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## 115 unionists killed in 2005

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions reports that at least 115 unionists were murdered for defending workers' rights in 2005, while more than 1,600 were subjected to violent assaults. Nearly 10,000 workers were sacked for their union activity, and some 11,700 arrested by police and security forces. Many countries ban unions altogether, while others allow only government-controlled "official trade unions."

"This year's report reveals deeply disturbing trends, especially for women, migrant workers and those who work in the public sector," said ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder. "The death toll was slightly lower in 2005 than the previous year, but we are nevertheless witnessing increasingly severe violence and hostility against working people who stand up for their rights."

Colombia once again topped the list for killings, intimidation and death threats, with 70 Colombian unionists killed. The government also imposed new labor regulations allowing for a longer work day, reduced severance pay, and restrictions on collective bargaining. A new "law on justice and peace" provides for prison sentences of no more than eight years for murdering unionists and other activists, and then only if charges are brought within 60 days of the crime. The government claims this will promote reconciliation and end a culture of impunity for human rights violations.

Kim Tae-hwan of the South Korean union center FKTU was one of 17 Asian unionists killed during 2005, run over by a truck driver who was following police orders to drive through a picket line. Thousands of workers were injured in anti-union violence by police and security forces in Bangladesh, India, Cambodia, China, the Philippines (where four unionists were murdered), South Korea and other countries.

Workers were subjected to strict government control in North Korea, Laos and the Maldives, as was the single Vietnamese union federation (which, however, has sought to mediate Vietnam's growing numbers of wildcat strikes). Dozens of Chinese union activists remained in prison, and the authorities brutally repressed protests by workers in many different locations, with unconfirmed reports of the deaths of two demonstrators. In Burma, where unions are illegal, ten organizers from the independent FTUB union were sentenced to three to 25 years in prison, and one has already died in prison. The army shelled the village of Pha Pya in order to disrupt a May Day commemoration.

The report also points to continuing violations of workers' rights in the United States. Two more state governments stripped public employees of union rights, and the National Labor Relations Board expanded the numbers of workers excluded from federal labor protections. More than 25 million private sector workers and nearly 7 million federal, state and local government employees do not have the legal right to negotiate over wages, hours and working conditions. The ICFTU also criticized the U.S. for requiring proof of majority status before unions could represent their members, and allowing employers to threaten and intimidate workers trying to exercise their right to unionize.

The ICFTU cites a study that found that 91 percent of U.S. employers subject workers considering unionizing to mandatory propaganda sessions, and nearly a third fire pro-union workers. As a result, even though unions almost always secure majority support before seeking a NLRB election, unions win only 31 percent of these elections. The NLRB continues to face a backlog of nearly 17,000 unfair labor

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# Australian Wobbs call for general strike

BY MARCUS NEOFITOU, MELBOURNE

As this issue goes in the mail, Australian Wobblies are part of a General Strike Bloc at Melbourne's June 28 protest against the new industrial relations laws – part of a week of protests across Australia.

On 29 March, Victorian Trades Hall Council Shop Stewards and Delegates passed a resolution urging: "That all unions consult their membership on an ongoing basis ... about their willingness to hold a general strike against the new workplace laws." However, Trades Hall officials have blocked discussion of a general strike at subsequent meetings.

Rallies are better than nothing but repeated rallies of hundreds of thousands failed to prevent the Government invading Iraq. Rallies alone won't stop the IR laws either.

Only rallies backed up by determined Australia-wide industrial action will have an effect. A 24-hour general strike would be a good start. Recent history shows us this type of action can and does work.

Three million on the street and widespread strikes defeated bad industrial relations law this year in France.

A general strike in Nepal defeated dictatorship by the king in that country.

In 1969, one million workers went on general strike in Victoria in response to the jailing of Tramways Union head Clarrie O'Shea. This strike was in defiance of both the Victorian Trades Hall and the Labour Council of NSW. Clarrie was soon released and the anti-union laws were never enforced again.

The ACTU and Victorian Trades Hall and many other conservative union bosses are too wrapped up in the Australian Labour Party and their own perks. They are doing quite nicely and see no reason to threaten their own

positions with radical action. They would rather enlist us in the elect ALP campaign and organise the occasional rally to divert worker anger away from their own complacency and corruption. We must never forget it was the ALP who with the Wages Accord helped send workers on the slippery path to rapidly diminishing wages and conditions.

Most union bosses only have their eyes on a seat in Parliament. This fight won't be won in that capitalist tool.

Many people argue that it is too soon for anything like a General Strike and if we tried and failed it would set the movement back greatly. I would argue that we have nothing to lose (but our chains) at this point. Many people are screaming out for action and I am sure would unreservedly join a real movement of resistance to the IR laws.

The MUA dispute showed that there is no shortage of people ready to defend and promote workers' rights. The numbers of people at the last couple of IR rallies – 250,000 in Melbourne alone – show the strength of feeling. However, if we only see a mobilisation based on rallies, marginal ALP seats campaigning and TV adverts, the numbers could well diminish as people become more disempowered and despondent about the chances of overthrowing the IR laws.

We have no choice but to fight these unjust laws as well as all the other freedom-denying laws passed in the name of anti-terrorism and economic competition.

Workers and the union movement could do well to remember and follow the oath taken at Bakery Hill in 1854, during the Eureka Rebellion: "We swear by the Southern Cross to stand truly by each other and fight to defend our rights and liberties."

## May Day actions kill anti-immigrant law?

In the wake of this spring's massive immigrant rights demonstrations, congressional leaders seem to have abandoned efforts to pass a new immigration bill. House and Senate bills are technically in a conference committee to resolve the many differences between the bills.

Although press reports have characterized the Senate bill as moderate, immigrant rights groups say it would leave immigrants much worse off than they are at present.

The Senate passed a "compromise" bill that calls for immediate deportation of a million or more immigrants, requires all workers to carry a new national identification card, requires employers to fire anyone whose documents they question, increase deportations, criminalize millions of workers who have had to provide false social security numbers to employers in order to get jobs, further militarize the border, and expand the importation of hundreds of thousands of "guest workers" who have few legal rights.

The Senate bill also calls for 350 miles of new "triple-layer fencing" along the U.S.-Mexico border, and another 500 miles of vehicle barriers. (The House version calls for 700 miles of walls, at an estimated cost of \$2.2 billion.)

Sen. Edward Kennedy said the fence could cost as much as \$4 billion, and cover almost a quarter of the U.S.-Mexico border. Several miles of border along U.S. cities

already are walled off, sometimes with steel plates, sometimes with concrete bunkers.

Details of just what kind of fence Congress mean to build are not clear. How tall would it be? How thick? What materials would be used in its construction?

Will it be electrified, to kill any living thing that comes into contact with it? Or will the National Guard and INS patrol it with attack dogs? Will they embed chunks of the Berlin Wall and similar structures in it to give it more historical significance? Will it be built by union labor at prevailing wages, or will this be another no-bid Halliburton contract, subcontracted to some fly-by-night operator that hires undocumented workers out of a Home Depot parking lot?

With estimates ranging from \$1 billion to \$4 billion for the job it seems that the wall is less a proposed structure than an occasion for politicians to play demagogue.

But the windy speeches are dying down as the polytricksters take a look at poll numbers that show voters increasingly skeptical of criminalization schemes, instead favoring an immigration reform approach that allows undocumented workers to stay in the United States. More than half of respondents told Associated Press pollsters that immigrants are "having a good influence ... on the way things are going in the United States" – something that certainly couldn't be said about George W. Bush, or Congress, or the bosses.





## Starbucks workers at fifth New York store join IWW

A delegation of the IWW Starbucks Workers Union entered Starbucks at 57th and Lexington at 2:45 on June 16, two weeks after the union filed new unfair labor practice charges against the coffee giant. Workers on the shop floor put on their IWW union pins and let the company know that they too were members of the Starbucks Workers Union.

Work stopped as they presented their demands to store manager Patrice Britton, who refused to accept the list and ordered everyone back to work. Meanwhile Wobblies were passing out leaflets outside, letting customers know what was happening.

There was chaos on the floor where the manager was ordering workers back to work while customers were asking what was happening and why they weren't being served.

Finally District Manager Veronica Park arrived and ordered Isis Saenz and Charles Fostrom to count their registers and clock out. They refused and were taken into the back room. Management yelled at the two to clock out and they continually refused. Saenz accused management of anti-union discrimination to which manager Britton exploded in anger. After 10 minutes workers were finally allowed to go back to work.

This is the fifth Starbucks store in New York City to establish a public organizing committee and make collective demands from the company. Some of these demands included a guaranteed 30-hour work week, an end to the 1 minute lateness policy, and an end to unfair firings. Workers also called on the company to stop all illegal anti-union activity and to abide by the National Labor Relations board settlement.

On May 30, the IWW Starbucks Workers Union brought Labor Board charges outlining continuing discrimination and retaliation against union baristas. Starbucks has breached its settlement agreement reached with the government in March.

"If there was any doubt in the past, Starbucks now has made clear its anti-worker intentions," said the union's general counsel, Stuart Lichten, of Schwartz, Lichten and Bright. "The company is violating one bedrock labor rights principle after another."

The charges contest final warnings before termination against three IWW Starbucks Workers Union members: Suley Ayala, Daniel Gross and Tomer Malchi. Starbucks disciplined the three because of their continued participation in union organizing. Ironically, Gross' first final warning before termination for union activity was rescinded by the previous settlement of IWW charges against Starbucks. Less than two months later, Starbucks concocted another one against him.

Pending charges also contest the firing of IWW barista Joe Agins, Jr. from a Manhattan Starbucks for his organizing activity.

The wearing of union pins continues to be an area of contention. While Starbucks agreed in March to acknowledge the long-standing right of workers to wear union pins, managers continue to discipline workers who wear union pins at Starbucks locations not directly at issue in the settlement.

"My manager flipped out when my co-workers and I put on our IWW pins," said Charles Fostrom, an IWW member and Starbucks barista. "I couldn't believe how gripped he was with fear because we chose to express our support for the IWW with a modest-sized pin."

After being informed by workers that he was breaking the law, the manager contacted his superiors who instructed him to continue to prohibit the pins.

In the midst of the fierce anti-union campaign, Wobbly baristas have made important gains in wages, security of hours, and individual grievances on the job. The union operates on a solidarity union model where workers control their own organization and take direct action against the company.

## May Week in Edmonton

BY DESIREE SCHELL

From April 27 to May 4, the Edmonton May Week Labour Arts Festival brought together workers, artists and the labour movement to celebrate the achievements of people's struggles for social and economic justice. Through visual arts, music, film, poetry and theatre, we were treated to an artistic display of the meaning of solidarity.

The festival is built around the May Day March on May 1st, the day chosen by workers to acknowledge the efforts and celebrate the gains they have made throughout history. As workers, we recognize and commemorate May Day not only for its historical significance, but also as a time to organize and speak out around issues that are impacting working-class people today.

The May Day March is an opportunity for people to take to the streets together and show their commitment to fairness and justice in and outside of the workplace. This year Memi von Gaza led a collaborative effort to create a huge capitalist pig on a throne to be carried in the march. The pig became the focal point of a fantastic stroll down Jasper Avenue to the Legislative Grounds, where he was dramatically dethroned.

Other May Week events included the Workers' Art Exhibit, which featured visual art by working people. This annual event is built on the premise that workers and artists



PHOTO: ED BORASS

share a common struggle for decent wages, healthy working conditions and culturally vibrant communities. The Labour Cabaret was a major success, bridging the space between activists, the labour movement, and those who just came for the funk.

The Edmonton IWW branch screened the film "The Inheritance" to a packed house, followed with a forum about what the story of a group of immigrant seamstresses from the 1940s can teach us about the class struggle in Alberta today.

### International actions for Starbucks workers' rights

IWW members and supporters entered Starbucks cafes May 17 in cities across the United States, Canada and the British Isles to inform workers about their right to form a union. The Day of Action commemorated the second anniversary of the founding of the IWW Starbucks Workers Union. Since 2004, baristas have improved their life at work through direct action on the job and in the community despite Starbucks' illegal anti-union campaign.

"Employees don't have to go through the indignities of working at Starbucks alone any more," said Starbucks barista Suley Ayala. "Together we'll continue our march toward a living wage, guaranteed work hours, and most importantly respect."

IWW members talked with workers and shared union leaflets until they were kicked out of stores in accordance with Starbucks' union avoidance policy. Actions took place in 20 cities including Albany, Atlanta, Denver, Edinburgh, Edmonton, Grand Rapids, Newcastle and Salt Lake City.

"Our union branch in Edinburgh was

very pleased to tell the local baristas that their sisters and brothers in the IWW are waiting with open arms," said Barbara Scott, an IWW member who visited several of the company's stores in Scotland's capital. "It's time for the labor movement to confront the multinational corporations with global solidarity from below."

"I'm taking a stand today because Starbucks workers deserve better than a poverty wage," said Greg Giorgio, an IWW member who visited Starbucks cafes in Albany, New York. "The IWW baristas have proven that grassroots solidarity works."

### Preamble to the IWW Constitution

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Join the IWW Today

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

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

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

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

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

**TO JOIN:** Mail this form with a check or money order for initiation and your first month's dues to: IWW, Post Office Box 23085, Cincinnati OH 45223, USA.

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

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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount Enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

Membership includes a subscription to the Industrial Worker.



# Pittsburgh grocery workers go IWW

Workers at the East End Food Co-op, Pittsburgh's only member-owned natural and organic food market, have organized with the IWW to improve working conditions, pay and benefits, and to address long-standing issues of low staff morale and high turnover. The Co-op employs approximately 50 workers.

Since going public with their organizing drive on May 15, workers have asked the Board of Directors to recognize the workers' demand for collective bargaining rights based upon a showing of majority support for the union through signed union cards. To date, the Co-op Board has not accepted the workers' demand for recognition, but has stated it is willing to re-examine a 2003 Board decision, which states that workers must vote for the union during a representation election held by the National Labor Relations Board.

Workers say that since a majority of workers have signed cards and are ready to have them counted immediately, any other process toward recognition is unnecessary and pointless, if not obstructionist.

"We're eagerly awaiting a response from the Board so we can begin bargaining," said Co-op customer service representative Stacey Clampitt. "We want the Board to accept the authorization cards instead of putting us through a long and tedious election process."

Since management learned of revived union efforts, workers have received confirmation of a higher starting wage with some increases for current staff, promises of a renewed retirement plan, and plans for

an early profit sharing check. "We welcome management's inspired improvements to our pay and benefits," said Scott Reigel, produce clerk. "But we need to sit down at the bargaining table as equal partners to negotiate and guarantee improvements in our wages and working conditions."

## Shattuck Cinema workers win election

Workers at Landmark Shattuck Cinemas in Berkeley voted 22 to 2 in favor of unionization with the IWW June 16.

Despite new promises by Landmark and an attempt by CEO Bill Banowsky to thwart unionization, workers say they never really been worried about the vote.

"Support has been almost unanimous since day one," said Ryan Hatt. "If you would have asked me two months ago I could've guaranteed a landslide victory."

Shortly before workers cast ballots, more than 50 union supporters rallied in front of the theater waving IWW signs, holding banners, and singing union songs.

Now that the NLRB vote has gone through, workers are looking ahead to the contract negotiation process. Negotiations at Kendall Square Cinemas in Cambridge, Mass., the only other Landmark theatre with union (UFCW) representation outside of the projection booths, have been moving extremely slowly with Landmark officials meeting only the bare minimum requirements to keep the negotiations process "in good

faith" over the last year.

"We knew all along that the negotiations process would be the difficult part," said Rachel Amberg. "But we're ready to do whatever it takes to make sure Landmark doesn't jam the gears. If Landmark was really interested in 'good faith' negotiations, we could get the whole process taken care of in under a month."

Workers are seeking a living wage, health care coverage, corporate accountability, and respect – and a door chair. Workers stand for long periods taking tickets. They used to have a chair but corporate didn't approve. Chair gone. Then a meeting took place a couple of weeks back with the CEO. He came to explain what a union is, though he was an hour late and didn't seem to have too strong a grasp of his subject. But the chair reappeared, only to disappear a few hours later. Rumor has it that management thought the union might claim the return of the chair as a victory, and so it's stashed away for now.

## Toronto IWW drive

The newly re-established Toronto branch kicked off an organizing drive in the city's service and retail sectors May 20 with an organizing workshop featuring New York Starbucks barista Tomer Malchi. Toronto Wobs are targeting low-wage positions with high turnover, mostly filled by young workers who have come to recognize that they can improve their wages and conditions only through their own activity – that their employers clearly don't have their interests at heart.

more, inspired by stories of victories, we also learned something extraordinary about the trade union movement. We asked people if their own unions campaigned online. Remember that this is a group of people who are union members, computer-literate, connected to the net, participants themselves in LabourStart's online campaigns.

And to our amazement, no fewer than 27 percent replied that they did not know if their unions campaigned online. We can only interpret that to mean that they think it's possible that their own union does campaign online, but they wouldn't necessarily know about it. To me, this is a huge vote of no confidence in the way at least some unions campaign and use the net.

If a union is doing its job, its members – and especially those like the ones filling in LabourStart's online survey – will certainly know if it campaigns online.

A glance at the web sites of many unions will show the reason for the problem: to many of them, campaigns consist of little more than the publication online of documents. In some cases, unions do campaign using their web site – but only using their web site. And so few union members visit the web site, and rarely return for a second visit, that one wouldn't know if a new campaign were launched. Most unions do not collect and use email addresses to effectively and regularly reach all their members – and we have learned that this is the only way to properly campaign online.

Most of the participants in the survey – 761 of them, in fact – made suggestions about how LabourStart could improve its own campaigning capacity. We're still reading through these, but one message came through loud and clear: campaigns are more effective if they are done in more than one language. Within days of getting that message, we launched LabourStart's first campaign (in support of Indonesian security guards who were occupying corporate headquarters) simultaneously in six languages – English, French, Spanish, Norwegian, German and Indonesian. Other improvements will follow.

I think every union and campaigning organization can learn something from this. And because we want everyone in our movement to know the results of the survey, we've made it available online, here: [www.survey-monkey.com/Report.asp?U=215935788547](http://www.survey-monkey.com/Report.asp?U=215935788547)



PHOTO: JESSICA HAWTHORN

## British Wobs lay organising plans

BY PETER MOORE

The British Isles IWW conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, on June 17 attracted 21 delegates from six IWW branches and groups in the United Kingdom, showing the IWW is gathering momentum. The Edinburgh GMB and Scottish Parliament job branch organized and hosted the event.

The conference tackled an ambitious agenda which included fund raising, industrial organizing, dual carders, Starbucks, organizing migrant workers, how to make the IWW more attractive to women workers, developing closer ties to IWWs on the European continent, and reforming the BIROC's regional delegate structure.

One hot issue of the day was IWW efforts to work with migrant workers and asylum seekers. Both the London and Glasgow IWW branches reported that they are involved in supporting asylum seekers, refugees who have not yet received formal refugee status.

In a brief speech and question session, FW Rosie Kane, a member of the Scottish Parliament, spoke about the importance of direct action as a tactic whether it be in community struggles to protect asylum seekers from government attack or stopping motorways dividing and destroying communities. She denounced the YMCA's complicity with the United Kingdom's Home Office for housing asylum seekers in detention-style quarters.

A ballot committee announced the result of the British Isles IWW's annual officer election. The new officers are: Adam Lincoln, Secretary; Louise van der Hoeven, Treasurer; Graham Moss, Northern Regional Delegate; Ilyan Thomas, Wales Regional Delegate; and Phil Wharton, *Bread & Roses* editor. The new officers take up their posts on July 1. Adam Lincoln pledged to keep building the momentum of a growing IWW.

## IWW General Assembly Sept. 1-3, Oakland CA

The 2006 General Assembly of the Industrial Workers of the World will meet at the Humanist Hall in downtown Oakland Sept. 1-3. Delegates will act on reports from union officers, consider resolutions forwarded by branches and union committees including a proposal to form an organizing department, and nominate officers for 2007.

Registration information is available to members at [www.iww.org](http://www.iww.org), and will be sent (along with a *General Organization Bulletin* including all items submitted in time for consideration) to members in good standing according to GHQ records in mid-July.

## Midwest Wobfest

IWWs will converge on Minneapolis July 14-16 for a weekend of music, history and discussions. The keynote address will be delivered Saturday by Staughton Lynd, followed by a cultural extravaganza.

For details or to register, email [twincities@iww.org](mailto:twincities@iww.org) or phone 612-339-4418.

## Online campaigns: Survey shows promise and challenge

BY ERIC LEE

In May 2006 LabourStart asked its readers to participate in what was probably the first-ever global survey of trade unionists on the subject of online campaigning.

The survey was not in any sense of the word scientific. It was conducted only in English. To know about it, you had to be on LabourStart's mailing list. You would almost certainly have been someone who participated in online campaigns. It was hardly a representative group of trade unionists.

Nevertheless, there were some interesting – and mostly encouraging – results.

First of all, we were concerned about "campaign fatigue." With a dozen active campaigns running simultaneously, and barely a week going by without a global online campaign being launched, we were sure that people would tell us to be more selective. But fewer than 20 percent of the 1,441 participants in the survey said that such campaigns were taking place "too frequently." The vast majority were happy with the number of campaigns being waged. And one in six said we weren't running enough campaigns!

Within days of our announcing this, LabourStart launched several campaigns on the same day (at the request of a global union federation) and despite the survey results, there were some signs of "campaign fatigue" with fewer responses than expected. The nature of the campaigns themselves may have explained this – these were not necessarily the most exciting campaigns we'd ever launched. But the evidence is that while activists like to say they're ready to do more, people do reach a natural limit, do grow tired, and we need to take this into account when planning a campaigning strategy.

We asked people if they'd be more likely to respond to a campaign if it focuses on workers in their own country. To my surprise, more than 80 percent said no – in other words, they demonstrated a profoundly internationalist spirit. It seems like many people in our movement are now ready to embrace the old idea that "workers have no country" – or perhaps the new idea that in an increasingly globalized world, borders are becoming irrelevant.



I'm convinced that those surveyed are telling the truth, but they are probably the hard-core of people that respond almost always to our appeals to participate in online campaigns. I'm also convinced that they are unrepresentative of the union movement as a whole, which remains trapped in 20th century thinking about nation-states and national borders.

Our experience with online campaigning shows that two kinds of campaigns do really well: campaigns which are highly dramatic, with a real sense of urgency (such as union leaders being jailed or killed), or campaigns that take place in English-speaking countries. In other words, while there is core group of genuinely internationalist participants in campaigns, they are a minority. Most people continue to react more strongly to campaigns that are closer to home.

One of the things that we always thought worked well needed confirmation and got it when we asked about reporting on victories. Over 91 percent of those responding indicated that they felt encouraged to take part in more campaigns when we reported on successes. This seems obvious to experienced campaigners, and yet it does not always happen. Many campaigning organizations, and not only unions, seem to constantly harp on the themes of suffering, defeat and weakness, and ignore the victories, even the small ones, which mean so much.

It goes without saying that the victories we report on must be real ones. We should be able to point to real-world changes that have improved the lives of working people and in doing so, encourage more and more people to participate in our campaigns. This week, for example, we were able to announce that a giant transnational corporation had dropped its lawsuit against union activists in Thailand following a brief global online campaign. You read a story like that and it's got to whet your appetite to do more.

While the survey results seem to show a fairly large group of activists ready to do



## Bosses seek chemical gag rule

FROM CONFINED SPACES BLOG

U.S. Rep Charlie Norwood has proposed legislation that would ensure that chemical producers and users “can continue to expose workers and the public to deadly hazards, and do so without interference by public health authorities and without the threat of legal action by those injured by their negligence,” according to testimony by George Washington University professor David Michaels.

In the early 1970s when OSHA was created, the agency adopted existing industry consensus standards for chemical exposure.

These “Permissible Exposure Limits were OK for their day, but they were based on the science of the 1940s and 1950s before the long-term and cancer-causing effects of many chemicals were known. Unfortunately, most of these outdated PELs are still on the books. Over the past 35 years, OSHA has issued only about 30 new chemical standards, leaving workers without the protection of the latest scientific information on these chemicals, as well as the thousands of new chemicals introduced into the workplace since then.

The one bright spot in this travesty is OSHA’s Hazard Communication (a.k.a. Right to Know) Standard, which requires chemical manufacturers to develop Material Safety Data Sheets that list OSHA’s “Permissible Exposure Limits” in addition to any recommended exposure limits to the product from professional organizations with expertise in occupational safety and health. These include the highly respected National Toxicology Program and the International Agency for Research on Cancer. Employers need not comply with these standards, but workers must be trained on the information on the MSDS, including the recommended standards.

Companies that produce and use chemicals are not happy with this arrangement.

Having successfully bottled up OSHA’s standard-making process, they see these recommended standards as a threat. Although employers don’t have to comply with the standards on the MSDS (aside from OSHA’s antiquated PELs), they fear that if workers learn the latest health information about the chemicals they are being exposed to, they may demand that something be done about their exposures. Or workers who are damaged by the chemicals may sue the manufacturers. And we can’t have that!

Law firm Patton Boggs, which represents companies that would like to continue to poison workers unimpeded, asked for legislation prohibiting OSHA from requiring the inclusion such standards in MSDSs. And Congressman Norwood was only too happy to sponsor the misnamed Workplace Safety and Health Transparency Act (H.R. 5554).

Under Norwood’s bill, OSHA could only reference findings adopted by a nationally recognized standards-producing organization where all persons affected by the provisions have reached substantial agreement. Instead of relying on expert analysis of the available evidence, OSHA could only be use information from organizations that develop standards “by consensus” where everyone – including the impacted industries – agrees.

Hypocrisy Alert: The companies pushing Norwood’s bill are praising ANSI’s process which issues voluntary standards “according to strict procedures that are transparent, in open meetings, with a generous input and appeal process for all interested parties.” But some of you may remember an effort by the American National Standards Institute to develop an voluntary consensus ergonomics standard. That process took years of meetings by a large committee of academics, industry and labor representatives. But as the final ver-



sion was nearing completion in Fall 2003, the industry reps threatened to sue the National Safety Council, which was sponsoring the process. The industry’s threat worked. ANSI and the Safety Council caved in and the consensus ergonomics standard died.

At a hearing on the proposed legislation, professor Michaels noted that Norwood’s flacking posed a serious health danger to millions of workers. Norwood was so upset at the suggestion that he was doing the bidding of Patton Boggs that he interrupted Michaels’ testimony, accusing him of attacking his honor. But Michaels was right.

When an IARC expert panel concludes that a substance like silica, or beryllium, or hexavalent chromium are carcinogenic to humans, shouldn’t this information be provided to workers through a MSDS and the right-to-know protections afforded by the Hazard Communication standard?

## Smithfield Packing: Walking into the pit of Hell

Smithfield Packing says it will not appeal a federal appeals court ruling that the meat packer violated workers rights at its Tar Heel, North Carolina, plant during union organizing drives in 1994 and 1997. The ruling required Smithfield to reinstate 10 workers fired for union activity, and to post notices agreeing to follow labor law in the future.

Workers are routinely cut by the slashing knives that slice the pork from the bones. They are hurt sliding and falling on floors and stairs that are slick with blood, guts and a variety of fluids. They suffer repetitive motion injuries. The processing line on the kill floor moves hogs past the workers at the dizzying rate of one every three or four seconds.

Former Smithfield worker Edward Morrison told *New York Times* reporter Bob Herbert: “Going to work on the kill floor was like walking into the pit of hell. They have these fire chambers, big fires going, and this fierce boiling water solution. ... It’s so hot in there. And it’s dark and noisy, with the supervisors screaming... I don’t think the company cared. Their thing was just get that hog out the door by any means necessary.”

Despite these conditions, Smithfield has blocked the United Food and Commercial workers union from organizing the plants 5,500 workers by firing union activists, threatening to shut down the entire plant if the workers dared to organize and to have Latino workers deported, and having the plant’s private police beat up a worker on the day of the most recent NLRB election for engaging in union activities.

After Smithfield’s illegal conduct during the 1994 NLRB election, the company agreed to stop violating labor laws. Instead, the company stepped up its campaign of harassment of union supporters and brought in local police to add to the climate of fear.

The UFCW represents workers at several other Smithfield plants, covering about 40 percent of the company’s 51,000 workers.

## Industry Night in Boston

Boston GMB members leafletted workers in businesses along Centre Street in Jamaica Plain asking them to attend “Industry Night.” Modelled on the South Street Philadelphia organizing effort, the IWW invited workers to assemble in the Milky Way Lounge June 14 to discuss common concerns. Several Centre Street workers attended, and the branch intends to make this the first of several such events which will hopefully lay the foundation for improving conditions.

## Palestinian workers in crisis

In a new report, the International Labor Organization notes that nearly half of all Palestinians live in dire poverty, largely as a result of the effects of the Israeli occupation. Unemployment is rising, wages plummeting, and both sides live in fear. The ILO concludes with a call for increased freedom of movement, a resumption of dialogue, and a “lasting peace ... based upon social justice.”

## Anti-Sweatshop All Stars converge on Pittsburgh

BY KENNETH MILLER

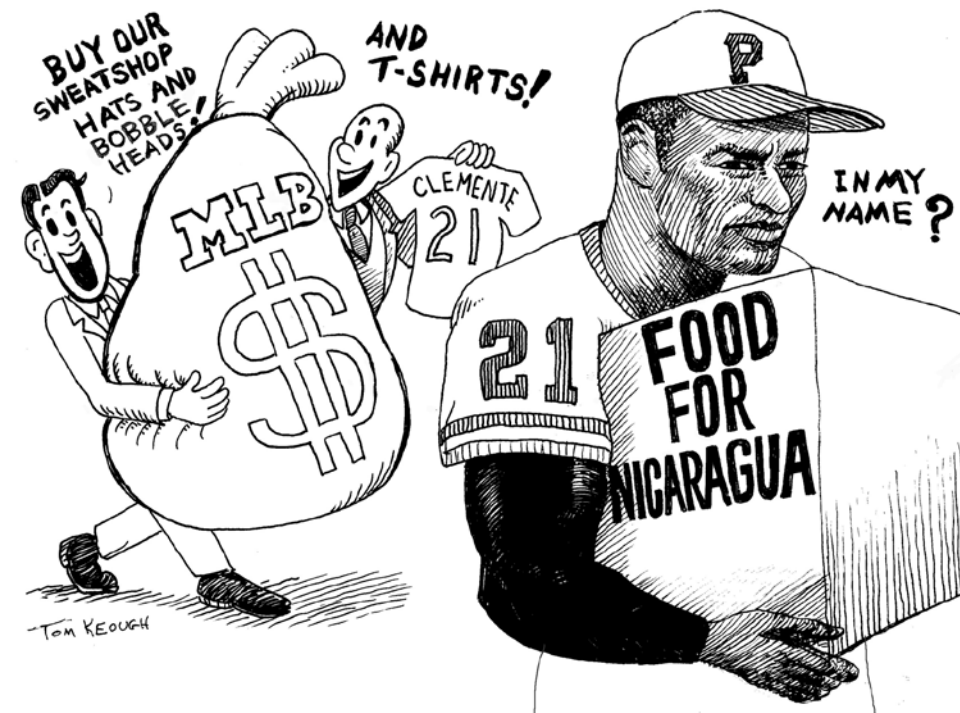
The workers who clean up Camden Yards in Baltimore are demanding a living wage and hosted a Freedom from Poverty March that ended at the office of Orioles owner Peter Angelos on June 24. These members of the United Workers Association are perfect examples of Anti Sweatshop All Stars – groups and individuals on the cutting edge of local and global worker solidarity movements. They know what is required for workers to win is only *fair play* and that this is a reasonable expectation of everyone involved with the sport of baseball.

When the Anti Sweatshop Pirates of Pittsburgh traveled to Baltimore for the Freedom from Poverty March we saw the sweatshop theme worked out visually in so many ways. There were large t-shirt signs in Spanish and English and a clothesline of Peter Angelo’s dirty laundry – poverty, workers rights violations, homelessness – featuring the Baltimore Orioles’ logo. Art was everywhere.

The Sweatshop Pirates of Pittsburgh were invited to sleep on comfortable cots in the offices of the United Workers Association. In the workroom, the uniforms of UWA hang on hooks along the wall. A big poster of Camden Yards filled with fans is marked “Welcome to the Sweatshop.” Everywhere UWA members are talking to one another about “Smart Strategies” for winning a living wage and they ask their guests lots of questions about their work and their commitment to Human Rights.

There were two kinds of songs at the Freedom from Poverty March. “Here I go to Angelos’ house to take back what he stole from me” was a hit that everyone sang. Two other songs that kept the crowd’s rapt attention were “Field of Schemes” and a song about the 1877 railroad strike.

The Anti Sweatshop Pirates of Pittsburgh have just begun to plan the food the Anti Sweatshop All Stars will have in Pittsburgh on July 10 and 11 – if our food is as tasty and served with as much heart at Freedom Corner as the food served to us in front of



the Health Care for the Homeless office we’ll have done well.

Members of the UWA have called a meeting of a Human Rights Baseball Alliance at the end of August in Baltimore. The proposal can be read at [HumanRightsBaseball.org](http://HumanRightsBaseball.org).

It will be the distinct pleasure of the Anti Sweatshop Pirates of Pittsburgh to make Peter Angelos *unwelcome* in the City of Champions during the 2006 All Star Game. July 7 – the beginning of “All Star Fan Fest.” The Anti Sweatshop Pirates will be showing up at the Pittsburgh Convention Center to deliver a load of Angelo’s dirty laundry and confront the Reebok/Adidas Fan Fest cosponsors about their scam apparel factory “monitoring program.” Direct Action Gets the Goods – Bucco! (Bucco is Pittsburgh slang for buccaneers).

Other Anti Sweatshop Activist All Stars include the Bias Busters of Kansas who bring the human rights precedents established in *Brown v Board of Education*, members of the Fort Wayne Workers Project with exciting experience standing up alongside immigrant

building trades workers and with innovative approaches to supporting workers (union and non union) with plant closing threats hanging over their heads, members of the Upstate NY IWW who talk about sweatshops with baseball fans at the Major League Sweatshop Hall of Fame in Cooperstown.

Pittsburghers have a lot to learn from each of these Anti Sweatshop All Stars and lots to share about the challenges and Civil Rights struggles here in Pittsburgh. Pittsburghers will have the opportunity to meet the anti sweatshop All Stars at and gear up for the Anti Sweatshop All Star Game at a dinner on July 10 hosted at the Friends Meetinghouse. We’d love for you to be an Anti Sweatshop All Star too. Contact [nosweatshopsbucco@yahoo.com](mailto:nosweatshopsbucco@yahoo.com) for more information.

The testimony of Pirates Sweatshop Workers from Haiti, Bangladesh and Honduras will be present at the 2006 All Star Game at PNC Park. It’s the Best Major League Sweatshop Education in America... and it’s up on the Jumbotron!

# Leveraging union power for social change: The Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas

BY PAUL BOCKING, IWW  
INTL. SOLIDARITY COMMISSION

Within Mexico's labour movement, as in most countries, unions with a powerful influence in their industry and strong internal democracy, are a rarity. The SME (Mexican Electrical Workers Union) is one such exception. Created in 1914 during the Mexican Revolution, the SME represents workers at Luz y Fuerza del Centro, a state-run utility providing electricity for the central region of the country, including Mexico City. During most of its 92 years it has managed to preserve its independence, democracy and militancy in a country where unions have historically been dominated and controlled by the state. The SME is currently a leading force in a nationwide social movement against privatization and cutbacks of public services, and the rollback of gains made by Mexican workers in decades past.

During the tail end of a year-long stay in Mexico City, I had the opportunity to meet with Fernando Amezcua Castillo, the SME's exterior secretary. As within the IWW, elections of SME officers occur frequently by direct and secret votes. Castillo and others on the 26-member central committee are elected for renewable two-year terms, with half elected each year. Positions for committees relating to specific workplaces, such as electrical substations or transmission line maintenance, are for year-long terms. As a result of these and other union events, whenever I walk past the SME's headquarters there's usually a large crowd of members milling around.

The SME exerts significant influence in Mexican society as a whole, and its power on the job is virtually unmatched in any other industrial sector. The SME counts roughly 40,000 active workers and 20,000 retirees who maintain a participating role in the life of the union. These members are present at all levels of production from the construction of new electrical facilities to their maintenance and the provision of customer services. With this strong presence by a democratic union, bringing the unionization rate of central Mexico's electrical generation industry to above 95 percent, workers have significant clout in negotiating with their bosses.

A few factors should be noted which go far to aid the SME's own reputation for militancy and independent action, which may make their model difficult to replicate in other industries. The nature of the job requires many highly skilled electrical workers who are difficult to replace, who in turn work in a strategic industry which the entire economy of central Mexico depends upon. Additionally, the SME has only one employer to negotiate with, it has won strict language limiting contracting out, and the industry itself is impossible to move.

As Castillo explains, the main problem SME members face is the government's indifference toward the utility. The SME voluntarily carries out extensive surveys of

## General strike against govt. control of unions

Unions representing Mexican miners, university staff and telephone workers have called for nationwide strikes June 28 – four days before presidential elections – to protest government interference in union affairs.

The National Mining and Metal Workers Union said unions representing 4 million workers have handed in strike notices to the Labor Department's arbitration board, and other unions are considering joining the action.

The strike is to demand that the government stay out of union affairs and abandon its effort to force Napoleon Gomez Urrutia out as leader of the miners union. The government is trying to impose its own president, leading to strikes at mines and steel works.



Light and Power, analyzing the present state of its generating and distribution capacities, and evaluating what the company will need in five or ten years in order to compensate for increased demand and aging equipment in need of replacement. The findings are then presented to management. According to Castillo, they'll say "good job" but often completely ignore the reports.

From an IWW perspective, this is evidence of yet another case in which the workers are more familiar with the operation of the company than management, and possess the capability to administer it better than the bosses. The contemporary well-known examples of enterprises taken over and run by the workers throughout Latin America can be applied wherever well-organized workers and a weak group of negligent bosses exist.

## The threat of privatization

In the case of Light and Power, the ultimate level of management beyond the company itself is the Mexican government, an institution in little danger of collapse. However it appears that the current neoliberal National Action Party (PAN) administration, like the old Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) before it, is deliberately starving Light and Power of funding in order to bring it to a deteriorated state where privatization would appear to offer better management. Since neoliberal policies began being enacted in Mexico in the mid-eighties, many state enterprises have been privatized, including the national railways, telephone company and banks. The government has long had its eyes on the electrical utilities, which multinationals including Enron have expressed interest in purchasing. With the infamous track record of Enron, it's clear that improved operations and service are not the rationale behind privatization.

However unlike many state companies that were successfully privatized, in the case of Light and Power the government faces a union determined to prevent this from occurring through militant mass mobilizations. In comparison, the national railway workers union, long controlled by an authoritarian leadership, welcomed privatization in 2001, though thousands of members soon lost their jobs when the new owners slashed services. The railway workers union is one of the principal pro-government and business-aligned unions which comprise the Congress of Labour (CT), representative of Mexico's conservative labour movement.

Despite its extreme contrasts to the railway union, the SME is also part of the CT, but as Castillo explains, the SME leads a democratic faction opposed to the ruling current led by the railway union bosses. It could also be inferred that the SME joined the CT when it was founded in 1966 in order to

provide a layer of protection and legitimacy at a time when openly autonomous unions like the Authentic Labor Front (FAT) faced steep government opposition. Castillo emphasizes that the main body of the SME's work in the national labour movement is not attempting to reform the heart of Mexico's bureaucratized unions, the CT; instead it devotes much of its energies to the Mexican Union Front (Frente Sindical Mexicano – FSM).

The SME was a leading force behind the founding of the FSM in 1998, with other major affiliates including the Independent Union of Workers at the Metropolitan Autonomous University (SITUAM) and the giant worker-run cooperative beverage manufacturer, Pascual. The FSM brought together several militant labour organizations at a time when the dominant position of the CT was becoming seriously undermined. The year before, several other major unions broke away from the CT to form the National Union of Workers (UNT), including the telecommunications and healthcare unions.

Asked what the differences are between the FSM and the UNT, both independent bodies sharply critical of the establishment unions, Fernando Castillo replied that a greater emphasis is placed on internal democracy, both within affiliates and within the FSM itself. "We don't have the same leaders for years and years, who hold multiple offices including as a deputy or senator (in the National Congress)." Hernandez Juarez, a major proponent of the UNT, has been its president since its founding. He has also directed the telecommunications union for over thirty years and was at one time a politician with the PRI.

Not opposed to pragmatism when it serves higher purposes, the SME and FSM work actively with the UNT on issues of broad concern such as fighting pro-boss reforms to federal labour law, demanding union autonomy from state intervention, and opposing privatization. To these ends, in 2004 the FSM and the UNT, with the participation of the democratic teachers' movement (the CNTE) and hundreds of urban and rural community and indigenous organizations, founded the Union, Farmer, Indigenous, Popular Social Front (FSCISP). In the past two years, this broad coalition has organized major public demonstrations and brief work stoppages to oppose the federal government's neoliberal agenda.

The SME and the FSM have also lent support to the radical project launched by the Zapatistas (EZLN) to coincide with the 2006 Federal elections. The "Other Campaign," a national movement to build a new grass roots anti-capitalist left in Mexico, has for the first time brought the EZLN into prolonged contact with Mexican unions. While the EZLN has made public criticisms of the

"new union bosses" like Hernandez Juarez, and of course are resolutely opposed to the old PRI-aligned CT unions, the Zapatistas have some contact with SME leaders. Many members of the SME's rank and file work on political projects aligned with the Other Campaign. Castillo sees the SME serving as an intermediary between groups involved in the Other Campaign and the unions affiliated with the UNT and the CT.

## Networking across borders

With a perspective far beyond "bread and butter trade unionism," the SME also enthusiastically engages with unions beyond Mexico's borders. The main focus of its international solidarity work is linking with other unions in the energy sector to share information on the industry and issue statements of support for each other's struggles. In particular, the SME is active in the Latin American and Caribbean Energy Workers' Forum. In May 2006, the SME hosted the network's second annual gathering, bringing together unionists from 15 countries in the region. The meeting issued a declaration denouncing the continued threat of imperialism in the form of U.S.-backed free trade agreements which attempt to force these countries to "open up" to multinationals interested in exploiting natural resources.

Through its work in this regional forum the SME also seeks to exchange information on work processes and technology within the energy sector in different countries and the wages and benefits obtained by its workers. The goal, according to Fernando Castillo, is for each union to use this information while negotiating contracts in order to raise the standards of energy workers throughout the region. Here the SME and its allies demonstrate the potential for leveraging workers' power in the age of globalized capital, through the combined strategies of industrial unionism and international solidarity. Beyond the special circumstances of the state-run electrical utility, the SME's high degree of shop floor power, active involvement in its country's social movements and cross-border networking, should be looked at by unions around the world as a model for increasing their members' collective strength.

## Oaxacan teachers maintain strike in face of vicious police attack

After repelling a massive police assault June 14, 70,000 teachers continue to occupy Oaxaca's central square. Attacking in the dead of night, thousands of police briefly seized the plaza where teachers had been camped for three weeks. Hours later, teachers reoccupied the Zócalo. While helicopters circled overhead, tens of thousands of demonstrators shouted "¡Ulises ya cayó!" (Ulises is out).

Weeks of massive demonstrations have closed the airport and elaborate public works projects widely believed to be a means of skimming funds by a government that claims it can not afford to support its schools.

## A revolution comes to us

BY GEORGE SALZMAN

Here we are, two old American farts eager to see the world get better but not able to do much about it. And suddenly a revolution comes to us, right here in Oaxaca City. Even before he was "elected" as governor, everyone knew that URO (Ulises Ruiz Ortiz) was filthy rich, as are all the top-level thieves in the PRI. During the 2004 campaign, large posters of his smug face beamed from every tree and post from Tuxtepec up over the Northern Sierras and down into the Central Valley to Oaxaca City. Taxis showed his face with promises of security and jobs.

But he's made a mess of it and now the

# Mexican teachers' struggle for better conditions inseparable from fight for social justice

BY PAUL BOCKING

Along a street in downtown Oaxaca City where labourers are replacing asphalt with classic colonial-style paving stones to augment the city's prospects as a picturesque tourist destination, the line of souvenir shops is interrupted by a building front unintended by the local chamber of commerce. A large, colourful banner (reproduced at right) covers the upper two stories with images of workers in struggle and slogans opposing neoliberal labour law reforms. This is the headquarters for the statewide Oaxacan section of the Mexican National Union of Education Workers (SNTE) and the National Coordination of Education Workers (CNTE).

The story of these two organizations is central to understanding the unfolding struggle in Mexico for democratic and militant unions, public resources, and an education serving the interests of communities marginalized by capitalism. For Mexico's education workers, the movement for better working conditions facilitated by an effective union is inseparable from struggles for social justice within their own communities.

## Assault on Mexico's schools

Since the early eighties, Mexico has been pulled into the neoliberal economic policies of capitalist globalization by a coalition of government technocrats, national and international business interest groups, the International Monetary Fund and the U.S. government. These policies increase investment opportunities for corporations while providing no protections for workers against the whims of transnational capital.

Mexican workers and poor communities have been forced to combat not only a violent and pro-employer government, but also authoritarian and corrupt union leaders backed by the state. As in many countries subjected to neoliberalism, a public sector constructed to serve the interest of the community is haunted by the specter of privatization.

Entering the offices of the SNTE-CNTE of Oaxaca, one immediately notices the bustle of activity inside. Members staff a table for teachers to sign up for the bus to May Day rallies in Mexico City. Others are working in offices for elementary, secondary and pre-university teachers, grievances and organizing.

In Mexico, teachers have traditionally served a role extending beyond the confines of the classroom. More than the front line of the national education system, in many cases

they have acted as community leaders and organizers. This legacy is especially strong in the rural and indigenous communities which populate much of Oaxaca and other southern states that have historically been deprived of state resources. In these communities many are forced to earn a living labouring in the U.S. or Canada as seasonal guest workers or undocumented immigrants.

Teachers have responded with campaigns to improve public education through increased funding and participation from parents and the community. However to meet these needs, teachers first fought for a union which represented their interests and values as workers in public education, rather than one loyal to the neoliberal dictates of the government. This context, and the ensuing struggle are documented in the outstanding 2005 documentary "Granito de Arena" (A Grain of Sand).

The SNTE represents the hundreds of thousands of teachers in Mexico's public elementary, secondary and preparatory schools. As one of Mexico's largest unions with over a million members, one might expect the SNTE to be a strong union, well equipped to defend its members' interests. But since its inception in the 1940s, the SNTE has primarily served the interests of the government, executing its policies in education and serving as a vote gathering machine for the ruling Institutional Party of the Revolution.

The SNTE's national leadership has been a succession of government-appointed autocrats, enjoying great personal privileges and not hesitating to use violence against dissidents. Meanwhile, teachers comprise one of the lowest paid groups of workers in Mexico, and the neoliberal program for education faced no response from the official union leaders. However, with their traditions of community organizing and activism continuing to the present day, teachers in the southern states of Mexico initiated an insurgent movement to transform their union into one run by its members.

## A union to serve its members and their communities

Sanson Jimenez Domiguez, a teacher and coordinator of SNTE-CNTE Oaxaca's radio programs, said that in 1979 teachers in the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas and Tabasco began organizing a movement that became known as the National Coordination of Education Workers. Despite government and official

intensify the pressure with blockades. The 5-kilometer "Long March" on June 7, started not from The Fountain of the Seven Regions within the city proper, where the first megamarch began June 2, but from the monument to Benito Juarez on the Pan-American Highway to allow for all the participating marchers, who ended up at and surrounding the Plaza de la Danza and the adjacent Oaxaca City Government Building.

A contingent paraded up Morales Street with their symbolic teaching supplies held high – carefully painted giant sharpened pencils, pens, chalk that I believe were in reality long poles of bamboo or other sturdy materials – just in case...

What is remarkable is how rapidly Ulises Ruiz Ortiz has managed to mobilize hatred across the whole citizenry. His notorious attack against *Noticias* a year ago gained him a steadfast and effective enemy. But targeting the largest-circulation daily in Oaxaca State is only one example of the "coups" he's pulled off to mobilize citizen contempt for his authoritarian regime.

The growing unity, perhaps alarming the political part of the ruling class, is gaining notice in the "mainstream" corporate press. At the moment the adrenaline level of the movement to remove Ulises is very high. We'll see what happens. ¡Adelante!



union repression, including the murder of some members, CNTE activists organized protests and occupations of education ministry and government offices across the country, culminating with a national strike in 1989.

With this victory, teachers won substantial raises for the first time. The old national president was forced to resign, but new president Elba Esther Gordillo promptly became an ally of the government, following in the footsteps of her predecessor by maintaining an undemocratic union and a multimillion dollar home in San Diego, California.

Despite the continuation of authoritarian, corrupt rule at the top levels of the national union, beginning in the eighties several state-level union sections, including in Oaxaca, achieved a substantial degree of freedom and united to become the SNTE-CNTE. These sections have been able to direct their own policies, as well as programs and negotiations relating to state-level education authorities, though they remain a part of the national union, to whom each member must still pay monthly dues, little of which is returned to the democratic union at the local level. This experience, something more than typical union reform but distinct from independent unionism, demonstrates some of the possibilities and difficulties of building democratic, militant unionism within a heavily unionized sector like education.

In CNTE sections of the SNTE, open elections for three-year terms are held for the state and local executive boards (in nationally controlled SNTE sections, elections don't normally occur). Every school is incorporated into a "delegation," in which teachers and education workers directly participate in the affairs of their union and resolve problems that arise on the job. Oaxaca's roughly 70,000 teachers send delegates to national CNTE conferences, and contribute to the CNTE bloc at the SNTE's congress.

With their high degree of autonomy from the national union, CNTE sections try to provide an alternative form of education to that issued by the federal government. Emphasis is placed on creating education models grounded in indigenous experience. Oaxacan teacher Sanson Jimenez Domiguez said classes are given in the community's language (i.e., not Spanish). Local culture and history are explored, with teachers making connections between the classroom and groups and activities in the larger community. A current CNTE project is the "march of the identities" celebrating Oaxaca's many diverse indigenous groups.

Through their teaching, CNTE members work to promote a more reflective analysis of society with their students. The CNTE is also active in fighting government schemes to increase corporate involvement in public education, whether through junk food vending machines, "educational" videos with

advertising, or corporate "sponsorships" of schools. Through their wider engagement within and outside their schools, the CNTE demonstrates a model for unionism that goes beyond wage and benefit issues and looks more deeply at their work, as well as the broader society.

## A national social movement

The CNTE's broader vision encompasses active participation in the social movements currently sweeping Mexico. The CNTE was a founding member of the Union, Farmer, Indigenous, Popular Social Front in 2004, a national coalition of leftwing unions, rural, community and student groups independent of the political parties.

Domiguez argues that the Front serves as an effective tool for coordinating actions against policies such as the proposed privatization of the electrical utilities and the national gasoline company, PEMEX. However, he continues, the Front lacks an alternative project for the nation. For this he looks to the "Other Campaign" of the Zapatistas.

In summer 2005, the Zapatista movement of Chiapas launched an initiative to help build a new anti-capitalist movement across Mexican civil society. The Zapatistas spent the subsequent months visiting every state in Mexico meeting with hundreds of local organizations. The SNTE-CNTE is not officially affiliated with the Other Campaign, as both organizations include members across the political spectrum, including supporters of the PRI and the centre-left PRD parties. The Other Campaign explicitly rejects working with electoral parties, and focuses its work on building autonomous social movements. However, many CNTE members work within this movement as Zapatista teachers.

Domiguez states that a major problem for Mexican public schools is underfunding, especially for those located in poor, rural indigenous areas, as in much of Oaxaca. Despite their rhetoric, little change has come from any of the major parties (PRI, PRD and the PAN, which now controls the federal government). Instead, they use public resources to promote their own interests. So many Mexicans are looking to build a national social movement against neoliberalism outside of the government system.

On May Day 2006, teachers from Oaxaca could be seen along with thousands of other members of the CNTE from southern and central Mexico, marching alongside the Zapatistas and workers from other sectors, in the massive annual International Workers' Day celebrations in Mexico City. Beyond a union reform movement, the CNTE continues to play a key role in the transformation of Mexico's education sector for the benefit of its members and the communities they serve, and in the grassroots mobilizations working for "another Mexico."



people are rising up, in fact, it seems that each day more and more groups within Oaxacan society are saying they agree with the *maestros* (teachers) who went on strike May 29 with relatively simple demands: adequate pay for themselves, government funding for required school uniforms (which are so expensive that many children stay home), decent schools and classroom supplies.

But URO wasn't one to seek peaceful resolution. He asked President Vicente Fox for federal backup and got 1,500 troops who were battle-trained a month ago in the vicious assault on San Salvador Atenco. And of course URO has his own corps of uniformed thugs. He gave the striking teachers an ultimatum to return to their classrooms by June 5.

The response – and no longer only by the 70,000 *maestros* – was to demand Ulises' removal from office (his destitution) and to



## Remembering the Coors strike

The '60s and '70s, as I experienced that period, turned out to be watermark years for the working class in the United States.

Unions were legalized by the Franklin Roosevelt regime in the '30s in order to save capitalism from itself. Corporate greed had created an economic disaster. Then, in the 1940s, World War Two made our factories hum producing war goods and left the labor force depleted as hundreds of thousands of young men and women went off to the war. Between 1940 and 1970, the energized new unions were tolerated by capitalism as a necessary evil; tolerated through the war due to the shortage of labor, and after the war, in order to re-tool for civilian production for the entire world. Most other nations had their means of production destroyed during the war and we had very little competition for a few decades which translated into large, easy profits for U.S. corporations.

Unions took advantage of this favorable climate to make huge economic gains for those privileged workers who were unionized. By 1970, union workers were living high on the hog compared to their recent past and became enamored of an illusion, invented by those who wanted to divide the working class – an illusion called the “middle class.”

For the first time, most union families could dream of sending their children to universities so they could escape the “working class” and allow less privileged workers to do all the manual and dangerous labor. Soon the only people who were proud to be called “working class” in my experience were intellectual leftists who had not punched a time clock very often in their lives. Could we have known in advance that the material comfort the bosses promised us would be hollow if we must trade our dignity, our self-respect, and any control over our lives for it?

When I came home from Korea in 1953, many workers had bought television sets, moved off their front porches, retreated into their living rooms and allowed this new phenomenon in their lives, corporate-controlled television, to shape their attitudes. Union membership began to fall during the '60s. In the early 1970s a majority of union members polled felt that the unions already had

too much power and by the mid-70s union membership was dropping dramatically. Supporting someone else's strike was rarely seriously considered. Union men were leaving the Democratic Party and beginning to vote more conservatively than their wealthy bosses. Only 60 years earlier, even the conservative A.F.L. talked of “class war against the capitalist bosses.” How soon we forget what happens when we aren't organized.

And as many union workers moved right, Joe Coors decided he could be most useful to his conservative values by providing millions of Coors profits to other conservatives who were trying to organize the extreme right, especially the Christian right, to come down out of the hills and take control of the government.

In 1973, he gave \$250,000 to Paul Weyrich to begin the Heritage Foundation, a right wing so-called think tank to compete with the more liberal Brookings Institution and Ford Foundation. For the most part, the Heritage Foundation is a propaganda mill rather than a think tank. Later, he gave another \$300,000 to build an office building for the Heritage Foundation. He thought that without real estate in Washington, Heritage would not be a permanent fixture. Joe promised \$2 million each year in order to keep it operating. Paul Weyrich, well known in conservative circles, played footsy with Nazis from Europe and Moonies from Asia. Weyrich was Colorado Republican Senator Gordon Allott's press secretary at the time. He would help Joe Coors found and/or support dozens more far-right organizations after Heritage.

Those of us watching the storm clouds build in the foothills to our west between the Coors family and the brewery workers did not realize at the time that we had front row center seats to a drama that would provide a view into the future of our class and our country for at least the next three decades. Back to Golden, Colorado, 1976.

Because of Dave Sickler's boundless energy and his increasing fury at the degrading treatment of Coors' employees, he had moved up quickly from shop steward of Local 366 to being hired by the AFL-CIO as business agent for the brewery workers. Ken DeBey



had sensed this quality in Dave when he talked him into running for shop steward over 10 years before.

I always felt Dave was a born Wobbly trying to fight an important battle confined somewhat by the straight jacket of business union bureaucracy. He got around it when he could. Dan Baum said in *Citizen Coors*, “Dave never missed a regional or national conference the way the porkchoppers did. He read labor history and followed labor news. He motivated the men in his local to spend their spare hours picketing stores in support of the United Farm Workers grape and lettuce boycotts. Lots of other business agents did likewise, but few spent their vacations in the dusty outback of Delano, California, working alongside Cesar Chavez and Dorothy Huerta, the way Sickler did. Sickler had found a kind of religion, as strong as any Coors, in his thirties and that religion was a workingman's fury – fury at how the drive for corporate profits chewed up ordinary people's lives, fury at the labor movement's ossification. Every worker's fight was Dave's fight.”

And when he spoke, Dave reminded me of Gene Debs. Tall, thin, leaning forward, finger in the air, and when he was told the by AFL-CIO to fire up his local to get a strike vote for their mid-contract wage re-opener, in early 1976, he did.

Coors had hired a weasel \$10,000-per-day lawyer named Erwin Lerten to negotiate and he had dared Local 366 to strike by refusing to negotiate and threatening to demand an open shop provision in the contract. Coors had removed 18 unions in eight years from their premises with this provision, or by calling for decertification elections.

The AFL-CIO wanted a strong strike vote to frighten Coors into negotiating, but the leadership of Local 366 didn't really want to strike. They would rather have waited for contract negotiations the following year. Coors was baiting them and the leadership of 366 knew it. But, as Sickler spoke to the membership and reminded them of the insulting lie detector tests (Are you homosexual? How often do you make love to your wife? Are you a radical? etc.), forced overtime, missed vacations, degrading strip searches and urine tests, required visits to the company psychologist, compulsory rotating shifts, the arrogant supervisors, John Birch hate propaganda in their paychecks, etc., Dave's anger rose as he spoke and his fury became the workers' fury. When he finished with “enough is enough,” they stood with a resounding “Strike! Strike! Strike!” Dave stepped down wondering, “Now what the hell have I done?”

At the next negotiation session Coors dared them to strike. Ken DeBey, Jim Silverthorn and Sickler tried to convince the membership that the timing was not right but Dave had done too good a job. Local 366 wanted revenge for all the insults they had endured. Ken DeBey said, “Hell, they are all adults. If they want this strike, let's strike. We may lose our union but if we keep giving in, we don't have a union anyway.”

Coors gave an immediate 7 percent pay raise to all who would cross the picket line and cut off the medical insurance of all who wouldn't. Coors was self-insured and could do that. They didn't give a damn about NLRB laws anyway. As an old friend Phil Goodstein said, “Coloradans don't need to be bought. They kowtow to rich people for free.”

Coors began hiring replacements immediately. The AFL/CIO didn't get strike pay going for the strikers' families for three weeks, nor did they get word out for two weeks to other unions to boycott Coors beer. Some workers began crossing right away. No one

had thought about the health insurance being cut off. Pickets braved icy January weather.

Meanwhile, the Coors brothers were managing to offend every minority in the USA and the boycott was taking off spontaneously. Corky Gonzales had started the boycott of Coors beer in Denver in 1966 because it gave Colorado Hispanics an easy way to show their anger with Coors' racist insults and hiring practices. Out of 4,500 workers in the plant, only nine had Hispanic surnames at that time.

In 1964, when the Civil Rights Act was before Congress, Bill Coors told employees in the company auditorium to write their congressmen to vote against the act. “If it passes,” he told them, “I'm going to have to fire 60 of you and hire 60 blacks.” That was a lie, of course, and Bill knew it. At a talk before a meeting of black and Hispanic businessmen in Denver Bill Coors told them that slave traders had done the blacks a favor. “The best thing they did for you was to drag you over here in chains.”

When anti-discrimination laws were passed, Coors had to hire women. Dave caught a foreman ordering a woman to lift a box heavier than she was. When Dave challenged him, he said, “We have to hire women, we don't have to keep them.” Bill, in an interview with *Life* magazine, said, “But a woman's place is in the beauty parlor.”

Bill Coors even managed to piss off farmers in southern Colorado when he refused to stop seeding the clouds, trying to bring water to his barley on a regular schedule. The Coors family was not obsessed with money or fame as other wealthy families might be. The Coors family's obsession is power; with an absolute need to control everything around them; in this case, the weather.

When all of these diverse groups heard about the brewery strike and AFL-CIO boycott they were galvanized and the Coors boycott took on a life of its own. The National Organization of Women, the NAACP, La Raza (the largest of many Hispanic organizations that joined the boycott), the National Education Association, United Farm Workers, Teamsters, most homosexual organizations, most of the left, and even southern Colorado farmers joined the AFL-CIO in this fight against Coors. It spread across the nation spontaneously.

The only way groups this diverse can work together is to understand that they have a common enemy, and that fighting together furnishes the best avenue to survival. The Coors brothers made that understanding easier, especially when Dave Sickler and Ken DeBey put all their energy into making sure that everyone was kept informed. This was beginning to look like class war to me. Corporations always understand that labor struggles are class war, but rarely do today's workers understand that they are fighting for their very survival. Workers come to the struggle unprepared. And so, rarely do they win. What was different this time?

Bill and Joe Coors, grandsons of Adolph Coors, were stunned by the criticism and the sudden drop in sales, but they refused to take the boycott seriously. They thought it would blow away with the first breeze, and were determined to run their business as they saw fit. It was a battle of principles. They set their feet.

*To be continued*

### Petition for Debs, Mother Jones postage stamps

The West Virginia Labor History Association has petitioned the U.S. Postal Service to create stamps in honor of Mother Jones and Eugene Debs – two labor leaders who participated in the IWW's founding convention.

Please write the postal service to support this petition: Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee, Stamp Development, U.S. Postal Service, 1735 North Lynn St. Room 5013, Arlington WV 22209-6432. Please send a copy to Sanford Berman, 4400 Morningside Rd., Edina MN 55416.



Most folks will thrust the events of several weeks ago onto the shelf of history, but these events are still shaping affairs in July and bear further scrutiny.

Hurrah for Los Angeles, that little burg never acknowledged by the press! This time around the huge Latino population really put L.A. on the map. Alerted by that draconian bill HR 4437, on March 25 hundreds of thousands of immigrant workers stepped into their marching shoes. They swelled the streets, packing 26 blocks with their outcry. Their mighty vibrancy resonated in Dallas, Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C. Their protest rose from half a million throats, outvoicing even New York. They wove the price of Mexico, Guatemala, Venezuela into banners swirling in the March wind, signifying a prolonged mass action.

The boom was lowered on April 19. The INS, with local police assistance, snatched up 11,087 undocumented immigrants in 26 states in the largest swoop ever in American history. Can we even be sure, in this hasty round-up often under cover of darkness, that some legal residents were not also swept up? And what does it say for family values to separate fathers and bread winners from their children, husbands from their wives?

What are the hard legal facts? Congress had not yet settled down to the business of

ironing out the most offensive bumps and kinks of the anti-immigrant bill, and already the enforcers were jumping the gun.

This May Day, Los Angeles again erupted into the streets with something over a half million protesters in two demonstrations, if we can believe the optimists.

As usual, undiscerning school officials harassed students or served up bland paprika instead of hot peppers, providing the kids with incentive to kick over the traces.

These buoyant young Latinos were dedicating the day to grassroots working class militancy. Walk out of school, walk off the job, Boycott. No buying. No selling. Boycott! Demonstrate the purchasing power of immigrants. Boycott!

Citywide school attendance dropped by 25 percent, and more than a fourth of business throughout the city (60 percent in some localities) closed their doors.

Another group with cautious middle-class perspective shunned Boycott as a term spelling trouble. They met at a different location, later in the day, and were joined by teachers, ministers, labor leaders. There, also, the turnout was huge.

The banners are now furled. It's time to sit back and take stock of what her have learned. Now the *real* grassroots work begins. But hey, don't put those banners in cold storage.



## Action against tip stealer challenged

BY MARK R. WOLFF

The National Lawyers Guild Labor and Employment Committee in New York City is inviting workers to a weekly protest outside Shelly's, where restaurant owner Sheldon Fireman has reportedly been stealing tips, paying less than minimum wage, and failing to promote people of color out of the kitchen into wait staff positions.

Fireman has retaliated against and fired workers who have attempted to organize with the Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC-NY), a worker's center for restaurant employees. On June 8, the Fireman Hospitality Group, the firm which manages Shelly's and other New York eateries including the Redeye Grill, accused ROC-NY of violating U.S. labor law with actions such as pickets, rallies and protests outside his restaurants.

Fireman called on the NLRB and the IRS to investigate ROC-NY for improperly using tax exempt funds and operating a competing business (the Center helped workers open a cooperatively owned restaurant). In a letter to the IRS Inspector General, Shelly F. accused the organization of advocacy that he claims violates its 501c(3) charitable status; claiming its direct action efforts fall outside the criteria for educational purposes.

The restaurant mogul also complained that the income of workers at the eateries picketed would be hurt because their operations would be interfered with, and said the pickets violated rules against distributing propaganda by making "unsubstantiated and

outrageous claims." And he complained that ROC-NY protests were not legally permitted because organizations such as the Union Theological Seminary obtained their permits "under the guise of a 'worship service.'"

The Fireman organization also listed in the letter organizations that fund ROC-NY, such as the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, American Red Cross, September 11 Fund, and the Lower East Side People's FCU, claiming that they too may be in violation of their charitable status by funding ROC-NY.

### Wild Oats workers win

Before Wild Oats Supermarkets opened in Westport, Conn., it sold a natural foods store, Food For Thought. Then Wild Oats located near the store, forcing Food For Thought, an organized workplace, out of business.

Eight employees, in a complaint filed by UFCW Local 371 with the NLRB in 2001, claimed they were refused consideration for employment at Wild Oats. UFCW also accused Wild Oats management of threatening to fire workers if they participated in union-related activities, even outside of the workplace and after the workday was over with.

The NLRB ruled on behalf of the employees. Wild Oats has paid out \$133,000 and is expected to pay another \$300,000 to compensate 35 other Food For Thought employees in lieu of the unfair labor practice ruling.

Six of the 35 employees now work for Wild Oats, and agreed not to dispute the

### VW workers defend 28.8-hour week

Volkswagen, Europe's biggest carmaker, has told investors it will boost the work week to 35 hours in six German factories where in 2004 it agreed to a 28.8-hour work week. Pay would not increase. The IG Metall union has rejected the demand, noting that VW also demands the right to eliminate as many as 20,000 of 100,000 jobs now in Germany.

ger hours, the unions say, the government should increase the minimum wage.

The National Labour Federation also condemned the legislation. Many workers are already required to work 10 or 12 hours a day, and the government does not enforce existing minimum wage laws.

### Pakistan: General strike called against 12-hour day

The All Pakistan Trade Union Federation said it would call a general strike if the government moves ahead with legislation to extend the legal work day from 8 to 12 hours, and allow employers to work women until 10 p.m.

Instead of making workers put in lon-



### Killed by 20-hour shifts

British distributor Produce Connection has been ordered to pay £54,000 after a worker died in a car crash returning home from his third consecutive 20-hour shift. He had worked 11 days straight without a break, and fell asleep while driving home.

education in institutions protected from police activity. Proposed legislation would limit free distribution of books, restrict transfers between colleges, and remove restrictions against police access to university grounds – ending the required negotiation with an "asylum committee" at each college.

### Comm. College of Allegheny violates teacher contract

Local 2067 of the American Federation of Teachers filed a grievance June 1 against the Community College of Allegheny County for violation of the teachers' contract. The administration failed to notify the AFT of plans to cut 42 jobs. According to the contract, the administration is required to negotiate college reorganization plans with faculty. The Allegheny County CC administration announced its plans to close the Bethel Park Center. Until 2007, non-credit courses are to be taught. Forty-nine part-time and no full-time faculty teach at Bethel Park.

### Glasgow strikers docked

Lecturers on strike at Glasgow University, members of the University and Colleges Union, were notified by the university principal that those who refuse to mark student exams will have 30 percent of their wages docked. At Glasgow Caledonian Univ. nearby, the administration said it would cut jobs to fund a 13.1% pay increase for lecturers.

### California adjunct faculty separating from full-timers

Adjunct faculty at Grossmont and Cuyamaca community colleges in Southern California filed a petition in May with the state labor relations board to decertify their present union and form a Part Time Faculty Association.

Part-timers dissatisfied with United Faculty, which represents 300 full-timers, claim a potential membership of 1,000 part-timers who would affiliate with the Community Colleges Association that has 42 chapters – part of the California Teachers Association.

United Faculty reps, however, call the severance petition a hostile takeover by the CTA, and blamed administrators for not accepting UF proposals in negotiations.

Part-time organizers cite under-representation in the UF leadership as a major complaint – only two of 20 seats on the steering committee, and eight at-large seats. Part-timers are paid at a meager hourly rate and have no health care. Many must work full-time elsewhere.

### Greek student occupations

According to Indymedia, on June 7 Greek students occupied 320 academic departments – affecting 75% of all the colleges in Greece. Students are confronting the conservative government which seeks to overturn constitutional guarantees such as a public, free

## War, protestors and the longshoremen

BY ERIC CHASE, OLYMPIA

Olympia, Washington, is once again in the international spotlight. Having been the focus of much recent media attention with stories of Rachel Corrie and Captain James Yee, the Olympia City Council's stand on making the capital city a nuclear free zone and uninviting the USS Olympia, a nuclear powered submarine, into the port to the recent Green Scare grand jury investigations into environmental direct action, Olympia seems to be a hot bed of opposition to U.S. foreign and domestic policy.

Most recently, Olympia has made international news with protests against the loading of military cargo in its relatively small port.

In the past few years, Olympia has witnessed increased use of its port to send military gear to the Iraq War. Much to the chagrin of many of the local residents, many of whom are vehemently opposed to the war or just don't particularly like armored military vehicles convoying through town, this capital city of a bit over 55,000 people has become an unwelcome staging ground for a war that many now realize is illegal and immoral.

The latest port protest resulted in the arrests of more than twenty people and the condemnation of several council members for being present at the demonstrations, one intervening when club-wielding sheriff's deputies went after onlookers and another, who trained as a nurse, administering first aid to those who had been pepper sprayed.

This war, this war against terrorism, this war in Iraq, this war in Afghanistan, this coming war in Iran, is only one symptom of a larger attack on basic human rights. We are seeing increased state, corporate and military power over the democratic process; labeling (and imprisonment) of critics as anti-patriotic, criminal or terrorist; normalization of state terror and torture; the legislation of social behaviors and beliefs at the highest levels; and the military taking over key industries in the name of national security.

The militarization of key industries can readily be seen when examining U.S. ports. In 2002, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union was engaged in contract negotiations with the Pacific Maritime Association, a conglomerate of multinational corporations that run the shipping of most west coast ports. The ILWU agreed to operate on a day-to-day contract while talks continued but instead the PMA locked them out.

While complaining that goods were rotting on the docks, the PMA crafted the news to interpret this as a strike by the ILWU when in fact the ILWU was willing to continue to work under the old contract so long as negotiations continued. Then the PMA, claiming to be victims of this fabricated strike, asked the Bush administration to step in. Under the Taft-Hartley Act, the Bush administration "forced" the Longshoremen back to work, and threatened to nationalize the ports and have the National Guard and the U.S. Navy scab on the ILWU.

[Today the ILWU is fighting plans to require everyone working in the ports to get government clearance – possibly blacklisting anyone with a criminal record, or a record of dissent against government policy.]

At the ILWU's 33rd Convention, the

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union that refused to load ships to Japan in solidarity with the people of China whom Japan attacked just prior to WW II, the union that refused to load military ships heading for Vietnam during our invasion of that country, the union that refused to load ships heading for apartheid South Africa, the union that shut down the ports for a day in solidarity with Mumia Abu-Jamal, the union that threatened to shut down the ports in solidarity with the prisoners in Seattle during the WTO protests, passed four resolutions condemning the Bush Administration and calling for the immediate end of the war Iraq.

So as an international union, the ILWU has come out against the war. Then why in Olympia was there friction between some of the protestors and the local union? On one level we have to acknowledge the local's democratic structure. Not all of the Olympia ILWU are against the war. While many are, they have a considerable number who have familial and political ties with nearby Fort Lewis. And the increased business from military shipments has meant more jobs for the port. Others will bring up the point that the federal government is more than willing to load those ships with the military and bypass the ILWU, so why shouldn't the Longshoremen get paid union wages for doing work that will get done anyways.

So what is the solution? Peace protestors want to stop shipments from going to the war machine, or at least make enough racket to be heard over the din of war drums. What does the ILWU want? Most certainly to survive...

Where is the common ground? Perhaps it is stopping not just the war in Iraq, but the larger war against poverty, immigrants, labor, the environment, and everything else this system is intent on destroying. Aside from passing resolutions, what will the ILWU (and other unions as well) do about this? To address this multifaceted war against democracy itself, we can't allow those shipments to continue nor can we allow the militarization of our ports. The peace and labor movements need to sit down and strategize, and not hurl insults at potential allies when we've got enough enemies at the gate.

### Wildcat upheld labour rights

New Brunswick dock workers have been nominated for Argentina's highest national honour, the Order of the Liberator San Martin, for refusing to load cargo to Argentina to protest the military dictatorship's imprisonment of some 30 unionists.

One hundred Saint John Longshoremen refused to load a ship headed to Argentina for several days in July 1979, picketing the port in defiance of their union's business agent.

The job action led Argentina's government to release several prisoners.

Retired longshoreman Jimmy Orr told the CBC the workers wanted to make a point. "We had a few dissenters but they were a distinct minority," Orr said. "The great majority of the [union] local was behind it." "This recognition is certainly something we'll all be proud of."

### Surveilling truckers

So-called Homeland Security inspectors have been using electronic surveillance devices to search the 5,000 trucks required to stop at the weigh station on Interstate 81 in Greene County in East Tennessee. Truck drivers complain of unnecessary long delays and say they can be pulled over at any time at random.



## Neither the “open shop” nor the dues check-off

BY NICK DRIEDGER, EDMONTON

To a business unionist, perhaps the strangest thing about the IWW is our opposition to the dues check-off. After all, many people in the labour movement consider the union shop along with the employer check-off to be the two of the greatest gains the labour movement has ever made. Typically, pro-employer groups try to undermine these two benefits by advocating an “open shop.”

The open shop is a strategy aimed at weakening unions, and creates an opportunity for some workers to get a free ride from the sacrifices of their fellow workers who chose to struggle for better working conditions. It is also a way of weakening unions by removing the steady, reliable income that a dues check-off provides.

But the dues check-off that comes with the union shop model also weakens unions. Below I would like to explain why.

### An accountable union

Dues check-off has a way of making unions less accountable to the rank and file. For instance, if collecting the dues and accounting for them are the responsibility of the workers themselves, corruption is much

more difficult. It is more difficult because of the greater number of people involved in the process: all the delegates who collect funds report at every meeting; the financial secretary reports all the finances every meeting; and since spending decisions are made at every meeting, few decisions are made without the direct involvement of the rank and file. In the event of a crooked delegate (which has been known to happen), all one needs to do is compare membership cards against delegate reports to see how much money is missing and who is responsible. Because of all of these checks and balances, corruption, while not impossible, is very difficult and not worth the effort.

Voluntary dues collection also puts the money directly into the hands of the organization of workers rather than passing through the bosses. This not only makes workers less reliant on their employer, it also helps workers see that the union is something that they are actively participating in, rather than just another deduction on their pay stubs.

Solidarity is like a muscle – if it is not exercised, it atrophies. By managing our own affairs (especially our finances), and not leaving them in the hands of specialists and paid

reps, members are kept in constant contact with each other. The more contact we have with each other, the easier it is for us to mobilize quickly around shared grievances.

The voluntary collection of dues cannot solve all our potential problems though – and it does have problems of its own. Collecting dues in a workplace where the workers have very little contact with each other can be burdensome. Also it can be tough for a small organization to do something like make the rent for an office without having a steady income to count on. There are some creative solutions that can minimize this problem, e.g., encouraging members to pay several months of dues in advance, or setting up voluntary bank withdrawals, with a delegate still meeting with members to make sure their cards are updated. A monthly withdrawal approach is used by many charities, NGOs, and political parties to raise funds. Such strategies could help smooth out union finances and make income a little more predictable.

Voluntary membership also means that sometimes numbers, and therefore finances, will fluctuate quite dramatically. Membership will often increase during times of job action, and decrease following resolution of

the issue. While we of course want to build the organization, we also want to avoid the path of the service model business unions, where bargaining units exist as legal entities long after any rank-and-file participation has stopped. This does not mean we shouldn't do our best to retain members, but coercing workers whose interest is flagging will not get us very far. Rather, we need to figure out ways to maintain militancy and to continue direct actions around new issues even as old ones have been resolved.

### Self-Management

It would be a mistake to think that voluntary dues collection is an archaic way of doing things or the result of an interest in historical reenactment. The reason that some unions (including the IWW) take this approach to dues collection is because of a belief in self-management. We believe that workers should use unions to better their lives, and that unions should not use workers to build up their organizations. After all, the division between leaders and the led is just as prevalent in the business unions as anywhere else.

If we are serious about building a better world within the shell of the old, managing our own finances is a first step.

## Book Review: Looking for a fair economy

REVIEW BY JON BEKKEN

Jared Bernstein, *All Together Now: Common Sense for a Fair Economy*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2006, 154 pages, \$12.

This slender volume challenges the “You're on your own” philosophy (abbreviated as YOYO throughout) that dominates U.S. politics today, instead arguing for a politics that recognizes our mutual interdependence and the impossibility of individual solutions to fundamental social problems.

Jared Bernstein is an economist with the Economic Policy Institute, a Washington, D.C., progressive think tank that receives a good chunk of its support from the labor movement. So it is hardly surprising that he views government policies with dismay (the cover describes him as “passionate,” but given the outrages it discusses *All Together Now* maintains a remarkably calm tone).

Bernstein focuses on how U.S. health care, poverty and retirement policies rely on market “solutions,” leaving people to bear these burdens on their own. He is distressed by economists' and politicians' “outright hos-

tility” toward government: “If you're running the shop, it's not that hard to prove ... that government is ineffective. You staff it with incompetents, slash its income, decry it from the bully pulpit, and sit back and watch your self-fulfilling prophecy come true.” (26)

This is the book's chief weakness. While it is indeed ironic, and for someone trying to promote progressive policies in Washington probably highly frustrating, to watch the polytricksters spend ever more money on corporate welfare, brutal wars, subsidies for millionaires and the like, a strategy that relies upon politicians to look after the interests of the vast majority is both short-sighted and wildly utopian. Bernstein notes that Democrats and Republicans share responsibility for the YOYO policies he deplores, but nonetheless closes his book with long quotes from two pro-corporate Democrats who have shown not the slightest interest in confronting our rulers and their vicious policies.

Bernstein does a much better job in setting out the problem. The economy is doing very well, as measured by traditional mea-

sures such as productivity and GDP growth, but growing numbers of Americans tell pollsters that things are getting worse.

The Bush administration is engaged in a major public relations push to persuade us that we're prosperous. It isn't so. Unemployment is up, particularly for better-educated workers, and Americans are carrying ever-greater debt as they struggle to survive. Median household income is up, slightly (it would be \$20,000 a year more if it had kept pace with productivity gains), but only because more household members are working longer hours – more than three months' full-time work per household, on average. Hourly compensation is down sharply from 1973 levels, when adjusted for inflation.

The only social solution on offer is “improving education” (by which the politicians mean more tests, less funding, and less effort to develop children's thinking skills). However, job growth is stronger for low-wage jobs seeking less-educated workers – high school drop-outs have seen their employment rate rise, while college graduates' rate is down.

Bernstein does a good job laying out the problem in straightforward prose that should be accessible to anyone interested in the state of our economy – and provides strong source notes that point to more detailed resources.

Halfway through, he turns to ways to address globalization, the health care crisis and income inequality. Bernstein calls for fair (not free) trade policies and a large-scale national project to generate new jobs such as the Apollo Alliance, a coalition of unions and environmentalists pursuing energy independence through conservation and renewable energy technology. He calls for gradually expanding Medicare to cover the entire population, which would save money while giving 46 million people health coverage. And, after presenting data documenting that productivity has risen sharply even as incomes have stagnated and the gap between the rich and the rest of us has grown ever more obscene, Bernstein calls for raising the minimum wage and forcing the Federal Reserve to pay as much attention to reducing unemployment as holding down inflation.

This is, by and large, a legislative program, and one that no one could believe stands a chance in the current congress (even though it would leave exploitation and the billionaires' hoarded wealth largely intact). So Bernstein has a chapter on how to talk to people who support current policies. If you dig below the surface, he argues, most people are uncomfortable with everyone's on their own policies; it's just that they don't see anyone offering alternatives.

Bernstein ends with praise for the likes of Senator Barack Obama, Democratic Leadership Committee chair Tom Vilsack (a colorless “centrist” who makes Clinton look like a populist), British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and the union-busting ACORN outfit.

But surely we can do better than that. If Bernstein is right, and I believe he is, that most people recognize that we have common interests and need to support each other if we are to have any kind of decent society, then we have the basis to talk about issues much more substantial than raising the minimum wage by 50 cents or even a couple of bucks an hour – a sum that would still leave its recipients unable to afford the basics of life.

Bernstein evidently believes that the ideas of the IWW Preamble are too radical for most people, but I suspect that our fellow workers are smarter and more ethical than they are given credit for, and that if we talk with them (rather than preach) about our common interests and shared concerns, that we will do better talking about solutions that actually address the fundamental problems we face, rather than trying to peddle reform nostrums no one could possibly believe could work.

## Can we afford the rich?

Britain's Office for National Statistics reports that the average gross income of the richest 20 percent of families, at £66,300, was 16 times that of the poorest fifth, who earned £4,300 on average. (The rich, of course, also have much more accumulated wealth to draw upon.)

In the United States the gap is much wider. The Economic Policy Institute reports that corporate CEOs earn 262 times the pay of the average worker, at almost \$11 million a year. That same CEO earns more before lunchtime on the very first day of work than a minimum wage worker earns all year.

This is not because CEOs are particularly good at running industry. The trade magazine *Automotive News* reports that chief executive officers of auto parts makers in U.S. bankruptcy court received annual salaries ranging from \$1.5 million to \$4.3 million a year, not including stock compensation, pension benefits, and bonuses promised but not yet paid out.

Evidently these bosses are being paid for their dedication to destroying workers' wages and conditions, since they have literally run “their” companies into the ground.

Even the boss press is getting worried. The June 25 *New York Times* reports that “the gap between the rich and the poor has recently been widening at an alarming rate. Today, more than 40 percent of total income is going to the wealthiest 10 percent, their biggest share of the nation's pie in at least 65 years.”

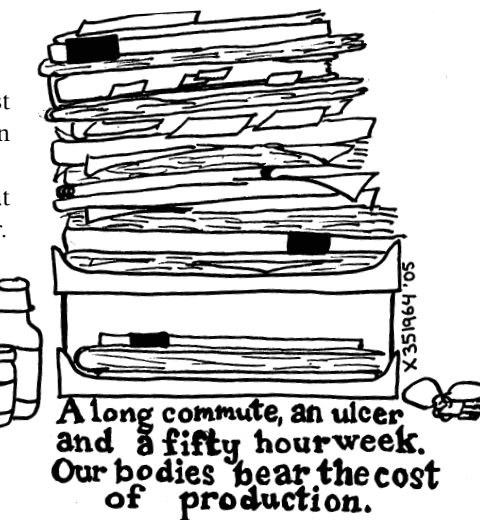
Public health researchers, the *Times*, notes, say growing inequality is leading to increased health problems; political scientists find that it encourages corruption and government policies to funnel ever more resources to the rich.

Similarly, the May 18 *Hartford Courant* says the big economic picture (stock market, GDP, profits, productivity, unemployment) looks good. “But the little picture – the one

that most of us look at every day – is something else. Housing, health care and gasoline prices are up. According to the federal government's own figures, median pay and benefits have not kept up with inflation... The poverty rate is up... Yes, worker productivity is up, but the money saved has gone to profits, not to wages.”

And even this phony prosperity that benefits only the rich is being paid for by running up the national debt, mortgaging houses to the hilt, maxing out our credit cards, and the like.

The government sees profits as a sign of prosperity – but in fact, they represent wealth stolen from those who do the world's productive labor. Gross Domestic Product rises faster if you bomb a city into rubble and



then rebuild it (making bombs, flying planes, clearing debris, burying the dead, long-term care for the wounded and construction all add to GDP) than if you use half the labor power to do something actually useful.

And unemployment is down only because so many people have given up on finding work, or have been forced into part-time jobs. A more realistic count would show one out of ten people who could work is jobless, even as average work hours continue to rise.

The Bloomberg business wire reports that inflation-adjusted income for the top 10 percent of U.S. households rose 2.3 percent during the first Bush term, and fell half a percent for everyone else. Little wonder that 70 percent of Americans tell pollsters that the country is on the wrong track.



## UK Wal-Mart operation faces national strike

Wal-Mart has announced it will ask the British courts to outlaw a strike at 20 distribution depots for the company's Asda supermarket chain. GMB members gave nine days' notice for the five day strike, set to begin June 30, to protest the company's refusal to recognize the union and negotiate an agreement, and to pay a previously agreed £300 per worker bonus for 2005.

The strike vote followed an industrial tribunal ruling ordering Wal-Mart to pay £850,000 for illegally interfering with workers' right to union representation.

Wal-Mart is reportedly hiring a scab force to maintain operations during the strike; the GMB has said it will mount mass picket lines in response to any effort to run the depots with scab labour.

Asda managers have introduced radio picking systems to pressure workers to up their daily pick rate from 1,100 boxes per person per shift (between 2 and 10 tons of product, depending on the weight of individual boxes) to 1,400. Dartford managers offered a crate of beer to any worker who picked 1,500 boxes. The union is concerned that workers could suffer muscular injuries, and that the radio devices could damage workers' hearing and lead to accidents.

GMB National Officer Jude Brimble said, "Asking ASDA workers ... to shift 1,400 boxes a day is equivalent of asking them to workout in a gym for eight hours a day, every working day. It is equivalent of ASDA asking their staff to work themselves to death."

## Palestinian unions in crisis

In a new report of the situation of Palestinian workers, the International Labor Organization notes that nearly half of all Palestinians live in dire poverty, largely as a result of the disruptive effects of the Israeli occupation. Unemployment is rising, wages plummeting, and both sides live in fear.

The ILO report concludes with a call for increased freedom of movement, a resumption of dialogue, and a "lasting peace ... based upon social justice."

On June 7 the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions issued a report on Israeli violations of Palestinian union rights. Israeli intelligence operations have kept Hasan Barghouti, director of the Democracy and Worker's Rights Center, and Shaher Sae'd, General Secretary of the Palestinian Federation of Trade Unions, from participating in union activities.

## General strike hits Guinea

A general strike over falling living standards paralysed Guinea June 8 despite the presence of armed riot police on the streets.

The strike was called by the two largest unions in the poverty-stricken West African country to protest deepening economic hardship and maladministration by a government they accused of being "blind to the systematic misery of the population."

Banks, businesses, schools and offices shut while streets were virtually deserted as a result of industrial action aimed at forcing a reduction in the price of fuels and the quadrupling of wages.

## Transit Union forced to sell headquarters to pay fine

The MTA spent about \$1 million hosting an annual transit rodeo, even while claiming it is too broke to afford the deal it reached with transit workers earlier this year. Instead, the transit authority has forced workers into binding arbitration, and Transit Workers Union officials seem too cowed by recent threats, fines and jail time to organize another strike to block the concessions.

The Transit Workers Union was forced to sell its headquarters building for \$60 million in order to cover a \$2.5 million fine from last year's three-day strike, and to keep the union solvent as it copes with management's decision to stop deducting union dues from workers' pay checks.

The TWU has a five-year lease to remain in the building, and will clear \$40.6 million after paying off the mortgage and lease.

## Mass evictions by corps in NYC

BY MARK R. WOLFF

According to a report aired on Democracy Now! June 2, the Pinnacle Group is attempting to push low-income and elderly tenants in Harlem and surrounding areas out of the rent-stabilized apartments it controls.

Juan Gonzalez, who has written for the *New York Daily News* on this issue, said in interview that the company has attempted to evict 5,000 through the borough housing courts, a fourth of Pinnacle's 20,000 tenants, using rent stabilization laws that allow double and triple rent increases when the 'rent-stabilized' apartments are remodeled. Apparently, the corporation has made fraudulent expenditures in accounting for these improvements, such as extraordinary amounts of paint for one occupancy, in order to challenge the tenancy of the elderly, immigrants and disabled in court.

Tenant organizers interviewed on the program cited Pinnacle Corp's plans to convert seven building to condominiums and sell them for exorbitant amounts well beyond affordability. At local community board hearings tenants testified to the convenient occurrence of fires in the buildings in question, especially where the Pinnacle Corp landlords were guilty of housing ordinance violations and had sought condo conversion. One tenant related how an entire building had been locked out after a fire. Another told of how her family coming home from work found eviction marshals at her door, as a result of claims by Pinnacle that she owed back rent. This worker was unable to return to her space for three weeks.

Gonzalez and Democracy Now! commentators noted the increasingly dire situation for workers who are forced to move into the city as a result of increasing transportation costs, and how national policy toward the elderly, disabled, and disadvantaged have increased their vulnerability to aggressive real estate developers.

## British NATFHE and Canadian CUPE vote to boycott Israel

MARK R. WOLFF

The National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education voted at its conference in Blackpool early in June to pass a resolution that its 67 thousand members break ties with Israeli professors and the institutions that haven't "disassociated" from "continuing Israeli apartheid policies." In Canada, the Ontario branch of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, which comprises almost half of the 210,000 member union, voted unanimously on May 27 at its annual convention, for a general economic boycott of Israel, along with divestment of its pension fund investments from Israel.

NAFHE and the Association of University Teachers [AUT] have merged into the UCU whose first annual conference is scheduled for a year from now. However, AUT, after a vote in favor of actions against Israeli policies of occupation in 2003 and resolutions in 2005, has changed its positions due to pressure from pro-Zionist faculty. AUT, has now released a statement against the NAFHE June 2005 resolution.

One of the main reasons British unions have given for breaking ties with Israeli academics is for their silence and complicity in helping the occupation.

When the AUT voted to boycott Israel academia in 2005, it more specifically targeted Haifa University and Bar-Ilan University. Bar Ilan, is located in the West Bank settlement of Ariel, 14km from the Green Line, that the Israeli government plans to use the separation wall to annex. A British classics professor refused to write for an Israeli academic journal accusing the Israeli government of expansionism and ethnic cleansing.

In an article in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*, Baruch Kimmerling, an Israeli sociologist at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, offered examples in Israeli academia of complicity in the occupation and oppression of Palestinians. One example, is the degree program at Hebrew University, for members of the General Security Service, or Shin Bet, whose covert intelligence, surveillance, and interrogation methods have terrorized Palestinians in the occupied territories for almost forty years.

The Shin Bet interrogation methods were banned by the Israeli Supreme Court in 1999, however, according to the Israeli human rights group, Public Committee Against Torture, the Shin Bet still continued to use torture throughout the second Intifada. Kimmerling names well known professors, such as Arnon Sofer, notorious for advocating ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, who was chair of the geography department of Haifa University. Sofer encouraged colleagues in the department and at other Israeli universities to post slogans brandishing his own style of racist epithets. Menachem Milson, is another example, dean of humanities at Hebrew University, he was head of the Israeli military government occupying the West Bank in the seventies and eighties where he organized Israeli-funded Palestinian militias to control the occupied territories.

## Workers under attack...

*continued from page 1*

practice cases, and workers wait a median 690 days from the filing of a charge until it is "resolved." The report does not generally address the quality of NLRB justice, but does criticize decisions allowing employers to reprimand a worker for using scrap paper to make a notice about a union meeting, allowing a California shopping mall to ban picketing despite state law protecting free speech rights at such locations, and further restricting the numbers of workers protected under labor law.

The ICFTU also criticized widespread interference in Venezuelan unions' internal affairs, and a requirement that unions provide names and addresses of all members to the government. Cuba continues to outlaw independent unions and strikes.

Across the region, thousands of workers have been fired for union activities, particularly in export processing zones. In Mexico, one worker was arrested and 163 fired by a garment maquiladora for protesting 12-hour days and fines that cut pay by an average of 40 percent. Teachers have been arrested for protesting government policies, and firings of union activists are increasingly common.

A series of protests by Iranian workers met with police torture and violence. The government blocked attempts to form a union by workers at the Khodro auto plant, producing for Renault, and many workers were dismissed for protesting against non-payment of wages. One worker was taken away by company security, viciously beaten, and reappeared several weeks later in Tehran's notorious Evin prison. In Iraq, 13 union representatives were killed as a direct result of their union activities, including Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions official Hadi Salih, who was brutally tortured and murdered by assassins who invaded his home on 4 January.

Migrant workers suffered extreme exploitation in several Middle East countries, where unions are often totally outlawed or subject to heavy legal restrictions. In the United Arab Emirates, 130 construction workers were violently attacked for striking, and some workers remained unpaid for up to 16 months.

In one of the worst incidents on the African continent, police in Djibouti shot one drivers' union member dead and wounded several others, while a strike of dock workers was met with 170 arrests and 70 dismissals. A draft labor code provides for the automatic suspension of any employee who takes up a union office. Zimbabwe's unions faced continued harassment by the government, with death threats against union leaders, arrests and detentions of union members, and several cases of physical violence against unionists.

Two workers were killed in April 2005 when a South African employer opened fire during a wage dispute; in September guards fired on striking farm workers, killing one. Police used rubber bullets and tear gas to crush protests by South African workers, while new laws in Nigeria placed heavy restrictions on the right to strike and banned unions for some workers. Ethiopian authorities targeted the journalists union for repression and maintained their ban on the teachers' union, several of whose members were detained and accused of high treason. In Sudan, Egypt and Libya, only state-controlled national union federations are permitted.

Coca Cola is a particularly ruthless violator of workers' rights across Central and Eastern Europe, countries where employers frequently refuse to transfer union dues deducted from wages to the union. Selective firings of union officials are also increasing.

The ICFTU reports violations of workers' rights in nearly every country. In Belgium, employers routinely seek injunctions barring picketing and other action to shut down struck facilities. In Bulgaria, strikes have been outlawed in the communication, energy and health care industries, and railway workers are required to keep at least half of trains running in the event of a strike. In England, several firms have set up company unions and hired U.S. union-busting consultants.

These three columns are overflow items that could not be fit in this issue because of space.

This spot is filled by announcements of materials available from the IWW literature department, which are produced separately and can not be produced here because of software incompatibility.

## U.S.-backed Iraqi government attacks oil workers union

The Iraqi regime has frozen all the bank accounts of the independent oil workers' union GUOE, both abroad and within Iraq. The action is part of a series of anti-union measures including the disbanding of the council of the lawyers' union, freezing the writers' union accounts and a September 2005 decree making all union activity illegal.

For that anti-union act the regime used the pretext of promising a future law to 'regulate' trade union organizations and their activities, and expanded former U.S. administrator Paul Bremer's decree outlawing union activity in the state sector.

Iraq's enormous oil wealth is being groomed for Production Sharing Agreements, which would transfer effective control over all aspects of oil policy, production and marketing to multinational oil companies.

The oil workers' union is one of the most effective opponents of this policy, organizing an anti-privatization conference last year and another one to come this year.

## Death squads in Costa Rica?

The offices of the Confederación de Trabajadores Rerum Novarum were attacked

May 24 and five union representatives held at gunpoint by assailants. One of the assailants placed his gun in the mouth of the CTRN Education Secretary.

The attackers ransacked the CTRN's office and searched through its filing cabinets, removing large amounts of paperwork as well as a computer. During the raid, the assailants were in communication by mobile phone with an unknown person, to whom they gave a running commentary of their actions.

The union has been fighting privatization of public telecommunications, utility, banking and other firms, and has helped mobilize resistance to ratification of the CAFTA free trade agreement.

## Mercadona supermarket strike enters fourth month

Workers at the logistics centre in Sant Sadurni d'Anoia of the Spanish supermarket chain Mercadona have entered the fourth month of their strike, organized by the anarcho-syndicalist union CNT.

Mercadona, whose slogan translates as "supermarkets of trust," is Spain's biggest supermarket chain, with 990 outlets and 54,000 workers. The company claims that all of its staff have permanent contracts.

## Bangladesh's NGWF secretary seeks bridge for garment worker justice

BY GREG GIORGIO

Amirul Haque Amin is General Secretary of the National Garment Workers Federation, one of Bangladesh's independent unions. Their struggle is monumental. Cultural and legal barriers to the existence of an organization where men and women fight together on the shop floor makes their presence a David and Goliath story.

Twenty thousand NGWF members are a tiny portion of the over two million garment workers who create 76 percent of the foreign trade revenue for the largely undeveloped Asian nation. Most organized garment workers belong to unions tied to political parties, co-opted by the state, or company unions. Amin knows the value of solidarity across borders and has a vision for his union and for workers around the world.

I met with Amirul Haque Amin in May at the Labor Notes Conference in Michigan and was acting as an official liaison for the IWW's International Solidarity Commission. The following is excerpted from that discussion.

*Could you give us a general overview of the origins and makeup of the NGWF?*

AHA: We started this federation in 1984. Presently our membership totals 20,000 plus, 15,000 are women workers and the rest are men.

*Would you explain how the NGWF relates to the rest of labor in Bangladesh?*

We are independent. This means we are independent from the political parties, independent from the state or government; we are independent from the employers. But we have a good relationship with the left-wing political parties. Not any specific party but many parties.

*How does this fit in with your approach to the workplace and other unions?*

You see, in the garment sector there are some other trade union federations and we share much of our work with some of the unions related to the employers or the political parties. There are many different trade union federations (tailors, textile workers, etc.) so, in many cases, we fight together and we always try to maintain close contact with them.

*What is the structure of the NGWF?*

The highest body of the union is the National Assembly. Every two years the members elect the central executive committee representatives who meet in Dhaka to make (policy) decisions. Under the central executive committee are the branch, local and factory committees. They also follow this type of regulation. We are trying. We cannot say that this is a 100% democratic trade union.

Almost all the time we try to take the decisions from our members. Those are the main guideposts of our federation.

*How would you describe NGWF tactics in response to problems you have with your employers?*

There are different types of actions. One might be for the whole sector, all the garment workers in Bangladesh. Another way if it is happening in a specific factory. In a specific factory dispute, if we see that the workers and our members have the sufficient strength, then many times we ... stop work. Sometimes we block management. Sometimes we blockade the owners association. Sometimes, even we block the labor ministry. But if the protest or demonstration involves the whole garment workers sector, then we organize toward the labor ministry or the government.

*Have there been extended strikes, long-term strikes in recent memory?*

Country wide, those (strikes) are not for a long time. On the second of March there was a strike for a half day... In factory level strikes, sometimes two days, three days even five days.

*Your union may be unique in its efforts to promote the rights of women in the workplace.*

Yes, we are trying to secure women workers' rights. Now in Bangladesh, 2 million garment workers are working in 4,000 factories. At least 85 percent are women. So this is our duty, how we can address women workers issues. If we do not address their demands, how will we get (maintain) our membership? This is one thing. You see women are facing a lot of problems within the society. In our federation we also address some of the social issues related to the women workers.

*You have produced an educational poster illustrating a number of people in a women's family and social circle and how they discourage her rights to self determination and participation in the union.*

That is the poster we have publicized for International Women's Day. In this poster we have tried to visualize the issues the women face from the employers, their co-workers, their trade union or even from their family.

*For women and for men, this all exists, even by your own description, within the context of some of the worst pay and working conditions in the world. Could you talk about what it's like for a garment worker in Bangladesh now?*

Garments are the biggest industrial sector in Bangladesh now. 76% of our total foreign money (comes from garment manufacturing). They (garment workers) are the lowest paid workers in the whole country. Many of the

In reality, employees have found that their jobs are not quite so secure once they start demanding their rights. The present conflict came to a head when workers at the logistics center, located in a town forty kilometers outside Barcelona, set up a CNT branch and began to organize for improved working conditions. Management's response was to refuse to recognize the CNT delegates, and then to sack three union members.

"We've been fighting the daily harassment of workers at Mercadona for a while," says Jose Uribe, secretary of the CNT section in the center. "A single striking worker can prepare and unload two tons of Mercadona merchandise in one day – that's why we need safety and hygiene. We have none... With these conditions, you could kill yourself any second. We also demand a paid half-hour lunch break. Mercadona doesn't pay breaks – not even lunch breaks."

On March 23rd the CNT called a 10-day strike. When management refused to negotiate, the strike was declared indefinite. The response has been heavy-handed. Pickets have been attacked by private security, as well as the police. "Mercadona's attitude is one of repression, fear and harassment," says Uribe. "They tried to bribe and blackmail us – insinuating deportation of the (mostly Latin

American) strikers and other such tactics."

Many workers came out in the first few days, and management bused in around 100 scabs to fill their places. As the strike has gone on, the numbers have been whittled down – there are now just twenty strikers. But, says Uribe, the full complement of 100 scabs has been kept on, enabling Mercadona to temporarily lower the workload.

"If they maintain it as high as it was before we began striking," he says, "the other workers will begin striking again."

The strikers are fighting a tough battle, with the Catalan government and the reformist UGT and CCOO trade unions lining up against them. (UGT representatives signed the agreement with management foregoing lunch pay.) But Mercadona is paying a heavy bill to maintain security guards and scabs, and the CNT is running an international campaign to keep the pressure on.

## Aussie union activity banned

Australia's RailCorp has told the Rail, Tram and Bus Union its members cannot take part in union activity even on days off. Industrial relations manager Mark Greenhill wrote the union a letter stating that employees needed written permission from RailCorp before doing any work for the union.



workers... are receiving \$12 per month.

*\$12 per month?*

\$12 per month. A majority of the workers are receiving \$20 to \$35 U.S. You see, even with this (the higher) salary, the workers cannot survive. And why is this happening? Our local management and local employers, they are exploiting the workers, that is one thing. Another thing is the multinational companies. They derive maximum benefit, maximum profit. But they are offering to our local government less and less slice of the goose and the local manufacturers are offering less and less salary to the workers. So I think the workers of the world should try to reach these multinational corporations and end this form of exploitation.

*What do you want to see the American consumers, unionists do to help your cause?*

We the workers... are highly exploited by the multinational companies. On the other hand, the consumers, they are also exploited by the multi-national company. In our own way, I think we should make a bridge between the producers – I mean the workers – and the consumers. This is one way. The other way (is for) workers in the developed countries, many of your workers... are working under the same multinational companies. This is our responsibility, how we can fight unitedly, how we can fight jointly.

The workers of the developed countries should support the workers of the undeveloped countries, they are fellow workers... So from the human point of view they should support each other. This is the fundamental question. One way is that if something happens in the production sector in Bangladesh, if we organize a struggle the workers in the U.S.A. can also organize some kind of protest or demonstration in support of our workers and our views. The same way if something happens in the developed country under the multinational company, if they organize some type of a struggle, they can also call us. Another way... is to support the workers in the undeveloped countries with material support, financial support. Our 20,000 workers (in the NGWF) cannot, when they receive \$12 in a month as a salary, from the union funds from our local resources, publicize and (carry out their struggles without help).

*How can the ISC of the IWW help you most directly?*

We need continuous support. But before

providing support, we need more (time to learn) about each other. So, I will be happy if someone from the IWW visits Bangladesh... [and] our members, shares their struggles, shares their information. I will go back to my union and convey the message of the IWW and offer of support. The NGWF should decide what specific cause of support (we might receive) because we have a lot of fighting, a lot of work.

*What is your view on the manufacturer's codes of conduct?*

The codes of conduct... [are] simply eyewash. If these companies... just followed the law of the land, local conventions or the international declaration of human rights, that's enough. Day by day this information (about labor law violations) is coming to consumers... and that is the reason that these companies are telling (everyone about their) codes of conduct. Nowhere are these codes of conduct being followed, especially on the production side.

*Consumers can reject the code of conduct violations, too.*

I think we should use all of the methods. If consumers can make more and more pressure toward the multinational companies... include the right to organize. Fires, factory collapses... the multinational companies should (address) building codes. Consumers should put more pressure on the implementation of the codes of conduct in their whole chain, in the supply side, in the production side. The consumers should ... pressure the multinational companies to improve the monitoring system. Consumers should (apply) more and more pressure.

*Do you want to build more links in the U.S. and elsewhere?*

We'll advance day by day because we should also know the character of that organization, what is their desire, what is their interest in this type of issue?

*You have relations with organizations in Europe?*

We have some good contacts, like with the Clean Clothes Campaign.

[The ISC of the IWW will continue to develop relations with the NGWF and plans are being developed for a visit to Bangladesh in the near future and other possible links and assistance. Hopefully, future projects that are mutually beneficial to both unions will result from these developments.]