Watson’s research on the role of various church leaders and authorities during the strike and the very real divisions between the church of comfortable authority and those with close ties to the working class. He also reveals how the ruling circle of official society, from state officials and religious leaders to school authorities and employers promulgated a flag-waving patriotism as an ideological facade to deliberately undermine the very real solidarity of strikers from many national backgrounds.

Watson does more than a credible job of piecing the strike together. The reader is carried along in the story. Yet there is something disconcerting in Watson’s analysis even when provided by one who is “labour friendly.” He sometimes seems to miss the point in the inspired vision of workers in motion. Perhaps it is the result of his small “I” liberal perspective or the journalistic attempt to appear “objective” and “value-free.”

The book has two deficiencies. Watson concedes that the workers were justified in their anger against the conditions of work and life. Perhaps because of his perspective, he paints any vision presented by the workers and their organization (the IWW) which attempt to reach beyond capitalism as a naive utopianism based on an almost mystical faith. There is, in fact, a vast difference between a vision of a fundamentally altered economic, political and social order controlled by producers and utopian plans based on blind faith.

In this perspective the dynamics of change are not the dynamics of class in all its divisions, intensity, movement, contradictions and solidarity. Instead, Watson emphasizes history made by organizations, institutions and exemplary individuals with workers as a mass of followers.

It is the failure of the author himself to see the possibilities of life beyond Capital that leads to an Epilogue which becomes one of resignation, almost cynicism about labor’s supposedly forgotten struggles. Surprisingly, little attention is paid to worker (and especially IWW) attempts to keep the memory and history of the Lawrence strike alive as an example of a battered working class summoning its strength to not only better its conditions of life under capitalism, but to potentially challenge capitalism itself.

Despite these weaknesses, Watson’s history helps us understand this great struggle, how workers actually overcame internal divisions in order to fight back and the few above desperately tried to keep them divided.

Bosses spy on workers

A survey by the American Management Association found that 76 percent of companies surveyed indicate they monitor the Web activity of their employees. Employers reported monitoring phone calls, emails, Web sites, and using video surveillance.

Workplace safety reality TV

A new reality television series in New Zealand gives viewers the chance to experience the work that goes on behind the scenes of workplace accidents and investigations.

Special Investigators follows workplace safety inspectors for the Department of Labour, Civil Aviation Authority and Maritime New Zealand going about their daily business, and showcases the variety of hazards people can encounter in the workplace.

Depression-era anthem echoes immigrant struggle

BY MARK R. WOLFF

Having returned from the first of a series of immigrant rights protests that culminated in the May first general strike action, I happened to hear on the radio a version of “Brother Can You Spare a Dime?” sung by Abbie Lincoln from her debut album. Though the song became popular during the 1930s depression, some of the words echo the sentiments of those immigrant workers whose labor was exploited in the construction of major public works projects in the United States and of those who served in the military.

The lyrics were written by E. Y. “Yip” Harburg (April 8, 1896 - March 5, 1981). Born Isidore Hochberg to immigrant parents on the Lower East Side of New York, he was known as Yip: short for the Yiddish yipsel, meaning squirrel. Yip went to Townsend Harris High School where he met lyricist Ira Gershwin along with his brother, composer George Gershwin. Together they worked on the school newspaper, and attended City College of New York. After graduation, Harburg worked as a journalist in South America. Upon his return to New York he became co-owner of an appliance company that went bankrupt following the crash of 1929.

Ira Gershwin introduced Yip to Jay Gorney. With Gorney, Harburg wrote songs for a series of musical reviews, including “Americana” in 1932, that included the song “Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?” for which Yip Harburg wrote the lyrics:

“Once I built a railroad, made it run / Made it race against time / Once I built a railroad, now it’s done / Brother can you spare a dime? / Once I built a tower, to the sun / Brick and rivet and lime / Once I built a tower, now it’s done / Brother can you spare a dime?”

“Once in khaki suits / Gee, we looked swell / Full of that yankee doodle de dum / Half a million boots went slogging through hell. / I was the kid with the drum. / Say, don’t you remember? they called me Al / It was ‘Al’ all the time! / Say, don’t you remember, I’m your pal! / Buddy can you spare a dime?”

Hilton hotel union protest

As we go to press the Hilton Los Angeles Airport hotel has announced it will reinstate at least 67 workers (the union says nine more were suspended) suspended May 10 after they met in an employee cafeteria to protest the disciplining of a union supporter the day before. The waiters and housekeepers were demanding an explanation for the suspension, and refused to return to work until a manager offered one. Managers refused to meet with them, instead suspending all workers who did not abandon the job action.

The suspension will cost the workers a week’s pay, and is the subject of unfair labor practice charges filed with the NLRB. The Hilton is the second-largest hotel in Los Angeles County, and is bitterly fighting a campaign to raise wages and organize workers at 13 airport-area hotels by Unite-Here.

The suspended workers responded with a picket line outside the hotel. Workers marched on the hotel May 12 in an attempt to reclaim their jobs, but were turned back by security guards. They were reinstated May 17 as the union was planning more protests outside the hotel.

Australian Wobs join almond packer solidarity campaign

Melbourne IWW members participated in a May 15 action as part of a Blue Diamond International Day of Action in support of 600 U.S. almond workers.

Blue Diamond, the world’s biggest almond processor, pays most workers a miserly \$11/hour, has been found guilty of massive labor law violations, and threatened to close down operations if the ILWU gained recognition at its San Francisco Bay area plant.

Pittsburgh IWW celebrates May Day & Branch Charter Day

BY KEVIN FARKAS, PITTSBURGH

More than 100 Wobblies, friends of labor, local activists, and community members celebrated International Workers’ Day in Pittsburgh. The Pittsburgh IWW’s second annual celebration of workers worldwide was held on April 29th at the Bulgarian-Macedonian National Education and Cultural Center and included a midnight march to the historic Homestead Strikers’ Monument.

Members of the Pittsburgh IWW, which was also celebrating the fourth anniversary of its chartering on May Day 2002, coordinated the evening’s events which included various musical acts, labor skits, poetry and spoken word performances, and speak outs by local union members and activists. In addition to the IWW, members belonging of the Teamsters, Steelworkers, and Writers Guild were present, as were representatives of local activist groups such as the Thomas Merton Center, the anti-war Pittsburgh Organizing Group, Pittsburgh Friends of Immigrants, and the Big Idea Bookstore. Members of the of the Pittsburgh Anti-Sweatshop Community Alliance, including IWW member and PASCA co-founder Ken Miller, were also on hand and spoke of this summer’s activities around the 2006 All-Star Game to raise awareness of major league baseball’s connection to global apparel sweatshops.

The most powerful musical moment of the night came when Mike Stout, a local labor activist currently releasing his 9th CD, belted out a haunting and spirited a capella rendition of “Which Side Are You On.” The most comical moments came from skits performed by local IWW members, including Mimi Yahn & Evan Wolfson who performed a Work People’s College satire. Delivering a powerful anti-war message, IWW member



Musician Steve Pellegrino entertains the crowd at Pittsburgh’s May Day celebration.

Jeremy Shenk did a riveting spoken-word performance that drew enormous applause.

As is the tradition of the Pittsburgh IWW May Day celebration, the evening concluded with a short midnight march to a monument dedicated to the Homestead steelworkers and strikers. Local labor authorities Charlie McColester and Mel Packer spoke eloquently on behalf of the workers who fought and died at the hands of steel boss Henry Clay Frick and his hired goons, the Pinkertons. As curious passers-by honked and waved to the crowd of about thirty gathered at the monument, Charlie McColester reminded the group that “just three blocks away Mother Jones was arrested by the police for demonstrating without a permit. But when asked by the judge if she had a permit to speak in public Mother Jones replied, ‘I indeed have a permit to speak in public, your honor, it was given to me by Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and James Madison!’”

The vibrant group concluded the evening’s celebration by singing a loud and proud version of a May Day favorite, the “Internationale.”

Newspaper workers stand together in Philly

Workers at *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Daily News* are represented by a patchwork of unions representing journalists, pressmen, advertising and circulation workers. Sometimes these unions stand together in solidarity, but too often they cross each other's picket lines as employers slash jobs and convert many workers into poorly paid part-time and contract positions.

The Philadelphia papers are in turmoil as the McClatchy chain is in the process of buying the larger Knight Ridder chain, and simultaneously reselling them and several other papers around the country because it says they are not profitable enough. Newspaper owners have become accustomed to profits of 25 percent or more of revenues – many times the profitability of most firms – and after years of newsroom cuts are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain those margins.

In response, the Newspaper Guild has worked with the Yucaipa group to put together a proposal to purchase all of the newspapers McClatchy is trying to unload (most of which employ Newspaper Guild members in their newsrooms), and gradually transfer them to employee ownership. McClatchy used the Guild efforts to leverage higher prices from other companies in reselling Knight Ridder's Northern California papers to notoriously anti-union MediaNews, but seems reluctant to allow employees to own some of the country's leading newspapers.

Among the bidders for the Philadelphia newspapers that it is seriously considering is Toronto investment firm Onex Corp. Onex has floated plans for deep cuts in the newsrooms in meetings with newspaper executives and Teamsters leaders. Teamsters officials say Onex sought their assurance that the drivers, pressmen and mailers it represents as a result of recent union mergers would not oppose the elimination of hundreds of newsroom jobs as long as their own jobs were protected.

The Teamsters refused. "They got the message that all the unions are together" and will deal with whoever buys the papers as a united front, said Joseph Molinero, director of the Teamsters' newspaper division.

Onex managing director Seth M. Mersky wrote back, saying he "can't fully appreciate" the Teamsters' concern "for colleagues at other collective bargaining units."

Onex does not currently own newspapers, although its founder helped start Canada's CanWest Global Communications newspaper chain in the early 1980s. The company owns computer parts makers, aircraft manufacturers, movie theaters and medical services operators, among other companies. Most of its holdings are unprofitable.

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* reports that Onex approached the Teamsters through former U.S. Rep. Richard Gephardt, once unions' favored candidate for president. In his follow-up letter to the Teamsters, Mersky thanked the union leaders for their "candor." He also misspelled the *Inquirer*, referring to it as the "Enquirer."

"I guess that name doesn't mean anything to him. But it's on our paychecks," said John Laigaie, president of Teamsters Local 628, which represents drivers. Onex "would really harm some groups, and that's something we all have to be prepared to fight together."

Paper workers fight job cuts

Finland's Union of Paper Workers struck paper mills across the country May 15 and 16 in what employers said was an illegal strike to protest the elimination of 2,557 jobs at paper giant UPM Kymmene, and the closure of its Voikka mill. The company is encouraging laid-off workers to take lower-paid jobs with a maintenance firm it is contracting with to do much of their work.

"Enterprises have adopted a managing culture that prioritises the shareholders' interests, although it is the personnel that has, by its work throughout the decades, created the enterprises wealth," insists Paper Workers' Union president Jouko Ahonen.

Partial victory in Iran

A few months back the ISC sent letters to the Iranian government concerning the plight of imprisoned and abused workers in a glass factory in Kurdish Iran. An international campaign by many working class organizations was able to help free them.

Hundreds of workers and their families staged a rally and march to commemorate International Workers’ Day in Saqez, Kurdistan, May 1, 2004. The event was organized by independent “First of May Council,” and was attacked by intelligence and security forces. Several participants were arrested, and seven were prosecuted for “organizing an illegal gathering,” “conspiring to commit criminal acts against national security” and sympathizing with Komala, a banned socialist organization in Iran’s Kurdistan.

Although all charges pertaining to association with the Komala were withdrawn, five out of the seven charged were sentenced to long prison terms. However, under intense international scrutiny the sentences were overturned in May.

Mexican miners solidarity

On May Day the ISC issued a statement in support of Mexican miners. Workers have occupied the largest, most profitable steel mill in Latin America to protest the government’s intervention into their union, as well as its dismissal of the death of 65 miners in a mining disaster last February. Police attacked the occupation, killing at least three workers. The occupying workers regrouped and with the help of thousands of local workers, retook most of the mill’s facilities. This struggle is making huge waves across Mexico. Check out the UE’s page at ueinternational.org, where you’ll find articles from Mexican News and Analysis by Dan LaBotz.



The International Solidarity Commission of the Industrial Workers of the World stands in solidarity with rank-and-file members of the Mexican Miner’s Union (SNTMMRM) who are demanding the right to their union officials of choice, and are engaged in active resistance through the occupation of the SICARTSA steel mill in Lazaro Cardenas, Michoacan. We condemn the violence against protesting union members, including the murder of at least three workers at SICARTSA, by police and military forces acting under the orders of the Mexican state and federal governments, and in cooperation with the interests of the Villacero Group management.

For decades, the Mexican government has served the interests of national and international capital by seeking to control the workers’ movements in the country. These efforts, which have seen the repression of workers demanding independent and democratic unions has continued into the NAFTA era, with the intent of keeping Mexico’s workers impoverished and desperate. ... In the last few years, that real successes have been made in the struggle for union freedom, with which workers have a strong tool to improve their standard of living. The IWW offers our sincerest hopes for this movement, and extends our support where this is possible.

The IWW demands that all levels of the Mexican government end their repression of protesting miners and steelworkers and

withdraw their police and military forces from the SICARTSA steel mill and that the union autonomy of the SNTMMRM is respected.

Pakistan: May Day greetings

In April, the ISC sent solidarity greetings to striking workers at Ammar Textiles in Pakistan: Amidst heavy police occupations, management crackdowns, international legislation and trade pacts aimed at crushing workers’ struggle for a decent life workers like you march on. Unless workers stand up and resist the constant flow of repression, all of us will have more work and worse work. In textiles from Vietnam to Bangladesh, from Colombia to India, struggles are building amidst this terrible repression and harsh conditions thanks to people like you. The International Solidarity Committee sends our support, love and solidarity in your struggle.

Soon afterward, the IWW received a message headed “Revolutionary greetings from the All Pakistan Trade Union Federation!”

May Day is a day to commemoration of the historic struggle of the workers throughout the world against capitalism, exploitation, and for safe working conditions and respect for the dignity of workers, May 1st is also a day to remember that an injury to one is an injury to all.

We are celebrating May Day in this critical time when the world situation is marked by the continuous onslaught of imperialism

against the nation sovereignty, the right of working class, the world are confronting the terrible consequences of imperialist globalization, undermining international law and basic human rights. The growing economic might of multinationals & transnational corporations and the imposition of policies of globalization have led to an unprecedented large-scale offensive against the democratic and social achievements of working people and against the trade union movement.

To pay rich tribute to the Chicago Martyrs and extend the solidarity with workers’ movement around the world as well as agitate against imperialist globalization, price hikes, enormous unemployment, anti-labor laws, downsizing & privatization and ban on union activities, the All Pakistan Trade Union Federation is organizing rallies in cities including Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, Rawalpindi/Islamabad and Quetta. Workers from different industrial areas of Lahore will gather at Lahore Press Club and march toward Assembly Hall. Thousands of workers, including women workers from formal and informal sectors will participate.

If there is no struggle there is no progress!
Gulzar Ahmed Chaudhary
General Secretary, Lahore

IWW, Bangladeshi garment workers’ representative meet

A representative of the ISC met Amirul Haque Amin May 6 at the Labor Notes Conference in Detroit, to discuss how to expand the relationship between the IWW and the National Garment Workers Federation. The NGWF is organizing workers who typically are paid about U.S.\$20 per month, with women workers facing particularly harsh conditions. Among possible initiatives discussed was an IWW delegation to Bangladesh.

Unions celebrate May Day amidst growing social conflict in Mexico

BY PAUL BOCKING,
IWW INTERNATIONAL
SOLIDARITY COMMISSION

Dozens of unions and workers’ organizations, with tens of thousands of participants between them, marched through the Mexican capital on May 1 in recognition of International Workers Day. In the late morning, affiliates of the independent National Union of Workers (UNT) including the Authentic Labor Front (FAT), the telephone workers and health care workers union marched downtown to the central square across from the National Palace. Members of the Mexican Union of Electrical Workers (SME), subway workers, firefighters, teachers and energy workers picked up the rear of the march.

With simultaneous marches snaking through downtown streets, cars were completely replaced in the centre with people carrying colourful signs and banners. Earlier that morning, affiliates of the conservative official federations held their own gatherings separate from the independent unions.

In recent weeks the Mexican labour movement has gained new energy as many unions rally in support of the Miners and Metalworkers Union (SNTMMRM). Its members are protesting the removal and replacement of the union’s president with one alleged to be more sympathetic to the interests of mining employers such as multinational Grupo Mexico, which also operates mines in the U.S. While recognizing that the leader of the miners’ union may in fact be guilty of corruption, as the Mexican government claims is its rationale for removing him, independent unions are demanding that these decisions be in the hands of the rank and file.

The government’s action is seen as a serious violation of union autonomy, harkening back to the decades when the country was under the authoritarian rule of the PRI. The IWW’s International Solidarity Commission has issued a statement in support of rank-and-file miners’ and steelworkers’ right to govern their union autonomous of

the government.

On April 21, hundreds of police and military forces attacked members of the SNTMMRM occupying SICARTSA, the largest steel mill in Latin America, located in Lazaro Cardenas, Michoacan, in southern Mexico. At least three workers were killed by police gunfire, but the occupation of the mill was maintained with the help of reinforcements from surrounding communities of thousands of rank-and-file workers.

These events have led to the formation of a new labour coalition and further splits in the once dominant Congress of Labor (CT), which houses most government-affiliated unions. Independent left-leaning unions in the UNT and Mexican Union Front joined with the SNTMMRM and other former sections of the CT to begin organizing nationwide actions against government intervention in unions and the violent assault on the steelworkers’ occupation.

Another significant event this May Day was the arrival in Mexico City of the Zapatistas’ nationwide tour to build an anti-capitalist social movement including indigenous, community, labour, student and political groups. Workers organizations, including rank-and-file groups within mainstream unions as well as independent radical unions participated with the Zapatistas in a national conference the week before May Day, of unions interested in participating in this movement. The meeting, hosted by the National Union of Workers at Uniroyal, has called for a revival of Mexican revolutionary unionism.

In the midst of labour events and the Zapatistas’ visit to Mexico City, hundreds and later thousands of police attacked the self-declared autonomous town of San Salvador Atenco outside of Mexico City. Authorities claimed they were cracking down on dozens of vendors selling flowers without a permit, near a site where the local government hoped a new Wal-Mart would be built.

During the first wave of attacks on May 3, townspeople including members of the



Popular Front in Defense of the Earth (Frente de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra - FPDT) held back repeated police incursions through bloody street fighting. Early the following morning thousands of police supported by helicopters overwhelmed barricades established at the town entrances and swept into the city. Violent acts of repression by police forces followed. Hundreds of local people and supporters were taken prisoners, many brutally beaten. During the conflict, police shot and killed a 14-year-old boy. Members of the FPDT, supporters of the Zapatistas’ “Other Campaign,” were singled out for violence.

Many observers view these extreme acts as a form of revenge by the Mexican government against the people of San Salvador Atenco. In 2002, the local FPDT and supporters led a successful struggle against the expropriation of their farm lands for the development of a new airport. Ironically, on the same day of the police attacks on May 3, Mexico gained a seat on the United Nation’s High Commission on Human Rights.

In response to the events in Atenco, thousands of students, community and labour supporters in Mexico City and surrounding areas have led marches to the town, blocked major streets in Mexico City, and engaged in popular education to counteract a right wing

media campaign blaming townspeople for the violence. Students at the UNAM, Mexico’s largest university, are preparing to shut down the institution in protest of the continuing detainment of activists. Solidarity protests have occurred throughout Mexico, and at Mexican embassies and consulates around the world.

These latest violations of human rights by the Mexican state – the shooting of steelworkers in Lazaro Cardenas and the repression in Atenco – are leading to growing political polarization in Mexico. An increasingly violent right wing government, looking towards the national elections in July, is rallying its supporters with cries of law and order and the protection of private property. Meanwhile popular movements become radicalized as the state rapidly loses its legitimacy.

Vietnam garment strike

Four hundred workers at the Folimex garment workshop in Ho Chi Minh City struck May 11, protesting long working hours and pay cuts from the VND 850 - 1,500 a month they were promised on hiring to as little as 200. They are members of the government-controlled trade union, which has been diligent about collecting dues from their pay checks but has ignored workers’ complaints over pay and conditions.