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Workers at AT&T Poised to Strike

Job action would be biggest U.S. strike in recent years; IWW/CWA in the heart of the struggle

By x359209

At midnight on April 5, 2009 contracts for most of the component groups represented by the Communications Workers of America (CWA) at the telecom giant AT&T expired. After weeks of mobilizing, approximately 90,000 workers were poised to strike one of the largest and most profitable multinational corporations. A job action by the CWA would be the largest and among the most significant labor actions in the U.S. since the UPS strike in 1997. It would also be the first major strike under the Obama regime. The brewing confrontation could set the tone for class struggle in the U.S. for the near future.

Attack on Healthcare

AT&T has been pressing hard for major concessions from its call center, billing and ordering, and technical workers, especially in the area of healthcare. The company is demanding harsh cost shifting in premiums and huge deductibles for current employees, and even steeper cuts for “second tier” workers

hired. AT&T is also demanding concessions in areas of seniority, overtime and discipline. Raises would be replaced for the first two years by one-time lump payments.

Billions in Profit

AT&T corporate public relations hacks have been spinning the message that healthcare must be reduced to avoid a repeat of what has happened to the U.S. auto industry. But AT&T is not General Motors. It is part of a growing, innovative industry—one where AT&T bosses made \$12.9 billion in profits in 2008 alone. Besides, the U.S. healthcare crisis and its skyrocketing costs are not the fault of workers and their families, and we should not be made to shoulder the crisis’ burden. Workers at AT&T are furious that such a rich company would attack their families’ access to healthcare.

The company has also sought to pit the different component parts of “the new AT&T” against each other (the old

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CWA Local 7250 member gears up for action.

Photo: x359209

Multiple Factory Occupations in Scotland

By Dek Keenan

Workers in Dundee, Belfast and Enfield, Scotland, are occupying their workplaces in response to management’s decision to close the shops whilst offering statutory minimum redundancy or no redundancy at all. These factory occupations are the first in Britain for some time and are a positive sign that workers are beginning to look to direct action tactics in the face of intensifying attacks.

The workers’ occupation of the Prisme Packaging Company in Dundee began on March 4, 2009, when workers arrived for work and were subsequently informed that they were being made redundant with immediate effect and without redundancy pay! The Prisme

owners were hoping that their 12 employees would just leave quietly, and certainly did not expect them to take matters into their own hands. Workers immediately occupied the plant, brought in provisions, and announced to the local media that they would not leave until they had justice. Ironically, this response may have had something to do with the non-unionised nature of the workplace. The workers did not ask for any trade union’s permission—the non-unionised workers just decided to occupy the plant on the spot. As one occupier, David Taylor, said “We were not militant people—just little people who refused to be little anymore. We stood up for what we believe in and we are all proud of that.”

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Direct Action Bloc Against the G20 in London

By Stuart Melvin

Hours before the G20 Summit circus rolled into London, thousands of people put on a very different kind of show, marching through the city streets while demanding a different state of affairs in which people come before profits.

Months before the G20 summit, a coalition of trade unions, NGOs and charity organizations got together and began planning their mobilisation. Anti-capitalists who engaged with this process reported a different feel compared to the “left/progressive” mobilisation around the 2005 G8 Summit in Scotland. To some small degree, the lessons of the awful “Make Poverty History” campaign have been learned and this mobilisation carried an anti-neoliberal message, demanding the powers that be

put people before profits and property.

In good time, a callout appeared for a “Militant Workers Bloc” to participate in the march. Although this callout originated in the anarchist scene, in a nod of respect to the work of direct-action focused but non-anarchist organisations such as the IWW and London Coalition Against Poverty, the callout was worded in such a way as to encourage our participation in the bloc.

Despite worries about respectability and being seen as an “anarchist union,” the British Isles Regional Organizing Committee (BIROC) agreed to join the Militant Workers Bloc. The organisers of the bloc agreed to ensure Wobblies marched near some of the most militant and radical unionists from the Rail,

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Workers Occupy Canadian Auto Parts Factory

By Kevin Bell, *Fightback*

On Tuesday, March 17, 2009, a group of workers in the industrial town of Windsor, Ontario, occupied the Aradco auto parts plant. The 80 workers at the plant, along with workers from the neighbouring Aramco plant, were told on March 9 that they should not report for work. This occupation marks the re-awakening of the occupied factories movement in Canada and is an important turning point in the ongoing crisis of the North American auto industry.

Aradco and Aramco produce motor mounts and other metal parts almost exclusively for Chrysler. The news that Chrysler planned to terminate its contract with Catalina Precision Products, the parent company of Aradco and Ar-

amco, led to the closure of the factories. The workers by law are owed back pay, vacation pay, termination and severance pay totalling an estimated \$1.7 million. In a criminal move, the workers were offered a paltry \$205,000. The workers, represented by the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) union, rejected this offer by 64 percent.

Chrysler, in the wake of the plant closures, applied for and received a court injunction which allowed it to remove parts and equipment from the plant. On March 17, about a week after the workers were first told not to report for work, Chrysler made its attempt to seize its property. However, the workers were not having any of it.

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Direct Action Bloc Against the G20 in London

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BIROC IWW members lead the march in London.

Photo: Paula, Reading GMB

Maritime and Transport (RMT) union, another sign of the growing respect the IWW carries amongst anarchists in the U.K.

Still, many members of the BIROC are trying to change the public perception in the U.K. of the IWW as a union for anarchist youth, into a legitimate option for the millions of workers who want to fight for better lives. For this reason, we attempted a small image change and in the process ensured that the IWW had one of the most impressive presences on the march.

In the two weeks preceding the march, Fellow Workers organised in the West Midlands, London and recently formed Reading and Cambridge GMBs worked around the clock—creating banners, flags and new flyers especially for the march. It was decided that to stand out amongst what was sure to be a sea of red and black, as well as represent the idea that we are a union for all workers

and create a friendly and approachable look, the BIROC would create a multi-coloured bloc with one bold slogan to tie it all together.

Having borrowed an inspired slogan from the Militant Workers Bloc callout, the Reading GMB created more than 100 flags, in six bright colours, each inscribed with the slogan and IWW logo in shining chrome, as well as a large white banner, carrying the same slogan and IWW logo in black and the six colours in the background. Loud and proud, the message was clear: “Solidarity is not a word but a weapon!” Of course, we wouldn’t want to drop the historic red banner entirely, and both Cambridge and West Midlands GMBs carried their branch banners high. West Midlands proudly displayed our history, proclaiming “An injury to one is an injury to all ... Since 1905.”

On March 28, approximately 40 Wobblies traveled from towns through-

out the U.K., from as far away as Glasgow and Edinburgh, to join with the nearly 1,000 people participating in the Militant Workers Bloc. This bloc joined the roughly 35,000 people forming the entirety of the march. Although the bloc itself included its fair share of masked-up ninjas, many serious class struggle organisations participated as well, including London Coalition Against Poverty, Antifascist Action, Haringey Solidarity Group and the Spanish CNT. Clearly, the bloc called for more police attention than the rest of the march, but gave them little to do as

we marched peacefully, claiming our place amongst the ranks of organised labour and the working class. At one point the bloc was effectively split in two by the G20 Meltdown contingent who insisted on posing for photographs every few minutes. However, in a way, for us this ended up being positive as the front section of the bloc was “escorted” (i.e. surrounded) by police for much of the march whilst the IWW held

our own in the later section, with a big multi-coloured presence, just in front of the militants from the RMT. Of course, it also meant that IWW flags could be seen flying from the front to the back of the march, the bright colours attracting plenty of attention.

An IWW printshop in the West Midlands produced 1,000 fliers for the day. These not only aimed to generate new membership, but were specifically designed to target existing trade union members, pointing out the benefits of dual-carding. We distributed a large amount of these at the end, but unfortunately a sudden downpour of rain made this difficult. No worry though; the recession-fed growth in class-struggle combined with IWW members participating in various union-led activities—such as the National Shop Stewards Network, where many disillusioned unionists are to be found—will provide plenty of opportunity over the coming months to publicise the benefits of dual-card unionism.



Photo: Paula, Reading GMB

The day ended with two rallies at Hyde Park. One, which was organised by the Trade Union Congress, featuring various celebrity leftists giving speeches, with the highlight being comedian and direct-action activist Mark Thomas.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the park at the historic Speakers Corner, and under the gaze of the cops, roughly 300 anarchists held an open-mic rally, inviting all to speak to the assembled crowd. At least two or three IWW members spoke to applause, calling on the crowd to build the class-struggle by engaging in grassroots organising in workplaces and communities.

All in all, the day was successful for the BIROC. While it was great to see several thousand people participate in what was essentially an anti-capitalist demonstration, the march itself was a quiet affair, with no real atmosphere of emotion. Despite this, the IWW showed a positive presence and certainly claimed our place on the march. The rest of the week was to be filled with clashes in the financial centre of London as 5,000-10,000 protesters went up against the police, resulting in smashed up banks, peaceful protesters being attached by thuggish cops, plenty of negative media stories and sadly one fatality, which seems increasingly likely to have been caused by the police.

However, at the end of the day, we know the changes needed to sort out the mess we are in and improve our lives will not come from the G20 summit or from street protests like this. They will come by mass working-class organisations claiming what is ours’: everything we produce.

The organised and vibrant BIROC presence in the “Put People First” march symbolised that we are slowly but surely becoming a force to help make that happen.

IWW Constitution Preamble

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 \$2000, dues are \$9 a month. If your monthly income is between \$2000 and \$3500, dues are \$18 a month. If your monthly income is over \$3500 a month, dues are \$27 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: _____

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The Employee Free Choice Act, Class Conditions and Class Power

By Tom Levy

Not since Ronald Reagan and the Air Traffic Controllers' strike has America seen such debate on the future of organized labor. Although the worsening recession, stagnant (and often decreasing) wages and the victory at Republic Window and Door factory in Chicago have all contributed to this growing dialogue, the main impetus for such discussion has been the election of Barack Obama and his support for the bill known as the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA).

If it passes, the EFCA will do a number of things. First, it will give legal backing to card-check union elections. Second, it will increase the penalties when bosses fire union supporters. Finally, in the event that workers choose to unionize, the EFCA will allow either party—the company or the union—to call in government arbitrators to impose a contract.

At first glance, the EFCA may appear to be labor's savior. After all, the big business unions have been trying to secure legislation such as this for years and are widely singing the EFCA's praises. The bosses, on the other hand, are poised to spend millions on a public relations campaign opposing the bill. Just recently a high-profile anti-union lobbyist warned industry executives that the surge in unionization the EFCA could bring would lead to the "demise of a civilization." In light of such sentiments, let us, as committed unionists, examine the implications of the EFCA.

Surely, a card check election is a much fairer way for workers to secure a collective bargaining agreement. Instead of elections being held on company property where the boss can coerce, intimidate, and fire union supporters, in a card-check election workers simply sign a card authorizing a union to act as their bargaining agent. If 50 percent plus one of workers at a shop sign a card, the company is legally obligated to recognize the union. Likewise, increased penalties against union-busting will make the bosses a bit more law-abiding and offer increased protection to union supporters. Finally, a collective bargaining contract—even one imposed by the government—will improve the wages and conditions of workers. By removing the barriers to organizing, the EFCA could potentially usher in an era of widespread unionization. This state of affairs will put upward pressure on wages and improve the lot of even non-union workers. In the process, the unacceptable and wholly immoral gulf between the rich and the poor will be diminished. In these ways, the EFCA will not only increase the numbers of organized labor, but will improve the class conditions of America's workers.

However, beyond class conditions, there is another angle we must consider. That, my brothers and sisters, is class power. Of the many lessons history has taught the working class, few are as important as this one simple truth: anytime the government offers what appears to be a concession to unions, it comes at the expense of the ability of workers to act in a militant, independent manner. Keeping this in mind, let us re-examine the EFCA.

First, the EFCA assumes contracts and elections (of any sort) are the only means of establishing a union in a given shop. Gone is the time when workers an-

nounced the formation of a union with a recognition strike. Government injunctions and feeble union leadership put a stop to that long ago. Along much the same lines, workers have been systematically prevented from enforcing union work rules and remedying grievances

through "quickie strikes." Nearly all union contracts now contain a "no-strike clause" that prohibits strikes during the life of the contract. Instead of the union being the vehicle of workers' collective action, the union

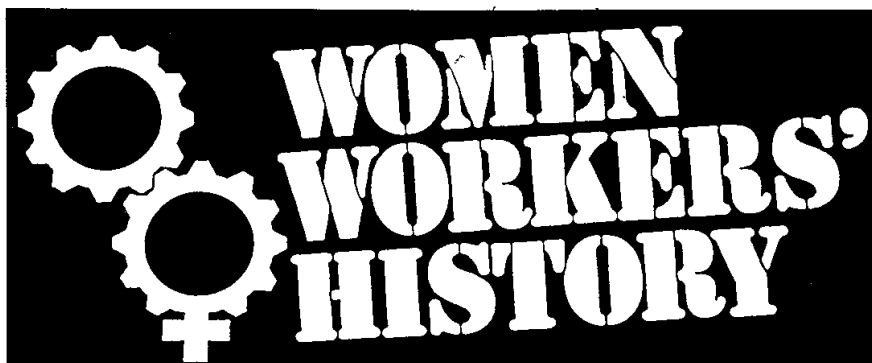
becomes responsible for policing worker militancy. It is a sad fact, but many much needed strikes have been stopped by union officials more concerned with protecting their own status as guardians of the contract than with improving the conditions of their membership.

Further, we must consider the implications of government arbitration. To begin, arbitration is inherently anti-democratic. Workers will not have the ability to vote on an arbitrated contract. Worse yet, arbitrators will almost inevitably include no-strike clauses and "management rights clauses" in contracts. Management rights clauses prohibit workers from taking part in decisions of who to hire and fire, how and where a company invests profits, and other such crucial business activities. Government arbitration, combined with no-strike and management rights clauses, severely limit the ability of unions to function as democratic, worker-run social institutions. Instead, under the provisions of the EFCA, service unionism will become the legally enforced norm.

No doubt, under the EFCA, union workers will make higher wages, receive better benefits, more vacation time and work under better conditions. However, this will come at the expense of class power. Put another way, the EFCA will remove from workers their autonomy vis-à-vis the capitalist state. Workers will be legally prevented from controlling their own unions. Union bureaucrats, government arbitrators, contract lawyers and politicians will stand between workers and their ability to use direct action and solidarity to secure better wages and conditions.

Instead of looking to politicians and union bureaucrats, workers can and should take matters into their own hands. We should use direct action techniques such as refusing to cross picket lines, engaging in "go-slows," boycotting non-union and scab goods, occupying our workplaces, holding mass pickets, and above all, going on strike. In such ways we act as a class and rely only on class solidarity to make such actions successful. Of course, it goes without saying that increased class power will inevitably lead to improved class conditions. By using direct action and solidarity we make sure we achieve better class conditions and that we do so on our own terms.

The IWW should not oppose the EFCA, but we should certainly not campaign for it either. Instead, we should use the opportunity opened by the EFCA to educate our fellow workers on the need for class power. Our ability to act independently, democratically and autonomously as a class will lead to America's workers achieving far more than we ever could through the EFCA. Even more than material gains, however, only by exercising class power can workers begin creating a society that always puts human need first.



Chapter 23 Typos and Segar Makers

In the late 1860s the organization of women workers took a big step forward when two national unions became the first to admit women into membership.



In 1867 the Cigar Makers International Union became the first national union to admit women. Why? The union recognized that new machinery would encourage bosses to hire less skilled women for less money, undercutting union wage rates. The National Labor Union had encouraged the organization of women. And there may have been fear of independent organizing by women. In 1864, the "Lady Segar Makers" in Providence, R.I. had organized.

Women had been printers since colonial times; after the organization of the National Typographical Union in 1852 they were sometimes used as strikebreakers. Women printers in New York organized in 1868 with young Augusta Lewis as their leader. After assisting the printers' union during an eight-week strike in 1869, Women's Typographical Union No. 1 was formally admitted into the NTU. Around the country, women began to join the NTU on an equal basis with men. In 1870, 22-year-old Augusta Lewis was elected national corresponding secretary of the National Typographical Union.



Graphic: Mike Konopacki

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Column Working Family

Parents of Sick Kids Need Time, Not Punishment

By Peter Moore

The old motto of the British and American trade union movements, “A Fair Day’s Wages for a Fair Day’s Work,” seems particularly cruel when its logic is applied to working parents with sick children.

If a parent must stay home to care for a sick child, this labor union motto allows employers to justify not paying the parent for the time off. In fact, this is what happens in the United States all too often. The U.S. Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) only allows employees to take unpaid time off if they have a family member with a “serious illnesses.”

Little wonder then that the 2,100 mostly female administrative workers at Canada Post struck over a contract proposal that would roll back their sick leave from 20 days to seven and prevent them from banking their sick leave each year. Losing 13 days of sick leave means losing the opportunity to heal one’s children and, if infectious, oneself.

Working parents are vulnerable to being fired for taking too many days off to care for their sick children. The more children a parent has, the greater the chances of them having a “health condition,” defined as a heart condition, cancer or something similarly deadly. In Ontario, Canada, Family Medical Leave, also unpaid, requires a doctor to certify that the family member could die within 26 weeks.

The inflexibility and dire conditions required make it impossible for parents to use it in order to care for their sick children. Equally important to note is that the law only applies to companies that employ more than 50 people. Perversely, the laws encourage sickness, rather than prevention, in order to claim the unpaid leave that is often needed to devote the time needed for full care.

The result is that most employees

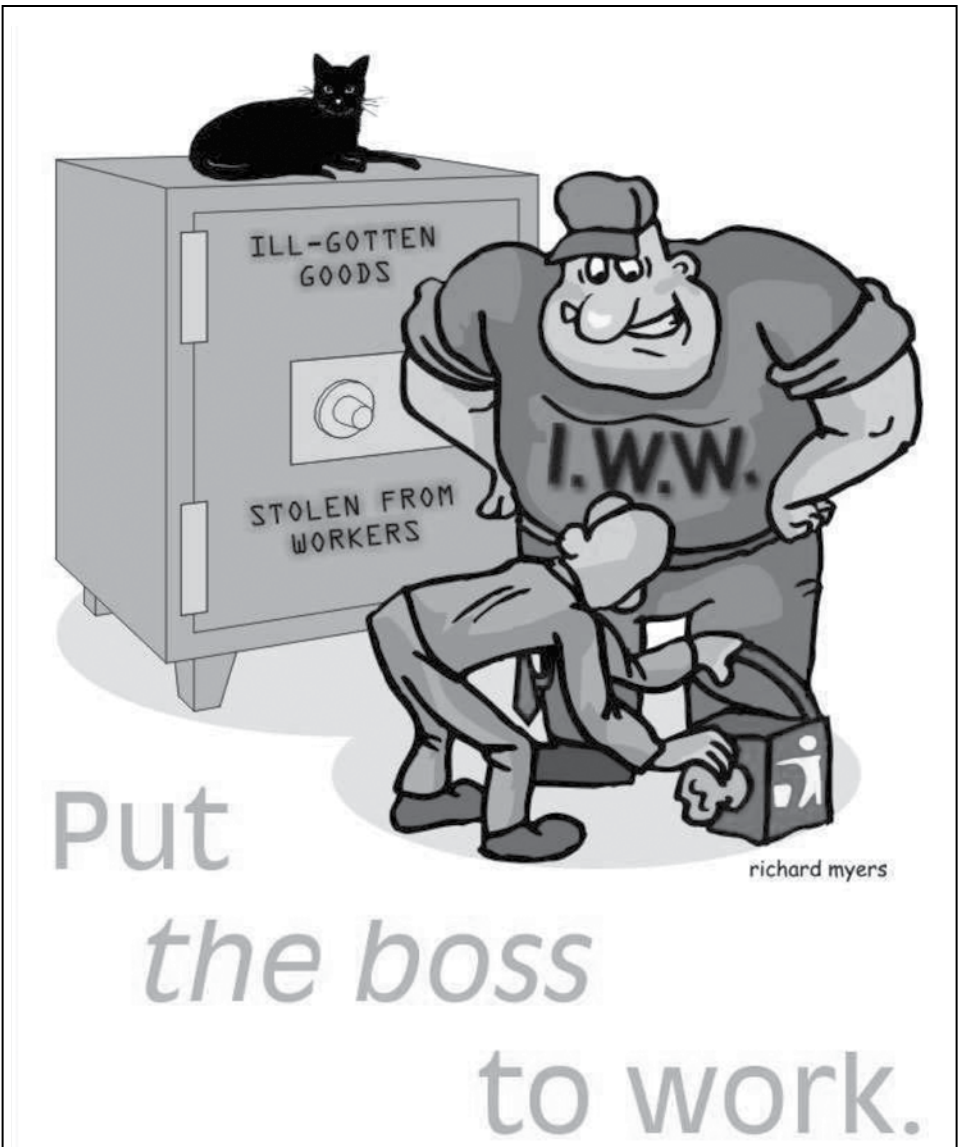
take their own sick days in order to care for sick children struck down with flus, colds, strep throat, and other common illnesses. Little wonder then that, if a couple can afford it, one parent leaves work in order to care for the children full-time as an in-house health safety net. Of course, this is never an option for a single parent family.

Yet one-income households are not the solution to this problem. The wages being paid today don’t support it and in most cases it would only reinforce a patriarchal family system that gives the male earner more economic power than his partner. The solution would be employers who institute paid family leave and job protection, so that parents can take care of their sick children. A vital part of making this happen would be unions such as the IWW

and allied community organizations making family leave a key part of their organizing and negotiating campaigns.

Parents living with the fear of being fired because their children are sick and can’t go to school are forced into an impossible situation that has a viral effect. One mother told me how she saw a father drop into her son’s school in order to give his child a dose of antibiotics. If parents are sending their children back to school when they are still “showing symptoms,” as school board guidelines warn, then it is no wonder their classmates become infected, putting another round of parents into the same vise.

By shirking their responsibility and abiding by minimalist labor laws, employers cause this problem and can use it to advance their control over the workplace. The cruel logic of “A Fair Day’s Wages for a Fair Day’s Work” doesn’t take the working family into account and never did. While the traditional IWW response to this motto is “Abolish the wage system,” a fitting interim response should be: “Work is secondary to a family’s health.”



Graphic: Richard Myers

Column Why I Became a Wobbly

By Mike Ballard

It was on the birthday of Karl Marx in 1990 that I became a Wobbly. There was a “call-in-sick on May Day” gathering in my hometown that year, organised by the local IWW GMB. I decided to check it out. There were some Wobs selling copies of the *Industrial Worker*, and singing songs from the “Little Red Songbook,” using kazooos as musical instruments. I took a copy of the *IW* home, and I noticed that it was about workers, not just “anarchists” as I had been told. Sure, there were anarchists in the IWW, but the One Big Union was not an anti-political sect. I noticed the Preamble still made mention of the abolition of the wage system and of the need for the workers themselves to organise as a class to abolish this vile system of exploitation. It was then that I decided to get organised into the One Big Union.

As a university student, I had been part of the anti-war movement in the 1960s and 1970s. I hung out with various student radicals and began reading what many on the left were saying. I knew that I wanted a more democratic society. I had experienced military dictatorship a few years before, in the Marines. I was never exposed to much other than Republican and Democratic Party thinking before my entry into the military, just after high school graduation. My parents, relatives and friends had next to no political beliefs outside the dominant ideologies of hard work, disdain for lazy workers, anti-socialism, belief in a Protestant or Catholic version of God and so on. Everybody I knew liked Ike and Kennedy.

In other words, I wasn’t brought up as a “red diaper baby,” but as more time passed and the more the simplistic aphorisms of my youth fell by the wayside in the wake of disturbing realities—such as legalized segregation below the Mason-Dixon Line, the horrors of the Vietnam War, and mass poverty in the land of plenty—the more I was drawn toward looking for ways to understand why things were happening the way they were. None of my friends and family actually wanted to do any harm. “Could it be the system?” I wondered. I began to reject “old time religion” shortly after my

first day at boot camp in Parris Island. I could no longer believe that God worked in mysterious ways that we could not comprehend and that we needed to be docile until death.

After my discharge, I started looking for answers. I began to find some of them in the “Catch 23” leaflets being passed out on the Michigan State University campus by members of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). There were many anti-war demonstrations and rallies to attend, and I became convinced that just ending the war wasn’t enough. We needed something more to become free from this sort of scourge. Then, there was a free university class taught by an old Socialist Labor Party member on Marx’s “Value, Price and Profit,” which blew away most of my cobwebs about “economics.” A very bright light went on in my head after that and I started making connections to all sorts of troubling issues. Even the Situationist texts which I read with some confusion in the past began to glow with a life of their own after that class. Old revolutionaries like Korsch, Lukacs and my future Fellow Workers in the IWW began to make real sense. It became clear that what was needed was a social revolution, a revolution accomplished by the workers themselves to get rid of the wage system and all its unspeakable spin-offs: sexism, racism, environmental destruction, and the suffering of the producers of the world’s wealth.

It was in 1990 at my first IWW Convention that I met Judi Bari, Utah Phillips, and other class conscious workers striving to change the world and make it into a more humane place, a place where we could start living in harmony with the Earth. And all of this was to be done in a democratic way. My Fellow Workers did not project themselves as the “vanguard of the proletariat,” nor as politicians hooked on the idea of “party building” or worshipping leaders, nor were they determined to sloganeer the masses into helping them seize state power. In fact, my Fellow Workers actually disagreed with each other about political matters and still stayed together in One Big democratic Union. I liked that, and I am still a proud member.

"A shorter workday for all employed workers would put thousands of unemployed to work. If everybody worked, there would be no poverty." ---IWW's 'Little Red Songbook'

May Day marks the beginning of the class struggle of wage workers to limit their working day to eight hours. It has been more than 100 years since workers began this important fight, yet today we work more than ever. As we all know, 10 and 12 hour shifts are commonplace and unpaid overtime has become a fact of life.* At the same time, massive layoffs are occurring and the threat of increasing levels of unemployment is creating great anxiety amongst family members.

Employers make massive profits by overworking one section of the working class, while using the unemployed section of the workers to force down wages and threaten effective collective bargaining by your unions.

*Did you know that you pay for your daily wage within the first two hours of work? That's how productive you and your mates are as a class. The other six to 10 hours of your day's productivity goes towards costs and profits for the employing classes.***

So what can we do?

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in Australia are agitating for a shorter work day, just like workers did before the original May Day. This is not to improve workers' lives, but it will create full employment overnight, which would kill the effects of the current financial crisis on workers.

If all workers worked four hours per day, they could still claim the same wage as they do now, because that money is made in producing goods and services which are worth that much on the market in the first two hours of their labour. The other two or more hours of wealth could go to their employers. The benefit of shorter working hours is that it would oblige employers to hire more of the unemployed and it would enhance the quality of life for working people in that they'd be able to spend more quality time with family, and/or in recreation and relaxation, while still enjoying a decent living wage. Our productivity has increased by leaps and bounds since the first May Day in 1886. After more than 120 years, we should take our cue from those workers who came before us and who demanded the eight hour day. On this May Day, we should begin to fight for the four hour day with no cut in pay.

Check us out...Get wise. Organise!

www.iww.org.au www.iww.org

* "A survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) shows that almost three million of the country's eight million employees regularly work extra hours and most do not get paid for it." <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2007/05/30/1937880.htm>

** the productivity of the Australian working class increases on an average of 2.9%-3.2% per year. http://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/83868/chapter01.pdf

Starbucks Union Member Laid Off After Confronting CEO

By Starbucks Workers Union
CHICAGO—The Starbucks Coffee Company informed outspoken union member and barista Joe Tessone that it was laying him off, just two weeks after he confronted CEO Howard Schultz over the company’s squeezing of employees. Tessone’s blog post on the encounter, titled “Howard the Coward: The Day My Boss Ran Away,” quickly became an internet hit among fast food workers and their supporters.

“When I heard Howard Schultz was in town, I knew I had to get to the store and make my voice heard as a barista and union member,” said Tessone, a four-and-a-half year veteran of the company with an excellent performance record.

“He said he’d speak to me after his interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, only to scurry through the emergency exit the first chance he got. I told Schultz that it was time to dialogue with union baristas and that too many of us we’re living in poverty but he

showed nothing but cowardice.”

Shortly after his exchange with Schultz, Tessone was ordered into a one-on-one meeting with a Starbucks regional director rather than the store manager who would normally administer discipline. The director warned Tessone that he was out of compliance with Starbucks’ new “optimal scheduling” policy, which pries open baristas’ availability to work without guaranteeing any work hours. The problem with the director’s rationale was that Tessone’s availability was in complete compliance with the optimal

scheduling requirements. The same rationale was erroneously deployed by Tessone’s store manager on March 18, when he was laid off.

“Starbucks’ claim that I was out of compliance with the policy is a fantasy; I actually exceeded its requirements,” explained Tessone. “I come to work on time and work hard every day. It is clear that my attempt to speak with Starbucks’ anti-union CEO, and the escalation of union activity at the company, is what caused my termination.”

This isn’t the first time that Howard Schultz lacked the fortitude to

discuss Starbucks’ animosity toward labor unions and its refusal to provide stable work hours to employees. In a remarkably similar situation in 2004, Schultz hurried out of a New York City Starbucks after union barista Daniel Gross challenged him to sit down at a table and talk face to face.

In addition to Tessone’s firing, the IWW is currently challenging Starbucks’ unlawful responses to the increased union activity in Chicago. These charges include allegations that Starbucks increased surveillance against baristas at a Chicago store to which the union recently expanded and illegally laid off barista Tracey Dietrich. The Starbucks Workers Union has thus far defeated the coffee giant in six labor cases across three cities.

“We will continue to ensure our members are protected,” said Chrissy Cogswell, a Chicago union barista.

“Every time the company violates workers’ rights, we will seek justice,” she added.



Graphic: <http://tcsbuxunion.com/>

The Starbucks Problem

By Erik Forman
Last month, anonymous sources posted a secret conference call hosted by Bank of America on the website Wikileaks.org. The leaked audio file provides the public with a rare window into the paranoid and anxiety-ridden conscience of the corporate elite. On the call, Home Depot founder Bernie Marcus, corporate executives, right-wing activists, and notorious anti-union lobbyist Rick Berman rail against the possibility of a revitalized labor movement, with Marcus referring to unionization of retail as the “demise of a civilization.” One participant coins the term the “Starbucks Problem,” referring to the possibility that workers will simply form their own unions, rather than waiting for the lethargic union establishment to initiate organizing drives.

The conference call was prompted by the potential passage of the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA). If it passes, the EFCA will change U.S. labor law to require employers to bargain with a union if 50 percent plus one of the workforce in any workplace sign union authorization cards. This would replace the current process, which creates delays of several weeks between the signing of authorization cards and an NLRB-supervised election, leaving the bosses plenty of time to fire or intimidate union supporters.

Many trade unionists pin their hopes for a revitalized labor movement on the passage of the EFCA. They hope that card-check provisions, combined with

stiffer penalties for union-busting will allow them to sign up millions of new members in the service industry. Of course, requiring employers to bargain does nothing to ensure the internal democracy or power of the new union. The *Industrial Worker*, newspaper of the Industrial Workers of the World, recently published a particularly lucid expression of this critique.

If corporate America is anxious about the growth of the Change to Win federation or the AFL-CIO, it was clear from this conference call that the “Starbucks Problem” leaves them absolutely terrified. In a tone verging on hysteria, one executive on the call worried that proactive groups of workers will simply start their own unions, as we have done at Starbucks with the help of the IWW.

Of course, the IWW has been organizing at Starbucks since long before the EFCA was a glimmer in the AFL-CIO’s eye. We know that workers don’t need professional staff, expensive lawyers, or government recognition to organize an independent voice on the job. What the corporate elites call the “Starbucks Problem,” we call “Solidarity Unionism.” And whether the EFCA passes or not, we will continue building solidarity with our coworkers, making demands, and winning gains for workers at even the largest corporate chains.

With or without the EFCA, the “Starbucks Problem” is going to get a lot bigger than Starbucks.



Graphic: Tom Keough

May Day Greetings

San Francisco Bay Area General Membership Branch

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Workers at AT&T Poised to Strike

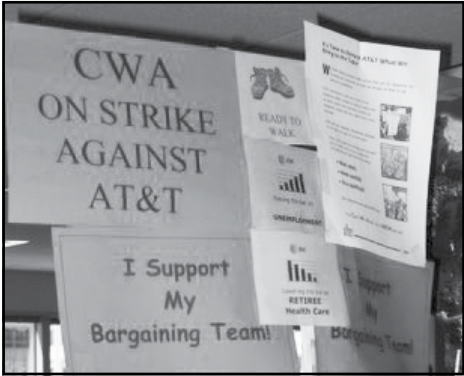


Photo: x359209

Ameritech, SBC, Pac Bell, Cingular) by taking advantage of real wage and benefit gaps and separate contract expiration dates. The CWA has only partially resisted these efforts. A new contract at the fastest growing (and least compensated) component, AT&T Wireless, was approved just as negotiations were hitting the wall for five of the other major groups. The union has given up on negotiating the old Bell South component contract, which doesn't expire until August 2009. By agreeing to postpone these negotiations until the summer, the union has given away more of the workers' leverage.

Time for Action

In the first few days after the contracts expired, CWA leaders announced that workers should report to work for now, while still expressing exasperation at the "final offers" being pushed by

AT&T. It is clear that AT&T is advancing the same attack that has drastically reduced the wages, benefits and power of all the core unionized sections of the working class, such as in the auto, steel and airlines industries. AT&T bosses are confident that telecom workers can also be tamed for the international capitalist economy, and are hardly fearful of the business unions, which have no real experience or desire to wage militant struggle.

But there are factors that favor us, the workers, too. There is a growing mood among workers at AT&T and throughout the working class in general that workers should not have to shoulder the bosses' economic crisis—that the rich must pay. The issue of healthcare is on everyone's mind, and a group of workers seen as struggling to defend their healthcare has the possibility of striking a chord deep and wide across the working class. Finally, President Obama was elected in no small part because workers wanted "change," and it will not be easy for his administration to openly attack any emerging struggle without damaging his standing and costing him room to maneuver.

The View from the Floor

Over the last few weeks in the Midwest call center, where we work, it has been interesting to join the union mobilizations and watch the attitude of our co-workers move quickly towards a

determination to take action. A month ago, any talk of a strike brought either yawns or fear from most people. As the contract deadline neared, however, the reality of AT&T's demands hit home. Now, union employees stand up in their cubicles and press loud "clickers," shake noise makers, or tap pens on their desks in a show of solidarity. The effect is like a massive cloud of locusts sweeping over the office and adds to the tense atmosphere. Groups of people discuss the latest news and share opinions about a strike. Red union t-shirts are everywhere and cubicles are decorated in union flyers. Petty discipline and rule enforcement from management have sparked a much stronger and organized reaction than usual—turning "team meetings" into heated debates.

Now there is a wide group of workers who are not only willing to strike, but want to strike.

Strike to Win

If we are forced to go on strike it is important that we win. We have little confidence that the business union approach can beat such a committed and powerful adversary. It is likely that the withdrawal of our labor alone will not be sufficient. It is clear that AT&T is prepared to force us to strike and has calculated the short-term losses and chaos it is prepared to endure in order to implement the long-term cuts to workers' healthcare and a second-class

Continued from 1
tier for newly hired workers. Certainly workers with greater skill and specialization than those of us in a call center have scabbed in strikes.

Direct action tactics like those most recently employed by the Republic Window and Door workers in Chicago, who successfully blocked the sell-off of their factory by staging an occupation, are ones we need to look at and advocate.

The IWW @ AT&T

Among the active core of union workers in our call center is a group of dual-card IWW members. The group grew out of a major struggle for greater union democracy in our CWA local about four years ago. We do not try and get workers to leave or dismiss the CWA, but instead we participate in the CWA as "solidarity unionists," fighting for greater militancy, democracy and revolutionary analysis of the system we are up against. We have built support for other local struggles in the airlines, at the university, and for active IWW organizing campaigns in our area. We try and create a social scene with our co-workers built on solidarity. We do not ignore the CWA or let it exclusively define our activity.

It is this mix of independent IWW organizing and dual-card organizing that really defines our membership branch and points toward a successful model for bringing the IWW back to the cutting edge of the struggle for emancipation from capitalism and the state.

Stella D'oro Strikers: No Contract, No Cookies!



Stella D'oro workers staged multiple pickets in 2008. Photo: socialistpartynyc.blogspot.com

By Betty Maloney and Dave Schmauch, *Freedom Socialist*

Something more than the smell of vanilla and anise is in the air these days at 237th Street and Broadway in the Bronx! The workers of the famous Stella D'oro cookie factory have been on strike since August 2008, after rejecting a rotten contract which included a reduction in wages, vacation, sick days and overtime. The bakery, which has operated since 1932, started as a family owned business and has long been considered one of the better places to work in the Bronx. Because of this, several of the 135 strikers have given most of their working lives to the company. The latest owner, Brynwood Partners, bought the company in 2006 solely as a speculative venture, and set out to break the union (Local 50 of the Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco and Grain Millers) in order to increase profits. But those responsible for the company's success, mostly immigrant women of color, have responded with militancy that the new bosses probably did not expect. Workers in different jobs at the factory refused to be divided when management proposed to foist the worst wage cuts on the women in the packaging department, while offering crumbs.

Because of their spirited refusal to give in to the proposed cutbacks, there has been a tremendous show of solidar-

ity from the immediate community and beyond. A community support committee was formed by local residents, members of several city unions and left political organizations. Radical Women (RW) and Solidarity helped organize a press conference that resulted in increased coverage of the strike. On a very cold and windy morning on January 31, 2009, more than 300 people turned out for a march from the cookie factory to a nearby Target store that sells Stella D'oro products. Chants of "What's disgusting? Union busting!" and "No contract, no cookies!" filled the air, and the driver of a passing subway train on the elevated track slowed down and blew his horn! Workers from the Republic Window and Door factory were in town from Chicago to tell about their sit-down strike and victory. They joined the Stella D'oro march, spoke at the rally and then went on to a solidarity meeting held downtown. Striking workers need financial support. Please give generously to "BCTGM Local 50 Strike Fund," 145 Talmadge Road, Suite 17, Edison, NJ 08817 (write "Stella D'oro workers" on your check). In the meantime let your local grocers know about the strike, and ask them not to carry Stella D'oro products.

This article originally appeared in the Freedom Socialist newspaper, Vol. 30, No. 2, April-May, 2009.

Students Re-Occupy New School in NYC



A student waves a red and black flag on the New School's roof. Photo: theactivist.org

By Diane Krauthamer

Early in the morning of April 10, 2009, a group of approximately 50 students took over and occupied the New School's Graduate Faculty building in New York City. Students were able to hold and occupy the building for several hours before police raided the building, pepper spraying and arresting students inside the building. A highly publicized video by videographer Brandon Jounan displayed the NYPD pepper-spraying students inside the building, and chasing and beating protestors outside. The protest and the arrests were covered extensively by local and international news organizations, and those individuals arrested received messages of support from across the world.

The students were calling for the resignation of Bob Kerrey, the embattled President of the New School, and James Murtha, the Vice President. The occupiers were also demanding greater transparency and accountability, and more student power in decisions regarding how the New School's money is spent and how the school operates.

An occupation of the same building, 65 Fifth Avenue in Greenwich Village, occurred in December, and ended with some of the demands being met, although the administration of the New School did not step down. The Adjunct-Faculty Union (ACT-UAW Local 7902) condemned the use of excessive force by President Kerrey and called for an investigation into the matters behind these protests: "The question should be asked why student dissatisfaction with the

administration needs to be expressed in the occupation of a university building. In our view, this protest is symptomatic of the administration's failure to foster a healthy and democratic educational community at the New School."

At the time this story was published, all 22 occupiers were released without bail. The New School In Exile website reports that the students are being considered for expulsion by the President, but they are organizing to oppose this, as well as the excessive use of police force. Three of the individuals who participated in the action and were subsequently arrested are IWW members.

With files from NYC Indymedia and ACT-UAW.

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Multiple Factory Occupations in Scotland

Continued from 1



Prisme workers in Dundee outside the closed factory doors. Photo: marxist.com

The occupation is strongly supported by Dundee Trades Union Council and has been visited by local Wobblies and students fresh from their own occupations of Dundee and St. Andrews universities. The talk has been, from early on, about the possibility of re-opening the factory as a worker co-operative in the style of the recuperated workplaces of Argentina.

Today Belfast, tomorrow...
A separate occupation in Belfast, which began on March 31, 2009, spread to Enfield, North London, within 24 hours. The workers at Visteon, a car component manufacturer that was formerly part of the Ford Motor Company, were given statutory minimum redundancy without consultation and which would occur immediately. They were

locked out on the same day that they received this news, despite being a part of the Unite union. Workers took the initiative, found an unlocked door and the occupation began! The redundancies affect over 600 members across three plants, the third being in Basildon, Essex. At the time this article was written, Belfast and Enfield remain occupied and, if evicted, the workers plan to picket the factory. The hope of the workers is to keep the plants open or at least achieve a “decent” redundancy package. They are looking for solidarity from Ford workers and the broader labour movement.

At present the leadership of their union, Unite, are supporting the action. But as John Maguire, Unite convenor at Visteon Belfast said, “Don’t wait for people high up in the unions and politicians—just do it yourself.”

These occupations point to a new way of dealing with the economic crisis—with direct action, initiative and solidarity. British Isles Regional Organizing Committee (BIROC) wobblies hope this is only the beginning.



Visteon workers confront police. Photo: labornet.org

Canadian Workers Occupy Auto Parts Factory

Continued from 1

As a truck showed up at the gates on March 18, about 30 workers, whose lines had swelled to around 100 with the arrival of support from the Chrysler assembly plant, formed a blockade preventing the truck and Chrysler’s security vehicles from entering.

A few hours after blocking the attempt of Chrysler to remove parts and equipment, the workers took the initiative and fought back. In a bold move they entered the closed plant and welded the doors shut. While a section of workers remained to maintain the lines around the plant, a detachment entered the plant to begin the occupation. Before Chrysler would be allowed to seize its property, the workers moved to seize theirs. Shortly before 6:00 p.m., a group of half a dozen workers appeared on the roof of the factory, and planted the CAW local 195 flag on the roof, announcing that the workers had taken control of the factory.

The events around the plant closure, and the attempt of the company to take the money it owes to the workers, left the workers with very little in the way of options. “They’re stealing our money,” said one 17-year veteran of the plant, “I’m ready to retire; luckily I don’t have small children. But, for many of my brothers here, this job is all they have. This is like a little funeral.” Ali Hammoud, an 18-year employee, said “I’ve got three little ones at home.”

“We need our money, so we can move on with our lives. That’s what we’re telling Chrysler now: if they need their parts and tools they must put pressure on Catalina so we can get our money.”

The workers’ struggle went beyond the demand for payment of the money owed to them. The workers began to demand legislative changes to enhance unemployment benefits and rules that would guarantee that workers receive their severance money before the banks and other creditors in the event of company bankruptcies. “They feel as though the law isn’t working for them,” said Gerry Farnham, president of CAW Local 195, “They are prepared to fight that fight for all workers, union and non union.”

At a rally of more 500 people on the afternoon of March 18, Ken Lewenza, National President of the CAW, announced that a deal had been reached



CAW members supporting the occupation on March 18. Photo: cpeml.ca

with the bosses. “We just struck an agreement not less than two or three minutes ago that we have in writing that provides some support, not all the support, for the membership,” said Lewenza.

In the meantime the occupation has been ended. If the occupation had continued, Chrysler production would have ground to a halt at a number of plants in Canada and the United States.

For a brief period the workers at Aradco in Windsor took matters into their own hands, and showed that the traditions of militant struggle in North America are not lost. Although the demands were initially over severance and back pay owed by the company, which it illegally refused to pay, quickly they became about more than that. They stood for all workers, not just themselves.

It remains to be seen what kind of deal Lewenza was able to negotiate. It won’t be the first time that the current leadership of the CAW has signed deals that do not meet the needs of workers. Maybe the workers should have maintained their occupation until they had a chance to read the small print. Farnham also commented that, “It’s bittersweet

because our members are still out of work.” Even if the workers get their settlement, they are still out of a job during the start of the largest recession since the 1930s. The workers need a strategy to not just get what is owed them, but to save their jobs and livelihoods.

Whatever the result of this struggle, it has shown that militant tactics work and can beat back the bosses. This struggle got significant media coverage and millions of workers who will find themselves in the same position are listening. Eventually, workers will not just demand their back pay; they will demand that their jobs be saved. Chrysler is threatening to shut down all of its Canadian operations and the entire industry is in crisis. These plants have the highest productivity in the world, and yet the capitalist system is destroying them. This system makes no sense for working class people.

The only solution to the loss of jobs, loss of livelihood and communities, and the crippling economic crisis which the bosses are demanding that workers pay for, is the end of the capitalist system. The workers are learning that factory occupations are the only tactic

Support the occupations:

Dundee: TUC Lobby Fund, C/O Mike Arnott, 141 Yarrow Terrace, Menzieshil, Dundee, DD2 4DY (cheques, POs payable to “TUC Lobby Fund”). Emails of solidarity can be sent to prismeworkerssolidarity@googlemail.com.

-Enfield/Basildon: stevehart@unitetheunion.com. Des (Basildon) - 07814432215. Kevin (Enfield) - 0780 889 5724

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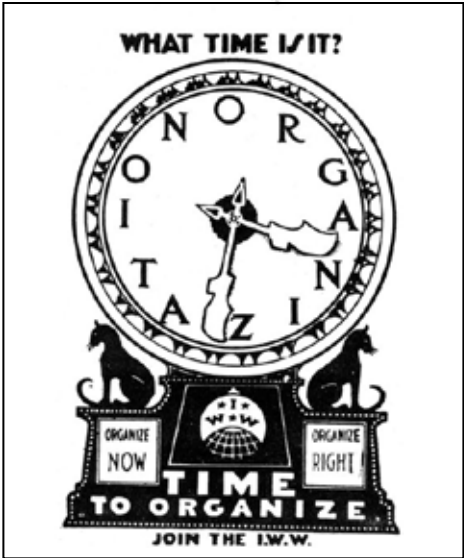
that works against factory closures. The next demand is to bring the factories and shops under workers’ control, and nationalize them to save jobs. That way we can end the crisis in manufacturing and re-tool production to meet the needs of the whole of society.

But along the way to the final goal every step forward, every small victory, must be celebrated. While the workers may only be struggling for severance, the logic of capitalism will not leave them alone. Each militant action is a revival of the memory of the working class, and its traditions. Out of the crisis of capitalism, workers are learning that the solution lies in their own hands and their own power.

Addendum

As we feared, the deal negotiated by the CAW leadership only provided \$400,000 for the workers, which is paid by Chrysler and not Catalina Precision Products. This is \$1.3 million less than what the workers are actually owed. It appears that Lewenza and the CAW bureaucracy wanted to do everything possible to bring the occupation to an end before it spread or became a focal point for a larger struggle to save manufacturing jobs. Hopefully workers at the next occupied plant will know not to end their occupation unless a full vote of all the workers has been taken. (March 20, 2009)

This story originally appeared in the journal, “Fightback,” and can be viewed on www.marxist.ca.



Graphic: riniart.org

The Best Way to Protect Jobs in Auto Is To Stop Making Cars

By Don Fitz & Tim Kaminski

In the days when there was an Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers union (OCAW), its St. Louis business agent, Bob Tibbs, Sr., enjoyed coming to Green Party events. He would tell us that his union knew how bad nuclear power plants were and that it would be happy to get rid of them if workers would be guaranteed jobs of equal pay in other industries. That's "social unionism." The union looked beyond wages and working conditions—it asked if what it was producing truly benefited humanity.

Social unionism is most needed in times of crisis. Auto is truly in crisis. According to the February 14, 2009 *Wall Street Journal*, car sales have dropped to a 30-year low. In November and December, 2008 Ford, GM and Chrysler went whining to Washington that without tens of billions in government handouts they would go belly up.

As if the big three automakers had told them what to say, Congress responded that a condition for granting bailout loans must be autoworkers' surrendering the gains won during the last half century. After a few months of browbeating its membership, UAW executives indicated their willingness to go along with giving up the right to strike and slashing wages, health benefits, job security, Supplemental Employment Benefits and rights of new hires.

Confident that it was successfully using the crisis to bludgeon the union, on February 17, 2009 General Motors asked for \$16.6 billion in addition to the \$13.4 billion it has already received and Chrysler wanted \$5 billion to be put on top of its \$4 billion in pocket. With no thought of protecting jobs via a shorter work week, GM pledged to chop 37,000 line and 10,000 salaried positions.

A split personality with two left hands

The response of the labor and social justice left has been to demand protection of the jobs and benefits of those whose work has not already been off-shored. Auto militants seek support from other unions to fight any give-backs that union bosses seek to shove down their throats. As news stories blast the opulent squandering of millions by bankers, unionists increasingly ask why they should bear the brunt of the attack on living standards.

Meanwhile, anyone whose head has not been buried in the sand for the last decade knows that the automobile is at the root of countless environmental evils. Few devices are responsible for more destruction. It's not just the tens of thousands of fatalities and injuries on the road. Or health disasters in auto factories and their feeder industries such as oil and steel. It's more than the enormous contribution of cars to greenhouse gases and climate change. Not even adding in the massive toxins that cars pour into the air—which results in asthma, lung cancer and other diseases—tallies the full destructiveness of the private automobile.

Transcending all of these is the automobile's being the cornerstone of a culture that sacrifices relationships between people to increasingly frantic "mobility."

Cities are split apart by highways as people live miles from their families in sprawling suburbs. The rush hour drive transforms the eight-hour work day into 10 or even 12 hours away from home.

Of all idols that the corporate mind-set worships, none is more blasphemous than the Tower of Auto. The automobile epitomizes a society that makes workers beg for a job that forces them to labor at an increasingly exhausting pace so that they can be dumped when the factory closes, robbed of their health care and pensions, and compelled to watch their communities polluted, their children poisoned from toxins and their grandchildren fried from global warming.

Yet, it is not unusual for people to rally to save jobs while having amnesia concerning the environmental catastrophe those jobs embody. And there is certainly nothing unique about an environmental forum that says nothing about worklife. Pity the poor leftist who schedules both in the same day, having to remember when to wear the personality of a labor activist who ignores the environment and when to be an environmentalist ignoring labor.

Forward to the past

There was a time, not so many generations ago, when the Knights of Labor and the IWW were the major unions, proclaiming that labor organizations should never limit themselves to bread and butter issues. Defending basic rights should be a part of imagining what society would be like if it was not ground down by capital. The original labor organizations asked how workers could reorganize industry to benefit society rather than to make profit.

Propping up an obsolete technology may seem like it is defending jobs. In the long run, it does nothing of the sort. Tall buildings used to have multiple elevator operators. As push button elevators came in, those jobs were doomed. Demanding that elevator operator positions be maintained could only feed an illusion. It would have been far better to demand, like the OCAW, that elevator operators be guaranteed transition to a different job.

Automobile production is doomed. The last half of the world's oil will disappear far more rapidly than did the first half. No fantasy of shale, tar sands, hydrogen or the like will save the private automobile. The only salvation for the remaining auto jobs is a complete rethinking of what can replace the production of cars. If autoworkers are to be retrained, what would their new jobs be?

If not the private automobile, then...

To say that the "private" car should be abolished does not mean that all automobile manufacture should cease. There will be plenty of need for vehicles for the disabled, construction, emergency use and car sharing. That is totally different than people owning a car for single occupant personal use. But production for these purposes would be vastly less than the constantly expanding production of private cars and could not absorb all auto jobs.

Automobile plants should be imme-

diately retooled to increase the production of buses and trains as the manufacture of cars declines. This would also result in a lowering of production. The only way that mass transit can be efficient is for the total mass of production to be less than that required to move the same number of people in individual cars. The number of jobs created by bus and train manufacture will be less than the number lost by manufacturing fewer cars.

Automobile plants need to be redesigned for environmentally positive production. Production of windmills and solar panels are good options. Increased production of bicycles is important if we are to design cities so people can make 80 percent of their trips without motor vehicles. Yet, adding non-private vehicles, buses, trains, and environmental production will tally a smaller number of jobs than required by actually existing auto plants.

The obvious solution to preserving jobs is a reduction in the number of hours everybody works. If we can produce what we need with fewer hours of labor, why don't all of us work less rather than having some work over 30 hours a week while others have no job?

Who could make this happen? It's not likely to be the corporations. Those sitting around waiting for the big three automakers to make a socially responsible decision will get bed sores on their butts.

Maybe the Democratic Party politicians will decide to do the right thing. Or maybe not. After all, it was the Clinton gang that rammed NAFTA through and did everything in its power to outsource U.S. jobs.

What about the UAW officialdom? A big problem is that none of the fundamental changes needed in the U.S. economy are going to happen without nationalizing the banks and the automobile companies. Demanding nationalization would require union bosses to think beyond Roosevelt's New Deal and they won't even ask to revive it.

New alliance, old alliance

Wasn't it 10 short years ago that labor, environmental, and human rights activists, along with those supporting rights of indigenous people and many others, came together in Seattle to block the World Trade Organization? Whatever the limitations of that coalition, it showed that corporate power can be successfully challenged by pulling many struggles together.

The potential for a new alliance is that we all have the same need: a better life with less work and the manufacture of less damaging stuff. Unfortunately, decades of defeat have left very few progressives willing to announce "The emperor has no clothes!" With a numbing unanimity of corporations, government and media demanding a "stimulus" package, who will say, "Attempting to jump start the economy by producing more of what we don't need is the opposite of what should be done." Rather than increasing production, we could live vastly better lives by reducing production in a sane, planned way and sharing the necessary work.

Is it too much for auto workers to question their own jobs? Actually, a better way to pose the question is: Why should any group of working people fail to challenge what they do and how they do it? If it is not outrageous for those who work in weapons plants to ask themselves if they should be guaranteed work that does not involve tearing the flesh off of other people's bodies, then why shouldn't autoworkers ask if they need to be manufacturing something as deadly as the privately owned car? The same applies to steelworkers, lead miners, doctors, nurses, teachers and social workers.



Graphic: J. Pierce

It is not just auto—working people throughout the country are hurting. Correcting for statistical manipulation by the government, the true unemployment rate rose from 17.5 percent in December 2008 to 18% in January 2009. The U.S. unemployment rate has already reached depression levels.

Again correcting for governmental statistical manipulation, the true number of jobless in January 2009 was 716,000. Even if Obama's promised 3 million jobs materialize, the gain will be wiped out in a few months.

America needs more cars like it needs a new generation of nuclear power plants.

We hear unending propaganda equating more autos with more jobs. To build a human economy we do not need a "stimulus" to increase the production of objects that harm us. Sensible economics requires: (a) universal health care, (b) universal retirement/unemployment coverage, and (c) guaranteed employment with a [much] shorter work week.

During the CIO organizing days, autoworkers paved the way in unionizing plant after plant. For decades, the UAW was a trend-setter for the rest of labor, demanding pay that would allow workers to own their own homes and send their children to college. Now, a beaten and cowed UAW blazes the trail of union self-destruction.

In the 1930s, labor needed to protect job security, pay and standards of living. Those continue to be essential, but the great task of today is redefining work. The last half of the twentieth century saw a continuous reconceptualization of how to organize everything from transportation to computers to office work. Today, labor will either be in the forefront or the victim of job redesign. Union leaders who insist that labor must have no part in rethinking production trade labor's birthright for a pottage of lentils.

Autoworkers have the ability to again set the bar by proclaiming that labor must be at the center of redefining jobs, the economy and, most important, working people's role in establishing a just society. Shouldn't those who do the work be the first ones to ask how it can be done in a different way or even abolished if it is useless or destructive?

It was no accident that Bob Tibbs, Sr. was a OCAW business agent during the workday and signed people up for the IWW during the weekend. Though Bob died several years ago, his spirit continues to inspire St. Louis activists who keep one foot in a languishing union, environmental or civil rights movement while hoping to kindle a dream for a different world. Now is the time to pull disparate forces together for a program of (a) full employment with (b) fewer hours of work and (c) working people deciding what to produce and how to produce it. The economy, the environment and our society are in too much peril to allow the same corporations who created the mess to continue to make decisions for us.

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Book Review

Plunder and Blunder: The Rise and Fall of the Bubble Economy

Baker, Dean. Plunder and Blunder: The Rise and Fall of the Bubble Economy. Portland, OR: Polipoint Press, 2009. 170 pages, paperback, \$15

By John Maclean

“The public should demand real accounting. Why does the Fed grow hysterical over a 2.5 percent inflation rate but think that \$10 trillion financial bubbles can be ignored? Where was the Treasury Department during the Clinton and Bush administrations? What about congressional oversight? Did no one in Congress think that massive bubbles might pose a problem? Why do economists worry so much more about small tariffs on steel and shirts than about gigantic financial bubbles? What exactly do people who get paid millions of dollars by Wall Street financial firms do for their money? And finally, why don’t the business and economic reporters ask any of these questions?”—Dean Baker

In “Plunder and Blunder: The Rise and Fall of the Bubble Economy,” Dean Baker says that the story behind our current economic crisis is one of “major institutional failures” and “energetic self-deception.” The failures occurred in his profession, in economics, and in high policy positions such as the Federal Reserve Board (the Fed) chair. They also occurred among various leaders, who took money from companies and institutions, even as they moved toward bankruptcy. These failures occurred in the mainstream media, which allowed deluded individuals to praise all of the above. Baker says that we should not allow ourselves to be fooled into thinking that all of this “was beyond our ability to predict or avert.”

The Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) economist says that because of an “upward distribution of income” beginning in the 1980s, the U.S. economy could not sustain a “virtuous circle of rising productivity, wages, consumption, and investment.” The “key institutions” of the economy got drawn into “risky bets and unsustainable policies.” Baker says that they got “hooked on bubbles.”

If the positive cycle that characterized the period from 1947 to 1973 had continued, Baker says, people would have been “able to take an additional 24 weeks of vacation each year” and also reduce their “work week to 21 hours,” while still maintaining the income we have today, until 2030. The end of this period of productivity coincided with the increasing influence of the financial sector over our lives. The decades to come were characterized by deregula-

tion, attacks on unions, budget deficits, a high dollar policy, and trade agreements; all of these factors forced less-educated workers into destructive competition.

Baker says that the good times during the Bill Clinton presidency had nothing to do with his reducing of the “federal budget deficit,” and much to do with a “strong uptick in productivity growth” and “two unsustainable bubbles”—one in stocks and the other having to do with the valuation of the dollar. The problem with Clinton is that he promised to spend, and not to spend. According to Baker, all the research on the good impacts of budget deficit reductions point to “only a modest boost to economic growth” which would happen “only over the long term.”

Both Alan Greenspan and Clinton allowed “bubbles” to advance. The bubbles’ “cheerleaders” were presented as “serious experts” and critics were “excluded from public debate.” Things looked forever good inside, and as a result a Democratic president was poised to privatize Social Security; the only thing that stopped this Clintonian momentum was Monica Lewinsky and the threat of impeachment, says Baker.

The stock collapse was NASDAQ-inspired, where the startups were mostly traded, and the steering of funds there took them from productive investment in manufacturing. The “main currency during this period” was in the form of stock options. Following the stock bubble collapse, accounting irregularities began to emerge; first, problems were seen in startup accounting called Earning Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization (EBITDA), and also in the steadier methods involving “profits and revenue.” Even with Enron and “the Sarbanes-Oxley act,” Congress still did not move on the “fundamental conflict of interest” which yielded the abuses: a company’s ability to select who audits them. The not-so-independent Senator Joe Lieberman led an effort to keep options off of a company’s books.

The bubble not only denied manufacturers resources, but also forced up the value of the dollar, and “led to [the] pension crisis.” Many companies were able to shift pension costs over to the government. No economists saw this coming, and none suffered unduly in failing. It needs to be emphasized that all of this yielded “the first investment-led recession of the post war period” and that this type of downturn is harder to get out of. As a result, beginning in the 2000s (despite the Fed’s lowering of interest rates), the economy still “shed jobs.” At this point, Baker says,

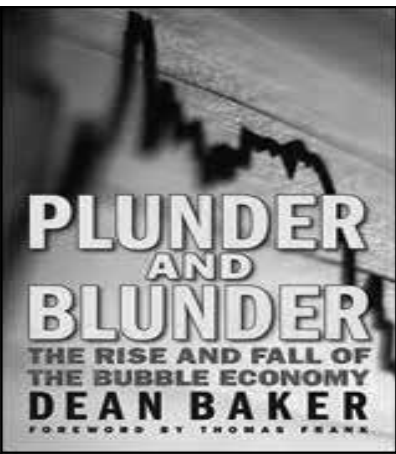
the value of the dollar should have been undermined, and short of this, “the country hitched its wagon to the next financial bubble.” Devaluing the dollar would have been “comparable to a tax increase.”

All along Baker was very critical of the media’s reliance on David Lereah, the writer of “Why the Real Estate Boom Will Not Bust and How You Can Profit From It,” and an economist for the National Association of Realtors. Baker says that during the housing bubble, a “boom-time intoxication” took hold, and with the expectation of ever-rising housing prices, people became willing to “pay more today.” He says that the easiest way to see a bubble in housing is to compare home prices with rent, taking into consideration inflation. In the midst of the bubble, the New York Fed published a paper claiming that billions of dollars in home improvements justified a trillion dollars in home price increases. Baker says that “ordinarily” this wouldn’t pass “the laugh test.” These flawed claims rarely got challenged. The bubble created “the illusion of prosperity” and the addicted wanted only its continuance.

Leading up to 2006, “non-standard mortgages” were surging, and lending that required “limited documentation” jumped from 22 percent of all mortgages to 44 percent by the end of the year. Incredibly, the number of “homes purchased with 100 percent financing went from 3 percent in 2003 to 33 percent in 2006.” No thoughtful person could seriously think that squeezed workers had suddenly become credit-worthy, but this “unmistakable warning sign” was “celebrated” by leaders enamored of home ownership. In this context, bad incentives were “everywhere.” Baker says that “mistakes were never acknowledged” in true policy failure “fashion,” and at the moment when baby boomer wealth was reduced to Social Security, the same policy-makers were pouring possibly trillions into a corrupt finance system.

The final chapter of the book is titled “Learning from the Bubbles.” Baker believes that despite the apparent prosperity of the past, “bubbles by definition aren’t sustainable,” and when they unravel they “cause enormous social and economic damage.” According to Baker, most media outlets have provided “cover [for] the extraordinary incompetence and corruption” of our institutional representatives. The damage is done, but we can still hold the negligent accountable.

According to Baker, “sensible policies” are needed, along with a “clear and serious commitment by the Fed



Graphic: dane101.com

to combat asset bubbles.” He says that powerful people have shown themselves to be “incredibly foolish” and willing to do great damage. The Fed must be willing to “talk” plainly about the economy; authority over margin requirements must be used in a timely manner in the stock market, along with abilities in housing markets. The Fed must be more careful with its power over interest rates, because this can, with a sharp rise, slow the economy and “throw people out of work.” Baker says that if the central bank “lacks the necessary political independence” from Wall Street, then it should be “reorganized” to insure it.

Next, he says, something must be done about the over-valued dollar and trade deficit. This state of affairs devastates working people’s wages, and “redistributes income from the less educated to the most” who tend to be protected. Foundational redistribution such as this makes the “broad prosperity” of the post-WWII period unlikely.

Baker also says that something should be done about the “bloated financial sector” which has become a drain on “the economy’s resources.” Many things can be done to limit “perverse incentives” and ensure “strict audits” in stocks and “credible appraisals” in housing. Also, financial transactions can be taxed to limit instability.

Finally, if workers are made to endure at-will employment, then it is only fair that incompetents in “high places” should as well. Baker says that the “exorbitant pay” extracted by leaders is truly “passed on in higher prices to everyone” and “distorts pay scales throughout the economy.” Our primary goals should be reducing the value of the dollar, and moving away from the “ideology of home ownership.”

What is a wage slave to do given such a tale? Plainly, take more responsibility for what goes on, and organize with the Wobblies to change what is politically imaginable.

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Obituary

Farewell, Fellow Worker Archie Green (1917-2009)

By Jon Bekken

Labor folklorist Archie Green died on March 22, 2009, in his San Francisco home at the age of 91. Green was a pioneer in the folklore field who specialized in recovering and documenting work culture, studying sailors' slang, pile-drivers' tales, millworkers' songs and coal-mining music, among other subjects.

Born in Winnipeg in 1917 to parents who fled Russia after the unsuccessful 1905 Revolution, Green worked as a shipbuilder and union carpenter before earning graduate degrees in library science and folklore. He taught at the Universities of Illinois and Texas, and spent several years successfully lobbying Congress to create the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress to document the lives and cultures of ordinary people. Green published several books on what he called "laborlore," mostly after his retirement in 1982.

Although he was not a member of the IWW, our union's rich cultural life was the focus of three chapters in his 1993 book, "Wobblies, Pile Butts and Other Heroes," and included an exploration of the origins of the "Wobbly" nickname. In 2007, Green completed a project nearly 50 years in the making, "The Big Red Songbook," compiling the lyrics to more than 250 songs in the various editions of the IWW's "Little Red Songbook" between 1909 and 1973.

The songbooks, along with sheet music for the original tunes to which the songs were set and other material, had been collected by long-time Wobbly John Neuhaus, who hoped to publish a complete collection of IWW songs. Neuhaus left his collection to Green when he died in 1958. It is now part of the Southern Folklife Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Despite the many references to Wobbly culture and organizing that pervade his work, Green was not particularly sympathetic to the IWW. Green felt the IWW legacy belonged to the entire working class, and so could be freely appropriated and reinterpreted to meet the needs of the moment. As a result, he could not understand why Wobblies were angered by Wallace Stegner's slanders against fellow worker Joe Hill in his novel, or why we complained about our history and songs being appropriated in the service of a pallid business unionism needing some social movement coloration to motivate the rank-and-file or call upon public sympathy. But though far from a Wobbly himself, Archie Green helped to document and preserve Wobbly culture, and the "laborlore" of workers and occupations across the country.

In a society determined to eradicate the memory of workers' struggles, he made it his life work not only to remember, but to persuade a new generation to



Labor Folklorist Archie Green poses in front of IWW posters. Photo: dailyyonder.com

recognize the centrality of workers—our lives, our struggles, our labor, our songs and our stories. Our challenge is to draw upon that legacy to inspire a new generation of rebel workers, to remember our glorious past and to learn from it as we struggle to rid ourselves of the parasitic exploiters who continue to poison our

planet, plunder our futures, and consign millions of our fellow workers to lives of misery.

As Ralph Chaplin wrote in 1915, "They have taken untold millions that they never toiled to earn, but without our brain and muscle not a single wheel can turn."

IWW Professor Fired for Political Activity

By Peter Moore

The University of Ottawa fired Denis Rancourt, a physics professor, renowned researcher, and IWW member on March 31, 2009, while he was speaking at an academic freedom conference in New York City.

The university sought to dismiss him on the basis that he had awarded high grades to a graduate level physics class, which Rancourt says he did in order to remove competition and performance as they are obstacles to learning. The university claimed that Rancourt's marking damaged the institution's credibility as an academic institution.

Rancourt has said that the university's board fired him before an April 1 deadline to submit a legal brief in his defense and that it ignored his submission of his students' exams as proof that he was evaluating students properly. The university disregarded the Association of Professors' (APUO) collective agreement and the grievance procedure by firing Rancourt without allowing him due process in his defense.

The APUO, a registered trade union that represents university faculty, has announced it will launch an inquiry and it will likely appeal the firing in court.

Rancourt had offered to accept mediation on March 11 and complied with the university's conditions to do so. The university's lawyer responded on March 26 that the university had "insufficient time" to do the mediation that it had offered.

The University of Ottawa said it will not comment on personnel decisions.



Photo: www.academicfreedom.ca

The story and debate about academic freedom is now national, with coverage on radio, television and national daily newspapers in Canada. One University of Guelph student gathered a petition of 120 signatures to send to the university president.

The IWW's General Defense Committee Local 6 has called for all members of the union and its defense committees to send a letter protesting the firing to University of Ottawa President Allan Rock at allan.rock@uottawa.ca and send a copy to the chair of the defense committee at claudc.cde@gmail.com. The committee has also called for people to sign an online petition to reinstate him at rancourt.academicfreedom.ca/petitions/online-petition.html

"IWW support has been great," said Rancourt in an email to GDC Local 6. "Now the real public opinion battle starts."

To learn the latest information, visit www.academicfreedom.ca.



Mass Education Needed for Working Class

Fellow Workers,

Chris Agenda was quite right in his article, "Mass Education Campaign Needed," feature on page 9 of the February/March *Industrial Worker*. The current economic crisis does provide the IWW with a great opportunity, not only for organization but also for education. The *IW* should solicit and publish articles dealing with not only the current economic crisis, but with general anti-capitalist economic theory and the socialized, workers' self-management alternative.

However, I think FW Agenda is dead wrong in his assertion that the worker "identity" is problematic for our work. On the contrary, it is essential. The mass delusion afflicting most workers is

the belief that they are middle class, and this is preventing the development of the class consciousness that is necessary to organizing the One Big Union. Yes, we are human beings, as are our bosses, but there is not one humanity. There is a humanity divided into classes: the employing class and the working class, and we have nothing in common. There will not be one humanity until we've abolished class society. That cannot come about unless the exploited class (workers/producers of all wealth) clearly recognize their station in society and organize to abolish exploitation. Only then will we be able to be truly human.

For the Works,
Mike Hargis

Labor Awaits May Day

By x364060

& amidst the clinking
Machines & the
Stupid boss & an
Insufficient wage (&
With a tear on
Her cheek)--she
Closed her eyes
& dreamt &
Dreamt for that
Better day--a day
Where--after
The General Strike--
She could meet
In her Industrial
Union & be organized

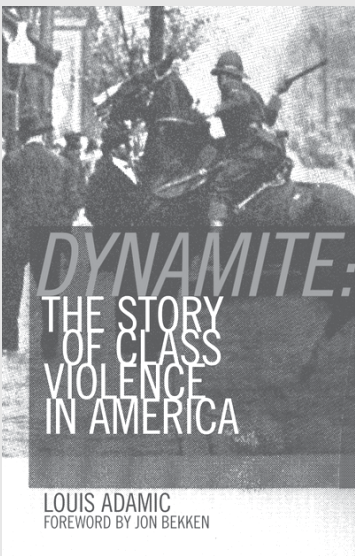
Finally for useful
Production--she
Could be involved
In deciding how
Much to produce & work--
She--in economic
Freedom--could
Feed her children
Local healthy grub
With leisure to
Grow & think--
Could sing a new song
Praising 0% unemployment--
Dance a new dance
With a new Industrial Spirit!

May Day salute to:

"Wobbly of the Heart"
Archie Green
(1917-2009)

who enriched labor culture enormously

-- Harry Siitonen, Bay Area GMB



Dynamite: The Story of Class Violence In America
BY LOUIS ADAMIC
WITH A FORWARD BY JON BEKKEN

The history of labor in the United States is a story of almost continuous violence. In *Dynamite*, Louis Adamic recounts one century of that history in vivid, carefully researched detail. Covering both well- and lesser-known events—from the riots of immigrant workers in the second quarter of the nineteenth century to the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)—he gives precise, and often brutal, meaning to the term “class war.”

This AK Press edition of Adamic’s revised 1934 version of *Dynamite*, includes a new foreword by

professor and labor organizer Jon Bekken, who offers a critical overview of the work that underlines its contemporary relevance.

“A young immigrant with a vivid interest in labor—and the calluses to prove his knowledge was more than academic—Louis Adamic provided a unique, eyes-open-wide view of American labor history and indeed of American society. *Dynamite* was the first history of American labor ever written for a popular audience. While delineating the book’s limitations, Jon Bekken’s foreword also makes clear for today’s readers its continuing significance.” —Jeremy Brecher, historian and author of *Strike!*

“Adamic’s *Dynamite* is a classic, written with the verve and perspective of an author who was a first-hand observer and participant in many of the struggles he chronicles. And it is a powerful reminder that class struggle in America has always been pursued with ferocity and intensity. With all the book’s strengths and weaknesses, outlined in a perceptive foreword by Jon Bekken, it remains a foundational text for those who wish to understand the world...and to change it.”

—Mark Leier, director of the Centre for Labour Studies, Simon Fraser University

380 pages, \$19.95



Singing Through the Hard Times: A Tribute to Utah Phillips

In his life, Utah Phillips was many things - soldier, hobo, activist, pacifist, union organizer, storyteller, songwriter. He was an oral historian who documented the events of the working class and turned them into stories and songs. And in the folk tradition, he passed them on to others. Righteous Babe Records continues that tradition with *Singing Through The Hard Times*, a 2CD set that celebrates the music that Utah sang

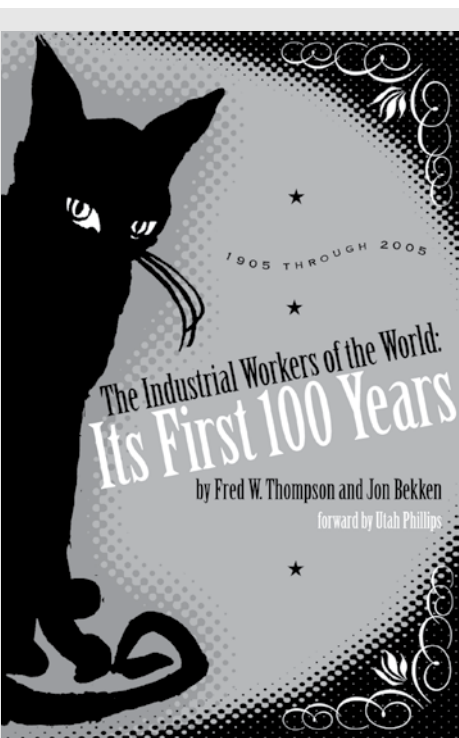
and loved. Included are performances from Emmylou Harris and Mary Black, Pete Seeger, Tom Paxton, John McCutcheon, Rosalie Sorrels, Gordon Bok, Ani DiFranco, Magpie, Jean Ritchie and many others - folksingers whose music springs from the same rich vein of the people’s history that Phillips chronicled throughout his life.

The project itself started as a way to help Utah through his own hard times. Last year, folksinger Dan Schatz spoke with fellow musicians Kendall and Jacqui Morse about putting together a CD to help Phillips defray medical expenses. Phillips had been ill for some time when the project began, and died in May of 2008. It meant a lot to him that his songs would continue to live for years to come.”Utah himself once said, “Kids don’t have a little brother working in the coal mine; they don’t have a little sister coughing her lungs out in the looms of the big mill towns of the Northeast. Why? Because we organized; we broke the back of the sweatshops in this country; we have child labor laws. Those were not benevolent gifts from enlightened management. They were fought for, they were bled for, they were died for by working people, by people like us. Kids ought to know that. That’s why I sing these songs. That’s why I tell these stories. No root, no fruit!” **39 tracks on 2 CDs, \$15.98**



Wobblies and Zapatistas: Conversations on Anarchism, Marxism & Radical History
BY STAUGHTON LYND AND ANDREJ GRUBACIC

Wobblies and Zapatistas offers the reader an encounter between two generations and two traditions. Andrej Grubacic is an anarchist from the Balkans. Staughton Lynd is a lifelong pacifist, influenced by Marxism. Encompassing a Left libertarian perspective and an emphatically activist standpoint, these conversations are meant to be read in the clubs and affinity groups of the new Movement. The book invites the attention of readers who believe that a better world, on the other side of capitalism and state bureaucracy, may indeed be possible. **300 pages, \$19.95**



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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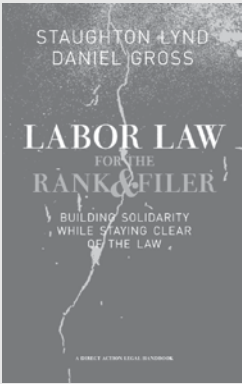


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Labor Law for the Rank and Filer: Building Solidarity While Staying Clear of the Law

BY STAUGHTON LYND AND DANIEL GROSS

Have you ever felt your blood boil at work but lacked the tools to fight back and win? Or have you acted together with your co-workers, made progress, but wondered what to do next? *Labor Law for the Rank and Filer* is a guerrilla legal handbook for workers in a precarious global economy. Blending cutting-edge legal strategies for winning justice at work with a theory of dramatic social change from below, Staughton Lynd and Daniel Gross deliver a practical guide for making work better while re-invigorating the labor movement.

This new revised and expanded edition includes new cases governing fundamental labor rights as well as an added section on Practicing Solidarity Unionism. This new section includes chapters discussing the hard-hitting tactic of working to rule; organizing under the principle that no one is illegal, and building grassroots solidarity across borders to challenge neoliberalism, among several other new topics. Illustrative stories of workers’ struggles make the legal principles come alive.

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The Bond Market: A Driving Force in Finance Capital

By John Reimann

“I used to think if there was reincarnation, I wanted to come back as the president or the pope or a .400 baseball hitter. But now I want to come back as the bond market. You can intimidate everybody.”— James Carville, influential advisor to former President Bill Clinton and Democratic Party strategist.

The Bond Market’s Importance

Many people are very conscious of the stock market but the bond-trading market goes almost unnoticed. Valued at some \$40-45 trillion, the bond market plays a vital role in the U.S. and world economy. Therefore, it is useful for the workers’ movement and socialists to understand the basics of what this market is and how it works.

Publicly held corporations have two means of raising the cash that they need both for day-to-day operations and for longer-term investments: They can sell stocks or they can sell a bond. The problem with selling stocks regularly is that this dilutes the value of the stocks already held, so the preferred method is to sell a bond, which, in effect, is taking out a loan. For privately-held corporations, selling bonds is their primary means of raising money.

The biggest seller of bonds and other similar “instruments” is the U.S. Treasury Department. Treasury notes, bills and bonds—referred to as treasury “Securities”—operate like the queen in a bee colony; the health of these “instruments” and what they do affect the entire bond market.

From Sleepy Backwater to Driving Force of Finance Capital

Until the 1980s, the bond market was a sleepy backwater of finance capital. Maybe the significance of the bond market could most easily be explained through the social life of those in the finance capital world. One such trader, Sidney Homer, described his situation in the 1970s: “I felt frustrated. At cocktail parties lovely ladies would corner me and ask my opinion of the market, but alas, when they learned I was a bond man they would quietly drift away” (qtd. by Michael Lewis in “Liar’s Poker”).

Then with the economy moving into crisis in the early 1980s, former president of the U.S. Federal Reserve Paul Volcker changed monetary policy. Up until then, monetary policy had been controlled by manipulating the money supply through purchases of Treasury instruments. Such purchases put more dollars into circulation, thus cheapening the value of those dollars.

Volcker sharply raised interest rates. Of course, increased interest rates make getting a loan or selling a bond more expensive, thus slowing down the

economy. From that time on, manipulation of interest rates became the means of affecting the availability of money. Former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan was much-loved by finance capital for years because he kept interest rates so low.

The Federal Reserve generally influences interest rates by setting the rate which it charges for overnight loans to banks—loans that banks take out in order to keep the required level of cash on hand. All other interest rates are more or less determined by market forces.

The constant manipulation of interest rates transformed the bond market from a sleepy backwater of finance capital to the place where the action was. To see why, one must understand how the pricing of bonds works. Basically, the price of a bond varies inversely with interest rates; when interest rates rise, the bond’s price falls, and vice versa.

How Bond Prices Vary

Take a Treasury Security, for instance, which pays a certain “coupon” each year. This is the price the investor is paid to “lend” the Treasury the money. The coupon is determined at the time the bond is issued. So if a 10-year \$10,000 bond is sold with a coupon of 10 percent, you get \$1,000 per year until the end of the 10 years, when you get your \$10,000 back. In this case you would pay approximately \$10,000 for that 10-year bond. Let’s say the day after you purchased the security, interest rates for 10-year bonds double to 20 percent. Well, if you wanted to sell the 10 percent 10-year bond today, with 10-year interest rates at 20 percent, then you would have to lower the price so that the amount you pay today gives you the equivalent of 20 percent over 10 years. Since the coupon is set (10 percent) and the amount you get back after 10 years is set (\$10,000), the only thing that can be changed in order to affect your overall return (the “yield” or interest rate) is the price.

All other interest rates are strongly influenced by those paid for Treasury Securities since these are such a massive portion of the market, and one of the more secure bonds at that. As interest rates changed, and as those changes were anticipated, the buying and selling of bonds became a matter of massive speculation. While the bond market itself was a mere \$45 trillion or so, the speculation derived from this market absolutely exploded. In 2008, the total derivative market was valued at an estimated \$791 trillion.

Bond Traders

How does this market operate? Michael Lewis explains: “Most traders act simply as toll takers. The source of their fortune has been nicely summarized by

Kurt Vonnegut (who, oddly, was describing lawyers): ‘There is a magic moment, during which a man has surrendered a treasure, and during which the man who is about to receive it has not yet done so. An alert lawyer [read bond trader] will make that moment his own, possessing the treasure for a magic microsecond, taking a little of it, passing it on.’ ”

It is easy to see that in a market valued at almost \$800 trillion, just taking a tiny fraction of this market will lead to gargantuan profits. Not only that, but it is in the bond traders’ interest to see to it that the market is constantly churning and that bonds are constantly changing hands. Involved in this dynamic are the increasingly complex derivatives, which nobody understood – not the purchaser, not the seller and not even the trader himself, according to Lewis. But it didn’t matter because this derivative was being bought not to hold until the bonds involved matured, but to be sold at a later date to some other speculator.

Even the most speculative of financial dealings in some way or another has some connection to the real economy—to production. There had to be something real involved. In the celebrated cases where there was absolutely nothing real involved, the individuals involved were considered to have committed a crime. This is the fate of Bernie Madoff.

Thus, involved in all these bonds was the purchase of homes, among other things. As long as such production at least had the appearance of moving ahead, the financial churning could continue. At the same time, this speculation helped maintain the appearance of a growing real economy.

Today, the policy of President Obama, as it was of former President Bush, focuses on re-energizing the bond market. Given the tremendous uncertainties of world finance, the most popular such investments today are in U.S. securities, such as Treasury notes, Treasury bills. This is because it is deemed inconceivable that these loans will not be repaid, and repaid in U.S. dollars, the currency considered less unstable than others. The U.S. dollar is thought to be a “safe haven” in uncertain times.

Low Interest Rates

The values of these U.S. securities are at record highs because interest rates are so low. The U.S. can get away with paying such low interest rates because (1) of the demand as explained above, and because (2) prices are not going up, meaning that lenders do not expect to be repaid in cheapened dollars. In fact, some economists are saying that the next big bubble to burst will be the price of U.S. securities. The largest holders of U.S. securities are the Chinese capitalists. At present, they are slightly increas-



Graphic: radicalgraphics.org

ing their holding of gold as a percentage of their overall holdings. If they should ever decide to seriously reduce their holdings of U.S. securities, this would signal the start of a collapse in these securities’ values.

Whenever the Federal Reserve has to raise interest rates, or whenever some other economic shock creates questions about the future of the U.S. dollar, this bubble is liable to burst. Inevitably, this will mean that interest rates will rise—before, during or after the bursting of this bubble. When that happens, it will be much harder for corporations to receive government financing. Already, the corporations are anticipating this event and are hoarding cash. The non-financial corporations of the S&P 500, a value weighted index of the prices of 500 large cap common stocks actively traded in the U.S., have increased their cash hoards by some \$43 billion from just some six months ago, and now hold some \$811 billion in cash and “marketable securities.”

Contradictions of the Capitalist System

What this insecurity in the world of finance reflects are the contradictions and imbalances of the capitalist system itself. On the one hand, we have a world economy that is absolutely dependent on international trade, which means international finance as well. But this must be measured in some terms, and those terms today are the U.S. dollar. As is befitting of any self-respecting capitalist, U.S. capitalism has taken advantage of this situation to export its own crisis onto the entire capitalist world in part through that world’s dependence on the U.S. dollar. Thus we have the contradiction of the nation-state haunting the era of global production and global trade. In addition, there exists the tendency for the rate of profit to fall, having been temporarily held at bay by the enormous profits of financial speculation through the bond market. Finally, we have had the ability of workers to buy back more of their own production by going massively into debt—a debt that was later bought and sold on the derivatives market (an outgrowth of the bond market).

Truly, the financial contortions of capitalism in its crisis are a wonder to behold. It’s too bad that many billions of people will be made to suffer as a result.

North of 49° Assembly June 13- 14, 2009

The North of 49° Assembly Committee is pleased to announce that the Winnipeg GMB of Manitoba, Canada, has agreed to host the Assembly on June 13-14, 2009. The committee is now working in earnest on putting together a program of panels, workshops and presentations that will help build the One Big Union in Canada.

Program proposals to date include:
- Building Industrial Union Branches from General Membership Branches,
- the IWW and Canadian labour law,
- race and organizing,
- the Working Homeless in Canada and the US, and
- the IWW and the Canadian labour movement.

Is something missing from the list above? Have a program idea? Want to present or be part of a panel? It’s not too late. Get in touch right away with your idea and we will discuss at our next committee teleconference. Want to participate in the teleconference? Send us your Skype name and we’ll link you in.

Want to register? Send us a note and we will let you know when the Assembly’s online registration form is available.

The North of 49° Assembly is an event open to all IWW members, regardless of whether you’re on the north or south side of 49°.

Hope to you see you there!

Publicity Contact, North of 49° Assembly: Peter Moore at pmoore26@yahoo.com



May Day 2009 Missoula, Montana

Capitalism is not working. It is not working for workers and it is not working for the environment. Capitalism is in reality a system of socialism and welfare for the rich and a ruthless free-market system for the poor.

It’s time to stop listening to the same old rhetoric, the same old promises, and the same old lies. It’s time to start bailing ourselves out.

In Missoula, Montana, workers, students, the retired and the unemployed are mobilizing on May 1st to begin creating a new society in the shell of the old.

When: Friday, May 1st at 2:00 PM
Where: On the Oval at the University of Montana
What: Theater, song, protest and a march on downtown Missoula to take action against debt, job insecurity, climate change, war and announce alternatives for a new society

Contact: Two Rivers General Membership Branch of the Industrial Workers of the World
Phone: (406) 459-7585
Address: P.O. Box 9366 Missoula, MT 59807

Solidarity Self-management Equity Diversity

The Government War on Women’s Rights in Nicaragua

By **Laura Mannen**

On Nov. 25, 2008, police blocked 400 women's rights activists from marching in Managua's annual commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. This shocking action came at the behest of Daniel Ortega, former revolutionary leader and current Nicaraguan president, in a bid to silence opponents of his harsh anti-abortion policies. Instead, a hastily called procession led by powerful "first lady" Rosario Murillo expressed support for Ortega's FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) government. The halting of the feminist protest is just the latest in a series of attacks that reflect the FSLN's rightward swing. As ever, a group's political direction can be gauged by its attitude toward women.

War on feminists

In October 2006, Nicaragua outlawed therapeutic abortion, i.e., termination of a pregnancy to save a mother's life. The FSLN backed the measure in a cynical alliance with conservatives and the Catholic Church. During the first year of the ban, at least 80 women died as a result. In November 2007, the Ortega government added criminal sanctions to the law. Since then, the FSLN and Ortega have attempted to stifle feminist critics who are exposing their severely tarnished image. In 2007, a church-affiliated group filed a complaint against nine leading feminists that accused them of concealing the rape of a girl by her stepfather. The confusing charges stem from the fact that, four years earlier, the feminists had helped a nine-year-old girl obtain a then-legal therapeutic abortion. Although prosecutors are required to either close a complaint or bring charges within three months, no action has been taken, leaving the women in limbo. In October 2008, Nicaraguan authorities raided the offices of the Communications Research Center (CINCO) and the Autonomous Women's Move-

ment (MAM). They confiscated files and computers amid accusations that the groups had illegally promoted abortions and engaged in improper financial dealings. Later that month, Dr. Vilma Núñez and the staff of the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH) were physically and verbally attacked by Sandinista supporters when they arrived for a meeting with the General Prosecutor. CENIDH was there to attend an investigative hearing of the Civil Coordinator, an umbrella group of several hundred social-issue organizations that has also opposed criminalization of abortion. In addition to the abortion issue, feminists across Latin America have earned Ortega's ire by publicly denouncing him for sexual abuse charges brought forward 10 years ago by his stepdaughter Zoilamérica Narváez. Ortega and Murillo (Narváez's mother) deny the charges. But feminists claim Ortega used his political clout to prevent an investigation or trial.

Murillo is standing by her man. She formed her own women's group and penned a manifesto titled "The 'Feminist' Connection and Low Intensity Warfare." The aim of her organization is to provide an antidote to what Murillo dubs "false feminism." She lauds women who embrace traditional family roles, and characterizes feminists as oligarchs, counterrevolutionaries, and well-paid agents of imperialism.

A dramatic about-face

What has become of revolutionary Nicaragua, which electrified the globe by overthrowing dictator Anastasio Somoza and establishing a workers' and peasants' government in the 1980s? In the first place, the U.S. spent a decade trying to destroy the FSLN movement by arming, training and funding its bloody contra opponents. And the Sandinistas did not fulfill their promises to the masses. Rather than advancing to socialism, they advocated a "mixed economy" that

included both state-run industries and for-profit enterprises—a Stalinist scheme that always leaves capitalism firmly in control. (Stalin led the bureaucratic counterrevolution that eventually led to the destruction of workers states in Russia and Eastern Europe.) After initial expropriation of Somoza family holdings, the Sandinistas put the brakes on land reform and nationalization of vital industries. The FSLN also refused to recognize the national rights of indigenous communities along the Atlantic coast, demanding that they assimilate into Nicaraguan society. Female militants, who made up 30 percent of the Sandinista military forces, were told to postpone demands for equality in favor of building the new society. These failures crippled the Sandinistas' ability to create fundamental change. Thus in 1990, a disillusioned, war-weary populace voted U.S.-backed Violeta Chamorro into office in an attempt to lift Uncle Sam's heel from their throats. However, Ortega remained active in politics, making unsuccessful presidential bids in 1996 and 2001.

An ex-radical's return

Daniel Ortega's inauguration ceremony on Jan. 10, 2007, had all the trappings of Nicaragua's revolutionary heyday. He denounced "savagely capitalism" flanked by Latin America's most prominent populist leaders, Venezuela's Hugo Chávez and Bolivia's Evo Morales. But Ortega's presidential campaign painted a different picture. His campaign slogan, "All reunited through reconciliation," was illustrated by his vice-presidential choice, former contra leader Jaime Morales Carazo, his close alliance with the Catholic Church and evangelicals, and his electoral plank against abortion. Ortega is no longer seen as a threat to Washington or capitalism. The day before his inauguration, he met with Bush administration officials offering \$175 million from the Millennium Challenge

Corporation. The real estate and tourism industries supported Ortega's bid for office because of his promise to respect private property. Foreign investors continue to pour money into the country. While courting external investment, Ortega and Murillo hypocritically denounce feminists and NGOs as agents of "low-intensity" foreign subversion. Pro-Sandinista media have claimed that abortion rights are "a flag raised by Nicaraguan pseudo-feminists with the intention of obtaining millions in foreign funds." They also resort to the tired tactic of accusing advocates for women's rights with being privileged imperialist pawns and undermining the national culture.

Stand up for women

Human rights defenders across the Americas are outraged by the Nicaraguan government's misogynist attacks. Ortega's official visits have sparked protests from Paraguay to Honduras. In October 2008, feminists at the Americas Social Forum in Guatemala passed a resolution condemning the government's actions. Radical Women in the U.S. has also sent a protest letter (see www.radicalwomen.org). Add your voice to defend feminist organizing and women's right to biological self-determination. Messages can be sent to Presidente Daniel Ortega, Reparto El Carmen, Costado Oeste del Parque El Carmen, Managua, Nicaragua. Copies can be emailed to the Autonomous Women's Movement (Ma_mujeresnic@yahoo.es). Women across the Americas will not wait in line for their demands to be met. It is time for "high-intensity" opposition to all who thwart women's voices and control over their own bodies!

Laura Mannen of Portland,OR, is a Latin America solidarity activist. She can be contacted at RadicalWomenUS@gmail.com
This article originally appeared in Radical Women.



Graphic: riniart.org

Filipino Women Workers Demand Equality

By Partido ng Manggagawa (Labor Party-Philippines)
Women workers are disproportionately affected by the ongoing mass layoffs, work rotation and other flexibility schemes. In the two industries that have been greatly affected by the global crisis—electronics and garments—women workers are the overwhelming majority. The country's top two exports are electronics and apparel and clothing accessories, accounting respectively for \$2.6 billion and \$181 million in revenues as of September 2008, according to the National Statistics Office. About 18 percent of exports are sent to the U.S. and 14 percent sent to Japan, both of which are in an economic recession. With the deepening crisis, the “double burden” of women workers becomes heavier. The traditional coping mechanism of the workers and the poor is the safety net of family relations, but this unduly relies on the unpaid work of women. The double burden means women are exploited as cheap labor in the factories and then utilized as unpaid workers in the home. The government must provide the safety net of social protection so that workers and the poor do not rely exclusively on the coping mechanism of family relations and women are not weighed down by the heavier double burden. A pro-labor and pro-women bailout package is needed to alleviate the burden of the crisis on the feminine shoulders of women workers. Yet the government is deaf and blind to these demands. In fact it is making a big fuss out of its false claim that Pilar

has overtaken Pepe, that Filipino women have overtaken men in terms of development. A presumptuous government study claims that women have surpassed men in health, education, and income, and that sooner or later it is Filipino men who will clamour for equality and demand their own "National Men's Month." This study asserts women have gained higher achievements than men in all three dimensions as indicated by the higher than one levels of Gender Equality Ratio (GER) for health (1.0248), education (1.0583) and income (1.2299) in 2003. In fact, the advantage of women in the income dimension grew larger as the GER in income increased from 1.1170 to 1.2299. This is probably one of the reasons why the theme of the government's commemoration of Women's Month is "Babae, Yaman ka ng Bayan!" (Women, You are the Wealth of the Nation!). The truth is that the study merely highlights women's achievements in those areas, but it hides the bigger picture of the state of inequality between men and women in the Philippines. It also contains chauvinist innuendos, or a sexist joke at its worst, by challenging the egos of men that they are outperformed by women. This exposes the fact that the government hardly understands the essence of women's struggle for equality. The awful truth is that around 51.4 percent (or 15 million) of Filipino women are not active in the labor force compared to the 78.9 percent (22.9 million) of men who participate in the labor force. Assuming that 4 million of these

women aged 15-19 are still studying and the 2.5 million aged 60-80 above have retired, there remain 8.5 million women aged 20-59 who are not active in the labor force. These women are a big chunk of the labor force that are doing full-time household work—unrecognized by society because the value of what they do remains invisible in the country's income accounts. Likewise, they are not counted in unemployment statistics. There were only 929,000 unemployed women accounted for in October 2008. These numbers indicate that more than half of Filipino women aged 15 and above do not receive their own income. So how can these invisible women be considered "yaman ng bayan" (wealth of the nation) when in fact they are without their own source of income? Moreover, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO), women are paid lower wages compared to men, and this is the trend worldwide. Despite the fact that there is no discrimination towards women in terms of wage policies in the country, the majority of women workers are found in the service sector, education, finance, health and social work, where wages are more often than not below minimum, without benefits, and with working conditions that are extensions of their household chores. In addition to these problems, approximately 40,000 women workers were recently laid off due to the global economic crisis. There are similar problems in public health. While it is true that women live longer than men, an average of 11 wom-

en die in childbirth every day, according to a recent study done by the United Nations Children's Fund. Pregnancy and childbirth complications remain the top 10 killers of women in the country. Additionally, it is estimated that 800 women die yearly due to complications of unsafe abortion. Around 3,000 women yearly are reported raped and the trend is going up. Another 3,000 women die of breast cancer yearly, and another 2,000 of cervical cancer. Thus women workers demand a (1) subsidy for displaced workers from the government; (2) tax refund for all wage earners; (3) expansion and reform of the public employment program; (4) extension of health care coverage for displaced workers; and (5) moratorium on demolitions and evictions. Aside from these, we demand the passage of the Reproductive Health bill. The Reproductive Health bill answers the problem of high maternal mortality that is bound to escalate in times of crisis. Without the Reproductive Health bill, reproductive health services will remain beyond the reach of poor working women. To fund this vastly expanded social program, the entire \$700 billion (Philippines) or \$14 billion (U.S.) debt servicing budget must be reallocated. Furthermore, we demand the reversal of the policies of liberalization, deregulation and privatization that are at the root of high prices of goods and the deterioration of public services.

Special Ed Forced Labor in Puget Sound Schools

By Brooke Stepp and Jeff Berryhill

In a number of schools in the Puget Sound region of Washington State, students involved in special education programs have been forced to undertake tasks outside what is usually found in standard academic coursework for students with special needs. Typically, parents of special needs students, in collaboration with educators and specialists, develop an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) in order to develop an academic program that is specific to the individual needs of the student. This plan is supposed to reflect the interests and strengths of the students in a way that also enhances their ability to learn.

One student, Colton Daline, has attended a number of schools in the Puyallup School District since elementary school. He has significant difficulties communicating through speech. Nevertheless, according to Colton’s father, Bernie Daline, “Colton likes anything with art, working on the computer, really anything he can build. He likes to be creative, to invent things.... He is a heck of an artist, loves to draw. He loves astronomy, anything about space and animals. Colton just loves science.” Along these lines, Bernie Daline suggested to the school district on a number of occasions that “it would be helpful to our son if they could acquire some graphic arts computer programs and share them with our son to accentuate his talent in that area.”

Bernie was under the impression that such a program could enhance his son’s artistic ability and encourage further academic development. However, this request and others similar to it, including increased speech therapy, have been ignored and neglected by the

school. This matter is especially troubling because the school district receives an additional \$10,000 from the state for every special needs child in attendance, precisely so they can provide supplemental programs and assistance for students with special needs.

According to Bernie, instead of adhering to the suggestions laid out in their IEPs, students like Colton are lumped into a program that treats all disabilities uniformly. These classrooms are called “general developmentally delayed classrooms,” and skills elementary for functioning, such as using the restroom, are taught. For a student like Colton, this can create many problems because of the specific nature of his disability. As a result of being placed in a setting that was not responsive to his needs, Colton began to mirror the range of behaviors exhibited in the classroom, ultimately further stunting his academic development.

Instead of providing the academically focused curriculum these children deserve that allows them to adequately develop their skills or strengths, the school is cutting corners by requiring them to do janitorial and administrative tasks. These tasks include “scrubbing windows, wiping down tables, collecting trash, and filing paperwork,” according to Bernie. In addition, while collecting trash, the students were not given adequate safety equipment, such as gloves. This is especially disturbing because students would collect discarded cigarette butts, used condoms, and broken glass.

Bernie recently lost a due process hearing in which the school district claimed that Colton was receiving “vocational training.” But schools are clearly taking advantage of their special needs

students when they compel them to participate in such activities. Due to the nature of their disability, some special needs students are unable to communicate about the ways they are being hurt at school. Failing to provide necessary equipment or therapy specific to a student’s disability, despite extra funds allocated for such services, shows a failure by the school to demonstrate a commitment to special needs education.

When students are engaged in nonacademic pursuits, this also allows the school to employ fewer para-educators and other special needs staff that would normally be meeting the academic needs of these students. Also, special needs students are effectively involved in work normally reserved for paid, often unionized, employees, without any compensation or labor protections, resulting in reduced employment opportunities for workers. In other words, this is not just an issue of children’s or disability rights, but is a labor issue as well.

Despite these setbacks, parents such as Bernie Daline and concerned community members are fighting back. Bernie is appealing the judge’s finding, this time with the help of a specialized lawyer. On a number of occasions, Bernie has picketed in front of various administrative buildings and schools belonging to the Puyallup School District to get the word out about his family’s experience. This could be happening in your community too. Bernie advises, “It is important to research the law and gain an



Photo: nwcommonaction.org

understanding of what rights students and parents have. There are a number of valuable sources of information available on the web. It is important to act fast. If there is an injustice in your child’s curriculum or education, file a complaint, or sign up for a due process hearing. This is where potential concerns gain the most attention. Don’t take for granted that the district is always working with your child’s best interest in mind, because they often do not. Also, look for advocacy groups; a number of them exist. They can provide valuable knowledge and assistance. Don’t give up. If you feel like you’re losing ground, reach out to other people; you will often find support. Until we all get together on board to do this, nothing is going to change.”

Groups such as the Olympia IWW have committed to working on this issue and are hoping to begin an organizing drive among special needs students across the Puget Sound. A community forum involving parents, students, educators, and community members is planned for the near future.

Labor’s Ranks Crank Up the Heat for a Fightback on State Budget Cuts

By Linda Averill, *Freedom Socialist Newspaper*

In New York and Washington, Democratic Party state governors are aiming their budget axes at public-sector unions and the services those workers provide. To stop this wrecking operation will require that organized labor conduct a sustained, all-out battle to demand that capitalists, not workers, pay for the economic crisis. Whether that happens depends on the ability of rank-and-filers to push their unions to actually mobilize a fightback, and to replace leaders who won’t lead.

A Unity Rally shows the way

In Washington, Governor Christine Gregoire wants workers and the poor to bear the brunt of the state’s \$8 billion budget shortfall. The response of labor officials, so far, is to organize lobby days, where each union independently pleads its case at the state capitol. This is a recipe for failure.

However, a ray of hope was provided by the Washington Federation of State Employees (WFSE) Local 304, which issued a call for a Unity Rally. The idea, initially put forth by President Rodolfo Franco, was for labor, students, service recipients, and community groups to come together against the cuts. WFSE 304 held their rally on Feb. 16, Presidents Day, when workers could attend. Their flyer had clear demands such as “Repeal tax breaks for corporations and the wealthy,” and no layoffs or cuts to services.

Students from nearby Evergreen State College in Olympia joined the rally to protest drastic tuition hikes. More than 200 people attended, and the



Members of the Professional Staff Congress at CUNY rally on March 5.

Photo: psc-cuny.org

diverse crowd included public workers, community groups, students, and unionists. Speakers at the podium expressed outrage at the governor’s plans to cut vital services and let business keep tax breaks, and they called for more action. And many members of other public-sector unions talked about the rally’s importance in providing an example of what their own labor leaders need to do.

Most significant, however, was that WFSE 304 pulled off this rally in spite of attempts by parent affiliate AFSCME District Council 28, to discourage WFSE 304 from doing the rally. WFSE 304 leaders were warned that the public and press would be hostile, but WFSE 304’s Executive Board stood firm. Steve Hoffman, a Freedom Socialist Party veteran and WFSE 304 activist, bolstered his leadership’s resolve by stepping up to take responsibility for mobilizing mem-

bers and community for the rally. The rally proved AFSCME 28 leaders wrong. WFSE 304 members did get support from the public in their call for unity, and the media picked up their message: Tax big business to pay for vital services. No cuts! No layoffs!

Indeed, the rally was such a success that AFSCME 28 officials did an about-face and decided to also hold a rally in March.

This is a step forward, but it will take more than just rallies to stop the cuts. Critical now is more pressure on union leaders to reach out for public support and prepare for work actions to save vital services. WFSE 304 showed that pressure works.

Mass protest in Manhattan

New York is in an equally dire predicament. With a \$15 billion shortfall,

Governor David Paterson is promising to gut services and lay off public-sector workers. So is NYC’s mayor, billionaire Mike Bloomberg.

This scenario created enough pressure on union officials to organize a rally on March 5; more than 40,000 people descended on Manhattan for the protest. Rallies were also held in other cities, including the capital, Albany. But the plan for what to do next remains unclear. One rally held by public-sector unions, even of this size, won’t stop cuts. For example, in California, United Teachers of Los Angeles stopped cuts to teacher benefits with an angry protest, but then settled early and rolled over on lay-offs of non-tenured teachers.

To stop layoffs and contract concessions will take a mass mobilization of public and private sector unions, the unemployed, unorganized, and millions of people who rely on public services. Strikes, including general strikes, must be in the mix.

As the crisis deepens, sentiment for such action is growing. And *The Advocate*, a publication of CUNY graduate students, spelled out the job ahead in an article entitled “Shut it Down:” “Since almost no city unions [leaders] are willing to risk breaking the Taylor law with a strike, this will require the organizational skills of the rank-and-file members of the city’s unions, from the Professional Staff Congress (PSC) and the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), to the Transport Workers Union (TWU) and the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT). Now is the time for the students and workers of New York City to recognize they share the same interests and fight these cuts together.”



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 Michael Ashbrook

Solidarity with sacked FAU member

The ISC passed a resolution against the firing of FAU member Benoit Robin by the Management of Babylon Cinema in Berlin. Here is the full text:

“It has come to my attention that staff at the Babylon Cinema in the centre of Berlin and the FAU-IAA, which has a presence there, have been opposing the precarious working conditions and capricious style of management. I was sorry to learn that projectionist and union member Benoit Robin was fired just before he would have become entitled to job protection.

“This message is a strong protest against that unfair labour practice. Beyond the issue immediately at hand, I urge you to desist from interfering with organizing in your shop.

Sadly, nearly the same case came up in Sheffield, with one slight difference; there it was a BIROC member who got the sack. Well, bosses will be bosses.

CNT-F member arrest and deported

In other news, CNT-F member Abdel El Idrissi was arrested and detained for five days in Bordeaux and later Toulouse because his residence permit from Morocco had expired. The ISC resolved to endorse the online petition launched by the French CNT. The threat of deportation continues to hang over his head, so take a look at www.collectifabdel.over-blog.com between now and the next *IW*, because next month Abdel might be “back home” courtesy of Sarkozy. But he will probably be okay. The CNT-F’s solidarity campaign is running well, as they received 713 signatures on an e-petition in support.

Day of Action at GM Europe

Responding to a solidarity appeal from German auto workers, the ISC passed this resolution in support of a Europe-wide Day of Action at General Motors (GM). The previous three EU-wide Days of Action had been directed against the plant closures at Luton, England; Azambuja, Portugal; and Antwerp, Belgium. This fourth one was against the threat of a pan-European shutdown. We sent it in English and German; if you volunteer as a translator, the IWW will do even better next time.

“The ISC thanks you for taking action against GM, and supports your demands. As you are helping workers in the Americas and the world, you can count on our solidarity. The IWW will never give in to the siren songs of ‘Buy American’ or ‘British Jobs for British Workers’ and we are sure that you will resist temptations from the nationalistic right. What the protectionists are really defending is the power of the billionaires and mega corporations. They seek to mislead workers into fighting their own kind, as they did in 1914.

“The last time globalized liberal capitalism collapsed, in 1929, the ruling class replaced it with racist dictatorships. By working together for international industrial democracy, we can forestall WWII.

Support non-violent protest against Israel

After some debate, the ISC passed a resolution recommending that fellow workers give their support to non-violent actions against Israel, which includes a boycott, divestment and economic sanctions, much like the campaign against that other late, unmissed race-state: the “Republic” of South Africa under apartheid.

Recently there has been wave of war crimes in Gaza which requires more than purely verbal protest. Hospitals, ambulances and stocks of food came under attack. Private homes were vandalized and even orchards where olive branches grew were flattened by tanks. Worst of all, many people were tortured to death slowly with white phosphorous. The unfortunate survivors will be living mirrors of the bizarre mixture of autism and sadism that characterizes policy of Israel’s military government. If we call their scars “horrible,” then what word can describe Israel?

The crimes of irresponsible splinter groups that engage in a pitiful caricature of guerrilla warfare pale to insignificance in the light of burning children. Still, it is in order to remind all Palestinians to enforce full compliance with the provisions of international law as best they can in the face of open and clandestine Israeli interference. It is especially important that the POW being held in Gaza be treated in accordance with the Geneva Convention. All of the deceit and cruelty of the colonialists taken together are not enough to justify even one slight violation of his human rights.

The ISC therefore recommends that those fellow workers who are willing to challenge Zionism should participate in the non-violent campaign against Israel that calls for “Boycott, Divestments, and Sanctions” (<http://stopthewall.org/news/boycot.shtml>). Further helpful information on whom to target may be found at www.whoprofits.org.

Meeting with the CGT in Spain

One of the newly elected ISC members visited the general headquarters of the Spanish CGT in Madrid last December. Step by step, the CGT-E and the IWW are moving closer together, as we are beginning to exchange materials. This is a step over the language barrier that stands between us. Now we have been invited to their annual conference which will be held in Málaga from June 4-7, 2009. Those fellow workers who are anywhere near Spain in early June and who know even a little of one of its languages (Catalán, Gallego, Basque, or Castilian) should definitely apply to CGT as guests and, please, inform the ISC. Of course we are sending people to Málaga, but rank-and-file involvement makes solidarity real.

And one reminder from the ISC: some people on the planet consider a picnic sometime in autumn to be their labour day. Most workers in the real world celebrate on the May 1, so join them.

Union Protests Bank of Spain Against G20



CGT-E clashing with the CCOO and UGT in Murcia.

Photo: CGT Región Murciana

By CGT Región Murciana

A representation of radical organizations and unions held a demonstration at the Bank of Spain on March 28, 2009 in the southern region of Murcia. This demonstration was held as part of a global day of action against the G20 Summit, and included members of the syndicalist Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT), Ecologists in Action and the Asociación por la Tasación de las Transacciones financieras especulativas y la Acción Ciudadana (ATTAC- Murcia).

The demo was held in lieu of a larger action organized by the large trade unions Confederación Sindical de Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) and the

Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT), with support from the regional government of the People’s Party (PP) and the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE – Murcia). According to a CGT Región Murciana member, the demonstration was held to criticize the behavior of those larger trade unions, which negotiate with “the political class” for a resolution to the financial crisis. Additionally, the protest demanded that “the actors who have brought about this economic and human crisis, the international banks and multinationals with the complicity of governments and political parties,” be held accountable for their role in perpetuating the crisis.

Workers Locked Out, Bosses Locked In

By Unite Union

Call center workers at Synovate in South Auckland, Australia, were locked out by their employer on April 11, 2009. The workers had been negotiating for secure hours and a pay raise of a dollar when they received word by text message the previous night that they would not be allowed to come back to work.

Upon arriving at the call center in the morning, union members found the front door padlocked shut by the company and a notice telling their non-union workers to sneak in by the back door. In response to this attempt to use scab labour Unite Union officials and members added their own locks to the front door and used cars and locks to block all other entrances to the building. This effectively locked the bosses inside for two hours until the union allowed one car to be moved to allow delegates to enter the building to continue the negotiations.

Unite Union Secretary Matt Mc-

Carten told assembled workers that he had dressed in a warm coat and had a razor in his pocket so he could shave before court if he was arrested. Most of the workers seemed positive and genuinely angry at their working conditions, particularly that their shifts can be cancelled with no notice. However, several talked about how they could not afford to miss work—this is what the company is undoubtedly relying on to break the union’s strength on this site.

There was a picket outside Synovate throughout the day. At the time this was written, the lockout was to last indefinitely. Workers are asking for supporters to text or call the two directors whose details are on the front door of the building, telling them what you think of their illegal lockout; Ian Mills: 021 655139. Debra Hall: 021 620394. Synovate Office: +64 9 538 0500

Follow the struggle online at: twitter.com/uniteunion

Panasonic’s Management Besieged by Employees

By John Kalwaic

In February 2009 in Beijing, China, employees of Panasonic were urged to quit their jobs and offered poor compensation packages. The workers were not satisfied with their packages, and 600 of them decided to storm Panasonic’s top

management offices. The workers held the offices for six hours until management escaped out of the back of the building. The Panasonic employees have filed a labor complaint with the Chinese labor board against Panasonic. Panasonic owns three factories in Beijing.

Workers Fired at Babylon Cinema in Berlin

By John Kalwaic

Workers at the Babylon Cinema in Berlin, Germany, have decided to organize with an anarcho-syndicalist union, known as the Freie Arbeiterinnen- und Arbeiter-Union (FAU), or Free Workers Union. Workers at this cinema have experienced particularly low wages, even for their low-wage industry. Many of the workers receive only €5.50 to €6.50 per hour.



Photo: linksunten.indymedia.org

At another nearby cinema, workers get €8.5 per hour plus paid vacations. An FAU activist at the cinema, Benoit Robin, was recently fired for labor organizing. Other FAU activists at the

cinema, Jason Kirkpatrick and Lars Rhom, have also been fired. There is now an effort to counter the union-busting activities of Babylon Cinema.

Support international solidarity!



Assessments for \$3, \$6 are available from your delegate or IWW headquarters PO Box 23085, Cincinnati, OH 45223-3085, USA.

