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Truckers fuel actions build toward May Day

On April 1, troqueros from New Jersey rallied on the New Jersey turnpike. On April 3, Houston followed. Truck drivers across the country participated in scattered actions to protest rising diesel fuel prices.

The price of diesel across the United States has risen by 21 per cent since the end of December 2007, from \$3.35 to \$4.05 per gallon, according to the US Energy Information Administration. A month before the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, the price of diesel was \$1.71 per gallon.

Something is wrong when we have to choose between feeding our families or buying diesel, said truckers.

The message was heard, but it was not loud enough, according to organizers, including members of the IWW, of a new round of protests on April 30-May 1.

Truckers across the board had called for better organization and coordination. In response, truckers at the three largest ports in the United States —Newark on the Atlantic, Houston on the Gulf of Mexico and Los Angeles on the Pacific—

Continued on 4

Zimbabwe on the brink

Unions, opposition call for calm, election results

The party that has ruled Zimbabwe for 28 years lost control of parliament in the March 29 elections, but President Robert Mugabe, 84, is stubbornly clinging to power.

The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) opposition party, heavily backed by Zimbabwe's unions, has declared victory in the presidential elections.

In turn, Mugabe has called for a recount of the vote and floated the idea of a run-off election between him and his MDC rival, Morgan Tsvangirai, 56, a former miner and secretary general of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions.

Tsvangirai rejected the idea of a run-off vote, saying the government should release the results first, which he said would show that he won 50.3 per cent of the vote. That result would make a run-off ballot unnecessary.

Tsvangirai said that the only reason why he is not sitting in the president's office now is a select group of military officers who back Mugabe.

"There has been a *de facto* military coup in Zimbabwe against the will of the people," he told SW Radio Africa in an interview.

The presidential election results remain unknown. The electoral

commission was shut down on April 11 and the country's high court denied the MDC's petition to compel the commission to release the results of the presidential election.

Meanwhile, the Zimbabwean population is struggling to survive with worsening economic conditions, including 100,000 per cent inflation. More than seventy per cent of the population is unemployed. One-third of the 12 million population receives emergency food aid, according to the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO). Agricultural forecasts warn of drought for the staple maize crop in 2008.

The Zanu-PF-controlled government appears to be ignoring the election results and preparing the ground for repression.

Police have arrested at least two foreign journalists and ransacked opposition offices on April 3. Heavily armed police are deployed in the capital and other cities. Groups of self-proclaimed war veterans, some too young to have fought for independence in 1980, have marched through Harare streets while other gangs have attempted to evict some of the 300 remaining white farmers as well as black farmers suspected of backing the opposition.

The popular mood is explosive.

—Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions

Continued on 3



IWW member Jim Crutchfield addresses truckers at a New Jersey fuel strike

Cambodian garment strike win

By Erik Davis

The Free Trade Union of the Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia (FTU-WKC) won an important victory prior to this year's May Day celebrations. By threatening a nearly country-wide garment worker strike, the union forced the Garment Manufacturer's Association of Cambodia (GMAC), to acquiesce and offer a \$6 per month wage increase to workers.

The GMAC originally appeared inclined to weather the strike and made no concessions.

However, in the last few days before the strike was to begin, the alliance of government officials and factory owners began to crack. This is an election year and the prospect of massive strikes and street demonstrations worried officials more than the notion that their factory-owning friends might make slightly less money.

By March 26, Prime Minister Hun Sen had written a letter to four government ministries, asking them to 'con-

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Union rivalry leads to clash at Labor Notes conference

Tension between rival unions erupted at the Saturday night banquet of a rank-and-file labor conference near Detroit on April 12.

The *Labor Notes* "Rebuilding Labor's Power" annual conference in Dearborn, Michigan, was the scene of a confrontation between the California Nurses Association (CNA) and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

Witnesses said that more than 200 people dressed in purple SEIU shirts spilled out of five buses around 7:20 pm, and attempted to march through the lobby, into the banquet hall. The protesters waved purple hand-clapper noisemakers and placards saying that "Rose Anne is a rich union buster" and chanting "union-busting is disgusting."

A line of conference volunteers and participants formed to prevent the protesters from moving forward. A number of scuffles broke out along the line, resulting in a number of injuries. Retired auto worker Dianne Feeley was knocked to the ground, hitting a table as she fell and cutting her head. Witnesses reported seeing a woman and a man in

SEIU shirts on the ground outside. Paramedics and nurses on the scene treated the injured.


SEIU Michigan member, David Smith, reported being hit in the face. He later had a heart attack as he entered his bus. "The coroner confirmed that his death was not related to the blow he received at the protest," said a SEIU spokesperson, who confirmed that five SEIU protesters had reported minor injuries.

The struggle lasted for up to 10 minutes, before security and police officers separated the two sides. "We'll be back," the protesters chanted as they walked away. Police later returned to the foyer and checked under all of the literature tables, said one witness.

"It was a stunt that got out of hand," said IWW member Phillip Bailey, adding that it was "clear that the SEIU members didn't know what they were doing." He saw SEIU reform activists leafleting the protesters as they got back on their buses, some of whom said they were told they were coming to a union-busting conference.

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From the General Executive Board

Direct action empowers workers to get the goods

Regular readers of the *Industrial Worker* may have noticed that the April issue arrived somewhat later than usual. This is because concerns about an article on the arrest of Marie Mason led the General Executive Board to hold up the issue for several days while it decided how to respond. Ultimately, the Board decided to release the issue, and ask for this article to be published to clarify our union’s views.

When Marie, a member of the IWW, was arrested, the union’s General Defense Committee responded by issuing a statement of solidarity and an appeal for assistance.

However, the appeal was not consistent with the GDC’s bylaws and the sweeping character of the Committee’s statement was troubling to many members, particularly because the charges (simply put, arson and property destruction done to halt bio-engineering experiments and logging) are unrelated to union activity.

Additionally, our union opposes these tactics, which stem from isolation and powerlessness. Militance isn’t a substitute for the organization necessary to truly transform the world.

Many articles in this paper have helped to differentiate IWW-style direct action from the petitioning that many other unions use to try to win grievances. In a nutshell, we much prefer settling a problem at work ourselves, rather than imploring the boss or the government to do it for us. Too much of what is currently done in the name of “organizing” is really begging; which causes us to wonder, “Why beg, when we can just get it done?”

It’s a question of what works. Alienated actions like those described in the charges against Marie and her co-defendants may disrupt things in the short term, but they also don’t come from a place of power. They come from desperation. Moreover, they pose a real risk of danger to our fellow workers, create a climate of fear which the bosses and politicians can use to attack all who oppose them, and are unable to build a sustainable movement.

The IWW is founded upon the principle that by coming together and acting collectively, we as workers have the power to win our immediate grievances in the short-term, and ultimately create a world without exploiters.

Workers have used direct action to win shorter hours by simply stopping work at an agreed-upon time, adopting safe work practices in defiance of the boss’ orders or blocking unjust firings by refusing to work until the fellow worker was brought back on the job. By following regulations to the letter and similar actions, workers have won pay raises and resolved countless grievances.

IWW-organized maritime workers won good meals on Atlantic Coast ships by refusing to crew any ship that did not stock enough food necessary to follow a worker-planned menu.

Worker’s direct action can address larger social issues as well. Another article in last month’s issue described how British seafarers forced an end to dumping nuclear waste at sea by simply refusing to do it. In Australia, construction workers’ green bans forced developers to abandon several gentrification schemes, to re-route highways to protect natural habitat, and stopped a dam being built that would have flooded the Tasmanian National Park.

In Argentina, general strikes brought down a succession of governments trying to impose World Bank austerity

schemes, and workers seized abandoned factories and other businesses and began operating them themselves.

On May Day, West Coast dockworkers have announced they will shut down ports along the entire coast to protest the war in Iraq. If munitions and transport workers followed their example year-round, the machinery of war would quickly grind to a halt.

This is the IWW’s direct action: workers coming together to directly resolve the difficulties we face. It has many advantages, chief among them that it works.

When we organize ourselves to fix problems, we are proceeding from the root of our power as workers, and building a self-awareness of that power which equips us not simply to address our day-to-day grievances but to challenge the bosses’ control over our lives.

Direct action is the manifestation of our latent power as those who do the world’s work. Without it, we are mere wage slaves; through direct action, we can articulate a movement of hope, and we can get the goods.

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Diesel price rally hits New Jersey turnpike

By Jim Crutchfield, IWW NYC GMB

Members of the New York City IWW branch attended a rally on April 1 at a truck stop on the New Jersey Turnpike, where an estimated 300 drivers, mostly owner-operators, met to protest fuel price gouging and address the media.

The rally was part of a nationwide work stoppage by truckers that reportedly shut down several major ports on the East and West Coasts and turned highways around Chicago into parking lots.

Drivers from as far away as Florida were present at the New Jersey gathering, along with many drivers’ family members and other supporters.

Two Wobblies addressed the crowd and were warmly received. The union collected contact information from nearly 100 drivers, many of whom expressed great enthusiasm for continuing their agitation and solidifying their organization.

IWW members also helped pacify the New Jersey State Police, who had started the morning with a barrage of traffic tickets, but backed off and just watched the show after being reassured that the gathering would be peaceful and that drivers would obey parking and traffic regulations.

A number of other groups were also represented. Teamsters Local 805 President Sandy Pope offered help and support to the drivers, as well as a message of solidarity. Pope’s local has developed a close co-operative relationship with the NYC IWW. A congressional candidate from the Socialist Workers Party also addressed the crowd, and party activists were busy handing out newspapers to the crowd, as always.

The drivers’ main concern was the price of fuel, which is now about \$4 per gallon. The average 18-wheeler gets about five miles to the gallon, which independent drivers must pay for themselves.



Truckers at a New Jersey fuel rally on April 1 speak to the media.

Brokers, who assign loads to the drivers, charge shippers fuel surcharges, supposedly to cover the increase in fuel costs since the launch of the Iraq war.

However, these surcharges are rarely passed on to the drivers who actually pay for the fuel. Among the drivers’ demands was a rollback of fuel prices to pre-war

levels and a rebate of windfall profits in the form of subsidies for alternative fuels.

The growing unrest among truck drivers nation-wide presents a significant organizing opportunity for the IWW, but also many difficult challenges.

The success of any organizing campaign would depend on the organization’s ability to adapt its structure and administrative operations to the needs of a large number of highly mobile drivers, who are seldom able to meet in any one place and also on its ability to educate the drivers as to their true economic role in their industry.

Most owner-operators are led to believe they are independent business persons, and the individualist, entrepreneurial mentality may present a serious obstacle to collective action.

An effort last year to organize New Jersey port drivers disintegrated, in large part because of many drivers’ unwillingness to subordinate their individual interests to the welfare of the group. No formal campaign has yet been launched by the IWW, but wobblies expect to continue meeting with drivers and assist in future actions.

Zimbabwe on the brink

Continued from 1

Tsvangirai is urging his supporters to not be provoked into responding violently.

“We are cautioning against unnecessary or opportunistic reaction which can even lead to the Mugabe’s repression and what we are saying is that at the end of the day they should wait, they should be restraintful until the results is known.”

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions and the Congress of South African Trade Unions issued a joint statement echoing the call for calm.

“The ZCTU is urging all its members to remain calm, as the situation is a cliff-hanger and the popular mood is explosive. The ZCTU is however extremely concerned that in the context of divisions in the uniformed forces and even amongst the war veterans a possibility looms that people may lose patience. No one predicted the Rwanda and Kenya scenarios until they happened.”

Zimbabwean workers have been at the forefront of the campaign to oppose and unseat Mugabe and the Zanu-PF party. Hundreds have been arrested and beaten over the last five years.

Leicestershire IWW targets education

By The Lesta Crew

The Leicestershire, England, IWW branch now has job branches at four educational establishments (DMU, Leicester College, LEAC and Countesthorpe College). These branches consist of admin staff, teachers, support staff, technicians, librarians and cleaners. We also have plans to organise two more job branches soon at a call centre and a food processing factory.

The branch is doing day-to-day casework, as well, supporting members with grievances, disciplinaries and such like. We reinstated one sacked member at a call centre, got a bakery worker his job back, and went into a sweatshop clothing factory to successfully get hundreds of pounds in backpay for one of our members.

Women’s work underpaid in UK

The British Trades Union Congress (TUC) has released a report that highlights a culture of undervaluing women’s work in the United Kingdom.

The report, Closing the Gender Pay Gap, based on government statistics and other research, showed that the pay gap for women has narrowed slightly to 17.2 per cent for full-time workers and 35.6 per cent for part-time workers, but the persistence of the gap needs to be addressed.

“Undervaluation of women’s work, a persistent employment penalty for mothers, occupational gender segregation, and discriminatory treatment in the workplace continue to hamper efforts to further reduce the pay gap,” said a TUC statement.

The British pay gap is a third higher than the European Union average, which is the result of segregation into so-called women’s jobs and the onset of more domestic responsibilities than men.

The report connects the dots between the gender pay gap, child poverty, and the underuse of women’s abilities that is contributing to a serious skills shortage that costs the economy £11 billion a year.

There is a critical need to tackle the penalties paid by part-time workers and mothers as well as for widespread cultural change to challenge the undervaluation of women’s work, according to the report.

Preamble of the IWW

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

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

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

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

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

Join the IWW Today

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

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

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

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

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

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

Initiation is the same as one month’s dues. Our dues are calculated according to your income. If your monthly income is under \$1,000, dues are \$6 a month. If your monthly income is between \$1,000 - \$2,000, dues are \$12 a month. If your monthly income is over \$2,000 a month, dues are \$18 a month. Dues may vary outside of North America and in Regional Organizing Committees (Australia, British Isles, German Language Area).

☐ I affirm that I am a worker, and that I am not an employer.

☐ I agree to abide by the IWW constitution

☐ I will study its principles and acquaint myself with its purposes.



Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Post Code, Country: _____

Occupation: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Amount Enclosed: _____

Membership includes a subscription to the **Industrial Worker**.

Emotional pressure & organization building

By Nate Holdren

We want to do two things on the job at the same time: build organization and improve conditions. We could do these separately. For instance, we could build organization with no plan to improve conditions, like setting up a poker night or a knitting circle. Or we could try to improve conditions without building organization, by bribing or kissing up to the supervisor. Neither of those has much to do with being a union. Being in a union means the union builds organization by improving conditions or improves conditions by building organization.

To build organization and improve conditions we have to take actions on the job. Action is the oxygen of a union. We start off by taking the existing informal organization on the job —the current relationships and communication and level of agitation— and directing this against the boss in the form of an action.

In planning an action, pick an issue that people care about. Ask, “Who has the power to change this issue?” For instance, the nightshift supervisor in the receiving department at a factory probably can’t control the health insurance plan or introduce a new health plan. But they can control how they enforce policy on bathroom breaks and how respectfully they treat employees.

List the issues people want improved and who has control over each issue. List the lowest level boss with decision-making power on each issue. Generally speaking, the lower they are on the food-chain, the less it will take to make them do what you want. This is important ear-

ly on when you only have a small group. Five people in one department probably won’t win much for all 100 people in the plant. But they could win improvements in that department that can be used to recruit more people in order to take on bigger issues and do more outreach. That’s how you build organization.

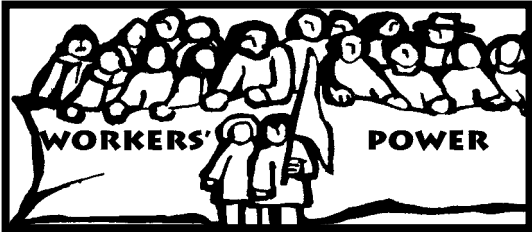
Early in a campaign it’s useful to focus on what could be called emotional actions or emotional pressure. Here’s

what I mean. Work is a headache for us, and to a lesser degree it’s a headache for our bosses. Generally it’s more of a headache for the boss the lower they are on the food-chain at work.

Emotional action is when we offer our boss a choice: make work less of a headache for us or we will make work more of a headache for you. This is easier the lower the level of the boss. If the boss is a supervisor we see everyday, then they will care more about our opinions and how we treat them.

When we collectively confront the boss about conditions that make our lives unpleasant, we give the boss an unpleasant experience. Think of this as sharing the wealth of misery that our jobs give us. By giving the boss a taste of their own medicine, making the boss take a helping of what our jobs force on us, we can start to force the boss to make small improvements on the job. That, in turn, helps us explain to our co-workers that we can improve our jobs by organizing together, and that if even more people get involved we can win even bigger improvements.

Send your submissions for “Workers Power” to forworkerspower@gmail.com.



Trucker fuel strikes build to May Day

Continued from 1

are planning to take coordinated action to shut down ports on the morning of April 30.

The organizers called “for all truck drivers across the nation to shut down to protest the high cost of diesel” and “to bring out the community to participate in May Day actions.” They are encouraging all truck drivers —intermodal, Over-The-Road (OTR), regional— to join them in letting government leaders know that something has got to be done. “Truck

drivers are the new slaves. Truckers are getting tired of working just to pay the cost of diesel,” said one poster advertising the action. The same poster said that actions will vary from a convoy on Washington, DC, to week-long shutdowns.

“Truck drivers realize that it doesn’t matter what race you are or where you’re from. Abuse from the brokers, dispatchers, and companies hurt everyone. Immigrants will be marching on May Day as well,” said the call.

Cambodian garment strike win

Continued from 1

sider’ the wage increase demand. That same night, GMAC broke ranks entirely. Not only did it agree to the wage request, they offered \$6, one dollar more than was demanded by the union.

The reasons for this extra dollar remain somewhat unclear. FTUWKC’s officials have not yet responded to the *Industrial Worker* for clarification.

The strike ended the same day that it began. As the strike was called off at the last minute, with so little time between the GMAC’s offer and the beginning of the long-scheduled strike, as many as 24 factories struck anyway. The president of the FTUWKC, Chea Mony, spent March 27 notifying workers to hold off on the strike, in response to the offer. While GMAC seized the opportunity to criticize the workers and the union, the agreement appears to remain in force.

Previously, the FTUWKC has coordinated large strikes to push for wage increases in 2004 and 2006, each time achieving an increase of US\$5 per month. In 2008, the demand was an

additional \$5 per month, bringing the monthly wage to \$55 without overtime. Other demands included an end to seniority wage increase caps, which previously were cut off after only five years.

Reports on the agreement continue to emerge, but it appears that Cambodian garment workers have achieved another crucial victory in the ongoing fight for control over work, profits, and wages. Cambodia’s garment industry is the sixth largest national garment exporter in the world, approximately 90 percent of which is shipped to the United States. Poverty, hunger, and oppression are the norm for many garment workers, as it is for Cambodians more generally. One-third of Cambodia’s 13 million people live on less than a dollar a day.

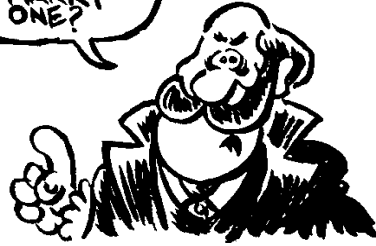
The FTUWKC was founded in 1999, and has established itself as the largest and most militant union in Cambodia. Three organizers from the union, including the union president and the presidents of two locals, have been assassinated since 2004.

WOMEN WORKERS' HISTORY

CHAPTER 13: BIRTH OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

WOMEN OF 140 YRS. AGO WERE DENIED MOST BASIC RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO VOTE. THEY HAD FEW PROPERTY RIGHTS; HUSBANDS COULD SPEND THEIR WAGES WITH LITTLE INTERFERENCE. AN INFLUENTIAL NEWSPAPER EDITOR EXPRESSED THE DOMINANT VIEW WHEN HE COMPARED WOMEN TO BLACKS; BOTH, HE WROTE, ARE BY THEIR NATURES “INFERIOR” AND “DOOMED TO SUBJECTION.”

WOULD YOU WANT YOUR BROTHER TO MARRY ONE?



WOMEN WERE NOT PREPARED TO BE “SUBMISSIVE.” ON JULY 19-20, 1847, SOME 250 GATHERED IN SENECA FALLS, NY TO ASSERT “THE SOCIAL, CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS RIGHTS OF WOMEN.” FOLLOWING SPEECHES BY LUCRETIA MOTT AND ELIZABETH CADY STANTON, THEY ADOPTED A “DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF SENTIMENTS,” WHICH CALLED FOR THE RIGHT OF WOMEN TO VOTE, EARN EQUAL WAGES AND CONTROL THEIR OWN PROPERTY.

SISTERS ARE DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES!!



MS. STANTON



MS. MOTT

13 YOUNG GLOVEMAKER, 19-YR.-OLD CHARLOTTE WOODWARD, EXPLAINED LATER WHY SHE ATTENDED THE SENECA FALLS CONFERENCE: “EVERY FIBER OF MY BEING REBELLED... ALL THE HOURS THAT I SAT AND SEWED GLOVES FOR A PITTANCE WHICH, AS IT WAS EARNED, COULD NEVER BE MINE. I WANTED TO WORK, BUT I WANTED TO CHOOSE MY TASK AND I WANTED TO COLLECT MY WAGES.”

RESOLUTIONS PASSED AT THE WOMAN'S RIGHTS CONVENTION HELD IN THIS VILLAGE ON THE 19TH AND 20TH INST.

Whereas, the great precept of nature is conceded to be “that man shall pursue his own true and substantial happiness;” Blackstone, in his commentaries, remarks, that this law of Nature being coeval with man, and dictated by God himself is, of kind, and superior in obligation to any other. It is binding over all the globe, in all countries, and at all times: no human laws are of any validity if contrary to this, and such of them as are valid, derive all their force, and all their validity, and all their authority, mediately and immediately from this original.

Therefore, Resolved, That such laws as conflict in any way, with the true and substantial happiness of women, are contrary to the laws of Nature, and of no va-

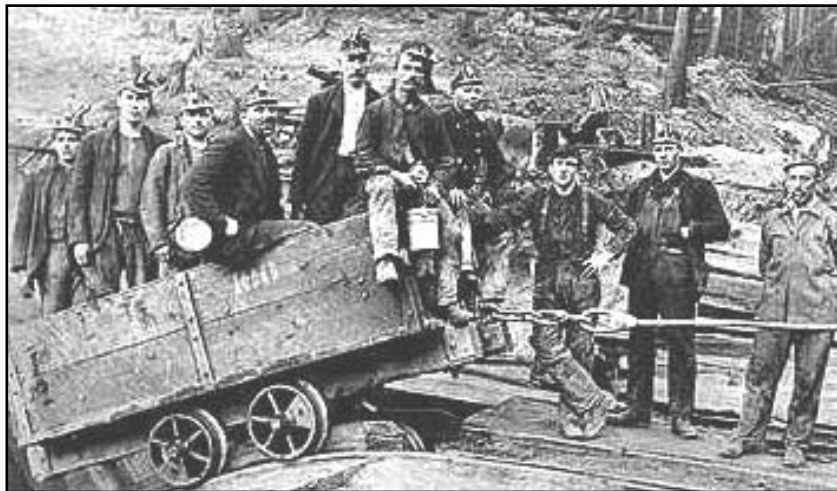
Resolved, That woman is man's equal, was intended to be so by her Creator, and the highest good of the race demands that she should be recognized as such.

Resolved, That the women of this country ought to be enlightened with regard to the laws under which they live, that they may no longer publish their degradation by declaring themselves satisfied with their present position, nor their ignorance by asserting they have all the rights they want.

Resolved, That inasmuch as man, while claiming for himself intellectual superiority, it does accord to woman, moral superiority, it is pre-eminently his duty to encourage her to speak and teach as she has opportunity in all religious assemblies.

Resolved, That the same amount of virtue, delicacy, and refinement of behavior, that is required of women in the social state, should be required of man, and the same transgressions should be visited with equal severity on both man and woman.

FRIDAY MAY 1st, 2009



CALLING FOR A NATION-WIDE GENERAL STRIKE
—CENTRAL ILLINOIS IWW GMB

Harvest Co-op fires 2 in Massachusetts

By Matthew Andrews

The Harvest Co-op likes to advertise itself as “your community market.” Technically, Harvest is owned by members who all have an equal share and vote in electing the board of directors. In practice, however, there is very little membership activity and the board of directors shields management from criticism.

Managers at Harvest come from a corporate background, and they operate accordingly. Wages are kept low.

Before our union campaign won a 50-cent raise, some workers had gone as long as six years without any increase. Employees frequently work six days a week to make up for short staffing. Failing equipment is not replaced, making work more difficult and costing Harvest money. Without clear disciplinary policies or a work evaluation process, management is free to play favorites. Some workers are privileged while most are neglected or subject to intimidation and firing.

Wasting food

Last summer, management at the Harvest store in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, distributed a memo to employees prohibiting our past practice of taking produce that cannot be sold, such as apples or peppers with bad spots. At the same time, management told Food Not Bombs they could no longer pick up spoiling produce for their Friday meals, which they serve to the homeless. Food that cannot be sold is thrown away.

Twenty-one employees signed a petition asking management to reverse this wasteful policy. Food Not Bombs sent a letter supporting us and proposed compromise policies to address everyone’s concerns. Management rejected the possibility of a compromise and insinuated that strict rules are necessary to prevent employees from stealing.

Sudden firing

For nearly four years, Diego Ben-cosme was a supervisor in the meat department. Diego took pride in his work. He boasted of working six days a week and never calling in sick. He also did maintenance work on the meat department refrigerators and other repair work around the store. On the wall inside the meat department, Diego posted monthly financial data from the Harvest, broken down by department and store. Once he showed me the numbers and explained how he had succeeded in improving profits and reducing losses for his department.

Although Diego was a supervisor with a mind for business, he also cared about the fair treatment of all employees at the Harvest. He was concerned by pay inequality, the erosion of employee benefits, and management’s failure to recognize and reward hard work.

Diego had begun to feel like a target because he spoke up about poor management practices. He had met with IWW IU 460 organizers the previous summer when management surprised workers with changes to our vacation benefits that cheated some senior employees out of time they had earned.

So his December 11, 2007 firing came as a surprise. The news spread quickly through the store, but nobody knew why. Diego explained to me that he went to a doctor’s appointment for about an hour on November 28 and had permission from manager Karla Andino and Manager of Operations Marc Cutler ahead of time and said good-bye when he left. He forgot to punch out on his time clock because he was in a rush. When management checked the payroll, management saw the mistake. This is a common mistake as workers often forget to type their code into the clock. Usually management fixed the error without any

disciplinary action. However, in Diego’s case, despite his years of service to the company, Harvest fired him.

Cleaning house?

Deon Furtick, a father of three, worked for four years in the deli. He had been talking to co-workers about organizing a union and attending meetings outside of work.



IWW supporters leaflet Massachusetts-based Harvest Coop during its board meeting to protest two firings, union-busting.

On January 19, Harvest fired Deon Furtick, for not punching out for his meal break on January 8. Deon had never punched out for his meal breaks and did not realize that not doing so put his job at risk. Cutler, who used to be our store manager and personally signed off on Deon’s hours every week, must have been aware of this. Harvest’s policy of not paying for meal breaks was not consistently enforced, and depended largely on the employee’s department. Other employees in this situation are simply spoken to by a supervisor or given a written warning. Deon was terminated without warning.

Deon had pressed for fair access to promotion in October 2007. Deon and three other employees approached Cutler about Deon not being given an interview for promotion to deli supervisor. Cutler refused to discuss the situation,

and did not return subsequent phone calls by Deon to set up a meeting.

In December, Deon complained about racism in the workplace, and requested a meeting with Sandra Andrew of Human Resources. Deon was told he would have to visit the Cambridge offices on his own time. As a father working two jobs, Deon could not promptly make the time to pursue his complaint. Then

Andrew went on vacation. A month after Deon had complained about racism, and two months after engaging in legally protected collective activity, Deon was terminated.

While Diego was talking to a lawyer and deciding if he wanted to fight for his job back, Deon came to the IWW and we immediately began to organize. Harvest members and IWW activists asked the board of directors to investigate and intervene.

After three weeks with no reply, we began passing out hundreds of flyers to customers outside the store asking them to telephone Cutler, who is the manager in charge of hiring and firing.

Articles about the case are beginning to appear in local newspapers such as *The Bridge* and *What’s Up/Spare Change*. Yet, when recently asked about Deon’s case, Cutler said it would be

“unprofessional” to re-hire him. We can only wonder what profession he thinks he’s in.

Management has thumbed their noses at members and workers by hiring a replacement for Deon, despite an ongoing investigation by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), and weekly protests in front of the store.

Management fought and lost a recent battle against Diego for unemployment benefits. Now Harvest will once again be paying lawyer’s fees to fight its own workers at the NLRB. If they lose this time, they may be required to reinstate Deon and Diego with back wages. Both Deon and Diego were excellent employees, yet because they stood up for themselves and others, management at Harvest sought any opportunity they could to fire them. Nothing could be further from the founding principles of the Harvest Co-op.

Harvest plays the victim

Chris Durkin, the Harvest’s Director of Membership and Community Relations, said that the Harvest is being “attacked” by union activists. He even compared the Harvest with Metro Lighting, a company in Berkeley, California, where workers who joined the IWW were locked out after protesting age discrimination and refusing to work under hazardous conditions.

It is becoming apparent that pride and power are more important to management at Harvest than justice for employees or even the financial welfare of Harvest. Shortly before the *Industrial Worker* went to print, management has put out a letter to all employees, stapled to our paychecks, red-baiting the IWW and advocating against joining a union. They ramble on about how the charges against them are untrue but do not offer an alternative perspective. Rather than intimidating workers, most say the letter just makes management look “stupid.”

With the assistance of the Boston branch of the IWW, we will be organizing a benefit show to support Deon while he waits for the NLRB and protest to take its course. Workers at the Harvest will continue to rely on community support as we build our organizing committee and reach out to all employees to talk about the benefits of organizing a union.

Union rivals clash at Labor Notes conference

Continued from 1

Union-busting?

The target of the protest was Rose Ann DeMoro, executive director of the California Nurses Association, who was scheduled to be the keynote speaker at the banquet. Prominent critic of SEIU president Andy Stern, Sal Rosselli, president of the 150,000 member United Healthcare Workers-West affiliate of the SEIU, had spoken on the “Democracy is Power” panel the night before.

DeMoro had cancelled her appearance on the Saturday morning, citing security concerns, related to alleged SEIU harassment of CNA staff. Conference organizers showed a short video of her speaking.

A confrontation at the conference had simmered from the start.

“The conference had an anti-Stern kind of feeling about it,” said Joshua Keough, a bicycle mechanic and IWW from Baltimore. SEIU staff disrupted healthcare sessions where there were speakers from the CNA or its national affiliate, the National Nurses Organizing Committee (NNOC).

A leaflet claiming DeMoro and her husband earned \$300,000 per year, printed with a union bug but otherwise anonymous, was distributed earlier at the conference, said IWW Les Caulford. He said that the leaflet was making an

odd claim as SEIU staff and president Andy Stern “don’t make chump change.”

CNNMoney.com reported that Stern earned \$230,000 in 2005.

Ides of March for labor unity

The SEIU alleged that the CNA and its national body, the National Nurses Organizing Committee, disrupted an Ohio organizing campaign involving 8,000 nurses and healthcare workers that was ready to have a union certification vote in March.

“The CNA flooded the state with hostile organizers and bombarded workers with wildly false and misleading leaflets and phone calls urging them to vote against the union,” said a SEIU media release. In turn, CNA alleged that the SEIU had cut a backroom deal with the formerly anti-union employer, Catholic Healthcare Partners, which itself filed for the union election, in order to install a “company union.”

The bitter dispute has spawned dueling web sites from SEIU, www.shame-oncna.com, and CNA, www.servingemployersinsteadofus.org.

The conflict between the two unions is spreading across the country. CNA has accused SEIU of harassing its organizers, while SEIU has said the CNA is “member poaching” in Texas and Nevada.

In a March 10 letter to the AFL-CIO’s executive council, the SEIU said, “the tactics being used by the CNA would make the Right-to-Work Committee proud.” The CNA is an affiliate of the AFL-CIO. SEIU broke from the AFL-CIO to form the Change to Win coalition in 2005.

In April, SEIU told its local unions to stop per capita payments to AFL-CIO Central Labor Councils, which coordinate local labor action and lobbying, “until the AFL-CIO takes action to stop the CNA’s shameful actions.”

In an April 15 statement, AFL-CIO president John Sweeney urged SEIU to end this pressure tactic.

“These organizations are not involved in the controversy in any way, and withholding resources at a time when we face the greatest political challenges in our history is a damaging affront to the determined, united efforts of the entire labor movement.” Sweeney added that CNA leaders were willing to meet with SEIU.

Dianne Feeley, while bruised from the *Labor Notes* protest, wants to see the dispute resolved.

“We have to find a way of de-escalating this. People have different strategies and opinions, but it should never come to violence.”

Analysis

No-match letters a wedge between workers

By x354189

Production continues unhindered at Ballco, a manufacturer of steel balls and valve components in Aurora, Illinois, United States.

Workers there transformed the company from a “pole barn in the middle of a corn field” in 1988 to a \$15 million dollar operation with 50 employees in 2005, according to *Transaction Magazine and Machinery Systems*. As a reward for their efforts, 33 of the company’s employees (many longtime employees) received the ultimate reward for their labor: they were fired.

Across the United States, similar scenarios are playing out in shops both large and small. At retail stores and restaurants, factories and warehouses, employers running the gamut from international corporations to local businesses are firing workers *en masse* due to the no-match letter program. These letters have been sent by the Social Security Administration (SSA) to employees since 1979, with the stated purpose to “obtain corrected information to help SSA identify the individual to whom the earnings belong so that the earnings can be posted to the individual’s earnings record.” In 1994, the agency began to send letters to every employer with 10 or more no-matches.

The letters are often used by employers as a pretext for replacing veteran workers with advanced pay scales, vacation days, and/or seniority with temporary workers. The Balco workers knew they were on the way out when their names were listed on a blackboard next to their replacement hire. Workers at both Balco and another company, Cygnus, were asked to train their replacements. Management in hundreds of companies has found the pretext of no-match letters convenient ways to fire all of the workers and then wash their hands with the soap of Legality.

US-born workers at such companies have displayed positive attitudes to the

removal of undocumented workers. Even in union shops, stewards and members alike affirm that the law must be enforced and that “the company had to do it.”

There are several problematic issues brought to the surface by such attitudes. First and foremost, the constructed legality of certain workers is being used

The superior status of “legal” workers is a wedge pounded into Labor.

to undermine working class solidarity. The superior status of “legal” workers is a wedge pounded into Labor in order to split its heart into separate chambers. Any successful union or organization of workers depends upon the equal participation and value of all. As the African-American abolitionist Frederick Douglass said, “They divide each to conquer both.”

Next, and of lesser importance, is the fact that companies do not have to fire no-match workers nor is it lawful. There are a number of statutes protecting the rights of workers on the job. For example, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act forbids selective enforcement of I-9 (Federal Employment Data) verification due to language or national origin. If the letters are used in the context of an organizing drive or an action for mutual aid, they are protected by Section 7(a) of the National Labor Relations Act.

Immigrant workers have realized their economic power through the *huelgas* (strikes) of 2006 and 2007. A new spirit has taken over workplaces around the nation. Instead of grinding away in desperation, shops were overcome with self-respect. The nerve of rebellion had been exposed through decades of toil. It

took only a minor congressional bill for a tremendous release of hope to spill forth and reclaim May Day.

Instead of accepting selective enforcement of work rules, abysmal treatment, and the injustices of racism, the immigrant worker has taught herself the dignity of laying down her tools, she has felt the pride of walking a picket, and she

has seen the power of millions in solidarity, marching upon the streets of every American city.

Homeland Security’s ‘Safe-Harbor’

In response to the immigrant worker’s movement, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has instituted a program known as the “Safe-Harbor” rule to enforce immigration laws through the SSA no-match program. Under this program, employers would have to verify employment eligibility through an electronic database and dismiss those who were determined ineligible to work in the US. If the DHS steps are not taken, employers have “constructive knowledge” of immigration violations and would be prosecuted by the agency.

This administrative edict marks the consolidation of the anti-immigrant backlash by the employing class.

When avenues of secure employment to undocumented immigrants have been cut off, the only avenues left are those of independent contracting and temporary work. In order to skirt minimum wage provisions, overtime pay laws, and safety standards, many employees are misclassified as independent contractors.

Independent contracting and temporary labor services provide a large pool of low-paid, casual labor that is exempt from most laws regarding worker’s rights. The DHS rule serves to increase the availability of temporary workers, while stripping these workers of rights that regular employment offers.

The DHS “Safe Harbor” rule has been placed on temporary hold. The AFL-CIO, National Immigration Law Center (NILC), and a number of other plaintiffs have secured an injunction against the DHS from prosecuting this rule until the issue is brought to court.

Yet, the no-match program continues. Another round of letters threatening eight million workers will arrive this spring.

Need help?

For more information on how to fight no-match firings, see the NILC’s no-match tool kit at www.nilc.org. For workers who are facing a no-match crisis, groups in Chicago have set up the no-match hotline at 1-888-DIGNIDAD (1-888-344-6432). It is supported by the United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers of America and staffed by Jorge Mújica, who was a major organizer for the immigration marches in Chicago.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS OF ART AND WRITING

The Women’s Caucus of the Industrial Workers of the World is currently seeking submissions for a publication of writing and art dealing with gender and sexuality issues. Submissions guidelines and deadlines are outlined below. Please direct any inquiries regarding the project or submissions requirements to whattheeff.booklet@gmail.com.

Submissions Deadline: October 1st, 2008

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- The final publication will include a majority of pieces by members of the IWW (a maximum of 10% of final content can be by non-members).
- **Content:** should address issues of gender and/or sexuality in the context of radical labour organizing, class struggle or direct action in the workplace.
- **Form:** art, poetry, interviews, reports, theory, plays, photos, historical research, narratives (fiction and non-fiction), anything else you can think of (try us, we’re flexible!).
- Submissions will be reviewed by the booklet sub-committee for appropriateness to our submission guidelines, we reserve the right to exclude any submission the sub-committee chooses; however, we will inform you of our decision and the reason for it.
- **Why?** To foster understanding throughout our union of people who might have less of a voice than others, to help create a community that recognizes oppression of women and queer folks through their stories, ideas and artwork, and to share our experiences with everyone so we can work toward stronger solutions.

WRITING GUIDELINES

- Submissions will be edited for spelling, grammar, length, and clarity. We will return the edited copy back to you electronically for final approval.
- Maximum submissions length: 2436 words (we’ll let 2500 slide!).
- Text submissions can be Word docs, .TXT, .RTF.
- Please include with your submission whether you want to use your name, remain anonymous, or use a pseudonym or your X-number.

ART GUIDELINES

- We would prefer art in electronic format, or mailed in hard copy to the Edmonton branch where they will be scanned.
- The booklet is currently being planned for printing on legal size paper in landscape format.
- All photos/artwork should be at least 300 DPI (not upsampled).
- Most graphic formats will be accepted, it would be appreciated if they were JPEG, TIFF, EPS, AI, FHx or PDF (if it doesn’t work we’ll let you know!).
- If any adjustments are made, we will return the edited copy back to you electronically for final approval.
- Please include with your submission whether you want to use your name, remain anonymous, or use a pseudonym or your X-number.

Please send electronic submissions by October 1st, 2008 to: whattheeff.booklet@gmail.com

Please send hard copy submissions to:
Industrial Workers of the World Edmonton General Membership Branch
Attn: Women’s Committee
PO Box 75175, Edmonton, AB, Canada T6E 6K1

Housing win for Seattle tenants

By Seattle Solidarity Network

On March 1, the IWW-affiliated Seattle Solidarity Network delegation presented a list of demands to a large property owner in north Seattle.

Several of her tenants were living with problems such as large holes in the walls and floors, lack of running water, and broken heating systems throughout the winter. Some had complained with no response. One of the most outspoken tenants, a young family with a three-year-old daughter, had recently been threatened with eviction.

Some of the neighbours had begun organizing with the network in January and drew up a list of specific demands. The delegation went to the landlord’s office at another of her properties, a motel just down the street. This was meant to be just an initial action that would have to be followed up, but then 23 people showed up.

People packed into the landlord’s small office, surprising customers and the landlord’s representative, who started yelling and said she would not accept the letter. We made her take two.

She immediately picked up the phone to tell her boss, and then called the police. As our group was leaving, she pointed at a tenant and told her: “You’re out!”

Police arrived an hour later to make a report, but didn’t pursue any charges.

That afternoon, we got word that someone’s broken heater had just been fixed. They now had proper heating for the first time in several months. At the same time, the manager began refusing

to accept rent money from one of the ‘troublemakers’. There were more signs that the landlord was looking for a way to get rid of them and we gathered phone numbers in order to respond quickly.

Despite the threat of eviction, residents kept insisting on their rights, and more of them started asking for repairs. The landlord and manager visited one of the more ‘troublesome’ tenants and scolded him, saying “You shouldn’t be talking to those people, they’re Communists!” Then they proceeded to fix his toilet.

Since the meeting, nearly all of the problems listed in the demands have been fixed. The landlord has had floors with holes repaired or replaced, restored heating, replaced rotten wood, installed smoke detectors, and fixed broken sinks and showers.

The few remaining repairs are now underway. There have been, so far, no more threats of eviction.

In April, the network won a tenant their deposit back after three months of non-payment.

How did this happen? All we can say is, it happened because some people showed they were ready to support each other. People got over their fear, started talking, and started to build up a little power. We stood together, and it looks like we scared them.

Contact the Seattle Solidarity Network at 206-350-8650, email info@seasol.net or visit our web sites www.seasol.net and www.seattleiww.net if you have a problem with your landlord.

OBITUARY

Robert “Bob” Wahlfeldt (1925-2008)

By David Johnson

It is with great sadness to report that one of the founding members of the Central Illinois IWW General Membership Branch, fellow worker Robert Wahlfeldt, died on March 26, 2008.

Wahlfeldt was born on June 7, 1925 in Danville, Illinois. When Wahlfeldt was 15 years old in 1940, he went west to South Dakota to work at his first job as a shepherd and wool tromper. It was there that he met an elderly Native American worker, who showed him the Ghost Dance (which was still illegal in 1940). This encounter had a lasting influence on his life for years to come.

At the age of 16, Wahlfeldt went to work on the Central and Eastern Railroad. In 1942, at the age of 17, he enlisted in the United States Navy and served in the South Pacific for the rest of World War II. During the war, he was a Navy rescue swimmer, saving the lives of numerous men; he received several medals and numerous commendations.

After the war, in 1946, Wahlfeldt took a job in a zinc smelting plant near Danville, Illinois, where he was a member of the Miners and Smelters Union (previously the Western Federation of Miners, Big Bill Haywood’s Union that helped found the IWW in 1905).

It was at this time that Wahlfeldt first met current and former members of the IWW, including fellow worker Herman Butcher, who had led a wild-cat strike during the war for improved wages and conditions. Knowing these people earned him the accusation of being “unpatriotic” and a “leftist extremist” by officials of the local Communist party.

By the time Wahlfeldt had joined the Miners and Smelters Union, no IWW branch existed in Central Illinois and

many IWW members were keeping a low profile due to the post-war repression of the Red Scare that had already started. Nevertheless, Butcher was a big influence in Wahlfeldt’s life.

During the Fifties, Wahlfeldt took a job at the local Veterans Administration Hospital as an electrical maintenance worker. A few years later he began working as a machinist, and became a member of the Machinist’s Union.

During the Sixties, Wahlfeldt took up the struggle of the Civil Rights Movement. He helped pressure the Danville Illinois City Council and the Mayor to appoint a city Civil Rights Commission, to investigate discrimination and police abuse. After the Klu Klux Klan had burned a cross in the yard of a local civil rights activist, Wahlfeldt organized a guard duty detail armed with shotguns, to protect the activist from further attacks.

During the Seventies, Wahlfeldt’s commitment to civil rights continued with involvement in the fight for Native American struggles and the American Indian Movement.

Throughout his working years, Wahlfeldt was very active in the Danville labor movement. He never hesitated to work on solidarity actions for local strikers and, at times, he publicly confronted corrupt union officials.

In 2004, Wahlfeldt moved to Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, throwing himself immediately into local anti-war, police abuse, and civil rights campaigns. In June 2006, Wahlfeldt met some IWW members in town who planned to form a branch. He approached me and I signed him up with the IWW. After the formalities, Wahlfeldt just stared at his new



Bob Wahlfeldt at the annual Unity March for Peace and Justice in Urbana, Illinois, on October 13, 2007.

union card, looked up at me and smiled, and stated that he had always wanted to be a wobbly, and that he was proud to finally have a Red Card. Two months later, Wahlfeldt, myself, and nine other fellow workers formed the Central Illinois IWW General Membership Branch.

Wahlfeldt stayed active in the branch as well as numerous other activist organizations in town.

His energy and enthusiasm was quite remarkable for a man in his eighties. He always had a cheerful smile and

encouraging words for his friends and comrades, and never backed down in a confrontation with the authorities or right-wing extremists. Though only a member of the IWW for a short time, Bob was always a Wobbly, both in his heart and in the way he lived his life. He told me once that he thought the IWW was the last hope of the American labor movement. His personal advice to me and many others was “just be yourself”, advice that both Wahlfeldt and the IWW have practiced with great success.

Review

Highlighting globalized capitalist blight

Paul Mason, *Live Working or Die Fighting: How the working class went global*, Harvill Secker, 2007, 320 pages, paperback, \$25.

By Daniel Read

This book’s title, *Live Working or Die Fighting*, first appeared on the banners of French textile workers in 1830, whose struggles against the rising power of the bourgeoisie became known worldwide.

But this book is no mere recollection of labor history depicting events that are now irrelevant. Each chapter opens with an example of the modern struggle, whether it is immigrant laborers in mainland Britain fighting for a betterment of working conditions or auto-workers in the factories of India resisting police violence. These struggles are then compared and contrasted with events that are often frighteningly alike, except they took place in the 19th century.

Indeed, this theme of contrast and comparison is what makes the book such an original read. It is free of jargon and has a highly accessible style that conveys to the reader the relevance of modern labor issues, something that today’s establishment would rather sweep away.

However, the author often appears hesitant to draw clear political conclusions to the militant and class conscious struggles he writes about.

Mason appears to be assuming that the high living standard enjoyed by the western working class is due to trade unionism alone. He does not mention the impact of imperialism and the parasitic relationship the West has had with the world nor the undeniable link between the West’s wealth and the poverty of the ex-colonial world.

For example, there is a detailed and inspirational account of the Paris

Commune, an event widely hailed by the international workers’ movement as an example of the proletariat placing the question of power firmly on the agenda. However, Mason draws few conclusions of his own, avoiding the important questions of revolution and class politics.

Professionally, Mason is the BBC Newsnight’s business and industrial correspondent. To be fair, for him to write a book openly committed to radical politics as a guide towards the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of socialism would be career suicide.

But if Mason is a closet revolutionary, it must be a pretty large closet. Throughout the book, his use of the word “socialism” appears to mean some brand of social democratic reformism, while “communism” refers to the state capitalist disaster zones of the former USSR and China. It implies a certain amount of confusion about Marxist theory that seems to me to lead him to reject Marxist theory altogether, which explains its absence in the book.

For Mason, it is almost as if Trade Unionism is seen as the ‘be all and end all’ to working class life, with workers parties remaining notably absent from Mason’s own elaborations on the nature of 21st century capitalism.

Despite these problems, the book is deeply insightful and original for important reasons. Every smug Blairite or even smugger Tory will try to tell you that the miserable conditions of the 19th century are well and truly in the past. Even worse, they will often attempt to pat themselves on the back regarding the modern British working class’ comparatively comfortable position compared to the hellish days of the early factory system.

Unfortunately, what they ignore or attempt to brush over is the replication

of such social blight over vast tracts of the globe, something which this book does a fantastic job of highlighting.

For instance, Bolivian miners today work in an environment that would not prove out of place in Engel’s own *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. Working with safety equipment that usually consists of little more than a rope and perhaps some hand holds found naturally in a vertical mine shaft, their daily lives inside dank and potentially dangerous tunnels is well catalogued in the book.

Die we may, we are not afraid

Rashid Ali, director; Maribu pache Daribu nahi; Hindi, Urdu, Oriya with English subtitles, 43 minutes.

Maribu Pache Daribu Nahi (Die we may, we are not afraid!) explores the roots of resistance and struggle in the eastern coastal state of Orissa, India.

The Kalinga Nagar area of Orissa is the site of an ongoing land dispute between rural tribal peoples and the Indian conglomerate, Tata Steel, which had acquired land in 2005 from state officials to build a new steel factory and hospital. Tribal peoples known as *adivasis*, objected, saying they traditionally owned the land. They formed their own organization, Visthapan Virodhi Janamanch, to fight the development.

In January 2008, hundreds of women and men demolished the boundary walls of Tata Steel’s hospital project, near the village of Maniapatana. It was the second attempt by the Janamanch to stop the project and reclaim their land.

The conflict over land had turned bloody in January 2006, when police responded to arrows with bullets. At least 12 tribals and one policeman died in the clashes, with more than 20 others in-

Mason’s greatest asset, aside from his lucid style, is his consistent ability to highlight the fact that low wages and dangerous working conditions are far from being things of the past. They are still with us, still relevant and still in need of correction.

Hopefully, the potential communards of the 21st century Chinese sweatshops and elsewhere will prove to be far less timid than Mason when it comes to gaining a political perspective of their own.

jured. In response, the protesters blockaded roads for more than 14 months.

Beyond this struggle, this film is about how the *adivasi* people are engaging and disengaging with an India set on development and the accumulation practices of global capital. The story looks at how the 100-year-old Tata company has negotiated with colonial and post-colonial India, starting with the so-called Socialist regime of India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and ending with liberalization that resulted in the struggle of *adivasis* against aluminium giants in Kashipur.

The shift in India from a mixed economy to neoliberalism is more than an asymmetrical exercise of power. It also reveals the struggle and resistance put up by the people against the politics of appropriation.

The film is about the holy grail of profits and development and the struggle of the marginalized, with a special focus on Orissa. To obtain a copy of the film, email creative.rashid@gmail.com or sisypus@riseup.net or call (1)813-774-6619.

With files from the IW.

Zanón workers took union, before factory

Continued from 12

to 15 countries and became an important economic motor for the region. The workers were well-paid and came to occupy a special place among the working class of Neuquén province: they could skip lines at stores, easily access bank credit and were treated with a lot of respect.

Though working at Zanón was desirable and paid well, working conditions were less than stellar. Workers were highly controlled through, among other methods, colour-coded uniforms that kept workers restricted to only the section they worked in. The company also viewed workers as a disposable commodity: there was, on average one death and about 30 major injuries each year.

The union that represents workers at Zanón is a provincial union that also represents the other four ceramic factories in Neuquén. Zanón is by far the biggest factory of the four and comprises the vast majority of the union’s members.

From its inception, the union was worse than complicit with the boss. According to some workers, the ceramics union of Neuquén was a top heavy, bureaucratic entity, that would cooperate with managers to develop a black list of workers to be fired at the end of each year, a process hidden behind the mask of “restructuring”. Top-level union bureaucrats, in collusion with the company, would also hand-pick the slates for the union executive elections. Workers were also effectively barred from forming any groups of their own.

Taking back the union

The fight that eventually ended up as a factory occupation started long before, when some workers started to quietly organize. Due to the high level of control that existed in the factory, the workers organized soccer tournaments off factory property to create spaces where workers from the different factory sectors could mix and speak more freely to each other about the complaints they had about their union.

At one point in late 1997, the company, wanting to diminish workers’ rights even further, took steps to rid itself of the union bureaucracy. In order to survive, the union had no choice but to finally take up some of the workers’ demands, which included the implementation of a system which made use of delegates. However, simultaneously the company went through yet another

restructuring. About 30 workers, many of whom could have been elected as delegates, were fired.

The union thought that this was an appropriate time to call elections and to present their hand-picked list without serious opposition. But the soccer games, along with heightened clandestine agitation within sectors, had been going on for almost a year and the

bureaucracy but not as radical as the ‘crazies’ on the brown list. To confuse the matter further they called this new slate the “red” list.

It turned out that discontent with the *status quo* was greater than the union pie cards had anticipated. The brown list comfortably won the Zanón internal factory commission elections of 1998 (brown: 187, red: 85, blue: 45). Since

The day the workers really won their union came in 2000. The union bureaucracy, in collaboration with the company, tried to expel the new factory commission for acting “against” the union.

The company maintained that they would only recognize the commission slate the bureaucracy had cooked up. The workers all walked off the job and formed an assembly where the widespread support for the brown list was affirmed. The joint attack waged by union bureaucrats and the company was stopped dead in its tracks.

The brown list took over just as signs of a major national recession were becoming apparent to many. Firings were picking up pace and there was a union conflict almost every day.

The workers developed efficient practices of militancy in response to the boss’ attacks. The fundamental strategy of the workers’ struggle for control was twofold: to ensure that all major decisions were made by the worker assembly (which all workers could attend) and then to guarantee that these decisions, once made, would be carried through.

For example, after voting to go on strike, they would take down a list of people who committed to going to the picket the following day. As soon as strikes were decided on, committees formed almost immediately.

By the time the factory closed its doors in 2001, the workers had developed a well-oiled machine of resistance. Their fight was well known in the community and they had established contacts with other worker, community, and unemployed organizations that pledged their support and solidarity.

This is not to say that their fight was easy. Since the workers took over, they have confronted and fought off the full force of the repressive apparatus many times. After six years of production under worker control, they have yet to receive any real support or even recognition from the government.

They have, however, consolidated many of their democratic and productive processes and are a model of industrial democracy and production, not for profit but for the use and the benefit of the community.

What are unions fighting for?

The workers in Zanón are still members of and active in their union. The current situation is quite unusual: the majority of workers represented by the union work in a worker-controlled factory; the rest are employed in the three smaller factories of Neuquén.

A pretty obvious question arises: why would workers, who are not in a relation of dependence, who control their own production and their jobs, need a union? The simple answer is that their union is one of the main channels through which they fight for and protect the processes of self-management. The workers also view their participation in the union as an essential part of worker control.

The lesson from Zanón, then, is to think about unions not only as a means to wage the fight against capital, and even less as a means to keep the peace between two “equal” interests. Unions don’t have to be used just to fight for a bigger piece of the pie, but can also be used in the fight to take back the entire pie: to create a better system of production, where we work and produce not for the benefit of the rich and powerful, but for the benefit of ourselves and our communities.

Special thanks to the workers of Zanón for their hospitality and inspiration, and to Raúl Godoy, who provided much of the information for this article.



Photo by Pauline Vignoud

Mural: The Argentine ceramic factory Zanón is “under worker control.”

workers were ready for serious change in their union.

During the election, union bureaucrats and bosses alike were alarmed to see an alternative slate presented. This “brown” list, as it was called, was made up of rank-and-file workers that had emerged from the quiet agitation. Unlike the union’s official “blue” list, the brown list had good representation across sectors. The alternative slate had the straightforward mandate of actually representing the interests of the workers —permanent and contract employees alike— as well as a commitment to democratize the union through the system of delegates and the holding of regular worker assemblies. Feeling threatened, the union bureaucrats slapped together another list, which they presented as being separate from the unpopular current

the workers at Zanón made up the vast majority of members in the provincial union, the fresh faces of the executive were able to effect changes union-wide.

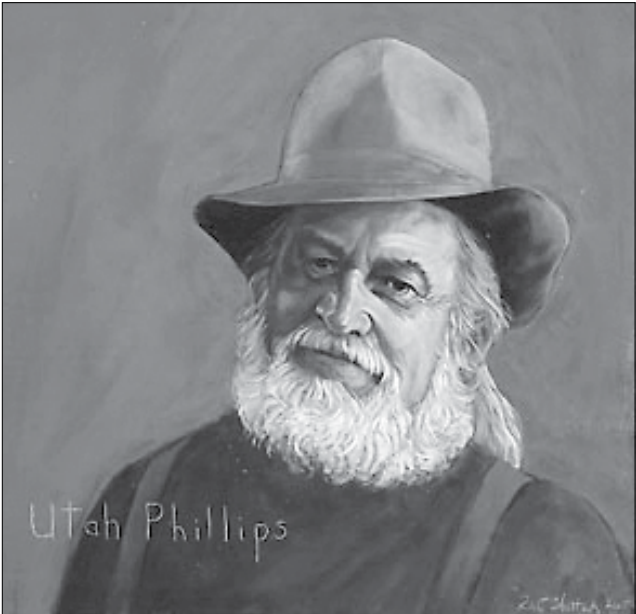
The new brown list did not simply turn their backs on the workers that had voted them there nor did they start making backroom deals with the boss. Instead, the newly-elected factory commission went to work making contacts with other delegates, other unions and even with some movements of unemployed workers.

They had an approach that simultaneously privileged external and internal work; that is, making contacts and building solidarity outside the union was seen as equally important as building militancy within the factory and union.

Consolidating Union Democracy



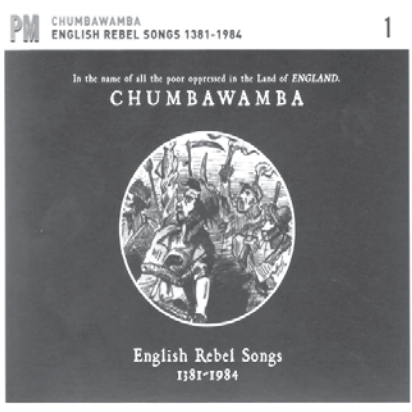
MAY DAY GREETINGS



“The stories I tell don’t just come out of my own life. Many of them come to me from my elders. I strained to hear them through the roar of my own ego, my own needs and desires. But when I became quiet and open to the thoughts and feelings of my elders, I learned that my life-story deepens, grows richer, by taking in the stories of those who have led extraordinary lives, lives that can never be lived again. Except in memory – through mine, through yours – as the fragments of our story, lives mix and blend into a common whole, the great river of our collective memory of which we are all a part and into which each one of us will, some day, dissolve.”

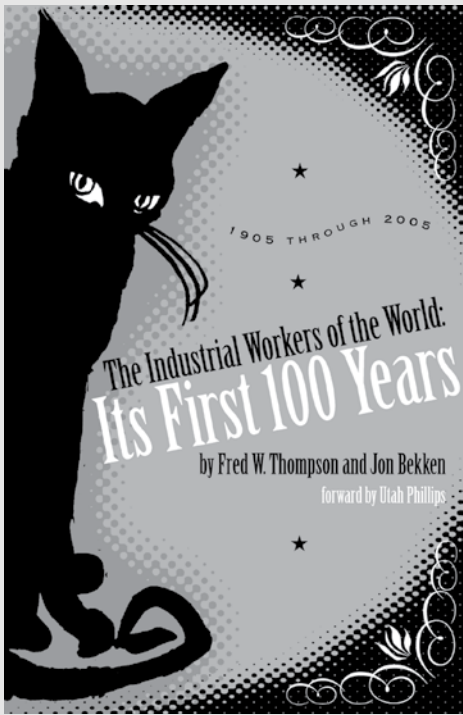
– Utah Phillips, from “The Past Didn’t Go Anywhere”

San Francisco Bay Area General Membership Branch



Chumbawamba: English Rebel Songs 1381-1984 CD

English Rebel Songs 1381-1984 is Chumbawamba's homage to the men and women who never had obituaries in the broadsheets; those who never received titles or appeared in as entry in "Who's Who." This is an album that conjures up the tragedies and triumphs of the people who shaped England: its citizens. The songs were discovered in songbooks, in folk clubs and on cassette tapes, chopped and changed and bludgeoned into shape with utmost respect for the original tunes. Originally released in 1988, this new CD version is fierce, sweet and powerful, and contains ballads not included on the original album. It's guaranteed to sway the listener, break hearts and encourage hope...just as those who inspired the songs by changing history. **13 tracks, \$14.95**



The Industrial Workers of the World: Its First 100 Years by Fred W. Thompson & Jon Bekken forward by Utah Phillips

The IWW: Its First 100 Years is the most comprehensive history of the union ever published. Written by two Wobblies who lived through many of the struggles they chronicle, it documents the famous struggles such as the Lawrence and Paterson strikes, the fight for decent conditions in the Pacific Northwest timber fields, the IWW's pioneering organizing among harvest hands in the 1910s and 1920s, and the war-time repression that sent thousands of IWW members to jail. But it is the only general history to give substantive attention to the IWW's successful organizing of African-American and immigrant dock workers on the Philadelphia waterfront, the international union of seamen the IWW built from 1913 through the 1930s, smaller job actions through which the IWW transformed working conditions, Wobbly successes organizing in manufacturing in the 1930s and 1940s, and the union's recent resurgence. Extensive source notes provide guidance to readers wishing to explore particular campaigns in more depth. There is no better history for the reader looking for an overview of the history of the IWW, and for an understanding of its ideas and tactics. **255 pages, \$19.95**

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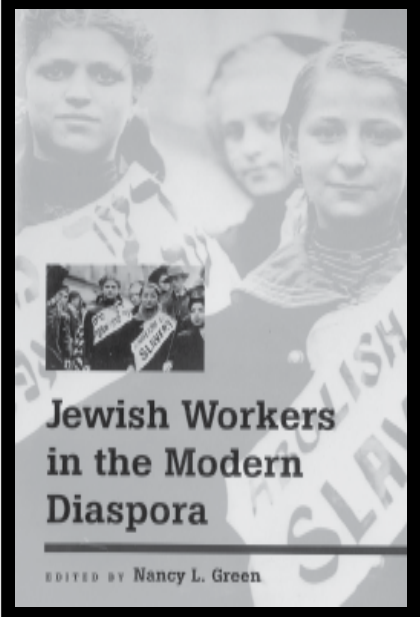
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Wobblies on the Waterfront

BY PETER COLE

This long-awaited book tells the history of the IWW on the Philadelphia waterfront. Wobblies built the first integrated longshore union in the U.S., winning better wages and shorter hours than any other American port until the employers, federal government and ILA came together to crush the union in the early 1920s. With IWW job control that lasted nearly a decade, Philadelphia proved both the practicality of the IWW's approach, and the union's commitment to racial equality. Cole's book is a sympathetic look at a vital chapter in IWW history. **227 pages, \$40.00**



Jewish Workers in the Modern Diaspora

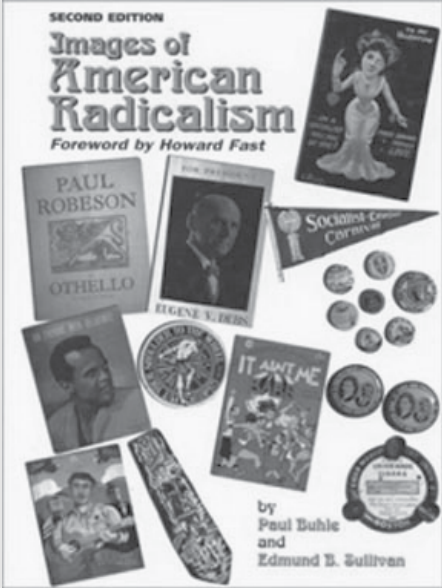
EDITED BY NANCY GREEN.

Documenting the history of the Jewish working class from the 1880s through 1939, this draws upon contemporary newspaper articles, letters, memoirs, and literature to give voice to the workers who left Eastern Europe for the West - and in the process, played a key role in building the modern labor movement as they battled intolerable conditions in their new jobs and communities. This book chronicles those struggles in major cities around the world, and also looks at the cultural and social institutions the Jewish workers built. **256 pages, \$10.00**

Images of American Radicalism

BY PAUL BUHLE AND EDMUND B. SULLIVAN

Historians Buhle and Sullivan engagingly document here the history of American radicalism. The more than 1500 illustrations provided – 72 in color – are paintings, drawings, cartoons, photographs, lithographs, posters, and other graphics depicting religious visionaries, Shakers, abolitionists, suffragists, anarchists, socialists, Wobblies, feminists, Civil Rights workers, gay and lesbian activists, environmentalists, and others in their quest for a cooperative society overcoming a competitive capitalism. Richly illustrating the history of American radicalism, Buhle and Sullivan write about limitations and failures, racism, sexism, and repression as well as the accomplishments and successes of the many radical movements. A dual index lists subjects in the text and illustrations. This handsome book is a superb visual approach to an important but little discussed aspect of American social, political, and cultural history. **42 PAGES, \$20 PAPERBACK, \$25 HARDCOVER**



A Century of Writing on the IWW 1905 - 2005: An Annotated Bibliography of Books on the Industrial Workers of the World *Compiled by Steve Kellerman*

This annotated bibliography published by the Boston General Membership Branch of the IWW lists all known books on the IWW, organized by category in chronological order. Brief critical notes describe the books, quickly and helpfully identifying their strengths and weaknesses. Other categories are Biographical Works, Miscellaneous Works including substantial discussion of the IWW, Writings by Wobblies, and a listing of novels featuring the union. An excellent resource for anyone doing research on the IWW. **38 pages, \$5.00**



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China: coal profits cost blood and bones

By China Labour Bulletin, www.clb.org.hk
Miners' lives are sacrificed in their thousands each year in China as rapid economic growth pushes up demand for coal and unscrupulous mine owners seek higher and higher profits.

The central government has made improving mine safety and reducing accidents one of its key policy objectives. Although the number of accidents and deaths in China's coal mines did drop again last year, the overall figures remain disturbingly high. Accident and death rates have declined from the peak of 2002 when nearly 7,000 miners died, but they remain unacceptably high with 3,786 miners killed in 2007. In August 2007, for example, over 12 million cubic metres of water from the flooded Wenhe River poured into the Huayuan coal mine in Shandong, trapping and eventually killing 172 miners. It was the second worst coal mine disaster in the history of the People's Republic of China.

China Labour Bulletin's latest report, *Bone and Blood: The Price of Coal in China*, identifies why the government has failed to have a lasting effect on mine safety.

Firstly, the system of contracting mines out to private operators on a short-term basis has led to contractors seeking a maximum return on their investment in the shortest possible time. Production capacity is exceeded way beyond safe levels, investment in safety equipment is insufficient or non-existent and unskilled and untrained workers are hired as miners.

Secondly, mine owners and local officials have created an almost impenetrable network of collusion that prevents central government safety measures from being enforced.

Finally, mine workers have no representative body to negotiate with mine owners and management over wages, working conditions and mine safety. The balance of power, particularly in privately owned mines, is so one-sided that workers are essentially powerless to protect their own interests.

The one government initiative — a 200,000 yuan (\$28,600) compensation benchmark for families of coal mine

accident victims— has actually further eroded workers' rights. The benchmark is being used by local authorities as the limit for compensation and they are ignoring bereaved families' specific needs and circumstances. Bereaved relatives

The balance of power is so one-sided that workers are left essentially powerless to protect their own interests.

who receive this compensation lose their right to seek redress or compensation through the courts.

Local authorities appear to be more concerned with maintaining public order and preventing social instability than with addressing the welfare of the bereaved.

China Labour Bulletin recommends:

1. Establish mine safety monitoring committees, consisting primarily of the workers themselves, for all large and medium-sized mines, with similar teams for small mines, as well as federations of safety management committees in areas in which many small mines are concentrated.

These safety monitoring committees and teams should consist primarily of representatives elected by the mineworkers themselves, and government mine safety organizations should be responsible for providing them with specialist and technical safety training. Regular meetings of these committees and teams should be held with mine operators, to make managers aware of safety issues identified by mineworkers and to ensure that prompt corrective action is taken.

Also needed is a system of *ad hoc* inspections by elected representatives of mineworkers, with reporting of workplace safety issues to mine managers whenever necessary. If mine management refuses to make needed improvements, these monitoring committees and teams should be able, as allowed by law, to organize a production stoppage, with coalface workers having the

right to refuse to go down the mine until remedial action is taken. Attempts by mine owners to prevent them from taking such measures should be made a criminal offence.

The government must recognize

and publicly acknowledge that allowing mineworkers to organize themselves and to supervise mine safety independently of their employers is an essential step towards improving safety, and one that does not pose any threat to social or political stability.

2. The short-term mine contracting system should be phased out and replaced by a long-term or unlimited-term contract system. This is particularly important in labour contracting at state-owned mines. Currently, large numbers of rural migrants form a highly liquid core workforce, while experienced miners at former state-owned mines are leaving the job due to age, physical infirmity and fears for their safety. Use of subcontractors in operations has led to rampant profit seeking at mines at the expense of safety. A stable, well-trained workforce that is aware of and knows how to respond to the inherent risks of the job is absolutely essential if mine safety is to be improved in China.

3. Mine owners will have to raise wages and provide decent welfare and social insurance benefits to maintain the stability of work teams and respect the rights of workers. Miners face extremely dangerous working conditions, yet mineworkers' wages and benefits have dropped sharply in relation to other industries. This situation has damaged morale and it explains why the overwhelming majority of coal miners are rural migrants ready to work in extremely hazardous conditions for low pay. The government should introduce a minimum wage specifically for the coal mining sector. The underground hardship pay at state-owned mines should be

made compulsory in the private sector.
4. The government must standardize systems and procedures for dealing with the aftermath of mine accidents and disasters within a legislative framework that provides bereaved families with clear legal channels for safeguarding their rights to redress. Bereaved families should be able to appeal and seek redress through the courts. Post-accident settlements should be brought within the regulatory framework of administrative law.

5. The government must establish a system of occupational injury insurance tailored to coal mining accidents. The government's current practice of picking up the compensation tab after an accident lacks a legal basis as it is not the employer and has no direct responsibility for workplace accidents. China already has a reasonably comprehensive system of occupational injury insurance. Such a step would remove the inherent conflict of interest whereby local governments currently have a vested interest in reducing both the amount of compensation paid and the effective legal rights of the bereaved families. Companies applying for coal mine production and management licences should be legally required to provide occupational injury insurance for their employees. Special provisions are needed to require private mines dependent on migrant workers pay higher insurance premiums to compensate for the higher risk factor and ensure these workers an adequate and acceptable level of compensation in the event of worker injury or death.

There is an urgent need for a countervailing force to stand up against the combined might of mine owners and local government. Trade union organizing is an essential measure to ensure the safety and well-being of miners.

The All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) is not taking on this crucial role in publicly-owned or private mines. Unions in state-owned mines are essentially tools of management. The ACFTU has done little to organize migrant workers. Until China allows workers free association, these recommendations are the least the Chinese government can do.

Read the full report at www.clb.org.hk.

International Solidarity Commission statement

International Workers' Memorial Day

The International Solidarity Commission of the Industrial Workers of the World —an international, independent labour union— sends its solemn and sincere condolences on this April 28, International Workers' Memorial Day, to the loved ones of workers killed on the job and expresses solidarity with injured workers everywhere. In particular, we would like to send condolences to the friends and family of Fellow Worker Ryan Boudreau, a bike messenger and IWW Chicago Couriers Union member whose life was tragically cut short in a fatal collision on August 13, 2007.

We recognize that, according to statistics compiled by the International Labour Organization, each year more than two million men and women die as a result of work-related accidents and illnesses every year while occupational accidents claim over 270 million victims.

Work kills more people than wars! Speed-ups, increased working hours, and short-cuts in safety procedures, designed to maximize production and profit, severely compromise the health and safety of the working class to the benefit of the boss class.

Cutbacks and red-tape in workers compensation and precarious employment conditions with little or no benefits often drive injured workers into a downward spiral of poverty and destitution. Factories and workplaces are outsourced

globally to regions with lenient labour regulations while workers' rights are regarded as "barriers to trade".

We also recognize that the basic, minimal rights that workers have gained were not granted by enlightened bosses or politicians. Rather, they were won through courageous struggle and direct action. One significant instance of this struggle was the wildcat strike by uranium miners in Elliot Lake, northern Ontario, Canada in 1974. The strike was prompted by the abnormally high rates of cancer in uranium miners and led to major improvements in workers health and safety throughout the country.

Countless other workplace struggles have contributed to the implementation of health and safety measures worldwide, often through work stoppages, slowdowns, and independent shopfloor action.

Only the vigilance, organization, and international solidarity of the working class can preserve and extend these basic workers' rights against the bosses drive for growth, production, and profit at any expense. Ultimately, only the reorganization of economic life on the basis of production for use, and recognition of labour as a means towards the fulfilment of our collective needs and desires, will ensure the well being of workers everywhere.

An Injury to One is an Injury to All!

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May Day Greetings:

Dump Capitalism, a predatory stage of
human development.

—Harry Siitonen
Bay Area GMB



The IWW formed the International Solidarity Commission to help the union build the worker-to-worker solidarity that can lead to effective action against the bosses of the world. To contact the ISC, email solidarity@iww.org.

By Mike Pesa

Solidarity with sacked union member in Sweden

The ISC sent a letter to management of the Arta Plast corporation in Sweden demanding reinstatement or full retirement compensation to Jorge Perez Salvo, a member of the Central Organization of Swedish Workers (SAC). Salvo, a senior employee who has worked for Arta Plast for 11 years, was notified that he will be dismissed without compensation in August 2008, only two years before he would have received a full retirement package.

ISC creates monthly electronic bulletin

The International Solidarity Commission of the IWW is creating a new monthly electronic bulletin to help keep our allies informed of our activities and relevant labor struggles around the world. To subscribe to the bulletin, visit lists.iww.org/listinfo/isc-updates. You do not need to be a member of the IWW to subscribe.

Condemning the assault on Basra, Iraq

The ISC sent a letter to government officials in Great Britain, the United States, and Iraq, condemning the recent assault on the Iraqi port city of Basra. Residents report that coalition forces have cut off electricity supplies, food and water to this city of 1.5 million people. According to the General Union of Oil Employees in Basra (IFOU), hundreds of civilians were killed or injured by occupation forces in the first 48 hours of the siege, which began at midnight on March 24.

The ISC called for the immediate withdrawal of troops from Basra. Furthermore, it echoed the IFOU's demands that occupation forces not use this siege

as an opportunity to privatize Basra's port and replace its militant workforce with non-union workers—which may be one of the motives behind this suspiciously-timed and extreme show of force. There is strong opposition in Basra to union busting and the proposed privatization of the port, which is part of a larger trend of privatizing Iraq's lucrative oil industry.

Guatemalan banana union faces murder, violence

The ISC sent a letter to the government of Guatemala expressing alarm and outrage at recent murders and other acts of violence against members of the recently-formed SITRABANSUR banana workers union.

Miguel Ángel Ramírez was shot to death on March 2. Ramírez was involved in an intense struggle for workers' rights on the Frutera Internacional SA plantation. Before his murder, he was illegally detained by company security guards and forced to sign a letter of resignation from the union.

His murder is part of an increasing trend of violence against banana workers in Guatemala and comes on the heels of the September 2007 slaying of Marco Tulio Ramírez Portela, a member of another banana-workers union, SITRABI.

In July, the SITRABI headquarters was raided by uniformed soldiers. In a separate incident, the daughter of the general secretary of SITRABANSUR was raped by armed men. Other family members of union organizers have received death threats by armed men who have shown up at their homes.

In its letter, the ISC expressed its support for the demands of banana workers and called on the government of Guatemala to investigate and take action to stop this violence and repression.

UAE guest workers riot

By John Kalwaic

On March 18 near Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), about 1,500 foreign guest construction workers went on a violent strike protesting that they had not received a promised wage raise. The rioting construction workers torched offices and vehicles belonging to their employer, Drake and Scull Construction Conglomerate. News sources from the region indicated that some of the rioting workers were Indian.

The protest started with a picket outside the company headquarters while protesting the unpaid wage raises. Police director Brig. Gen. Humaid Mohammed al-Hudaidi said, "Even before the workers received a reply, a group of workers incited the others to go on a rampage destroying company property." Authorities expect to jail and deport the workers who were involved with the riot. A diplomat from the region described the riot "as the most violent incidents at a labor camp in the gulf."

Authorities blame the falling US dollar for the workers' inability to make ends meet. But it is clear that there are other reasons for labor unrest than the falling US currency.

Around 91 per cent of the UAE's population is made up of foreign guest workers from poor regions of South Asia, including Bangladesh, India, Pakistan,

and Sri Lanka. Unions and strikes are both prohibited in the UAE; if the workers have a dispute with the boss, there is little they can do.

One of the striking workers, who did not wish to be identified, said he makes about \$163 a month.

This was the second riot since October 2007 when guest workers in the capital city of Dubai torched property and police vehicles. In that riot, 45 Indian construction workers were sentenced to six months in prison followed by deportation.

In June 2006, also in Dubai, more than 319 Chinese guest workers took their boss and a deputy hostage in protest of plans to deport the workers. The UAE government had planned to deport the Chinese workers because they were involved with an illegal "work stoppage" against unpaid wages.

Many Persian Gulf states have a majority of guest workers in their active populations.

These countries include Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain and the UAE. These US-backed, oil rich nations depend on guest workers from poor South Asian countries to do construction and manual labor. However, guest workers have few or no rights and no clear avenue for expressing dissent.

Zanón workers took union before occupying the factory



Zanón worker works on a ceramic tile printed with poetry. Photo by Pauline Vignoud

By Rhiannon Edwards, Wobbly Dispatch

After a year of working with the recovered enterprises of Argentina, I had the opportunity to visit the largest and possibly most famous of them: the worker-controlled ceramics factory Zanón, located in the southern province of Neuquén.

I went to Zanón as a representative of the IWW's International Solidarity Commission, and brought messages of solidarity from the IWW to the self-managed workers. My friend and I were welcomed by the workers and invited to stay in the guest room which they had converted from an out of use bathroom. We were interviewed on Nuestra Lucha (Our Struggle), one of three radio shows that the workers host as a means of maintaining their political fight. We heard tell of the inauguration of the Worker's Library, which was to be held in a few days and decided to stay longer than planned in order to help set up and attend that event.

Zanón is an anomaly among the diverse group of factories and other businesses that have been taken over by their workers in the midst of the social and economic crisis that rocked Argentina in the first few years of the new millennium.

With over 450 workers, Zanón is by far the largest of these factories, but it is also set apart by the workers' unique approach to self-management. The main difference being that in Zanón they took over their union first, and the factory after; this difference became fundamental to the establishment and continued success of worker control.

The story and history of Zanón is of high import and relevance to union members across the world.

Worker Control in Zanón

The factory truly does belong not only to and in the service of the workers themselves, but to the wider community as well. Despite Zanón's uncertain legal position, the forces that be have never been able to kick the workers out, because the community—at times in the tens of thousands—has consistently shown up to defend the workers' project. In return, the workers make the factory available in service of the community, whatever form that may take: hosting rock concerts, donating ceramics and labour to build hospitals and popular housing, developing a library (among other social initiatives) or giving away specially designed tiles on street corners at Christmas.

The workers of Zanón argue that in order to protect their worker control,

they need to fight on two fronts: the productive and the social. Worker control doesn't exist if the workers aren't producing anything, yet equally important is the social and political fight to create and maintain support for their project: if they are not supported, their existence as self-managed workers is in serious danger.

Zanón is the darling of the international progressive press and there is much information available detailing the process the workers went through to gain control of their factory, as well as how they run it democratically, under worker control.

A much less known story is that of the years prior to the factory's closure, when the workers were struggling to gain rank and file control over their corrupt union. If these steps toward the democratization of the union hadn't taken place, the now famous bastion of worker control would likely not exist. It is this lesser known story that resonates much louder for workers: worker control works in Zanón, not because the workers or the context are inherently different; it works because workers took steps to reclaim their space within the union and were able to take their fight one (big) step further: to take back their own production.

The Making of Zanón

Luis Zanón forms part of a very wealthy, very influential family and the ceramics factory is just one part of a family dynasty that spans multiple industries. The factory was started with a loan from the state bank on the eve of Argentina's last, and most brutal, military dictatorship (1976-1983). While we were cleaning up the space that was to become the Worker's Library, a certificate was unearthed that sent chills up everyone's spine: it was addressed to Luis Zanón from the Federal Police of Argentina, applauding him for his "moral virtues" and contributions as a citizen. The certificate was dated August 1976, that is, a mere six months after the coup and in the midst of a terrible wave of repression in Argentina that eventually tolled 30,000 people dead or disappeared.

Eventually, the factory came to be the premier ceramics manufacturer in South America, with technology unequalled anywhere on the continent. By the mid-Nineties, Zanón was exporting

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