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Panhandler organizer gets death threat

Posters threatening a panhandler organizer and comparing panhandlers to pigeons appeared on Ottawa streets in Ottawa as part of an effort to increase hostility against homeless people begging on the street.

One of the professionally-designed, color posters shows IWW panhandler organizer Andrew Nellis with a gun in his mouth, while a grinning mayor of Ottawa looks on, over the words "Panhandlers, follow your leader." Another poster shows a pigeon surrounded by a red circle with a strike

through it with the text: "Do not feed the human pigeons." Ottawa's mayor had publicly compared panhandlers to pigeons, saying that if people didn't give them money, they would disappear.

The posters claim to be a message from the "Central Capitalist Assembly" with the motto, "Direct Action is an Action of Capitalism", although it is unlikely that the posters were created by anything more than several individuals.

Following the posters' appearance in September, Nellis found that a hacker had cracked his email, IRC chat account,

and used his credit card. He also received a \$1,700 hydro bill, which he believes was prompted by an attempt to cut off his electricity.

The panhandlers union also found itself under attack on the online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, which ignored many posts supporting the article in favor of deleting it. Previously, users from the Ottawa city hall Internet Provider address had edited the panhandlers' Wikipedia article. Media had used the article as background about the street organization, which was now lost because of deletion, according to Nellis.

Despite the intimidation and an array of problems, Nellis is upbeat.

"This is good news because it means that the panhandlers' union is effective enough to merit this type of attack."



The poster that urges panhandler organizer Andrew Nellis to kill himself, with Ottawa's pro-business mayor Larry O'Brien smiling in the background.

FedEx exploits employees as independent contractors

Workers' rights advocates denounced FedEx Ground for classifying its employees as independent contractors and for union-busting.

American Rights at Work and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights released the report, "Fed Up with FedEx: How FedEx Ground Tramples Workers' Rights and Civil Rights" on October 26 to expose "an insidious pattern of anti-union conduct and efforts to subvert labor and discrimination law."

FedEx Ground, a subsidiary of FedEx Corporation with annual revenue of US\$32.6 billion and 280,000 employees and contractors, is using the independent contractor loophole as a way to avoid the responsibilities an employer would have toward 15,000 employees. This loophole skews competition in the market by allowing FedEx Ground to undercut UPS and DHL, according to the report.

"Under the law, true independent contractors are supposed to enjoy entrepreneurial control over the methods they use to do their work. But these misclassified workers suffer the worst of both worlds: they are without meaningful control over their work and they are without the legal protections and benefits of employees."

The incentive to misclassify workers is high: 30 per cent less costs to the payroll for these workers, avoid paying workplace compensation and evade workplace injury responsibility.

Some 10 million American workers are classified as independent contractors, according to the US labor department.

"We have to buy our own sweat shop," said FedEx driver, Bill Gardner.

Another benefit for bosses is that independent contractors cannot unionize under the law. "[D]rivers must first undergo long, expensive, and arduous court processes to prove that they are in fact employees of FedEx Ground before they can begin to seek redress for violations of their civil or workers' rights," said the report.

FedEx can and does take advantage of such delays to intimidate, interrogate and fire the union members and organizers. This harassment includes racial and ethnic slurs, says the report.

The report recommends that FedEx comply in good faith with labor laws; that the government raise public awareness to make corporations more accountable; that the government pass the Employee Free Choice Act to make union organizing easier; improve law enforcement and encourage federal and state governments close loopholes and draw up new laws to protect workers; and improve the procedures and increase congressional oversight over the National Labor Relations Board.

Surprisingly, the report offers no recommendations to the workers themselves on how to improve their working lives.

Metro Lighting IWW faces restraining order

Metro Lighting in Berkeley, California, filed a temporary restraining order against fired IWW member Gabe Wilson on October 19.

The basis of the restraining order is an incident that happened in May 2007, long before the current dispute.

Wilson is now banned from meeting with his six locked-out co-workers and prohibits him from picketing the store. Wilson was fired for union organizing in September 2007. An Unfair Labor Practice charge is pending.

Locked out IWWs see this latest move as another attempt by Metro Lighting owners to break the union's resolve to work in a safe environment.

The owners locked the workers out when they demanded an area be cleaned after employees found caustic alkaline was improperly disposed of, potentially releasing harmful chemicals into the air.

"[Caustic alkaline] is corrosive to flesh [...] and it causes irreversible eye damage and skin burns. Do not breathe dust, vapor or spray mist or get in eyes, on skin or clothing," according to the manufacturer Material Safety Data Sheet. Exposure to this chemical can corrode the respiratory system and digestive tract and cause severe irritation or burns.

The San Francisco Bay Area IWW continues to picket Metro Lighting on a regular basis, using songs, chants and directions for customers to other lighting stores to make their presence felt.

The union is demanding the reinstatement of all union workers with back wages and a pay raise for the retail workers who earn less than half what their co-workers in the assembly shop.



Gabe Wilson, the IWW organizer at Metro Lighting who was hit with a restraining order that prevents him from picketing and organizing with his locked-out co-workers.

Metro Lighting has a history of not negotiating with the IWW. Six of its seven employees are union members.

Owners rejected a proposal to increase retail workers' wages from \$10 plus commission to \$12 per hour. The workers also say that Bruce Cockrill, 61, a three-year employee of Metro Lighting, is discriminated against on the basis of age as he is paid \$4 per hour less than his co-workers. The owners said he is paid less because he draws on his medical coverage more. The union has asked that Cockrill be paid at an equal rate as other employees and be compensated for three years of being underpaid on the basis of his age.

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IWW a union for all

I was glad to read FW Ortiz' comments in the October 2007 *Industrial Worker* [defending Tom Morello]. And I agree.

Far too often it seems people think "solidarity" means cooperating with those of like mind only. It doesn't.

For us in the IWW especially, solidarity must mean cooperating with those with whom we may strongly disagree in order to advance the Working Class and bring about a better world.

Thus among our ranks the Christian must join hands with the non-believer; anarchist with the Democrat; the Muslim with the Jew; the "pro-life" FW with the "pro-choice" FW. This must be encouraged.

Unlike sectarian organizations that drift off into meaningless dogmatics and useless cyber-wars the IWW—even in its darkest hours—has vowed to leave no

one "behind". It has continued to forge ahead with action rather than impotent theory (or worse yet, social dogma) in helping to bring about a better world. The others talk. The IWW does! It is because of this real and respectful solidarity that we are still here 102 years later!

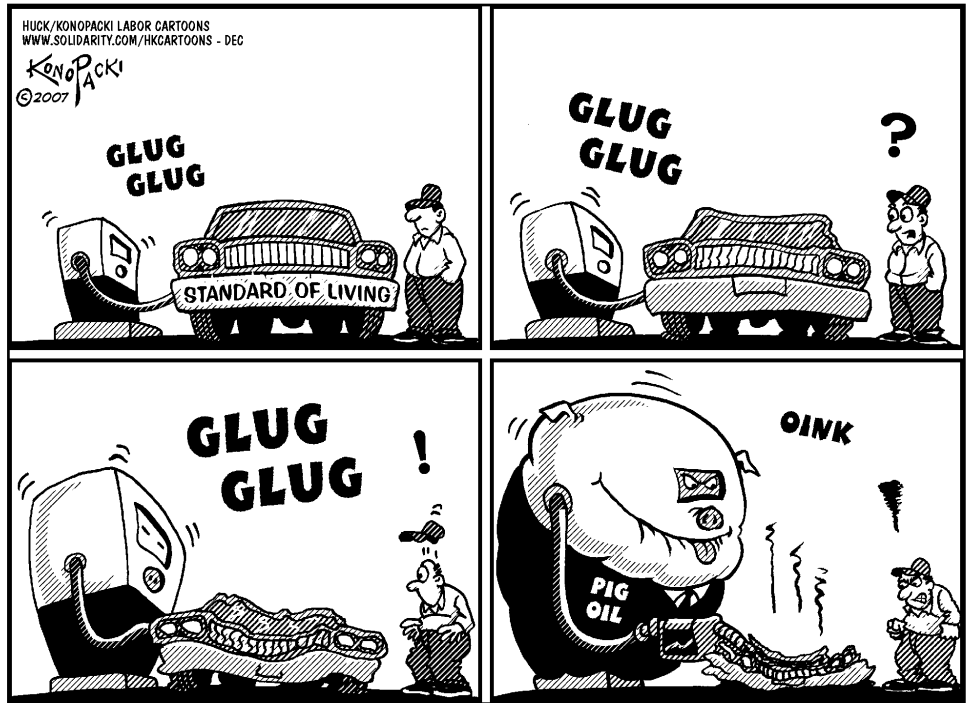
In the McCarthyist era, the IWW was asked by the US government to take a decidedly anti-Communist stance. While in no way a Communist organization (being fundamentally opposed to Bolshevik ideology), to its own detriment the IWW refused, rather preferring to support personal freedom of opinion within its ranks. We paid the price but today are stronger for it.

By training its sincere members to set aside personal prejudices for our common goal (all the while supporting each member's absolute right to their cherished personal beliefs) the IWW is indeed "bringing about a new world in the ashes of the old"!

In our meetings, struggles and direct actions we are encouraged to accept those who hold different opinions and core beliefs from ourselves as what they really are: Our Fellow Workers.

Solidarity Forever!

Tim Connelly
Johnson City, NY



Correction

An edit introduced an error into Jon Bekken's article, "2007: The IWW in the history books" on page 8 of the November 2007 *Industrial Worker*. Ahmed White did not discuss criminal syndicalism prosecutions against environmentalists in the 1970s in his book, *The Crime of Economic Radicalism*.

Letters welcome!

Send your letters to: iw@iww.org with "Letter" in the subject. Mailing address: IW, PO Box 52003, 298 Dalhousie St, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 1S0 Canada

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CAW-Magna no-strike pact: pragmatism or sell-out?

By Marc B. Young

A voluntary recognition, no-strike agreement between automotive parts manufacturer Magna International and the Canadian Autoworkers Union (CAW) became the biggest Ontario labor news story this Fall.

In Canada, members of the Stronach family, who control Magna, are regarded as something akin to a Kennedy clan in-training. Founder Frank Stronach, known for his large "L" liberal and Canadian nationalist views, built a reputation as both a dynamic capitalist sometimes at odds with Conservative governments that ruled the country in the Eighties and early Nineties, and as a man with an eye for horses.

More recently, his daughter, Belinda Stronach, launched a rollercoaster run from corporate headquarters into federal politics. After a brief fling with Conservatism, she became a senior minister in Paul Martin's Liberal government. She was presented as a poster woman for feminist success in the 21st century. She has since announced her retreat from parliament and returned to corporate life. Now it's her father's turn to be back in the public eye.

'Remaking' labour relations

Frank Stronach never liked unions, at least in workplaces he owned, until this Fall. In October, he reached a pact with the CAW called the Framework for Fairness Agreement (FFA). The deal permits union votes by about 18,000 workers in some 45 Magna facilities, according to CAW data (all but one located in Ontario, the exception in Nova Scotia). It will take years for all of these employees to pronounce on the proposal, but the project of getting Magna plant staff into collective agreements is off and running. At this writing, workers at Windsor Modules had voted 87 per cent in favour of a contract that includes, among other gains, an immediate \$3 an hour pay hike.

But not all union activists are happy with these developments. Many are screaming. Sam Gindin, who was once former union president Robert White's main policy advisor and now teaches political economy at York University, is sharply critical of the deal, emphasizing but not restricting his complaints to the strike matter.

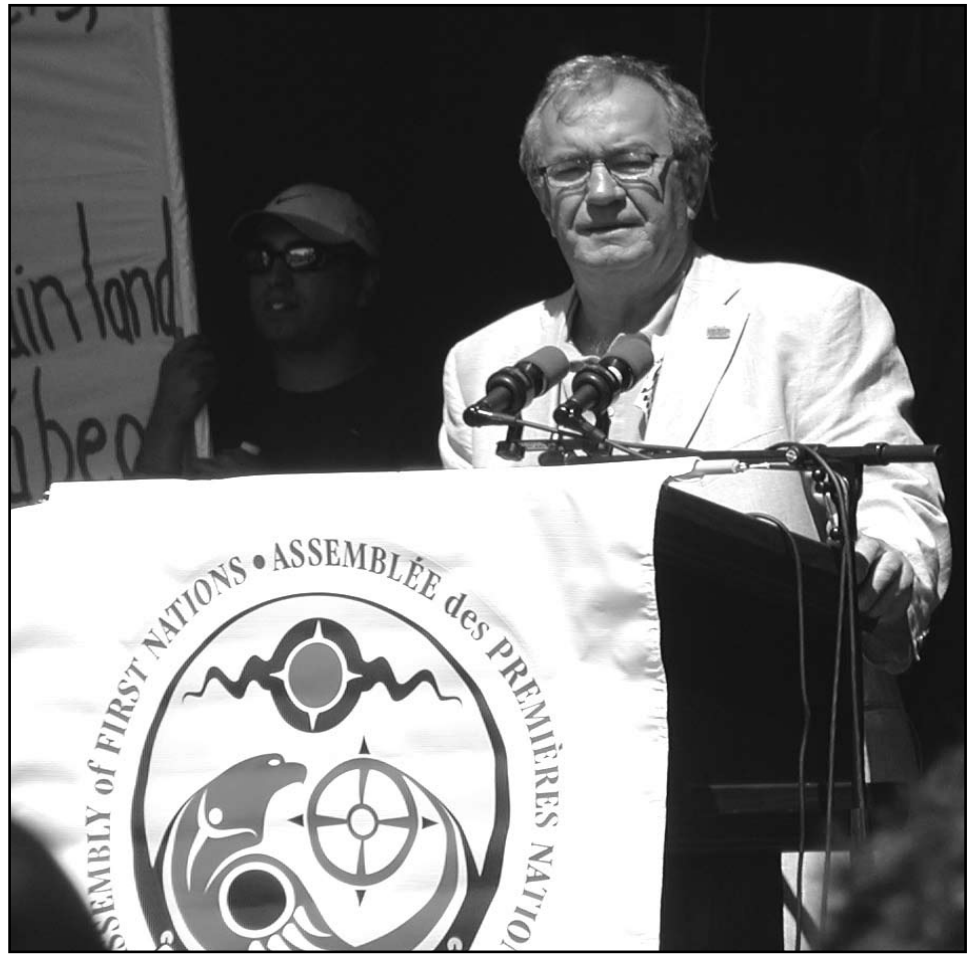
"The CAW's abandonment of the right to strike at Magna has enormous implications in terms of the labour movement's struggles," said Gindin recently. "And it mindlessly undermines those workers who never had this right or have seen it eroded as governments expanded the scope of 'essential services' or introduced back-to-work legislation."

In short, a precedent has been set or at least reiterated. Other employers, faced with organizing drives or not, can now cite a union model in the private sector that guarantees uninterrupted production.

Other critics of the arrangement, such as long-time postal workers researcher Geoff Bickerton, have attacked the deal for the poor quality of plant democracy it endorses. Specifically, his criticism focuses on the ways in which Employee Advocates will be selected under the FFA. These advocates are worker representatives who will fill a post inherited from Magna's pre-union days. Bickerton, reading the FFA correctly, observed that Employee Advocates can apply for the job. Rather than standing for election by their peers, however, applicants get short-listed by a four-person sub-group of the bipartite Fairness Committee, another Stronachian institution.

Since the Fairness Committee is 49 per cent composed of management reps, Bickerton and others initially concluded that managers would likely have some say in who became an Employee Advocate.

According to the process, the successful applicant to the post must finally



CAW President Buzz Hargrove speaks in Ottawa, Canada, at the National Day of Action organized by the Assembly of First Nations on June 29, 2007.

be endorsed by the Assistant to the CAW President.

In a series of emails to the *Industrial Worker*, CAW economist Jim Stanford acknowledged that the FFA text is blurry on this matter but asserted, "the claim that Magna management picks the union reps is utterly false." As it turns out, said Stanford, "the language in the actual contract (it is more explicit than the FFA) is clear: the sub-committee of the Fairness Committee which shortlists the EA candidates is composed only of worker reps to the Fairness Committee." So the CAW is ready to acknowledge that

the process by which union representatives in Magna plants are to be chosen is "indirect and unusual," but not undemocratic.

To be sure, even the route by which workers get on the Fairness Committee isn't one of unmitigated democracy. Secret ballots decide things but candidates will generally need three years' experience before being eligible to run. Good disciplinary records will be a prerequisite. Candidates have to buy into the workers-and-managers-are-in-the-same-boat school of labour relations. In other words, management retains certain instruments with which to keep militant types out of the running.

To return to the bigger picture, Stanford and CAW president Basil Buzz Hargrove argue that the real issues at stake has to do with the declining union presence in the Canadian private sector (around 17 per cent) and the need for unions—the CAW primarily—to retain their power in the automotive industry. Adding 18,000 workers, the union says, means expanding unionization in the country's independent parts sub-sector by about 25 per cent.

With an overall union density of around 50 per cent in the parts business, the CAW maintains that it will wield the weight necessary to push up wages and benefits in organized and unorganized facilities alike. Moreover, the union has tried conventional organizing for three decades at Magna, with limited success. Now is the time to win better compensation packages and conditions for Magna employees by "getting fierce employer opposition off the table," said a CAW PowerPoint presentation on the FFA.

As for the no-strike agreement, "workers do not join unions to go on strike," according to Stanford. True enough. But obviously, as he well knows even as others remind him, it is the potential for the withdrawal of labour that gives workers some credibility and power in collective bargaining.

Arbitration undermines collective bargaining. During the most recent rounds of contract talks between Ontario's hospitals and the Ontario Nurses' Association, the employers' representatives simply declined to bargain in good faith. Compulsory arbitration as it exists in health care means no deal has to be reached at the table. The employer can pitch something paltry or even draconian; no matter, an arbitrator will come

Continued on 4

Preamble of the IWW Constitution

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life. Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the earth.

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

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

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

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

Join the IWW Today

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

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

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

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

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

TO JOIN: Mail this form with a check or money order for initiation and your first month's dues to: IWW, Post Office Box 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. Dues may vary outside of North America and in Regional Organizing Committees (Australia, British Isles, German Language Area).

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 acquaint myself with its purposes.



Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Postcode, Country: _____

Occupation: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

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Membership includes a subscription to the *Industrial Worker*.

Facebook is a flawed union organizing tool

The new technology, they said, was going to transform the Internet forever. Instead of you having to go online and “pull” web pages to your browser, it would “push” pages to you. In fact, it was making the web browser itself obsolete.

It was such an amazing thing that Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation (the owners of Fox News) offered \$450 million to buy the company.



And companies, media outlets, even unions were told – you’d better get on board or you’ll be left behind.

Some of you may recognize the story I’m telling – it describes something called PointCast, which most of you will never have heard of. But it, and its so-called “push technology” were the next big thing a decade ago.

Most of you will never have heard of it because like so many next big things, it fell as quickly as it rose, and its massive overvaluation turned out to be a harbinger of things to come. Three years later the dotcom bubble burst and PointCast was never heard from again.

A year after PointCast peaked, another company – an Israeli startup called Mirabilis – had developed the next next big thing. America Online (now Time Warner) snapped up the company for a mere \$407 million in 1998 and its four young owners could now retire as millionaires.

Never heard of Mirabilis? Maybe you’ve heard of its sole product – an instant messaging client called ICQ. Or maybe not. Today ICQ is one of dozens of such products and others (such as MSN Messenger, Jabber or even Skype) seem far more popular. I wonder if anyone reading this article uses ICQ. I know that I haven’t for several years.

The stories of PointCast and ICQ should be a warning to those who are willing to jump on any bandwagon and advocate the adoption of every shiny new thing on the Internet -- or else face the danger of falling behind.

There’s a much more recent example that may be more familiar to you. A couple of years ago, the next big thing on the Internet was the social networking site MySpace. This time, Rupert Murdoch’s company did get its hands on it, and purchased MySpace for \$580 million in 2005. Shortly thereafter, the site lost much of its lustre as it became increasingly to be seen as just another arm of Murdoch’s evil empire. Today MySpace is no longer seen by anyone as being particularly “cool”.

In 2005, MySpace was the next big thing. If you were serious about using the Internet, if you wanted to reach out to millions of people, you absolutely needed to be there. But not anymore.

Now it’s almost 2008 and there are even more bandwagons to jump on. The latest is Facebook. Unions are being told that they need a presence on Facebook or else no one will know they exist.

They need to use Facebook to mobilize thousands of people, to send a strong message to companies and governments, to grow their ranks, to make unions seem relevant to young people.

What a fantastic tool. It allows you to mobilize people online. But wait a minute, isn’t this something we’ve been doing with websites since day one?

It is, but here’s the difference. Let’s say I set up a group on Facebook to tell the Burmese government to stop crushing democracy. I’ll get tens of thousands of people to sign up to join

my group. And I’ll announce – we’ve got a giant Facebook group. We’ve got all these committed people. We’re practically a mass movement.

But hang on – in what sense is a Facebook group a “group”? How does it

differ from a simple online petition? The answer to the latter question is that it doesn’t differ – it’s just another way of doing an online petition. A worse way.

If I set up my online campaign on Facebook I can, in theory, email

all members of my group. Not really, though. What I can do is to send them messages through Facebook – not to their actual email addresses, but force them to logon to Facebook to read my message. Even if they do this, it adds an additional couple of steps for them to follow.

If my Facebook group is over 1,000 names, I can’t email them – and our experience has been that even with groups of under 1,000 names, the email doesn’t always seem to work.

What you’re doing by outsourcing your campaigning to Facebook is growing their company, giving them direct access to your supporters and members. What’s the alternative? Do-it-yourself online campaigns where you retain the information on who has sent off protest messages.

LabourStart has campaigned this way for years. Every time we do a campaign, we collect the emails, names and unions of participants. If they’ve given us permission, we’ve added them to our mailing list and they receive our weekly email newsletter. Our list has grown from 3,000 names five years ago to 51,000 names today due to these campaigns.

Imagine if Facebook had existed five years ago and if we had tried to campaign using it. We wouldn’t have a mailing list today and we certainly wouldn’t be able to send out more than 50,000 emails a week.

Facebook is a poor replacement for a real online campaigning strategy for unions. And it makes us vulnerable to the whims of those who own the company. Last month, Microsoft invested \$246 million in Facebook. It sees Facebook the same way that Murdoch saw MySpace (or PointCast), as a way to make money.

Unions that have tried to use Facebook have not always had such great experiences.

Earlier this year, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) tried to organize casino workers in Nova Scotia, Canada. They used Facebook and were shocked to find that their Facebook account had been closed. When they asked for an explanation, they were told that they were an organization, not an individual, and weren’t allowed to have an account. (They replied that companies were allowed to have Facebook accounts, but this had no effect.)

A union in South Korea using a similar system was engaged in an organizing campaign collecting details of potential members all of which was lost when the company decided to shut them down.

The lesson I learn from all this is that the best tools are the ones we wield ourselves – and that the best way for unions to campaign online is not to jump on the latest bandwagon, but to spend the time, effort and money to create powerful online campaigning systems ourselves.

WOMEN WORKERS' HISTORY

CHAPTER 10 REVOLT AGAINST LONG HOURS

WHEN MANY NEW ENGLAND FAMILIES LOST THEIR FARMS DURING THE 1837-40 DEPRESSION, MANY "FACTORY GIRLS" LOST AN ESCAPE ROUTE FROM MILLS TO HILLS. CALLED "POVERTY'S DAUGHTERS" BY A CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL, THE MILL WORKERS IN NUMEROUS CASES BECAME THEIR FAMILIES' PRIMARY BREADWINNERS.



MEANWHILE, INCREASED NUMBERS OF STOCKHOLDERS CREATED A GREATER DEMAND FOR PROFITS. THE "COTTON BARONS" CUT WAGES, SPED UP WORK AND INCREASED HOURS IN LOWELL AND OTHER TEXTILE TOWNS. OBSERVED HENRY DAVID THOREAU IN 1842: "THE PRINCIPAL OBJECT IS, NOT THAT MANKIND MAY BE WELL AND HONESTLY CLAD, BUT UNQUESTIONABLY, THAT THE CORPORATIONS MAY BE ENRICHED."

PSSST. GONNA JOIN THE F.L.R.A.?



DAMN, STRAIGHT!!

IN RESPONSE TO THESE CONDITIONS, THE FEMALE LABOR REFORM ASSOCIATION WAS ORGANIZED IN JANUARY 1845 IN LOWELL, MASS. BY 12 COTTON MILL WORKERS. IT GREW BY LEAPS AND BOUNDS. THE FOLLOWING YEAR, MASS MEETINGS OF WOMEN WORKERS BROUGHT THE ORGANIZATION TO MANCHESTER, NASHUA AND DOVER, N.H.

THE PRINCIPAL GOALS OF THE NEW ORGANIZATION WERE TO REDUCE WORKING HOURS FROM 12-13 HOURS TO 10 HOURS A DAY, AND TO OBTAIN IMPROVEMENTS IN SANITARY AND LIGHTING CONDITIONS IN THE MILLS. SAID AN ANONYMOUS MILL PAMPHLETEER, "A LARGE CLASS OF FEMALES ARE SLAVES TO A SYSTEM OF LABOR WHICH REQUIRES THEM TO TOIL FROM FIVE UNTIL SEVEN O'CLOCK WITH ONLY ONE HOUR TO ATTEND WANTS OF NATURE..."

Time Table of the Holyoke Mills,	
To take effect on and after Jan. 3d, 1853.	
standard being that of the Western Rail Road, which is the Meridian time at Cambridge.	
MORNING BELLS.	First Bell ring at 4.40, A. M. Second Bell ring in
YARD GATES	be opened at ringing of Morning Bells, of Meal Bells, and kept open ten minutes
WORK COMMENCES	minutes after last Morning Bell, and ten minutes after Bell which rings from Meals.
BREAKFAST BELLS.	1st. to March 31st, inclusive, ring out at 7. A. M.; ring in at 7.30
	1st. to Sept. 30th, inclusive, ring out at 6.30, A. M.; ring in at
DINNER BELLS.	Ring out at 12.30, P. M.; ring in at 1, P. M.
EVENING BELLS.	Ring out at 6.30, P. M.
	* Excepting on Saturdays when the Sun sets previous to 6.30 ring out at sunset.
	At such times, to all times, the Bell tolls.

DO NOT ASK FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS...

CAW no strike deal

Continued from 4

down with something in the end. Yet it remains the case that nurses and other hospital workers make financial gains. In theory, the Magna workers will, too. But will they learn about struggle and labour autonomy?

Probably the most worrisome aspect of the Magna-CAW deal is the way it explicitly draws the union into the company’s business agenda. Gindin, back when he worked for the union, used to write about how labour organizations had to resist the logic and the language of competitiveness. President Hargrove

once endorsed that fundamentally radical approach and, in certain corners of his heart, may still. But at Magna, Employee Advocates, the workers’ indirectly elected voice, will have the responsibility to “work with all parties to develop continuous improvement ideas to make the division more competitive.”

What happens when managers say the bottom-line requires layoffs? Will the CAW be able to mobilize its workplace leaders in the Stronach empire and turn them into fighters who know that the interests of millionaires and waged employees ultimately fall to dovetail?

That’s when we’ll learn whether the pessimists or the optimists know best.

IWW organizing to tame Wild Edibles

Rooting out the rot in New York City's fine dining suppliers

By Diane Krauthamer

Wouldn't it be a real travesty to spend \$50 on a wonderful lobster dinner at New York City's highest rated restaurant, only to find out your meal that the food was rotten?

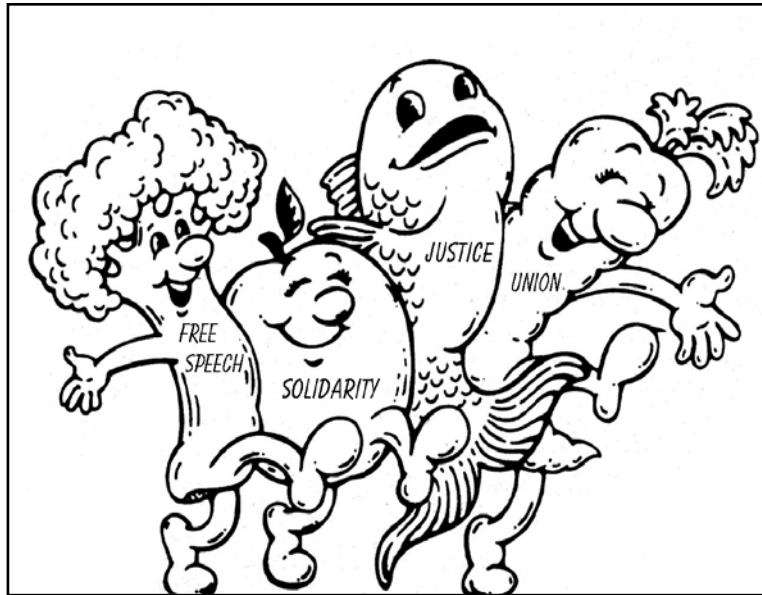
Of course, fine dining establishments must comply with health and safety standards in their kitchens. Of course, establishments ranked as New York City's most popular wouldn't dare serve rotten seafood. But it isn't the food that is rotten in New York City's food industry—it is the suppliers' treatment of their workers that will turn readers' stomachs. The food supplier that systematically treats its workers rotten is called Wild Edibles.

Wild Edibles supplies seafood to locations throughout New York, including highly-rated spots in Zagat's guide such as the chain operated by restaurateur Danny Meyers. With such high-profile customers, it wouldn't seem that company CEO Richard Martin needs to cut costs, but in light of illegal labor practices he may need to start worrying about losing business.

The last step in the NYC food chain

Shifts at Wild Edibles begin at 2 AM. The delivery and factory work is physically demanding and lasts into the early afternoon. Workers at this Queens-based seafood company usually worked more than eight hours per day with few breaks and inadequate pay. While the conditions in themselves are hardly tolerable, continued discrimination and harassment have resulted in some people quitting and others getting fired.

Former employee Augustin Meza says that in his five years at the company, he witnessed and experienced consistent racial discrimination and eventually quit out of frustration. Meza said that Latino workers were denied rights and privileges that were granted to their white co-workers. Meza saw evidence of this in comparing timecards. He said that while Caucasian workers never worked more than 8 hours per day, Latino workers would work 10 or



Graphic: www.radicalgraphics.org

more hours without receiving overtime pay. Additionally, Latinos were generally made to work "half-time" on holidays because it would make the next day's work "easier for everyone else."

Latinos also faced higher scrutiny. They were made to pay for soft drinks when white workers received them for free, and management constantly watched them like hawks.

"(Martin) was always telling us 'you have to do something' and making us work. But when white people were outside smoking and laughing with each other, he didn't say anything," Meza said. After years of working under these conditions, Meza made three attempts to speak directly with owner Richard Martin about his concerns, but was simply ignored.

Of course, Meza is not the only person who has had to deal with wretched conditions at Wild Edibles. His co-workers dealt with similar exploitative conditions, and after years of tolerating discriminatory practices, they united together and stood up to the bosses.

Organizing and union-busting

In mid-July 2007, New York City Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) organizers reached out to Wild Edibles

truck drivers and warehouse workers to build organizing efforts. Within a little more than a month, workers were actively organizing with the union to demand an end to exploitative conditions.

One worker who immediately took on a leadership role in organizing, Raymundo Lara Molina, was fired after a month because of his involvement. IWW organizer Billy Randal said workers at the plant "felt someone had identified him as an active union supporter."

Following this, workers became increasingly concerned about being targeted and picked out, but this did not hamper their efforts.

On August 20 at 2 AM, IWW supporters and members joined Wild Edibles workers and

marched on the plant, demanding that Martin pay overtime, reinstate Molina, and cease further retaliation against Wild Edibles employees for union involvement.

Martin retaliated on the spot by firing another organizer, Jason Borges, at the demonstration. According to public testimony, Martin called Borges into his office, asked him what he wanted. When Borges replied that he wanted to be paid overtime and receive benefits, Martin refused and promptly fired him, yelling at Borges to "get the fuck out" as Borges left. On August 24, Raúl Molina was also fired in retaliation. In the weeks following, Julio César Moreno Gonzalez and Marco Antonio Corona were forced to leave due to the high pressure that they faced.

Taming Wild Edibles

In response to illegal discrimination, 16 current and former Wild Edibles employees filed a federal class action lawsuit against the company on September 17. According to the complaint, Wild Edibles violated New York Labor Law and the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) by not compensating workers 1.5 times the base wage for working more than 40 hours per week, and by discriminating

and retaliating for protected activity.

Additionally, a temporary injunction was filed in order to protect workers from further intimidation and retaliation. Despite this order, two more workers, Jose Fernandez and Limo Martinez, were fired in late September.

As litigation continues, the six fired workers and their supporters continue to draw attention to the company's illegal practices through the courts and beyond.

Just after the suit was filed in court, current and fired Wild Edibles workers, members of the IWW and supporters from the newly-formed workers' rights organization, Brandworkers International, held a press conference in front of one of Wild Edibles' largest customer restaurants, an upscale French restaurant in the West Village called Pastis. In addition to announcing the lawsuit, workers alerted customers that Pastis was serving seafood processed under shameful conditions.

With the spotlight shone on Wild Edibles' unfair employment practices, Pastis owner Keith McNally agreed on October 4 to stop doing business with

Workers are fighting together across the food supply chain in the hope that justice will be served.

Wild Edibles. McNally's other fine dining restaurants—Balthazar, Schiller's, Morandi, Pravda, and Lucky Strike—have also

discontinued business with the seafood company until the dispute is resolved. This caused a 10 per cent loss of revenue or \$1 million per year for Wild Edibles, according to court papers.

Now, fired workers and their supporters are shining the spotlight on Danny Meyers' upscale chain of ten restaurants, called the Union Square Hospitality Group, which encompasses some of the most fashionable restaurants in New York City such as Union Square Cafe, Gramercy Tavern and Blue Smoke. Supporters are drawing customer attention to these restaurants in the hopes that Meyers will discontinue business with Wild Edibles until the dispute is resolved.

Meanwhile, current Wild Edibles workers are re-building union presence in the shop. Demands are slowly being met as the campaign strengthens. Workers are fighting together across the food supply chain in the hope that current employees will work in humane conditions, that former employees will receive the compensation that is owed to them, and that justice, not rotten seafood, will be served.

With files from Stephanie Basile, Jonathan Harvey, Daniel Gross and Billy Randal.

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an injury to one is an injury to all

(back)

restaurant & warehouse workers need your help fast!

Worker democracy in the Buenos Aires subway

By Rhiannon Edwards, *Wobbly Dispatch*

The employees of the subway system in Buenos Aires, Argentina are fighting to create a new workers' movement, and they are taking on their company, their government, and their union to do so.

These workers have developed a different way of unionizing: their grassroots organization is built on direct democracy rather than on a power hierarchy. They have shown that it is possible to build a powerful workers' movement based on solidarity and democracy.

The subway workers' struggle began more than a decade ago in the midst of an economic and social crisis characterized by soaring unemployment and dismantling of social security systems. The government's neoliberal agenda and its policies supporting deregulation, privatization, and flexibilization of labour created this crisis. Many social movements and workers' struggles surfaced during this time. They have been striving ever since to build a different kind of world: one without these problems.

Privatizing transportation

In the Nineties, during Carlos Menem's presidency, Buenos Aires' transportation system was one of many targets for privatization. The contract to run the city's subway system was sold to Metrovias, a private company, in 1994. Since privatization, Metrovias has fired more than two-thirds of the employees, reducing staff from 4,600 to 1,500.

The subway system is technically still publicly owned: the national government owns the trains; the municipal government owns the railways and stations. Metrovias administers transportation service and manages personal. In return, the company receives 240 million pesos in subsidies annually, which is roughly equivalent to US\$77 million. Despite this substantial aid, the quality of service has declined steadily since privatization.

When the union isn't on your side

The workers' struggle has gotten out of the control of their union's bureaucrats. The subway workers' union is the Unión de Tranviarios Automotor (UTA), which is affiliated to the Argentine General Labour Confederation (Confederación General del Trabajo, CGT). The UTA endorsed a mediocre contract early in negotiations but the workers continued to agitate; ultimately the company was forced to sign a much better contract. This is one example of how the workers have chosen to by-pass their union's bureaucratic structure. Despite the high stakes against them, they have succeeded in mobilizing to achieve their demands.

In contrast to the union's hierarchical organization, the subway workers have developed a purely democratic one. Every section of workers on each of the five major subway lines elects a delegate. The delegates meet weekly in the Hotel BAUEN, a worker-run, "recuperated" business, where they coordinate actions across all the subway lines. The delegates bring any major decisions to assemblies where every worker gets an equal vote.

Using this flexible, responsive way of organizing, the subway workers have built a strong sense of unity. To the chagrin of the union, they have won many of their demands including a six-hour work day, and a good benefits package. They have also achieved the highest salaries in the sector.

Beyond wages, working conditions

The subway workers in Buenos Aires

fight in solidarity with all workers. Their demands aren't limited to their own working conditions and salaries, as is the case in most labour conflicts.

Instead, they incorporate issues that don't necessarily have to do with their own situation into their demands. In the last few months they have brought these more outward looking issues, such as movement unity, into the limelight. To do so, they have used direct job actions; these actions, of course, are not sanctioned by their union.

The workers demonstrate their wish for a united movement in several ways. They utilize 24-hour strikes in solidarity with tertiarized, or contracted-out, workers in the industry. Also, the delegates

often enable people to travel to and from protests or marches for free, increasing the numbers that can attend. Most importantly, the workers are vocal in the call for a national six-hour work day to address the high structural unemployment in the country. The transit workers have already achieved a shortened work day for themselves; they seek to share their victory with all workers.

The workers' new organization supports individuals who are suffering as a result of their involvement in the struggle.

Recently, workers have refused to sign forms approving the use of dilapidated trains; one such worker is delegate Néstor Segovia. Because Segovia refused to sign the form, Metrovias is trying to fire him, and is accusing him of sabotage.

For weeks, the workers have been in a state of "permanent assembly" in defence of Segovia, and are ready to take action if necessary.

The battle for public opinion

Over a million people use the subway system every day, and job actions often cause major delays and inconveniences for them. Despite this, public opinion is not entirely against the workers. Delegates continually state in the media that they have the safety of subway users at heart.

They explain that delays and bad

service are the fault of the company, which has allowed the service to fall into disrepair. The delegates call attention to the company's lack of investment in train maintenance despite the millions it receives each year from the government.

The company, union bureaucrats, and even some government officials are all invested in undermining the workers' public image. They accuse the delegates of having a political agenda that is separate from the union struggle. Company spokespeople routinely attribute the cause of the dispute to internal union conflicts. They deny the workers' assertions about the lack of subway maintenance, and categorize direct actions as sabotage or vandalism.

Contrary to their opponents' claims, the workers have employed many different tactics to gain support and to leverage their demands. They are not afraid to strike when necessary, causing temporary traffic chaos.

However, they prefer to open the gates and let people on the subways for free. This approach has helped maintain public support for the workers' struggle.

Worker democracy and beyond

The employees of the subway system are demonstrating the power they can have when they put solidarity and democracy into practice.

Workers everywhere, within unions or not, can learn from Buenos Aires. Taking union matters into our own hands is a vital step towards exercising more control over our lives.

2 Colombian teachers killed in less than a week

By Education International

Education International condemns the assassinations of two teachers in November and calls on the government of Colombia to bring those responsible to justice.

Mercedes Consuelo Restrepo Campo was shot dead outside the San Juan Bosco school in the town of Cartago by two armed men on a motorcycle on November 7, reported the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia – CUT.

Restrepo, who had taught for 30 years, served on the executive board of

SUTEV, a regional affiliate of the teachers' union federation, Federación Colombiana de Educadores (FECODE), in the department of Valle de Cauca.

Her murder follows that of Leonidas Silva Castro on November 2. He was murdered in his home in the Barrio Prados del Norte neighbourhood in the town of Villacaro. Castro had arrived home after attending a trade union event. He was an active member of the Asociación Sindical de Institutores Nortesantandereanos (ASINORT), an-

other FECODE affiliate.

Colombia remains the most dangerous country in the world to be a trade unionist.

The previous year on August 17, another ASINORT member, Fabio Martínez Rincón, was murdered in the Norte de Santander department.

Union leaders are targets of attacks by armed groups for political reasons. Teachers, who make up almost one-third of the organised work force are frequently targeted.

5 Guatemalan unionists killed in 2007

Five union organizers in Guatemala have died in 2007, making it the most dangerous Central American country for union members.

Banana picker and union organizer Marco Tulio Ramirez was the latest to be killed in September. Fresh Del Monte Produce subsidiary denied having any role in his murder and said it had called for a police investigation. Since Ramirez's death, suspicious cars have followed union members on and off the company's property, Ramirez's brother told Reuters news service.

In January, Pedro Zamora, leader of Guatemala's port workers' union, was killed in front of his children, at the same time as the union and bosses

were in negotiations. Two leaders of the municipal vendors' union were killed in February.

In July, soldiers raided the SITRABI union's office asking to see information about members. The ministry of defense later said the action was unjustified.

The union activists' deaths are showing the impotence of provisions to protect labor standards in the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), which has governed trade between the United States and Central America since 2005.

The US Trade Representative gave \$40 million to the Guatemalan labor ministry, but this money had done little or nothing to strengthen workers' rights.

IBM Italy signs after Second Life picket

By www.uniglobalunion.org

One month after a virtual protest staged in the digital world of Second Life with almost 2,000 avatars (digital characters), at times effectively blockading IBM islands, IBM Italy has signed a new agreement with its workers.

The September 27 virtual demonstration had global media play and put a spotlight on IBM's demands for cuts to the workers' conditions. However, it was the threat of a real strike after the virtual protest that helped break the negotiation deadlock, said UNI, an international

service workers' union.

The new contract, pending ratification by the members, restores a performance bonus the company cut unilaterally.

The agreement signed between IBM Italy and the trade union Rappresentanze Sindacali Unitarie (RSU) also has IBM contributing to a national health insurance fund and concedes that negotiations over the company's industrial strategy and communication with its employees will remain open.

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French labor fights hard, but must unite to win

The ten day transport strike in France is over for now, but no one is holding their breath that the ongoing negotiations will resolve rapidly the dispute over special pensions for one million French workers.

Special pensions allow certain workers, including some transport workers, to retire earlier and still get a full pension. Sarkozy also has plans to slow wage increases and cut the French public service by not replacing one in three retiring workers.

"We will not surrender and we will not retreat," boasted Sarkozy on November 20 as more than one million public service workers walked off their jobs and marched in protest at their treatment. They were joined by thousands of students protesting Sarkozy's privatization reform of the universities through marches and school occupations.

What remains in question is whether Sarkozy will take that arrogant attitude into the negotiations. Sarkozy will need to assess the cost of losing his political credibility with further showdowns with transport workers against the relatively small €400 million the special pension cuts would save.

The unions are wary and have already announced plans to strike again in December if negotiations result in no progress.

Suspicion of union leaders

Union members are suspicious of both their union leaders and Sarkozy when it comes to negotiations.

"The conflict between 'responsible' union bosses and radical rank-and-file has come to the point where the bosses of both Thibault of the CGT and François Chereque of the CFDT were ejected from a demonstration in Paris by angry members of their own unions," said Jérémie Berthuin, International Secretary of the CNT-France, in a dispatch.

The reasons for this suspicion are clear. While the CFDT (a moderate and "responsible" union) was calling for an end to the strike for more than a week, the CGT's leader, Bernard Thibault,

(close to the 'Communist' Party) called for an end to the movement, while leaving its transport section and its grassroots hanging on the picket line.

The decision by union leaders to start negotiating and urge their members to return to work is a questionable tactic that weakens the hand of the unions.

"We all know that a one day strike won't be enough to win," said a communiste from the Comités Syndicaliste-Révolutionnaires (CSR) in Rennes.

Media manipulation

Sarkozy's influence over the mainstream media is another factor.

"The capitalist-owned media and state campaign every day to make private workers jealous of public ones," said CSR.

This divide-and-conquer strategy is also being used within the public service, between the public service workers and those with special pensions.

There is a terrible media campaign that accuses the railway and bus workers of 'taking passengers hostage.' The political right also organized a protest to "denounce the dictatorship of the strikers," reported Berthuin of the CNT-France.

The mainstream French and international media is complaining about the impact of the strikes on the French economy; the sacrifice of the rank-and-file who made these strikes effective will be unsung. While the ten-day strike cost France around €400 million (US\$594 million), it also cost the transport workers ten days wages, ranging from one-third to half of their monthly earnings.

With these unnatural divides, Sarkozy may not have to worry about facing a united front that could paralyze his government.

Yet, there is a rank-and-file spirit of resistance that remains a wild card.

"We're the human stones ready to be lobbed at the government. We're the last line of resistance to protect France from neo-liberalism, capitalism and the end of society," said bus driver, Herve



CGT members march in the streets to defend their pensions.

Photo by Cortex

Berthomé, to The Guardian.

People unhappy with the return to work order went much further and sabotaged a number of rail lines on November 21. One such fire damaged 18 miles of signalling along a track, delaying trains for hours. Rail management immediately suggested the saboteurs could be dissatisfied union militants.

Student allies?

More than 60 campuses have been taken over in a militant way. There are strong tensions between strikers and scabs (under strong police protection). The national students' coordination committee meets every week.

Two currents are confronting each other. There is the militant current composed of JCR, CNT-FAU, SUD Students that is trying to enlarge the movement by connecting with the other sectors of society that are on strike. Against them stand the pseudo-socialist UNEF that is playing for time.

The picture is mixed in primary and secondary education. There are schools where nothing is happening, while in

others the teachers are on strike, and in still others they have called renewable strikes. City wide teachers' meetings are being established to coordinate and expand the strike at the municipal level. Striking teachers have joined the strike meetings of railway workers in some places.

Need for unity

While the negotiations proceed, French workers need to spend time building the foundation of a broader unity among workers. This strike, and the struggle against Sarkozy in general, will need coordination and cooperation far above one day strikes and symbolic marches. Workers need to democratize their own unions and elect a union leadership that is accountable to a militant and organized rank-and-file. And such a movement would build the relationships and recruit the allies required to stand against Sarkozy's next moves: forcing down general pensions, privatizing healthcare, and introducing a more "flexible" labor code.

With files from the CNT-France and CSR.

Guards strike Tacoma, Olympia ports

By John Kalwaic

Security guards working for a private company at Olympia and Tacoma's ports launched a "wildcat" strike to organize with an independent union over one favored by the company.

As the security guards struck, they told port workers with the ILWU not to cross the picket line, which they did not.

The security guards at these two ports work for Maersk, which wants the guards to accept the company's union, Securitas. But the workers have chosen to organize instead with the independent International Longshoremen's Warehouse Union (ILWU), which organizes port workers in the area. Management is trying to block this from happening.

The guards do not feel like the Securitas union represents their interests. They feel it reflects the interests of the

company "Maersk." The guards rallied on November 8 with support from Jobs With Justice, the IWW and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). The rally was aimed at getting the Maersk company to agree to arbitration by the ILWU so they could have fair negotiations.

The Tacoma police department tried to grill SDS members for their identity and phone numbers and tried to pressure them for information about the upcoming Smash the Tacoma ICE rally, a protest aimed at a Homeland Security detention center.

The police did not get any information to this regards and the rally was successful. This action comes on the eve of antiwar groups trying to block military equipment from being delivered to Iraq in some of the same ports.

Starbucks union threatened with lawsuit for info pickets, boycott

HMSHost has threatened the IWW with a lawsuit for planning to picket rest areas selling Starbucks products on the Pennsylvania turnpike. HMSHost is a company that runs concession stands at 106 rest stops along major motorways in North America. It claims revenues of \$2 billion.

The lawsuit is an effort to stifle First Amendment activity, according to the Starbucks Workers Union. "The IWW Starbucks Workers Union will not be deterred by a baseless lawsuit and we look forward to carrying out our communications initiative at Pennsylvania's HMS-operated Starbucks stores" on November 23, said the IWW. And they did the info picket.

The HMSHost letter said the information pickets and call for a boycott "constitutes illegal secondary activity"

that violates labor law.

To prove its case, HMSHost would be required to prove that the IWW had threatened or coerced it to stop selling Starbucks products. HMSHost threatened to seek compensation for any loss of trade, warning the IWW that the Thanksgiving weekend is particularly lucrative.

Schultz applies for \$30 million flat

Starbucks Chairman Howard Schultz is applying for a \$30 million apartment in the 950 Fifth Avenue Co-op in Manhattan, New York. The Starbucks Workers Union called an email action to get the co-op to reject his application.

"Your building would become a frequent venue for First Amendment activity should Chairman Schultz move in," said a sample campaign email.

St. Louis school bus drivers to decertify

By John Kalwaic

School bus driver in St. Louis, Missouri, decided to end their affiliation with School Transportation and Allied Workers' Laborers Local 509, which is part of the North America Laborers Union. This decision came after the local did not back the action of the bus drivers when they defied the union leadership with a wildcat strike against Laidlaw, which is owned by the Student First company, a subsidiary of the Scotland-based First Group Company, that runs the bus services.

Laidlaw had signed a 90-day extension with the Laborers Local 509. The

union also negotiated a 45-cent per hour pay increase, which the workers called unacceptable. The bus drivers didn't like a deal made behind their backs. In response, they did a two-day wildcat strike against the company and the union. When the drivers struck, they invited the people to join them in rowdy picket lines and were ready for a militant strike. However, after the second day into the strike, the drivers agreed to go back to work. After the strike, the rank and file workers felt betrayed and misrepresented by their union and petitioned for its removal.

Bulgarian teachers win strike

By John Kalwaic

A major strike in Bulgaria came to a close after six weeks with a victory for the teachers' unions who won a 20 per cent increase in pay. The country's two major labor federations, the Bulgarian Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (BCITU) and the Confederation of Labor Podkrepa, were both out in full force. Both of these labor federations have teachers unions as their affiliates.

One of the BCITU affiliates, the Bulgarian Teachers Union, was calling the government and the education ministry to raise the teachers demands by 100 per cent.

The government tried to placate the teachers by offering them a lesser offer of 10 per cent with a 5 per cent raise each year. Most of the striking teachers rejected this offer and continued to strike, eventually agreeing to the 20 per cent increase.

Many labor unions in former communist countries like Bulgaria come from the old Stalinist state-controlled unions such as the BCITU. Although these unions are far from perfect, many of them are much more independent than they used to be under the former Stalinist dictators.

Review

Wallace deals one-two blow to the classless society

Len Wallace, *Culture Shocked*, CD not yet released.

Review by Smokey Dymny, IWW Toronto

I received this recording in the mail as I was setting out for the summer on the coast of British Columbia.

The very first song, “A Class Act”, knocked me for a loop. It’s as rollicking as a sea shanty and as political as a Wobble-In. In North America, the purveyors of smug middle class-hood like to make us believe this has become a happy, apolitical, classless society.

Well, this song is a rapid one-two blow to the gut and to the brain pan. It harkens back to when worker solidarity was a constant fact ‘cause everyone instantly knew what class they were. It runs barreling through all the permutations of the kinds of actions bosses and workers take which prove we’re still very much a class-based society. It’s a song of puns and fun and home truths.

Just one of the choruses should show you how Len does it:

It’s a Class Act when you got a job and love it

It’s a Class Act when you tell the boss to shove it

It’s a Class Act when you strike for higher pay

If they send in scabs—that’s a Class Act.

If the rest of the songs on the album were duds, this one alone would make it worth buying the CD. But they aren’t duds either. Len Wallace has included some rare favorites. Wallace’s accordion version of Woody Guthrie’s “1913 Massacre” sounds like a better suited instrument for an Italian immigrant song. Also in is Phil Ochs’ quirky “Pretty Smart on My Part”. He’s added working songs by his contemporaries like “The Ballad of Red Dan” by Chuck Angus from north-

ern Ontario, “Saturday Night at the Hall” by Chuck Suchy from North Dakota; and “Factory” by the now almost venerable Springsteen.

Add to those some blazing and some sorrowful accordion instrumentals and you have the best of combinations: old, new, total radical sensibility and danceability too. Len’s a one-man hootenanny, for those of ya who remember what that was. For you younger folks that’s like a Woodstock—only acoustic.

When I first heard Len’s “Freedom Train”, I was flabbergasted.

I had set out for my summer trip with a self-assigned project: to write a song about the On To Ottawa Trek, an exodus of the unemployed, which started out from Vancouver in 1935. Tired of working in Labour Camps for “relief” payments, the unemployed were organized by Slim Evans, who had learnt his organizing skills from the Wobs in the United States. About 1500 men rode on boxcars on a train headed east. They were planning to complain of their conditions in Ottawa to the prime minister himself. Communities along the way were prepared in advance and met the Trekkers with food and sometimes lodging. The Bennett government was scared and organized an attack by the Dominion Police to halt the Trekkers in Regina. The working folks in Regina tried to help. Even children on bicycles rode to a local stream and brought rocks for the workers to defend themselves from baton-wielding cavalry.

It’s kinda strange that no one’s written a song about this famous event before, but it’s good that Len did it. It’s strong, and clear, and a fitting tribute to those mostly unheralded men who stood up for their rights. It’s also an implicit indictment of the current state of the business unions. With Canada’s so-called “low” unemployment of 5.9 per-



Photo by worldaccordion.tripod.com

Accordion player and accomplished Canadian folk singer Len Wallace.

cent, that still means a million folks are ‘officially’ out of work. When you factor in those whom the statistics don’t count, there are actually several million. If only a quarter, nay a tenth, of all those folks were organized to march on Ottawa again, the politicians would be quaking in their boots. Thanks to Len for reminding us what 1,500 strong-hearted men can do.

Len manages to squeeze in some humour on his squeezebox also. There’s a riotous Dylan parody called Heaven, Hell, Bob Dylan & Accordions. This rather long title came from the origins of the

song. At the Québec Festival D’Accordón he was given 28 seconds to improvise a song on the heaven & hell theme in a folk style. He got the prize for imagining how Bob Dylan would sound switching over to accordion (vocal stylings included.)

If there’s ever a new revolution of the workers of the world, there will be many styles of music to spur us on. But for those who relish the foot-stomping kind of dance style music which immigrant workers partied to in all the old union halls across North Amerika™ before the corporate music machine took over, Len’s my choice!

Phil Ochs birthday to be commemorated in New York

By John Pietaro

Though the right-wing would remain happy if we forgot about Phil Ochs, history will demonstrate that he was one of our nation’s most profound voices of protest, active in the fertile period of the Sixties to mid-Seventies. For an artist of conscience, there was much work to do. His songs called for peace and an egalitarian society. His songs damned the establishments that begat the murder of civil rights activist Medgar Evers and allowed organized labor to forget its true mission. He cried for our nation and praised its promise.

Ochs’ songs unashamedly revealed our faults but also offered the means to rectify them. His music was a brash call to those he’d encountered while performing at rallies, for Phil was a presence at such radical actions, not merely a voice on a recording. Always a labor activist—Ochs was an IWW member—he traveled to Hazzard, Kentucky during a period of bloody strikes in the earliest Sixties, boldly performing for the pickets and in ear-shot of threatening goon squads. Several songs document these human struggles, including the hauntingly beautiful, “No Christmas in Kentucky”. Shortly thereafter, Phil became entrenched in the Civil Rights-era Freedom Rides, traveling to many points on the Klan’s radar, but living to tell the tale. His periods in the Deep South are chronicled in songs such as “Freedom Riders” and the brutally blunt “Here’s to the State of Mississippi”.

Ochs’ protest songs and commentary became some of the most important music of his period. On “Crucifixion” he emoted about the loss of John Kennedy and the loss of innocence, perhaps conscience itself. “One More Parade”, “I

Ain’t Marchin’ Anymore” and “The War is Over” gave us anthems that would carry the peace movement. “The Power and the Glory” spoke of his pride in the United States’ mission and greatness—even as the FBI began an investigation of him that would span a decade and fill 410 pages. “Cops of the World” spat back into the faces of the reactionary government.

Though bedeviled by the pain that comes with clinical depression and bi-polar disorder, Ochs maintained his principles and activism. He was a major part of the protest surrounding the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago, performing his best material in Lincoln Park. Ochs stated that he spiritually died in Chicago, as the police riot rained blows upon democracy. Later, he would also befriend the great Chilean songwriter, Victor Jara. Shortly thereafter, the CIA-backed coupe would take the lives of Jara and thousands of others; this was a terminal assault to the faltering Ochs. In 1976 Phil Ochs died by his own hand.

This grand voice of protest song dared to speak back to the criminals in the US government. He alerted his audiences to corruption and brutality. He dared us to care, at the expense of himself. Now, in view of the December 19 anniversary of his birth and over 30 years since his passing, the silence of dissenters has become deafening.

The Flames of Discontent is hosting a Phil Ochs Birthday Tribute: I Ain’t Marchin’ Anymore on December 14, 8 PM.

The concert will feature noted folkie/activist Bob Lusk and The Flames of Discontent with special guest speaker, Sonny Ochs, Phil’s sister.



Flames of Discontent and folk singer Bob Lusk will hold a Phil Ochs (above) tribute on December 14, 8 PM, at the Colony Café in Woodstock, New York. See www.flamesofdiscontent.org to confirm details.

Review

Local 8 shows interracial unionism key to victory

Peter Cole, Wobblies on the Waterfront: Interracial Unionism in Progressive-Era Philadelphia, University of Illinois Press: Urbana and Chicago: July 2007, 227 pages, hardbound, cost \$40.

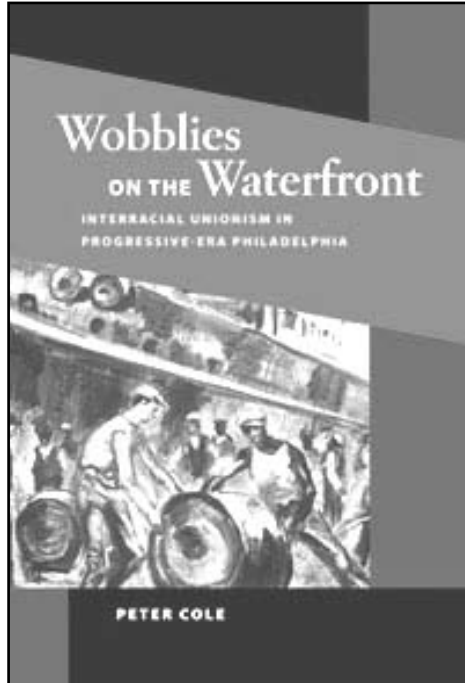
By Matt White

Peter Cole's *Wobblies on the Waterfront: Interracial Unionism in Progressive-Era Philadelphia* challenges the idea that the IWW's vision of interracial unionism was little more than revolutionary slogan and tokenism. Instead, Cole describes how the IWW overcame the barriers of racism on the waterfront in Philadelphia, United States.

As Peter Cole —tells, Philadelphia area longshoremen and sailors known as Local 8 were the only major example of successful interracial unionism until the Thirties and arguably until later. Cole describes Philadelphia's long history of ethnic barriers and racism, particularly the bitter street fights between Irish immigrant longshoreman and African-American longshoremen. He describes in detail as well the constant corruption of Philadelphia's government. Cole also presents how previous Philadelphia longshoremen's organizations failed because of racism.

The context Cole provides makes the story of the success of Local 8 that much more improbable and satisfying.

In 1913, 3500 longshoremen of various backgrounds including African-Americans, Irish-Americans, and recent Lithuanian and Polish immigrants went out on strike together and formed Local 8. As Cole points out, the strikers sought out the IWW, not vice versa. The predominantly African-American longshoremen (more than 50 per cent) chose the IWW over the more prominent and established International Longshoremen's Association because of the IWW's egalitarianism and the fact that one of the Philadelphia IWW's leaders was himself an African-American, that leader being Benjamin Fletcher. (Fletcher, incidentally, was the recent subject of another Peter Cole book put out by C.H. Kerr this year.) That the ILA was segregated and undemocratic did not help it gain favor amongst Philadelphia longshoremen.



The IWW and Local 8 grew in Philadelphia because of its success with on the job actions and its bold anti-racist stance. It was normal practice for instance to get a job with scabs or non-union longshoremen, then refuse to work until the scabs had joined or been fired. That in a nutshell shows how much power Local 8 had.

Local 8 maintained racial harmony in numerous ways. One was through a rotating leadership system, which specified that the top two leadership positions of the union were filled by one African-American and one white and that those positions were rotated year to year. Another way to make sure that every group was empowered was to make sure that each group was represented in every committee and amongst the delegates. The ethnic groups that made up Local 8 understood that their livelihoods depended on interracial solidarity.

While economics bound them together, shortly after the founding of Local 8 members became bound to each other socially and interacted with and formed strong relationships with each other outside of their work.

What all of this added up to was that very simply, at the apex of their power, Local 8 controlled the Delaware River. That Local 8 did this without ever

signing a contract still would shock any modern union person.

Wobbly waterfront during WWI

Local 8 was even stable and powerful enough to ride out the famous government repression of the IWW that began in 1917 with the United States' entry into the First World War.

Cole argues that the US government's repression of the IWW in Philadelphia was not because the government actually believed that the IWW was aiding the Germans but because the government wanted an excuse to destroy the IWW. It is almost funny how disingenuous the government was being at this time while many Philadelphia-based Wobbly seamen were being killed by German U-Boats and many Philadelphia Wobblies were either not against the war or even for it, such as jailed leader Walter Nef. Even as most of Local 8's leaders, including Ben Fletcher went to jail for several years, Local 8 still held its own, showing that the IWW in Philadelphia was deeper than just their well-known leaders sitting in jail.

Under Communist attack

Cole explains in detail the effect that the rise of the Communists had on Local 8 and on the IWW as a whole. Cole explains that at the worst possible moment in Local 8's history, the Communists probably did the most to destroy Local 8 when they accused Local 8 of loading supplies that would be used against the Red Army fighting the Russian Civil War. It was a bogus charge and one that Cole shows to be improbable at best, but one that got Local 8 de-chartered the moment it could least afford it, as it was being attacked by the AFL's powerful International Longshoremen's Association, the government and local capitalists.

By the early Twenties, several members of the GEB were Communists and were following the dictates of the Moscow and American Communists. The Communists believed that the proper way to bring about a revolutionary labor movement was to bore from within, not by creating a separate radical labor organization, thus the Communists

believed in crushing the IWW. That the Communist influenced- GEB pulled the charter of the Local 8 and thus prevented Benjamin Fletcher (an anti-Communist) from being elected to the GEB, does not speak well of Communist foresight. At this moment the government and Communist-supported ILA managed to finally regain a foothold in Philadelphia thus destroying the longshoremen's democratic unionism and later their interracial unionism.

One of Cole's regrets is that he never got to speak with a member of Local 8. However, Cole uncovered an impressive range of sources from interviews with Philadelphia longshoremen who were members of the IWW and later the ILA, military intelligence files and the like. By using the writings of A. Phillip Randolph and W.E.B. DuBois on the subject of Local 8, Cole puts into context how extraordinary Local 8 was and how nationally prominent they were. If and when Benjamin Fletcher becomes a figure seen in school text books (as he has become in several African-American history textbooks), it will probably be in large part thanks to Cole's scholarship.

Using Philadelphia as an example, Cole argues very convincingly that the government repression argument for the decline of the IWW is not exactly true, but instead it was a combination, at least in Philadelphia, of government repression, the government, and Communist-backed International Longshoremen's Association, and increased racial tension, all coming together during the birth of the Communist movement in the United States. If that sounds complex, that is because it is complex, at least a lot more complex and credible than some other major historians' arguments on the IWW.

Because of the book's focus on race, *Wobblies on the Waterfront* will be relevant in the US for many years to come, as race and racism remain prominent problems. Because it is well written, because it argues an alternative view of the IWW and because it revolves around many still pertinent issues, Cole's book is one of the few "must-read" books on the IWW and labor history in general to come out recently.

Review

Worker centers defend immigrants, unorganized

Janice Fine. Worker Centers: Organizing Communities at the Edge of the Dream. Economic Policy Institute and ILR Press, 2006, US\$21.95.

Review by Matt Dimick

Worker Centers is the first book-length examination of the recent US phenomenon of worker centers. For this study, Janice Fine, an assistant professor of labor studies at Rutgers, identified 137 such centers across the United States, surveyed 40 of them, and conducted in-depth interviews with nine.

Fine describes worker centers as "community-based mediating institutions that provide support to low-wage workers." They provide this support in three ways: (1) delivering services such as legal representation for unpaid wages, English classes, worker rights education, health clinics, bank accounts, and so forth; (2) providing advocacy by conducting and disseminating research on low-wage working conditions, lobbying for new or improved laws, and working with government agencies to improve monitoring and complaints processing; and (3) organizing by building ongoing organizations and developing leadership for direct action. As Fine makes clear, the vast majority of these worker centers are identified as immigrant worker cen-

ters, and it is these that are the focus of Fine's book.

The book provides a fairly comprehensive, bird's-eye view of workers centers, covering their origin and development, the historical trends of immigration and the institutions supporting immigrants, methods of outreach and recruitment, models of delivering services and advocating for policy changes, strategies for economic action and raising standards for wages and working conditions, and a view into the internal life of worker centers. Many of these topics are of interest and relevance to IWW organizing.

For example, worker centers use a broad variety of methods for outreach and recruitment. One means of first contact is to provide information on labor rights through community presentations, ethnic media or English-as-second-language (ESL) classes. Fine explains that these impersonal methods are more effective than they might otherwise be because of immigrants' urgent demand for information about their rights. More targeted methods use home visits from information garnered from welfare-to-work programs, work sites, churches and soccer teams.

Many of the worker centers cited churches as central to their efforts: many

immigrants rightfully fear the government and often, because of experiences in their home countries, labor unions as well. Soccer leagues have also provided effective networks, with some worker centers even starting their own leagues.

Worker centers also provide a range of services that are both a means of recruitment and a core activity. The most frequently provided services are legal representation, mostly for violations of wage payment and hours of work rules, along with ESL classes. Other services offered include hiring halls (most common in day laborer worker centers), health services (everything from health-and-safety workshops to actual clinics), ID cards, and assistance in check cashing and opening bank accounts.

Such services help fulfill essential needs for low-wage immigrant communities as well as provide an effective means of outreach. But Fine also points out that providing these services often creates a tension between meeting individual workers' needs and the stated goals of the centers to promote broader, systemic change. Although they are often first offered to attract new recruits, the immense need for legal and other assistance can quickly occupy the center's attention and resources.

Besides providing services, worker

centers also engage in economic action. For instance, day laborer centers have actively promoted the creation of hiring halls. The Korean Immigrant Worker Advocates (KIWA) has achieved some success in increasing the payment of the minimum wage in the Koreatown restaurant industry in LA through the use of boycotts and picketing. But these examples are the exception rather than the rule. Fine writes that most centers do not have a coherent economic strategy, "nor had they asked themselves what kind of power and how much of it they needed to build in order to have a significant labor market or policy impact."

The spread and growth of worker centers is certainly a phenomenon worth taking note of and IWW members and organizers should think about how we can learn from them. They offer many techniques of outreach and recruitment that can be used in organizing. Provided the risks are understood, the use of services to attract and retain members offers promise. Local branches should approach worker centers to offer support as allies or perhaps even to discuss strategies for raising industry standards.

Branches or members can even think about starting their own centers, as a means to access money and resources to catalyze their own branches and IUs.

full page ad

Informal workgroups are seeds of solidarity

By M. Jones

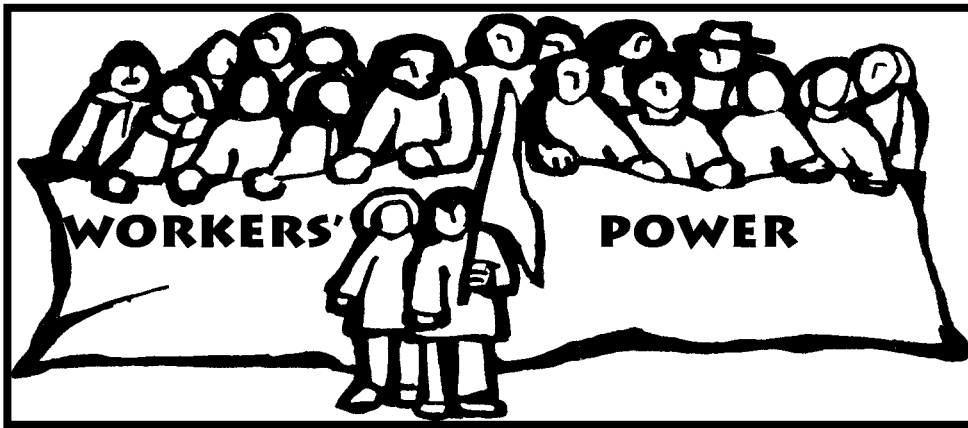
In every workplace throughout history, workers have come together and worked for their common interests.

This cooperation takes many forms. Sometimes it is at the level of two workers next to each other in cubicles who support each other and make work less miserable by being able to laugh with one another. Other times, the workers form into a group that encompasses enough people that they can informally control the speed of production and the work conditions that surround them. Sometimes, a group of workers within a shop grows into a union, ideally across an industry who can directly exercise power in relation to the boss.

This cooperation is significant, whatever form it takes. In each form it challenges the isolation that exists in other aspects of our lives as workers. In these relationships, we begin to see the possibilities of what it means to take collective action and what it means to control the means of production. We are empowered by these relationships. Where we can build on them, we can have success and begin to make changes.

These bonds we form with our fellow workers are the basis of our organization, the basis of Industrial Unionism and the basis of a working class movement. Where these bonds originate and

where they are most intense is in our workplaces, where they come out of our day-to-day interactions and struggles.



The first two forms mentioned—support between individuals and support between a group of workers—are incomplete. Little can be done if our work group remains isolated in a group of two or three. If we begin to informally control production, we still may be isolated within a larger company or industry. These forms must be expanded through organization. But look at these small groups as the seeds, and the tiny cells within a larger muscle of organization, a muscle that must be constantly exercised.

Through organization, these small

work groups branch out through an issue or as part of a campaign. They encompass other workers, get further

defined through this organization, and identify workplace or industrial issues to struggle against. Again, this often happens informally and we should not overlook it or believe that workers are incapable of acting outside of formal organization. Small informal actions are happening all over the place, and even in this context, workers begin to see their power, in small ways. It has to grow and it must become formal in order to grow into a position of strength that can push forward demands.

As the struggle grows, it becomes more formal and the definition it gets

is one of class. It moves from a group of friends or acquaintances that want to make things better on the job to a group of workers making a demand on the boss and having an action to follow this demand. In this action, we must come together and confront things directly ourselves. This means not relying on a third party, on the government, a lawyer or the press to enforce our demands, but doing it ourselves, with other workers inside our workplace and outside of it. This is direct action and is present in informal and formal struggle.

In this struggle we, as a group, are defined by our relationship to the boss and to production, in a way that is not possible when we act as individuals. This is when we become the working class, a group acting in its own interests.

We all identify ourselves as part of this group, the issue we have been organizing around now becomes one of the working class versus the employing class. Through these actions, we begin to see what is possible, not just for ourselves and our families but also for our fellow workers, for our organization and for our union. Out of these small seeds—informal work groups, organization, direct action—our class is defined. We cease to be individuals, left to the whims of the bosses and become a force that can push our own issues and agenda.

Analysis

SIV: a new sieve in the world of high finance

By John Reimann

Anyone who thinks that the recent turmoil in the financial markets is over should think twice. The announcement of three major banks—Citigroup, Bank of America and Morgan Chase & Co.—that they are setting up a super SIV in cooperation with the US Treasury Department should put no one at ease.

SIV stands for “structured investment vehicle”, which play a major role in the world of high finance. Banks that have loans on the books can bundle them together and sell them through an SIV, which is legally a separate entity.

The SIV then sells short term “paper”, meaning that it takes out short-term loans, at a lower interest rate than the loans it holds. These loans are mainly credit card debt and home loans. The SIV makes a profit off of the difference it pays on the short term loan and the interest it receives from the longer term loan. The SIV, in turn, pays a fee to the bank that set it up in the first place. So in reality, the bank collects the interest on the long-term loans but it calls it “fees” from the SIV, and in this way it doesn’t have to put these loans in its accounts.

This seems like an unnecessarily complicated way of marketing these loans. Why doesn’t the bank simply sell them in its own name? The reason is that if it did so, it would have to keep the loans on the books. By law, and by accepted (capitalist) accounting procedures, banks must have a certain amount of cash on hand as a percentage of the loans it has outstanding. This precaution is in the case lenders default.

By packaging the loans through the SIV, they can get around these accounting procedures.

Since most workers don’t buy SIV paper nor deal in this world of high finance, it can seem that all this is the capitalists’ problem. However, the capitalists need some way of keeping track of each other. If they don’t, then they will be reluctant to lend each other money, which means that corporations can’t get the financing to invest, which means an economic gridlock. Not only that, but an even greater amount of fraud would occur, and the capitalists would be cheating each other (and the small investors)

even more than normal.

All of this would make the system even more unstable.

Presently, there is about \$400 billion in SIVs. Some of the loans that the SIVs market are to prime borrowers who are most likely to repay their debts. Others are subprime loans—the type that have been going into default. What’s happened is that investors are unwilling to buy “paper”—invest—in any SIVs because (I suppose) they are unable to distinguish which is which, and anyway the SIVs have the better ranked debt (AAA and AA rated loans) all mixed up with the lower ranked, higher risk loans. This has caused the credit market to “freeze up” as they are saying now.

The three banks set up a super SIV which will only buy AAA and AA ranked loans from other SIVs. Supposedly, this will get the credit markets flowing again.

However, some financial analysts are already calling this a “shell game”, and who knows what sorts of accounting tricks will be involved in this? Further, what can end up happening is that this super SIV may end up drawing all avail-

able investors, leaving the rest to sink or swim.

Considering that this super SIV will be funded with about one-quarter of the total amount in the SIV’s (\$100 billion out of a total of \$400 billion), a considerable problem can yet remain.

It is interesting to see the terms used in this world of high finance. This super SIV is called “master liquidity enhancing conduit” or M-LEC. A spokesperson for Citigroup, Danielle Romero-Apsilos, “explained” matters thusly: “Some of the recent stresses that we have seen in the market have developed more as a result of illiquidity rather than deteriorating credit.

“As a result, some sectors of the market, such as (asset backed commercial paper) have been functioning less efficiently than previously. Given the importance of this sector, the private sector created this (conduit) as an alternative, optional source of liquidity for the SIVs, with the objective to facilitate a solution that enhances the orderliness of the market.”

Basically, the whole world of high

finance—the world that must function if most workers are to have jobs under capitalism—is so full of pure speculation and outright fraud that they have to talk in such terms so that nobody will be able to get a clear grip on what is going on.

Underneath it all, the problem of the tendency toward overproduction carries on. All the financial manipulating has enabled lenders to make all sorts of loans that workers will be unable to repay, which has partially and temporarily lessened this tendency. This has been hidden for quite a few years. It is possible that they will be able to continue to cover over all of this for a few more years, but this is far from certain.

Meanwhile, on another front, oil prices continue to rise, causing the stock market to fall. The Dow Jones fell 190 points on Monday, October 22. Citigroup, one of the banks that set up the SIV M-LEC, announced that its quarterly profits fell a massive 57 per cent last quarter. Meanwhile, the dollar continues to sink like a stone while the price of gold (and other commodities) continue to rise. Definitely think twice.

Twin Cities Workers College announces Winter courses

The Work People’s College is a project of the Twin Cities IWW, dedicated to providing free, radical, and practical education to working people focussing on history, culture, theory, and practical organizing.

We draw on the historical legacy of the original Work People’s College founded in 1907 by Finnish immigrants and laborers in Northern Minnesota and supported by the IWW.

The upcoming winter session will feature two courses:

Fellow Worker Steve Holm will facilitate Chomsky 101: An Introduction to Noam Chomsky’s Life and Political Thought. This 6-part class will introduce participants to the thinking and writing of one of America’s preeminent dissidents. The class will cover themes including Media and Propaganda; U.S imperialism around the world; and the anarchist alternative through short readings and group discussion.

Fellow Worker Jeff Pilacinski will

present Coup de Sabots and the Creativity of Direct Action. Using Elizabeth Gurley Flynn’s definitions of “Sabotage” and “Direct Action”, the course will examine the history behind everyday forms of resistance, while empowering each other with practical methods of increasing workers’ control on and off the job.

This class will incorporate a number of different learning methods, including: participant presentations, small group discussions, role plays, short participant compositions, video screenings, reading assignments, and some lecture.

To register for classes, call 612-339-1266 or send an email to twincities@iww.org. Include your name, contact information, and the class for which you



Education for emancipation: Participants in the 2006 class “Lessons of the Spanish Revolution.”

are registering.

Chomsky 101 meets Saturdays, November 17th - December 22nd 2007, 11:00 am - 1:00 pm, Downtown Minneapolis Public Library, 4th Floor, Conference Room N-402

Coup de Sabots meets Thursday evenings November 29th - January 3rd 2008 6:30 pm - 8:00 pm Pierre Botte Library, 55 Broadway Ave NE, Minneapolis.

Union activists targetted across the globe

144 killed, 800 beaten or tortured in Africa, Americas, Asia, Europe, Middle East

By ITUC

An appalling total of 144 trade unionists were murdered for defending workers' rights in 2006, while more than 800 suffered beatings or torture, according to the Annual Survey of Trade Union Rights Violations, published by the 168-million member International Trade Union Confederation. The 379-page report details nearly 5,000 arrests and more than 8,000 dismissals of workers due to their trade union activities. There were 484 new cases of trade unionists held in detention by governments also documented in the report. The report gives accounts of mass dismissals, beatings, detentions and threats against workers and their families used, sometimes routinely, in countries in each region of the world.

"Workers seeking to better their lives through trade union activities are facing rising levels of repression and intimidation in an increasing number of countries. Most shocking of all is the increase of some 25% in the number killed compared to the previous year", said ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder.

Colombia kills most unionists

Colombia remained the most perilous place in the world for union activity, with 78 killings, almost all of which were

carried out with impunity by paramilitary death squads linked to government officials or acting at the behest of employers. Of 1,165 murders documented between 1994 and 2006, only 56 perpetrators have been brought to trial, and a total of 14 have been sentenced.

A wave of anti-union violence in the Philippines is also documented in the Survey, with 33 unionists and worker-rights supporters murdered, in some cases by killers acting in collusion with the military and the police.

In China, more than 100 workers are detained in prisons and forced labour camps living in appalling conditions.

The Zimbabwean government continued its violent repression of the country's trade union movement. Police arrested 265 participants in a trade union protest and then proceeded to severely beat 15 of them, including top leaders of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions in detention.

Government hostility

Growing government hostility to fundamental workers' rights is a major cause of violence against trade union members. In Australia, where the government's deceptively-titled "Work-Choices" legislation stripped workers

of many rights and benefits and has imposed heavy restrictions on union activity, with harsh penalties for individual workers and union officials. The government launched prosecutions against 107 construction workers, who faced heavy fines for taking industrial action in support of a health and safety representative who was dismissed. In the United States a National Labour Relations Board Ruling deprived millions of the right to organise, extending the definition of the term "supervisor". Switzerland tried but failed to invalidate the authority of the ILO's Committee on Freedom of Association with regard to Swiss labour laws.

Multinational companies attack

Multinational companies are another source of violence against union members. Repeat offenders included Coca Cola subsidiaries and suppliers, Wal-Mart, Goodyear, Nestlé and Bouygues. Several multinationals took advantage of an increasingly hostile environment in Poland to clamp down on workers' rights and conditions. Suppliers to well-known global brand names, especially in the textiles and agriculture sectors,

used heavy repression to maintain their control over the workplace.

Women workers

Women workers in particular continued to face repression, particularly given the exploitation of the mainly female workforce in Export Processing Zones in Asia, Africa and Latin America, with numerous instances of dismissal and outright refusal by employers to recognise even the most fundamental rights of their employees. In Morocco women textile workers stood trial for organising a strike, while in Mauritius women workers taking part in a sit-in were beaten by police. Abuse of women domestic workers, amongst the most exploited of the world's 90 million migrant workers, is also a prominent feature in several countries, notably in the Gulf States.

"Governments need to face up to their responsibilities to make sure that global standards adopted at the International Labour Organisation are fully respected everywhere in the world," said Ryder, who noted that little had changed from last year's survey.

With files from the IW.

Ontario court says union fines for scabs crossing picket unfair, unenforcable

A clumsy lawsuit by a Public Alliance of Canada (PSAC) local has strengthened the hand of scabs in Ontario.

PSAC had fined more than 200 of its members for crossing the picket line during its Fall 2004 dispute with the federal government.

The PSAC fine was the members' gross pay for each day they crossed the line. The members were also suspended from being able to vote or stand for positions in the union one year per day worked during the strike.

The Ontario Superior Court of Justice ruled on October 17 that neither of the union's members Jeffrey Birch nor April Luberti had to pay a \$476.75 fine for crossing the picket line three days.

The judge, Robert Smith, said the PSAC fine was "unconscionable" because it charged the defendants more money than they would have taken home, after taxes.

The fine also didn't match the union's own calculation for the damage the scabs did by crossing the picket. PSAC's formula of one penny in damage per striking member (25,895 members) meant that the damages done would have been \$258.95, not the \$476.75 charged to the defendants.

A fine which is 454% greater than the Union's estimate of damages is excessive and unconscionable.

"I find this estimate was pure speculation on the part of the Union," said Justice Smith, adding that

"requiring a member to pay a fine which is 454% greater than the Union's estimate of damages is excessive and unconscionable."

The judge also chastised the union for not looking for other ways than fining union members to maintain picket discipline. "The

Union could have waged information campaigns to persuade its members that they should support the Union's course of action, or the Union could have set their 'strike pay' at a rate that would have encouraged support for the strike," said the judge. PSAC strike pay is \$50 per day. The judge also ruled that the union's constitution isn't part of the legal statute, meaning the union can't use the courts to enforce its rules.

The timing of the ruling may embolden the Conservative government negotiators to be tougher at the negotiating table. The Union of Taxation Employees's contract ended on October 31.

Anti-union lobby group Canadian LabourWatch helped Birch and Luberti secure law firm Heenan Blaikie. It is now using this case to paint PSAC and other unions who have fined scabs as bullies.

Korean workers fight free trade with US

By John Kalwaic

About 15,000 Korean workers, students, and farmers marched in Seoul against the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States, clashing with riot police.

Many South Korean farmers are afraid agricultural imports imported from the United States would wipe out the market for their crops.

Workers, mainly from the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions are worried that the FTA has called for labor and pension reforms.

Many of the student demonstrators also protested Korea's involvement with the US-led coalition in Iraq and some of

the government's "anti-communist" laws that do not allow for freedom of speech.

South Korean students and workers have realized they are natural allies in the fight against neoliberalism, frequently sharing the risks of confrontation with police during protests.

A new wave of strikes is also rolling across Korea.

Juang Hea Jin lit himself on fire during a strike against an electric company on October 27.

Self-immolation has a long history in South Korea. On May Day, Koreans commemorate ChunTea Il who lit himself on fire during a strike in the early 1970s.

Workers Initiative Takes Action Against Greenkett Company in Poland



By John Kalwaic

Photo by Workers' Initiative

Thirty members of Workers Initiative, an anarcho-syndicalist union in Poland, picketed the Greenkett Company's headquarters in Steszew on November 9 to protest the firing of Lukasz Sybilak.

Many of the picketers held red and black flags at the demonstration along with the WI's logo the tell tail fist and gears.

The firing is the company's latest attempt to break the Workers' Initiative union organizing at their factories and demanding better wages and working conditions.

In March 2007, the company fired two other union members, Jolanta Szy-

pura and Aurelia Wlodarczyk. The union filed a complaint and in labor court, the company agreed to pay the dismissed workers each 6,000 Zlotych (US\$2,415) and their trial costs.

The union said that as a result of their organizing and the solidarity displayed, salaries have increased by 10 per cent, social benefits are being paid and working conditions have improved.

Greenkett Polska is a part of a multinational corporation Grupo Ig, which maintains its subsidiaries in Slovakia, Brasil and USA. The plant in Steszew, built few years ago, employs about 120 workers.

Australian labor party wins majority amid anti-union hostility

The Australian electorate thumped the right-wing Liberal and National party coalition on November 24, handing the Australian Labor Party control of the government.

The Liberal Party lost one-third of its seats, dropping from a 74-seat majority to 47. Its coalition partner, the National Party lost three seats. The Australian Labor Party gained 23 seats, to control the House with an 83-member majority. One of its election promises was to withdraw 550 Australian soldiers from combat roles in Iraq.

While Labor is celebrating, it is chilling to see as of this printing that nationally, less than 660,000 votes separated the two parties. That means that 4.8 million Australians supported or at least tolerated Liberal Prime Minister John Howard's all-out attack against unions.

Throughout the campaign, the Liberals tried to present the Labor Party as a front group for a shadow government controlled by unions. It also highlighted that the unions had donated \$60 million to Labor since 1996.

"Can you trust a front bench with 70 per cent former union officials? Risk union bosses back in charge?" asked one Liberal television ad that said labor would crash Australia's \$1.1 trillion economy. "Can you afford to pay your mortgage under a Labor government?" asked an Internet banner ad.

While scare tactics didn't change the result, this propaganda puts pressure on the new prime minister to prove he is not beholden to the Labor party's union backers. What should concern Australia's working class now is when and how the the new PM will get tough on the ally that boosted him into power.