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Individual contracts undercut equal pay

By Australian Council of Trade Unions

The pay gap between men and women has widened under the Liberal Party of Australia government led by John Howard. Women on Australian Workplace Agreements (AWA)—individual contracts between worker and boss—are falling furthest behind.

Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) President Sharan Burrow revealed the findings of this study at the national conference, Shaping the Future of Women in Australia, in Sydney on October 10.

The most recent data shows the gap between men's and women's earnings has widened in the past three years. Women working full-time now earn only 84 cents for every dollar earned by a man working full-time—a drop from three years ago, when it was 87 cents for every dollar.

"Workplace Relations Minister Joe Hockey's claim that the wages gap between men and women has narrowed under the Howard government is simply not supported by the evidence. Mr. Hockey is wrong again," said Burrow.

The research shows the unfair industrial relations laws have particularly hurt women on AWA individual contracts. Women on AWAs only earn 81 cents for every dollar earned by men on AWAs. Women on collective agreements fare better, earning 90 cents for every dollar earned by men.

"Women on AWAs are earning on average \$87 less per week than their counterparts on collective agreements and for part-time women, the difference can be as much as \$140 per week," said Burrow.

Australia's booming economy is also leaving women worse off. In July 2007, wage costs in higher-paid, male-dominated industries such as mining and construction were growing three times faster than wage costs in low paid sectors such as retail and hospitality, where many women are employed.

Also on the conference agenda were strategies to improve paid maternity leave, promote accessible childcare, support women in leadership, and increase women's influence.

NLRB permits decertification campaigns for voluntarily recognized unions

By americanrightsatwork.org

The US national labor board has undermined voluntary recognition of unions by allowing a decertification campaign within 45 days of recognition.

Voluntary recognition is when employers agree to recognize a union once a majority of workers sign union cards. It's a peaceful and quick way to get to the bargaining table and, for workers and bosses, a better alternative to the flawed National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) election process.

The appointed Republican majority of the Board sided with anti-union groups to allow as few as 30 per cent of anti-union employees to petition an election to decertify the union.

This latest NLRB ruling, the Dana Metaldyne decision, will remove a key protection for new unions who could otherwise face a decertification cam-

paigned by a minority of anti-union employees. This protection allowed stability during the bargaining of a first contract.

In the current case, both Dana Corp. and Metaldyne Corp. voluntarily recognized that a majority of their workers formed unions with the United Auto Workers. When the Regional NLRB Director dismissed decertification petitions filed by anti-union employees a few weeks after recognition was granted, the anti-union National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation filed charges on behalf of these employees to challenge this longstanding protection.

As the dissenting Board members wrote, a minority of anti-union employees can now "hijack" this important period of time when an employer and union need to begin bargaining a contract, and destabilize the new relationship.



IN NOVEMBER, WE REMEMBER...

The laurels of victory are laid on the head of a Haymarket martyr at their memorial grave in the old Waldheim cemetery in Chicago, United States. The Haymarket martyrs were executed on November 11, 1887. The mobilizations around their trial and execution inspired a new generation of labor activists, including many who joined the Industrial Workers of the World in 1905.

Analysis

UAW strikes to get GM, Chrysler contracts

The 73,000 United Auto Workers (UAW) at General Motors struck for the first time since 1976, bringing the automaker back to the bargaining table in just two days.

The UAW also used a six hour strike on October 10 to force Chrysler to make a tentative agreement, which has yet to be ratified by the rank-and-file.

The new four-year GM contract, ratified October 10 by 66 per cent of workers, was widely reported to have created a US\$50 billion health fund that would be run by the UAW on behalf of 411,000 current workers and retirees.

GM will also protect jobs on the basis of seniority. Last year, GM shut 12 plants and cut 34,000 jobs.

While UAW leaders may have breathed a sigh of relief that their gambit worked, the contract gives pause.

GM gained key concessions that divide the workforce. New hires won't get the same health benefits as current employees and their starting pay will be lower than the current rate.

In turn, GM agreed to hire 3,000 temporary workers into "full-time, traditional employment," which for the union, removes a potential threat to workplace solidarity.

Still, GM looks to be the big winner by shedding the long-term health cost for current workers and retirees. Not having this liability will mean it will be in a stronger position to demand more concessions during the 2011 contract negotiations. Auto workers in unions such as the Canadian Auto Workers will now have to compete with a contract that has lowered standards and, thus, put them at a bargaining disadvantage.

German occupied bike factory ready to roll

By John Kalwaic

Bicycle workers in Germany who occupied their factory to prevent its closure have met their goal of 1,800 orders to keep it running under workers' control.

"Never before in the Federal Republic of Germany [has] self-managed production in an occupied factory taken place," said Strike-Bike's website.

Workers of the Thuringian Nordhausen bicycle factory in Germany occupied their factory on July 10 to prevent closure by owner Bike Systems GmbH. While the boss declared bankruptcy on August 10, the workers stayed put and decided to found Strike-Bike, a worker-owned cooperative that would keep the 135 employees in work and in control of the factory.

The strikers are affiliated with the anarchosyndicalist FAU (Free Workers

Union) and have launched a website www.strike-bike.de to take orders and publicize this new direction.

Production is planned to start on October 23. The staff received orders from most European countries as well as from Australia, Canada, Egypt, Israel, South Africa and the United States.

The workers are "overwhelmed from the dimension of worldwide solidarity" displayed, according to a statement on the website.

To order bikes, contact:

Bikes in Nordhausen e.V., c/o André Kegel, Bruno-Kunze-Str. 39 - 99734 Nordhausen or telephone 03631-622 124 and 03631-403 591 or fax 03631-622 170. Email is fahrradwerk@gmx.de.

With files from the IW.

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UK postal 48-hour strikes take fight to Royal Mail



Placard supporting the postal strike.

By West Midlands GMB

Royal Mail sought and won a court injunction to stop two back-to-back 48 hour strikes on October 15-17.

The Communications Workers Union (CWU) had held two 48 hour strikes on October 5-6 and 8-9 to pressure Royal Mail to end the bargaining deadlock.

“Strikes are a proportionate response to an employer that is completely out of control. Rather than running the business, Royal Mail’s actions demonstrate they are intent on destroying it,” said Dave Ward, Deputy General Secretary of the CWU postal workers union.

West Midlands IWW have showed solidarity with fellow workers at the post office every time they have chosen to strike. The IWW continued this support by hitting all the large sorting offices across Birmingham to build public awareness about the strike to the public.

The IWW also wanted to remind strike breakers that they are scabs and, if they continue to betray their fellow

Strikes are a proportionate response to an employer that is completely out of control. —Dave Ward, CWU

workers in future disputes, would be held responsible for their actions.

“The Newtown sorting office had plenty of workers who were prepared to break the picket. This cannot continue. We believe in ‘one out-all out’. Scabs will not be tolerated and dealt with accordingly,” said one IWW member.

The crux of the dispute boils down to the post office being privately owned. In order to create more profit, the management have sought to ‘modernise’ through the possible sacking of thousands of workers.

This modernization is coupled with a proposed below-inflation pay raise of 2.5 per cent, essentially a pay cut.

The post office is also proposing ‘modernising’ the high street post offices by shifting the counter staff into WH Smith stores.

These management proposals are sending a clear message of contempt to those who use the post office on a regular basis.

The post office is now seen no longer as a service but yet another way for capitalists to earn cash at our expense.

Save Leicester Post Office petition

The Leicester IWW branch’s petition to save the Bishop Street post office is still available for signatures. The petition, supported by the local CWU postal workers’ union, is a way to rally community support against the closure of a readily-accessible and historic post office. Royal Mail plans to move the post office into the basement of a local WH Smith bookstore. Sign the petition at www.ipetitions.com/petition/bishopstreet/

With files from the IW.

Ottawa IWW wins Rumba backpay

The Ottawa-Outaouais IWW branch won its fight to get Aurora Herrera her pay from the Rumba nightclub.

The IWW met with the club owner and received the remaining money owed to Herrera.

The branch had picketed the club in August, which forced the owner to pay half of the wages owed.

However, he reneged on a promise to pay the rest by the end of the week.

IWW member Herrera has since returned to school in Toronto with all of the money she earned over the summer and not a penny less.

IWW women’s caucus calls for project volunteers

The Women’s Caucus has drawn up several projects that we are all interested in working on. We welcome all wobblers to participate, including women, men, and transgendered people. Please email the project contact, if you would like to work on any of these projects.

Project: Work with IWW Organizers

Description: Work with the Organizing Department and Organizing Training Committee to incorporate into their training sessions information on how workers can deal with sexism/racism/homophobia while trying to organize. This group also can do research and make recommendations about the issue of stipends for low-income union organizers. **Contact:** Sarah at sarah@gmail.com

Project: Booklet of diversity stories

Description: Compile a booklet of writing in which women, queers, and people of color share personal anecdotes from their experiences in labor activism. This booklet will include stories, interviews, poetry and art. The focus of all submissions should be based on their relevance to the IWW: its history, methods and members. Other parts include direct action and worker-run community organizing.

Contact: Kirsten at kmayoh@gmail.com

Project: “Culture of Inclusion” policy

Description: The Women’s Caucus will draw up a policy to be presented at GA 08. This policy will call for the inclusion not just of women and men but of

people of all genders as well as people of any race, age, disability, sexuality, etc.

Contact: Stephanie at callthedoctor@hotmail.com

Project: Publicize the Sato Fund

Description: Work with the GST to publicize the Sato Fund through iww.org, the IW, and other outlets. We will also research Charlie Sato to raise awareness of her life and work.

Contact: Stephanie at callthedoctor@hotmail.com

For info on how to get involved in the women’s caucus in general, contact Stephanie via mail at PO Box 1211 / New York, NY 10029-9998 or via e-mail at callthedoctor@hotmail.com. Or join our email list for all genders and colors.

Join the IWW Today

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City, State, Postcode, Country: _____
 Occupation: _____
 Phone: _____ Email: _____
 Amount Enclosed: _____

Membership includes a subscription to the Industrial Worker.

IWW defence committee calls for nominees

By Tom Kappas, GDC Central Secretary Treasurer

The General Defence Committee (GDC) is calling for nominations

for a new steering committee. All members in good standing of the IWW’s defence committee are invited to stand for election or make a nomination.

Nominees must be a member of the IWW for one year and a member of the GDC for the last six months.

People who don’t belong to the IWW can be members of the General Defence Committee, too. Nominees who are not IWW members can stand for election, providing they have been continuous GDC members for the past two years. The deadline for nominees is November 9.

Current nominees include, from the United States, William Frazier from Sterling Heights, Minnesota; Marie Mason from Cincinnati, Ohio; Kenneth Miller from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and from Canada, Kirsten Mayoh of Edmonton.

Only GDC members can elect the steering committee so members can expect their ballot and read the candidate statements in the November *Defiant Spirit* newsletter.

People who want to join the GDC are urged to visit the committee’s web site www.iww.org/projects/gdc/ to print the application and send it to The General Defence Committee of the IWW, c/o IWW, P.O. Box 23085, Cincinnati, OH 45223, United States or email gdc@iww.org for more information.





Several months ago, I was approached by a friend with a request that LabourStart launch an online campaign in support of local care home workers in the area where I live—north London, England.

“We don’t do local,” I said. LabourStart specializes in global campaigns in support of workers’ rights around the globe. A local campaign in support of a couple of hundred workers was out of the question.

There were a number of reasons for my decision, including the assumption that local campaigns were by definition

With a bravado born of innocence, we laughed off the threat.

small campaigns. After all, how could we mobilize trade unionists on six continents in support of what was essentially a local dispute in north London?

But my friend did not give up. She pointed out that this campaign touched on broader themes—these were formerly public-sector workers now employed by a private company. They were almost all women. The issues of low pay, privatization, gender equality and others were at play here. And the local union was being quite innovative in its use of the Internet—it was even putting up videos on the web on a regular basis.

In the end, I reluctantly agreed. The campaign in support of care home workers in north London, employees of a registered charity known as Fremantle Trust, went live on August 25, 2007.

As usual in these cases, initially very few people signed up in support of the campaign. Merely putting up links on LabourStart and other websites had almost no impact. It took a mass mailing several days later to get the word out. By the beginning of September, the first few hundred messages began to reach the inbox of the Fremantle Trust’s chief executive, Carol Sawyers.

Generally, the targets of such online campaigns have reacted in one of two ways. Either they ignore us or they answer us. A good example of the latter was the chief executive officer of Air New Zealand, who responded to a LabourStart campaign by answering individually every one of the thousands of messages he received—initially with a form letter. But when people would follow up, he’d take the time to answer those letters individually.

Ms. Sawyers chose a third route—she neither ignored the campaign nor sought to answer it, but instead decided to close it down. On August 31, she wrote to me, saying that our campaign was “inaccurate, misleading and potentially libellous. Please remove it and cease forwarding e-mail traffic that contains it.” The “potentially libellous” phrase was not placed there accidentally.

England has some of the worst libel laws in the world. Here, the burden of proof is on the defendant. Libel laws have been used repeatedly against campaigning organizations, most notably in the case of the infamous “McLibel” campaign when McDonald’s waged the longest court battle in English history to shut down a campaign consisting of two activists who’d had the temerity to hand out a leaflet critical of the corporate giant.

Back in the 1980s, an international labour rights journal published in the UK was nearly closed down by similar threats, and attacks were made by the

Biwater multinational corporation in the 1990s against the LabourNet website. Libel suits are a powerful way to deal with dissent. Ms. Sawyers was well aware of this.

With a bravado born of innocence, we laughed off the threat. When one colleague asked for the original copy of any registered letter we might receive from the Fremantle Trust’s lawyers, I announced that we’d auction off such a letter on eBay. We took for granted that no lawsuit would actually happen because there was no basis for the allegation that what we had done was in any way libellous.

In a further escalation of the dispute, Fremantle chose that week to sack a Unison shop steward on trumped up charges of misconduct.

What we did not anticipate was that Ms. Sawyers had also contacted our Internet Service Provider, and sent them

the same text she sent us. On September 6, we received an email message from the ISP’s legal department which said, “We have received a recent complaint

on behalf of the Fremantle Trust on the basis that you have placed on your website induce [sic] trade unionists to send e-mails to The Fremantle Trust which is considered to be inaccurate, misleading and potentially libellous. Please remove it and cease forwarding e-mail traffic that contains it ... Please could you remove the material by Friday 12pm on the September 7, 2007 or we have no option but to close your website down.”

It was an extraordinary message—based on an allegation made by an employer in an email, saying that we had published something they didn’t like. Without any court case, with no legal basis at all, the ISP had panicked. A phone call to them clarified matters—we had 24 hours to either close down the campaign or lose the entire LabourStart website.

We tried to explain to the legal department of the ISP that this was an industrial dispute, that there was no libel—just a disagreement over facts, to no avail. Finally, the ISP agreed that if we could get an email sent from the union—Unison, Britain’s giant public sector union—clarifying this, they would remove the threat. Within minutes, Unison had sent off the letter. Eddie Coulson, Unison’s regional organizer, told the ISP, “It is inevitable that Fremantle will try and cease the distribution of information that is detrimental to them as much as they would try and stop the distribution of incorrect information. We are only guilty of exposing them and I trust this reassurance is enough to reassure you that you are not being placed in a vulnerable position.”

We waited for the ISP to confirm that everything was alright, that we did not need to remove the campaign. But we heard nothing. Working right up until the deadline on noon on Friday, we phoned, emailed, did everything to contact 1&1 to confirm that the threat to LabourStart had been lifted. But we heard nothing.

At noon on Friday, we closed down the Fremantle campaign. And two hours later, we launched it on another web server, based in Australia. We created a special domain name—wewillnotbesilenced.org and launched a Google ad campaign on the keyword “Fremantle” pointing visitors to the new site. We publicized this attempt to silence us to our mailing lists and word got out.

Within a few days, the campaign had become the largest LabourStart had ever run. Our previous record-holder had been the 2005 campaign in support of striking Gate Gourmet catering workers at London’s Heathrow Airport. That produced some 8,000 protest messages. But the Fremantle campaign reached over 12,000 messages. Carol Sawyers’

WOMEN WORKERS' HISTORY

CHAPTER 9 DARK SATANIC MILLS PART 2

SEVERAL CITIES (LIKE LOWELL, MASS) GREW UP AROUND TEXTILE MILLS WHICH ATTRACTED YOUNG WOMEN IN DROVES, AS FARM GIRLS RESPONDED TO THE UNHEARD OF OPPORTUNITY TO WORK FOR CASH WAGES AND BE ON THEIR OWN.

HI-HO, HI-HO, TO THE SATANIC MILLS WE GO!!



OWNERS, OBSERVERS AND EVEN SOME OF THE MILL WORKERS THEMSELVES REPORTED GOOD WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE EARLY YEARS. SOME “FACTORY GIRLS” FOUND TIME TO ATTEND LECTURES AND WRITE POETRY AND ARTICLES, PUBLISHED IN THE LOWELL OFFERING, THE FIRST MAGAZINE WRITTEN EXCLUSIVELY BY WOMEN.

LOWELL OFFERING
Ms. HERE WE COME!!

A REPOSITORY OF ORIGINAL ARTICLES, WRITTEN BY “FACTORY GIRLS.”



BUT RAPID TURNOVER—THE AVERAGE MILL WORKER STAYED FOR LESS THAN 3 YRS. AT FIRST HELPED KEEP HIDDEN FROM PUBLIC VIEW THE HARSH REALITY THE FACTORY SYSTEM HELD FOR MOST WORKERS. WOMEN TOILED 12-13 HRS. A DAY, 6 DAYS A WK., IN MILLS STIFLING IN SUMMER AND FREEZING IN WINTER. WAGES (AFTER DEDUCTIONS FOR BOARD) WERE \$1.75 A WEEK.



AS PRICES SKYROCKETED DURING THE 1830S CONDITIONS DETERIORATED: BOARDING-HOUSES BECAME OVERCROWDED, THE QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF FOOD DECLINED. RULES BECAME MORE IRRITATING. SPEEDUP, WORK RULES AND PAY CUTS SPARKED STRIKES (SEE CHAPTERS 2-7) THEN CAME THE 1837-40 DEPRESSION... (NEXT: THE FIGHT FOR THE 10 HR. DAY!!)

attempts to silence us had backfired.

A few days later the workers demonstrated at Fremantle Trust’s headquarters. They held up signs spelling out “We will not be silenced.” In addition to the struggle against low pay, against privatization, and for gender equality, the Fremantle dispute had now turned into a free speech fight.

Three days after the Friday noon deadline given to LabourStart, the ISP’s legal department sent an email message which read in part, “Sorry for the late reply i have spoken to UNISON, and request that you restore all the deleted items on the website since he has confirmed [sic] that the exact figures

are correct and that from looking at the text closely i do not believe that they are considered to be defamatory.” Note the semi-literate nature of the email—as one friend pointed out, it seems as if the ISP, in a cost-cutting move, was hiring six year olds for their legal department.

We wrote to the ISP and complained about their shameful behaviour during this entire episode, and spoke about the time and money we had to waste to move the campaign over to a new server. We asked that the ISP take this up at a higher level and get back to us—and raised the possibility of bringing their conduct

Rebuilding the IWW at Streetlight Shelter

By Chris Knudtsen, Portland General Membership Branch

I was excited to find out that my shop was with the IWW when I first started working at Streetlight Youth Shelter.

The shelters are run by Janus Youth Programs, a non-profit that offers a wide variety of services for homeless and at-risk youth. Within a short time I found out that the shop had not been actively 'union' in nearly a year because of low worker participation. As a result there had been a lack of communication between the union and the shop until myself and a co-worker re-initiated contact. This was my first time unionizing through my own work.

I have two more weeks at my job as of the time writing this and we are nearing the end of a contract negotiation between the IWW and Janus. We started slow, re-mapping the entire shop to get a feel as to where our co-workers stood. There had been a fairly large turnover between the current shop and when I first started, mainly for the better. The shop was full of new workers that were critical of management's treatment of us whereas a number of the former workers had become jaded, both by the job and by past organizing. Within a month of meeting with our delegates, Matt and Doug, we were ready.

After the preparation, our shop was paired with another delegate, Gabe, from the Portland General Membership Branch. Gabe stepped up in a big way for our shop, coming to the first several negotiations and meeting with us on a regular basis. He chaired the negotiations by being assertive, at times confrontational, when the workers still felt uncomfortable doing so. Janus' negotiations team was completely unprepared for the level of organization and energy we brought with us.

We called bullshit on them when one of their representatives sat at the table reading a paper when he should have been negotiating. We called bullshit on them when one of their representatives left the union hall with a copy of this very paper without paying for it. It was great. It was the first time I got the chance to fight the boss (or the boss' boss in this case) in an organized way, when I knew that my co-workers were behind me.

One of our strengths was that we were organizing on the shop level while doing the negotiations. Anya, one of the workers in the shop, invoked her Weingarten Rights when she was presented with a formal write-up for not having an updated timesheet. (Weingarten Rights give employees the right to have union representation when managers meet with them to discuss disciplinary issues.) She refused to sign it. Not surprisingly, our boss flipped on her. Within a few days, every write-up related to time sheets was removed from workers' files.

The first negotiations meeting that I chaired, on Gabe's suggestion, went fairly well although I lacked some of the confidence and assertiveness to feel comfortable with 'taking point' at the table. The next night at work, my boss called me in for a supervision meeting, during which he presented me with a write-up for having unauthorized overtime. Up until this time, I had always had "unauthorized" overtime to come in early to my shifts and make sure the shelter was ready before opening. Several other workers also did this on a regular basis.

Following Anya's lead, I also cited my Weingarten Rights, much to my boss' dismay. He immediately scheduled a follow-up meeting. Gabe and I walked in a few days later and threatened my boss with an Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) suit because the write-up seemed like it targeted me for union participation. The boss was pissed and refused to take the write-up away. The next morning Gabe brought me down to the NLRB offices in downtown Portland where we filed a ULP. The write-up was taken off my record about a week later and my other immediate supervisor was written up for not dealing with time-sheets properly.

Since then, we've run through parts of negotiations and dragged through others. Management was unwilling to bend on any language regarding the "no strike/no lockout" articles in the contract and as of now they've made minor concessions in terms of wages or paid time off. They have, however, made some substantial moves towards having a more concrete discipline and grievance procedure, better recognition of worker rights, and added an unpaid 'mental health day' off for every month.

Many of the articles that we've argued in negotiations have led to our

supervisor being confronted by his boss, which still plays into unfair power dynamics, but at least it's our boss being screwed for once.

We are currently nearing a standstill over economics and paid time off. Janus claims that there is not enough money to meet our demands. This claim comes from every level of their negotiating team (some of whom make around \$78,000) as well as the Executive Director of Janus (earning over \$116,000). Their crocodile tears do nothing more than frustrate the workers and are slowly leading us towards new tactics such as contacting County and City officials to try to push for leverage.

Facilitating our current progress is our newest delegate, Ryan, who has spent countless hours over the past few months in negotiations, shop meetings, and meeting with us individually to

bring things together. His dedication has also inspired the workers who are the ones who stand to gain or lose the most from negotiations.

It is sad to leave before the negotiations are over, not to mention frustrating to not be able to see the conclusion of one of the most powerful organizing campaigns I've been able to work on.

Watching my co-workers step up to take control and stand up for themselves has been an honor that I reluctantly walk away from.

With that being said, our two newest workers are incredibly strong characters who are pro-IWW so there is little concern that the organizing will have to be done by only a few. I leave with a mixed sense of accomplishment, regret, and optimism that the workers of Streetlight and Porchlight will get what they deserve.

Opinion

Big Labour forgets to bring backbone to the Montebello trade summit in Canada

By Nelson Ross

On August 21, a beautiful Monday morning, thousands of protesters rallied in the small town of Montebello, Québec. They gathered to send a strong message that the three leaders of North America—George Bush, Stephen Harper and Felipe Calderón—were not welcome.

Dubbed the "three amigos", the leaders were in Québec to discuss a new, destructive trade partnership: the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP). The SPP is a tool for creatively working to erode labour laws, environmental policies and establish security perimeters, among other issues. The SPP is described as "NAFTA on speed."

Big Labour in Canada is rightly opposed to the secrecy and cloaked nature of these meetings between government leaders and big business. This and all trade discussion directly limits workers rights and security both here and abroad.

To its credit, labour was present and supported the events. The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) promoted the protests in Montebello. They also worked in conjunction with the District Labour Councils who paid for ten buses to convoy protesters to and from the remote site. In addition, the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) gave space in their head office in Ottawa for organizing leading up to the action.

However, beyond the promotion and funding for logistics, Big Labour's role was disappointing. For instance, as the first march began, labour led the way to the front gates demanding a halt to the meetings. They shouted that "war criminals are not welcome here."

After only ten minutes of talking

tough and smiling for the press, Big Labour tucked its tail between its legs. They instructed all of the labour protesters to stay at the back of the rally in the "green zone."

The CLC even had marshals who walked around telling labour activists to leave the front lines and return to the police-designated protest areas.

Only Steelworkers from Local 1005, the IWW and four OPSEU members remained. As I stated to a marshal: "I didn't come here to hide in the corner."

Big Labour's presence without substance is nothing new. One only needs to look back at the Summit of the Americas in Québec and World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle for further examples. However, as a young activist with passion and commitment to both sending a message and living it, I was disheartened to see labour walk away and leave the rest of the protesters on the front lines.

I remember seeing an old woman pleading with them to stay in solidarity. Big Labour effectively made those protesters more vulnerable by dividing an already small rally of approximately 2,000 people. They put an even smaller group of protesters at the mercy of repressive police forces. As the CLC announced to the crowd that labour was leaving, they also turned their backs on working people. They may talk the talk, but they definitely didn't walk the walk.

CLC's sellout was disgraceful to me as a working class activist. The old IWW motto "an injury to one is an injury to all" is often proclaimed by Big Labour. Apparently, on August 20 in Montebello, the CLC showed us that they don't really believe in it.

Eyewitness

The meat grinder churns on

By x347368

Today one of my co-workers shredded a couple fingers down a knuckle length on the table saw. He had been in a hurry and distracted while feeling insecure about his job status.

The guy had been working for a scab outfit that is supplying cabinetry to my job site. He was hired by my company because of his familiarity with the system we're installing, and was allowed to join the carpenter's union. Unfortunately, he brought with him retrograde work practices non-union contractors typically encourage and continue to promote throughout the industry.

I walked into the cutting room, and he was standing there grasping his cut down fingers in his hand to stem the blood flow, looking imploringly to me. I called the general foreman to send up the hoist, but no can do. I unhooked my co-worker's tool belt and took his hardhat off, then walked him down 11 flights of stairs to the street where I finally got cell reception for 911.

While we were waiting, curbside chelsea, he asks me to get him some water. I go to the deli, return, then hold it up for him as he drinks, water dripping off his chin, the pool of blood growing larger on the asphalt. Finally, the ambu-

lance arrived. I was told I could go back to work. I walked back up to the room, where the filler piece he cut still eerily hung from the saw off the safety guard. Blood was splattered everywhere.

Tile layers, tapers, laborers, carpenters were scurrying about as if nothing significant had really happened. A shard of bone like a wispy toothpick lay by the blade. I checked with my tape measure to find the guide had been set a full 1/8" out of line, likely a result of "corner cutting."

Fingertip skin and partial nail lay on the floor. I thought to myself: "I'd rather be begging for change on the street than this."

The union mantra rings true: safety-plus-quality = productivity. That is, start methodically and pick up speed later. Management usually wants immediate gains before reasonable processes can be established, misplacing priorities.

It is our responsibility as workers to stand up for values and ethics at the point of production, because we cannot trust the bosses to conform.... and the meat grinder churns on.

Thirty-four stories below the top, in a bathroom stall reads the graffiti: "Ask yourself: do you work to live or live to work?"

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Ben Fletcher, Local 8, and Me

By Peter Cole

I wanted Local 8 to exist before I knew it did.

When I was an undergraduate, I knew I wanted to be a historian before I knew what aspect of United States history interested me. I was inspired by the example of the modern civil rights movement, as well as from the myths and pop culture creations of that time. It was the first social movement that I seriously thought about. I came to appreciate that race matters and racism were perhaps the central paradox of US history. Fortunately, while still in college, I also was introduced to labor history—so few are, a real bias in education—and started to read about the American labor movement.

Predictably, when I entered graduate school, I learned how little I knew. The only certainty was that I wanted to write about social movements. Though from a privileged background (upper-middle class, white, suburban—well, that last one is a questionable privilege), I already appreciated that the world was seriously messed up and that the only way it was going to get better was if people organized and fought to make it better. Unless you're rich, individuals don't stand much of a chance to change things. Ordinary folks need numbers to make things happen. History told me as much.

I also was starting to understand that economic inequality, increasing exponentially under capitalism, was the main culprit, though studying the black freedom struggle made me realize that reducing any important problem to a single cause is problematic. I also saw that race (ethnicity and nationality) was a real blind spot for many on the Left; somehow, a class-based revolution was going to solve the reality that white folks had risen up on the backs of non-white

ones. I didn't buy that; it was too simplistic. Hence, I was thinking about how issues of class and race fit together, how solving one of these matters would not necessarily solve the other, how social movements had to figure into the solution. But only some very special group of humans, who would be willing to fight the good fight on multiple fronts simultaneously, could do the job.

Then I read Mel Dubofsky's *We Shall Be All*, still considered by academics if not Wobblies, as the standard history of the Industrial Workers of the World. Though there are plenty of problems with Dubofsky's book, I still credit it for opening my eyes up to the IWW. Like many folks, even those who claim to seriously study US history, I knew absolutely nothing about the Wobs. This book was an eye-opener.

One line in *We Shall Be All*, just one line, aroused my curiosity and eventually turned into the numerous articles and the two books I have written on Local 8 in Philadelphia. In a section on governmental repression of the IWW during World War I, Dubofsky made a brief reference to Ben Fletcher, the only African American arrested during the 1917 federal raids. Who was Ben Fletcher?!? How in the world did a black man get involved with the Wobblies? Sure, the IWW had a lot to offer African Americans and other oppressed groups but—let's face it—precious few blacks were in the IWW, right?

Over the next few years, I wrote a dissertation on Local 8, which organized thousands of Philadelphia longshoremen into the most radically inclusive labor union of the early twentieth century. The union dominated waterfront labor relations through its militant, direct action tactics, willingness to organize all workers in marine transport, and openness to

blacks and immigrants—something that the American Federation of Labor and most white organizations (working class or other) were unwilling to do. Local 8 lined up African Americans, Irish Americans, Poles, Lithuanians, West Indians, and other native-born and immigrant white workers, put them into a single unit, integrated work gangs, and fought to treat all workers as equal, regardless of their race, ethnicity, nationality or job skills. The Delaware riverfront never had seen such a militant, successful union but, the truth is, no American port of call ever had.

Of course, the combination of being so inclusive and radical (the two go together, don't they?) meant that Local 8 was a threat to local business interests and even the US federal government. Hence, the wartime repression that Wobblies know so well along with, ironically, many of the records that I would use to write their story. For instance, federal spies infiltrated Local 8 and gave regular reports to employers after World War I. Without these records, my job as a historian of Local 8 would have been much harder.

To many people, Local 8 equals Ben Fletcher, for good reason. Fletcher, a black man born and raised in Philadelphia, was not only Local 8's best known black member, but also the IWW's best known black member. He joined the IWW and became a local leader prior to the formation of Local 8, though to this day how and why he first joined the IWW remains a mystery.

Fletcher traveled up and down the Atlantic coast to organize waterfront workers, especially black ones, in Norfolk, Baltimore, Providence, and Boston. He attended national conventions. He gave brilliant lecture tours and soapbox oratories. He was loved by his fellow workers in Philadelphia, especially the black ones. He scared the hell out of "the Man."

As I slowly and quietly toiled to produce a publishable history of Local 8, I also managed to connect with Franklin and Penelope Rosemont, the publishers of the legendary Charles H. Kerr Press. Together, we came up with a thin volume that was my honor to work on: a short biography of Fletcher (though, really, since we know so little about his personal life, it is mostly about Fletcher in Local 8) with a collection of most every item ever written by or about Ben. As it turned out, that book came out a bit before the general history of Local 8.

Finally, this summer, the University of Illinois Press published my book

Wobblies on the Waterfront: Interracial Unionism in Progressive-Era Philadelphia. Although a few other historians have written some good pieces about Local 8 and Ben Fletcher, I do think that my books and articles set the standard. I am not suggesting that all the work on Local 8 or Fletcher is complete, not by a long shot, because many questions still remain unanswered. To me, the most important unanswered question is what the rank-and-file members of Local 8 were thinking; I cannot say with confidence that I know. Sure, thousands of black and white Americans and thousands of immigrants proudly belonged to Local 8. But what did they think of their interracial, multiethnic union that belonged to the most radical outfit in the nation?

In a way, I wish I could not write that last sentence but there it is. And, who knows what other materials might be uncovered in future years. If there are people out there who are as fascinated by this Philadelphia story as I am, I encourage you to keep digging! We all would benefit from the effort.

I am so happy that I "found" Local 8, as it opened my eyes and gave me hope. When I think about how the world could be made better—and we all should be doing that—I think about Fletcher and the thousands of other proud, militant, egalitarian members of Local 8.

Today, nearly a hundred years after the founding of Local 8, America and the world still are divided economically, racially, and ethnically. Today, American workers and workers the world over are divided, placing their national identities above their class ones.

I recently spent five months in Tanzania and they are as hung up on their differences with Kenyans and Ugandans as Americans are about Mexicans and Chinese people. Who benefits? Well, most of all, global corporations that play workers in different countries off of each other every single day; just consider the recent UAW strike against General Motors.

Truly, the IWW is needed as much today as it was when a group of bold men and women got together to form the union. I sincerely believe that one of the keys to our future success at making the world a better, fairer, healthier, happier place is not just forming powerful unions. No, Local 8 shows us what must be done: we must organize people of all ethnic, national, and racial backgrounds, no questions asked. They are workers, enough said. The genius of Ben Fletcher and Local 8 was to wed these issues together so that they were inseparable. They rose, and fell, upon solidarity. We are their heirs.

Let us get to it.

A 21st century Free Speech fight

Continued from 4

to the attention of government regulatory bodies in the UK such as Ofcom.

A month has passed and we have gotten no reply from the ISP. Meanwhile, the online campaign continues and the Fremantle workers continue their struggle on the ground.

They have called a national demonstration for November 10th. Film director Ken Loach has been by to see them. The profile of their campaign is quite high and tens of thousands of people know about their dispute.

For us, it's not only been an invigorating experience, but a learning experi-

ence as well. I've learned that small local campaigns can sometimes capture the imagination of many thousands of people around the world. I've also learned that a combination of terrible libel laws and our dependence upon a commercial web server has made LabourStart vulnerable to attacks like this one.

I have no doubt that the Fremantle workers will win improved pay and conditions and their union will emerge much stronger from this dispute. We've seen once again proof that online campaigning is an effective tool, one that all unions should use regularly.

Readers Soapbox

IW editor panders to Zionist Histadrut

Continued from 2

A Palestinian activist described it to me years ago: "Israel controls 90 per cent of the public debate on the Middle East. Yet, when we speak out we are drowned out by the cries for balance and equal time."

If Histadrut takes a public stance against Zionist apartheid, then, by all means, they should have a voice, but absent this, they remain part of the problem.

In the February 1973 issue of *The Industrial Worker*, Fellow Worker Martin Comack wrote "...the Histadrut, Israel's version of the AFL-CIO, backs up Zionism, the same as George Meany and Teddy Gleason approve the mass murder in Vietnam.

"There is a radical socialist opposition forming in Israel, composed of Jewish and Arab workers and students. Even the most sectarian of the Bolsheviks have carried articles about the real Leftist opposition in Palestine. Is it asking too much for the *Industrial Worker* to do likewise?"

Fellow Worker Alice Scanlon suggested checking out "the really radical Israeli groups like Israc, whose activities have been suppressed within Zionist Israel by the government and Right-wing thugs like Meir Kahane" (IW 1973).

As far as the current situation of Histadrut and labor inside Israel, PGFTU Executive Committee member Abdellal stated:

"[T]he Histadrut and the labor movement in Israel is declining and going backwards and suffering from financial crisis. Our information is from the Israeli newspapers and the public information sources. This weakness is absolutely an outcome of the distancing of the leadership from the real interests of the workers. Each and every labor organization, if you distance yourself from the basic interests of the workers, you will be weak. Now there are organizations inside Israel that protect the workers as an alternative to role that Histadrut has to play in it. One is called Together [the small Meretz party, now

called Yahad]. It is a progressive organization that works solely to protect the workers and there's another organization called The Worker's Line [Kav L'Oved] which also does the same kind of work."

With its long history of support for labor world-wide, the IWW must take a stand in support of Palestinian labor unions and against Israeli apartheid. The IWW must take a stand in support of the Boycott against Israeli goods.

As the *Industrial Worker* in 1976 editorialized: "The only way to avoid a major bloodletting is for world labor, especially US workers, to enforce a total ban on trade with South Africa in support of the black workers struggles there. Such a boycott would be more crippling to the white-supremacist governments than any "sanctions" taken by nations that have no intention of enforcing them." We can do no less for the Palestinian workers.

In Struggle for OBU, sparrow

John Kalwaic responds

When I said there are four trade unions in Palestine, "three controlled by Al-Fattah and one by Hamas" it was from an article on LabourStart.org. I, by no means, meant that the PGFTU was not worthy of international support, just that some Palestinians were critical of its ties with Al-Fattah.

I was also talking about some of the sectarian in-fighting between Al-Fattah and Hamas and how it was detrimental to Palestinian trade unionists. I do not think that the PGFTU is a state or party-controlled union; rather I think that the PGFTU is tied to Al-Fattah the same way the AFL-CIO is to the Democratic Party in the US. We can always give our support to unions like the PGFTU against the occupation. However, I think the forming of an independent trade union should always be welcomed.

I have evidence from these sources that there are four trade union federations in Palestine. Here are the web sites I used: www.labourstart.org/docs/en/000420.html, www.nosweat.org.uk/node/528, www.greenleft.org.au/2007/720/37373

NYC campaigns winning, but face stiff resistance

Top City Produce: 5 locked out

Workers at Top City had been negotiating a contract and were awaiting a signature from the boss.

In early October, however, five union workers were fired before the contract they negotiated was executed. The “Gang of Five” – Osvaldo Garcia, Mario Mora Marin, Diego Aruando Pino, Esau Lopez Hernandez, and Carlos Campos– have been some of the strongest and most active members of the IU 460/640 over the past two years.

The incident began when Mario was suspended for arguing with a driver, who refused to help him unload their truck. The next workday, the gang of five approached Top City’s owner in an attempt to discuss the situation. The owner responded by locking them out then subsequently telling them they were fired. Workers picketed at 5:30 AM every morning in protest. Teamsters’ Local 202 pledged to honor the picket and pressure Top City’s supplier in the Hunts Point market to sever their relationship. The pickets ended in a boisterous Saturday morning picket followed by a media conference where three of the fired workers shared their stories. The five workers remain locked out.

Handyfats Trading: NLRB appeals

As reported in the October IW, fired workers from Handyfats were ordered re-instated after a judge ruled that management had fired them for concerted activity. Amazingly, it wasn’t Handyfats but the federal National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) who decided to appeal the decision. The NLRB itself had prosecuted Handyfats, fought for reinstatement for the IWW workers, and won. However, NLRB appointees at the federal level–Bush appointees–argued that the case was flawed.

EZ-Supply/Sunrise Plus served

On September 17, the NLRB in Washington voted to request an injunction from the Federal court that would force EZ-Supply Corp./Sunrise Plus (EZ) to execute the contract tentatively agreed upon by IU 460/640 and management. The fact that the Washington board has gone along with the injunction request indicates EZ’s flagrant disregard for the law. The Washington board has averaged only 16 injunctions per year under



IU 460/640 workers from Flaum, Amersino, Handyfats, Starbucks, and others from the NYC GMB with the Sheet Metal Workers Union Local 137's Fat Cat in front of Wild Edibles.

the Bush Administration, far lower than under previous presidencies such as Clinton. On October 5, the union and the NLRB went to Federal court to seek the injunction (both against EZ-Supply and its alter ego Sunrise Plus). The judge assigned the case to a magistrate, meaning that the union will be back at the table with EZ within a month. However, the injunction will not return any of the EZ workers fired last December to the job.

Giant Big Apple Beer tries settling

Negotiations in the unpaid overtime and minimum wage lawsuit between management at Giant Big Apple (GBA) and 17 former workers represented by one of 460/640’s lawyers, Stuart Lichten, are coming to a head. The company and its attorneys have made individual settlement offers to each of the workers. In some cases, the amount was satisfactory, while several workers will continue to press for higher settlements. The union expects the settlement will total between \$300,000 and \$400,000 including lawyer’s fees. This settlement represents the first of IU 460/640’s many back wage suits to reach a payoff.

Wild Edibles fires 5, defies court

When Richard Martin, owner of the #1 Zagat’s rated seafood distributor and retailer Wild Edibles, told a crowd of striking workers that he would “never deal with a union” and “never pay overtime,” he clearly didn’t know what kind of union he was dealing with. IU 460/640 is making him eat his words like they were a delicious tuna steak. A month later, workers are receiving overtime pay. Martin clearly likes a good fight: he locked out workers when they demanded to be paid overtime and that he reinstate a fellow worker. Over the subsequent month he fired four workers in retaliation for their concerted activity.

On September 17, the workers’ lawyer, David Rankin, filed a class action suit in Federal court alleging overtime and a request for a temporary injunction against Wild Edibles to halt the company’s retaliatory activities. The judge sided with the workers and ordered a temporary restraining order prohibiting the company from making any changes to working conditions without consulting the workers’ attorney first, which

remains in effect as the IW goes to print.

Despite the court order, Wild Edibles terminated a fifth worker. Rankin and the union will be in court arguing for the company to be held in contempt and fined. Meanwhile, Brandworkers International, a workers advocacy group that is coordinating the union’s media and legal efforts, held a press conference in front of Pastis, a shi-shi Manhattan restaurant that purchases fish from Wild Edibles. Rather than deal with continued scrutiny over his relationship with Wild Edibles, Pastis owner Keith McNally agreed with Brandworkers to cease doing business with Wild Edibles in all six of his high-priced Manhattan restaurants.

Penang restaurant closes

The combination of health code violations, rising rent, and a relentless IU 460/640 leafleting campaign forced upper west side pan-Asian restaurant Penang to close. A week before closing, the restaurant’s owner received a subpoena from the New York State Attorney General’s office over the restaurant’s failure to pay six kitchen workers minimum wage and overtime.

HWH Trading/Dragonland Trading/USA Garden still slippery

HWH Trading has changed its name twice since IU 460/640 marched on its facilities on July 1. The union has logged at least five separate addresses for the company. It appears that HWH’s slick owner may be trying to sell his business in another desperate attempt to avoid justice. The NLRB has issued a complaint against the unlawful termination of all three IWWs who were fired after the union’s march and the Attorney General’s office is expected to issue a subpoena against the company within weeks over the unpaid overtime and subsequent retaliation.

Flaum Appetizing makes progress

The workers at Flaum Appetizing remain strong and united. So far they have won paid time off while the business is closed during Jewish holidays, improved job conditions and respect, and overtime pay, although some workers are still not being paid properly. Given the IWW’s solid majority in the shop, the union has filed for an election.

Women chainmakers’ strike still inspires UK labor

By Andrew Denning and the IWW West Midlands GMB

Ninety-seven years ago, 700 desperately poor and overworked women chainmakers in Cradley Heath, England, said enough is enough, stood up and took action to improve their lives.

The main industry of Cradley Heath during the industrial revolution was iron working, specifically chain making. In *The White Slaves of England*, Robert Sherard said that the Cradley Heath District made 1,000 tons of chain each week.

Sherard used the word “slave” as a critique of the wage system as “chronic hunger can bind tighter than any iron link.” Chronic hunger was the lot of the women chainmakers of Cradley Heath. Sherard told how many of the women were 70 or over and others were younger than 15, working twelve-plus hours a day. Their overseer was called a “sweater”.

Some 3,500 chainmakers worked in small shops, two-thirds of them women. Their low wages were one of the reasons they weren’t organized. They were faced with a choice between union dues or some bread for the table.

In 1905, a Women’s Chain Making organisation was formed as part of the National Federation of Women Workers. Chain making in the Black Country

began to receive government attention, who considered regulating wages, ostensibly to improve the lot of workers.

During the negotiations to establish a better wage, the employers complained that higher wages would make them vulnerable to foreign competition and would encourage faster mechanisation thus the loss of jobs. Remember this was 1910, not 2007.

Finally, a wage, mostly affecting the women workers, was agreed within the nationally organised board. The employers, however, quickly tried to wriggle out of their obligations and tried to find loopholes in the agreement. The dirty tricks backfired. This mistreatment galvanised the women into action and a mass meeting was organised. The



Photo by IWW Midlands GMB

women voted to “come out and stay out” and 700 did.

Money collected from supporters helped the women avoid being starved back to work. Even a big businessman like George Cadbury donated to the fund.

The women struck for ten weeks and they won. The money left over from the strike fund was used to found The Workers Institute in Cradley Heath. The institute, built for the benefit of working people in the area was moved in 2004 to make way for a road enabling easier access to a shopping centre.

The Women Chainmakers of Cradley Heath resistance to the capitalist class should never be forgotten. They are an inspiration to all workers fighting for a better tomorrow.

So what has changed for Cradley Heath since 1910? Our New Labour

rulers tell us things are getting better and better. At the official chainmakers remembrance festival, government, Labour party and union bosses stood and smiled. They still believe that they have a direct connection to the working class struggles of yesteryear.

The irony that they are celebrating women fighting capitalism, while their function is to preserve and maintain this unfair system, was completely lost on them.

We live in a world shaped by the concessions of the ruling elite. Our ancestors forced these concessions through the class struggle.

The Women Chainmakers of Cradley Heath are an inspirational example of how we, the working class, can push for change.

In remembrance of the Women Chainmakers strike in 1910, the West Midlands Branch of the IWW placed a plaque and wreath at the Peace Gardens in Birmingham city centre and on September 13 erected a series of twenty placards along High Street commemorating Cradley’s proud history of working class resistance. With the advent of a new Tesco superstore being built, the placards also questioned the interests of big business versus those of the community.

With files from the IW.

2007: The IWW in the history books

By Jon Bekken

Without question, the most important work on the history of the IWW to be published in the last year is Peter Cole's long-awaited *Wobblies on the Waterfront: Interracial Unionism in Progressive-era Philadelphia* (University of Illinois, 2007, 256 pages, available from IWW Literature Dept. for \$40).

In this book, Cole recounts the IWW's success in building a vibrant and successful interracial union in a city characterized by virulent racism. Marine Transport Workers IU Local 8 has received little attention from historians even though it controlled the Philadelphia

waterfront for nearly a decade before it was broken by an alliance of employers, the federal government and the International Longshoremen's Association. Under the ILA contracts that followed, employers were able to slash wages and reinstitute segregated work gangs, 50-hour weeks, and the shape-up.

Despite its ultimate defeat, Local 8 speaks to the power of the IWW's vision and its ability to organize thousands of workers across deeply entrenched racial barriers to forge a unionism that spoke both to immediate conditions and the need for social transformation.

I reviewed Cole's collection, *Ben Fletcher: The Life and Times of a Black Wobbly* (Charles H. Kerr Publishers, 2007) in the February *Industrial Worker*, noting that despite heavy-handed and shoddy editing, the book remains a useful introduction to an important and often neglected IWW organizer. Cole also has an article in the *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* (July 2007), "Philadelphia's Lords of the Docks: Interracial Unionism Wobbly-Style," which focuses on the use of direct action tactics to build what he refers to as "one of the most, perhaps the most, racially inclusive unions of its era."

Steve Kellerman's essential comprehensive bibliography, *A Century of Writing on the IWW 1905 - 2005: An Annotated Bibliography of Books on the Industrial Workers of the World* (Boston General Membership Branch, 2007, 38 pages, \$5 from the IWW Literature Dept.) is organized by category in chronological order. Thus, the first book listed, under General Works, is the Proceedings of the First Convention of the IWW, first published in 1905, and the last is Archie Green's compilation of IWW songs, *The Big Red Songbook*, published in 2007. Brief critical notes describe the books, quickly identifying their strengths and weaknesses. Other categories are Biographical Works, Miscellaneous Works including substantial discussion of the IWW, Writings by Wobblies, and novels featuring the union. All but six of the books listed are in English.

The Big Red Songbook has finally been issued by the Charles Kerr Co. (Archie Green, David Roediger, Franklin Rosemont and Salvatore Salerno, eds., 2007). Reviewed in the May *Industrial Worker*, the heart of the book is the text of 190 songs that appeared in songbooks from 1909 through 1973 with short introductions to each song, 61 songs and poems that did not make the songbook (some with no discernable connection to the IWW), a checklist of all songs from the various editions of the IWW songbook and the edition in which they first appeared, and a discography including surviving recordings by song title, and commentary. Unfortunately, the editors do not note subsequent appearances or the frequency with which songs were reprinted.

Rosemont also writes on poet Kenneth Rexroth's encounters as a young man with Wobblies and Chicago radicalism more generally in "Rexroth's Chicago, Chicago's Rexroth: Wobblies, Dil Picklers, and Windy City Dada" (Chicago Review, 2006, pp. 151-163). His actual experience with the IWW was brief and sporadic, but Rexroth wrote of his affinity for the movement in later years.

Australian poet Lesbia Keogh Harford, who was briefly a member of the Melbourne IWW, is discussed in Jeff

Most historians of the IWW pay little attention to criminal syndicalism prosecutions which cost thousands of Wobblies their liberty.

Sparrow's "Signed Up In a Rebel Band": Lesbia Harford Re-Viewed" (Hecate, 2006, pp. 8-35). Sparrow downplays the significance of her IWW membership (she evidently joined because of the union's anti-war efforts, she was later active in class war prisoner relief and related defense efforts), instead preferring to view her against the context of Australia's larger nonsectarian radical movement.

Bruce Olds' novel, *The Moments Lost: A Midwest Pilgrim's Progress* (Farrar, 2007), is set against the backdrop of the 1916 IWW strike of metal miners in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. I have not laid hands on a copy of the novel, which has received mixed reviews, but it appears that the most basic facts about the strike are mangled, climaxing with an orgy of union violence that pushes the "socialist" protagonist into the arms of the employing class. In actual fact, of course, it was the employers' goons who carried out the violence, and the workers who paid the price, but perhaps such a story was too ordinary to suit the novelist's needs.

Former IWW organizer Lenny Flank has published *I.W.W.: A Documentary History* (Red and Black, 2007, \$13.99), compiling 18 pamphlets, speeches and other documents and eight pages of poorly reproduced images. Brief notes introduce the sections, which seem to have been selected more to explain the union's ideas than its history. Included are pamphlets by Ralph Chaplin and Wm. D. Haywood on the General Strike; E.G. Flynn and Walker K. Smith on Sabotage; two speeches by Eugene V. Debs from his brief association with the union; writings by Justus Ebert, Joseph Ettor, Thomas Haggerty, James Kennedy, Vincent St. John and Wm. Trautmann on the IWW's ideas and organizational structure; John Reed on the Paterson strike; the 1920 Comintern statement urging the IWW to abandon its efforts (its presence here is unexplained); the IWW resolution opposing World War I; and a pamphlet on the 1919 Seattle General Strike.

Graduate students continue to produce Ph.D. dissertations on the IWW, most recently Peter Morse's "Wobbly identities: Race, gender, and radical industrial unionists in the United States, 1900-1920" (State University of New York Binghamton, 2006). Morse looks to English-language IWW newspapers (he apparently ignores the more numerous foreign-language press) and pamphlets and the independent *International Socialist Review* to argue that despite the union's declared commitment to organizing "Negroes," Asians and women into One Big Union, IWW rhetoric was implicitly constructed from a white male perspective that perceived these workers as problems or questions to be addressed, rather than as integral parts of the working class speaking in their own

voice. It is a present-minded argument that ignores the IWW's persistent and often successful efforts to bring these workers into the union and to persuade workers more accustomed to focusing on their differences to instead examine and act upon their common interests.

Dan LaBotz summarizes his dissertation in a recent *The Americas* (April 2006, pp. 563-590), "American 'Slackers' in the Mexican Revolution: International Proletarian Politics in the Midst of a National Revolution." The editors (LaBotz knows better) get the name of our union wrong, and the article focuses on socialists and the nascent communist movement, but does include some discussion of the role these exiles played in IWW organizing in Tampico, Mexico.

Finally, Ahmed White's "The Crime of Economic Radicalism: Criminal Syndicalism Laws and the Industrial Workers of the World, 1917-1927" (Oregon Law Review, 2006, pp. 648-769) compares the legal campaign to crush the IWW to the current onslaught against civil liberties in the name of the war on terror.

White describes the criminal syndicalism prosecutions as "the most explicit, straightforward, and altogether remarkable effort in modern America to use the power of the state, backed by law, to stamp out a radical organization." Most historians of the IWW pay little attention to this decade-long effort, which cost thousands of Wobblies their liberty, made it impossible to continue union organizing in many parts of the country, and consumed the IWW's energies and resources with defense work.

White offers a legal history of this

prosecution, examining prosecutions around the country and the judicial rulings that made it possible. While many criminal syndicalism convictions were overturned on appeal, White notes, these decisions were justified on evidentiary or procedural grounds, rather than on the basis of the right to free speech or to organize.

While he does not discuss the criminal syndicalism prosecutions that were brought against IWW members as recently as the 1970s and the laws' use against environmentalists with limited success, this is an important contribution to the history of the IWW and of state repression in the interests of the employing class which is worth the trouble to seek out.

Joe Hill Lives

by Len Wallace

Get wise! Get wise! Get wise!
Don't you know
that Joe Hill
took the hit for us?
The bullets that seared his
body and heart
were aimed
at the heart of the working class:
to make us obey
to keep us quiet
to make us bow
to make us consent.
Every bullet a history of
the whip on the back of a slave,
the lynching of my Black brother,
a policeman's club cracking a head,
the blood of my brothers and sisters
on the streets,
a child chained to a machine.
102 years later
his injury is mine
and 102 years
isn't too long to forget.

Review

Voices of Horizontalism in Argentina

Marina Sitrin,
Editor. *Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina*. AK Press, Oakland, 2006, 255 pages, paperback, \$18.95.

Review by Joseph Lapp II

Horizontalism follows the story of Argentina's political and social upheaval from the massive, neo-liberal inspired financial collapse, through the protest-filled days that brought down five successive governments in less than two weeks, led to neighborhood assemblies organized to meet the community's essential needs, and spawned hundreds of the now-famous worker occupied factories.

This book, as opposed to being some kind of theoretical work, brings the voices of people who participated in these historic events and who continue to participate in these struggles to the fore in interviews organized around different facets of social movements involved.

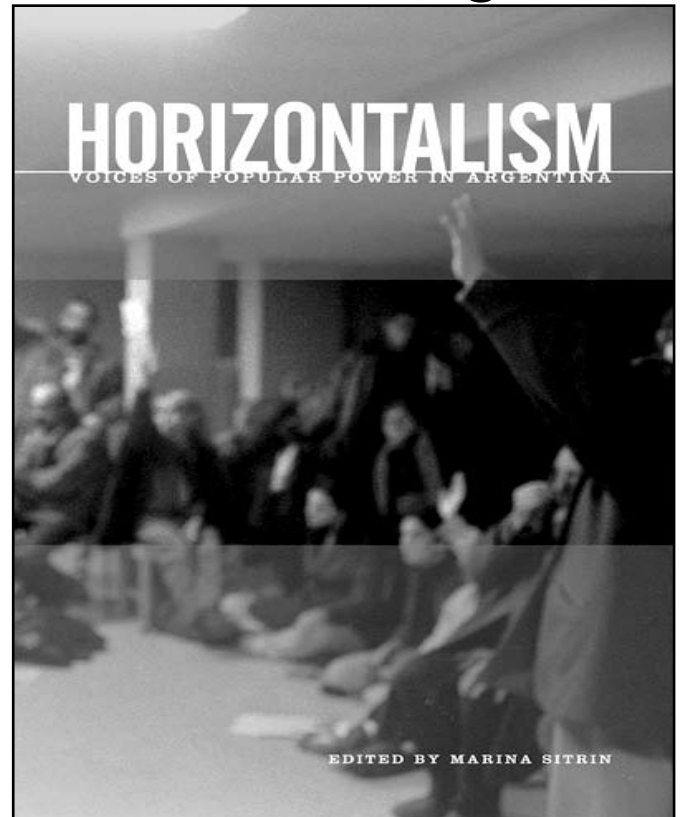
Wobblies will find inspiration in every area covered by this book, from the militant unemployed protest movement to the consensus-based neighborhood assemblies. Of special interest are the stories of workers re-occupying abandoned businesses and producing without bosses and, in most cases, without wages. Because the narrative is derived directly from the voices of the workers

involved we can hear their frustrations, their hopes, and their determination coming through in every page.

No book put together by an American on a Latin American issue can be above reproach. Horizontalism is no exception.

But Sitrin's choice to use only the transcripts of interviews she performed and her choice to publish the book first in Spanish, does set it above most of the countless books coming out about the current upheaval in the Global South.

I recommend this book as an example of the capabilities of people who are fed up with capitalism and fed up with government by the employing class.



Review

Revenge of the Atom Spies nukes War on Terror

Flames of Discontent, Revenge of the Atom Spies, Hidden Agenda Records/BMI, 2007, CD, \$12.97 on CDbaby.com.

IWW John Pietaro and Laurie Towers are back as the Flames of Discontent with the new CD, *Revenge of the Atom Spies*.

Wobblies are well-familiar with Pietaro and Towers as they recorded their first CD, *I Dreamed I Heard Joe Hill Last Night...A Century of IWW Songs* for the IWW centenary and perform in and around New York's Hudson Valley and New York City.

This second 14-track disc of the Flames links the American theme of the Red Scare from the Fifties to today's new cold war, the so-called War on Terror which has criminalized dissent domestically and globally.

The music is an eclectic mix of melancholy, irony, humor, and rebellion. The slow tempo and tragic mood of September's Divide and Contrasts clashes against the Elvis-inspired title track, *Revenge of the Atom Spies* and *Ballad of the Big Wind*. Thrown in for good measure is the ska punk narrative of *Who's to Blame?*, two spoken word tracks, the boppy *Song of the Translucent Liberal*, *jazzy Walls*, and the simply beautiful guitar and bass of *Injustice*. Then there are the classic IWW songs, *Stung Right* and *Joe Hill*, and the Spanish civil war song, *Long Live the Fifteenth Brigade*.

With such an array of musical styles, the Red Scare theme of the lyrics holds the CD together.

The atom spies who are getting their "revenge" are presumably the American communists Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, executed on June 19, 1953, after being convicted of passing nuclear secrets to the Soviet Union. There is doubt to this day that they transmitted secrets that actually helped the Russians build a nuclear bomb and that they received a fair trial. The Rosenbergs were the only people tried and executed by the US for espionage during the Cold War. They were buried in Pinelawn, New York.

Their trial fanned the flames of anti-

communist hysteria, providing Senator McCarthy with the wave of fear he and his Committee of Un-American Activities used to persecute hundreds of activists, artists and others through public hearings, blacklisting and blackmailing.

The spoken word tracks by actor and activist Paul Robeson and the principled Lillian Hellman help provide the historical context for the CD.

"I am being tried for fighting for my people. My father was a slave and my people died fighting for this country... No fascist-minded people will drive me from it. Is that clear?" Paul Robeson told the Committee in 1956.

American playwright Lillian Hellman told the Committee in 1954: "To hurt innocent people whom I knew many years ago in order to save myself is, to me, inhuman and indecent and dishonorable. I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions." Hollywood put her on its blacklist for years for her statement.

Robeson and Hellman's words still ring true today in the need to directly confront the encroaching surveillance of the state and to hold ourselves to a moral standard that is higher than what is laughably called public morals today.

Pietaro and Towers use a combination of wit and rhetoric to tie the blunders of the past to the blundering idiots in power today.

In *Who's to Blame?*, the Flames try to identify who leaked to the media that Valerie Plame, the wife of White House critic Joseph Wilson, was a CIA agent. After listing all of Bush's cronies as suspects, Pietaro sings: "It's so hard to choose. This insidious bunch has control of the news." In other words, it doesn't matter who leaked the information because the issue is that Washington already controls journalists dependent on it for news content.

Democrats and so-called progressives are not spared either. "When did you drop your ideals of fighting the good fight?" asks the *Song of the Translucent Liberal*, which skewers the liberals who insist that reforming the system—and

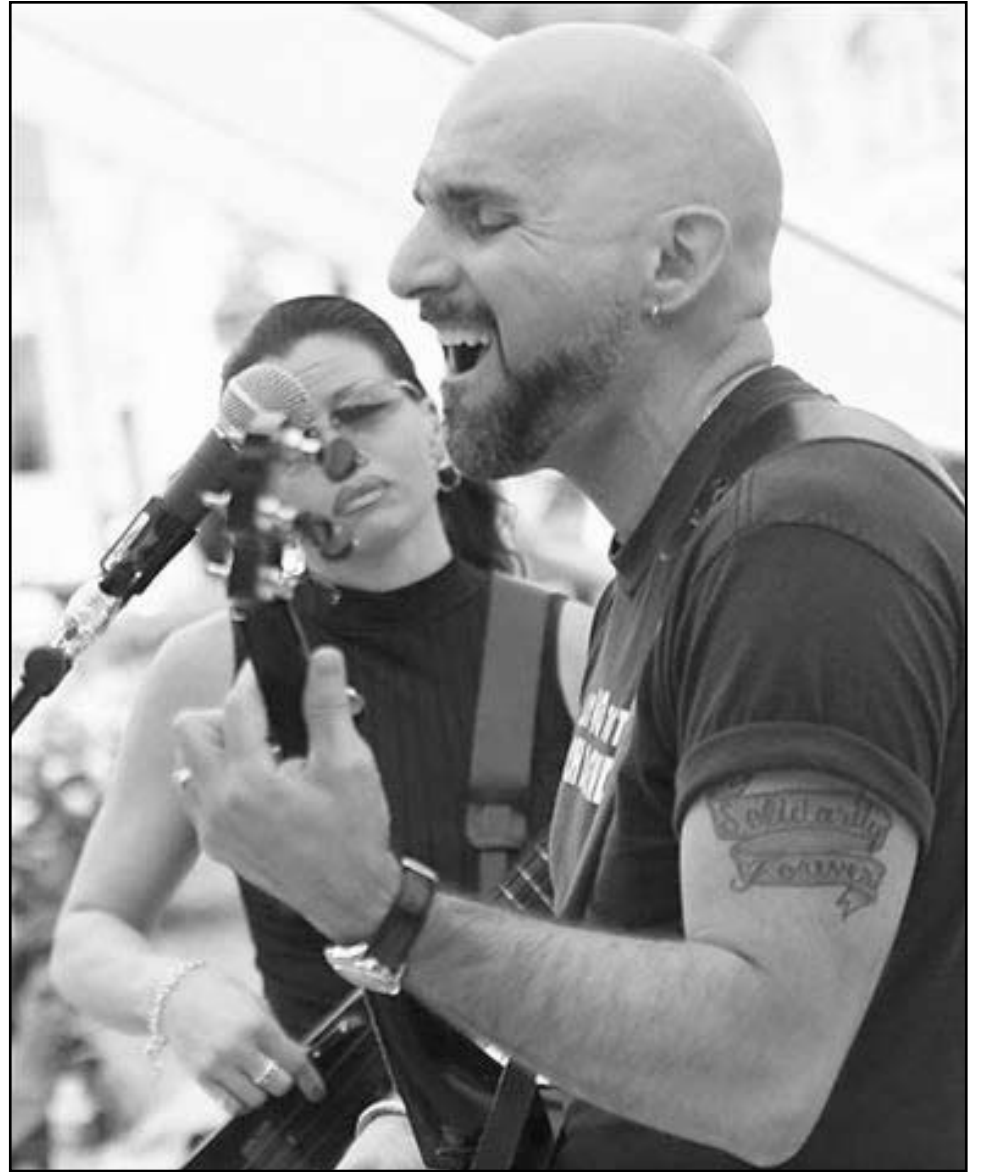


Photo from www.flamesofdiscontent.org

John Pietaro and Laurie Towers play at an anti-war rally at West Point.

voting for war and domestic oppression to retain credibility—is going to do anything more than co-opt the activist. "The greatest fall is from within, work the system with a grin," mocks the lyrics.

Walls decry not only the physical walls, such as the one on the Mexico-US border and the one being used to expropriate land from Palestinians in Israel, but the psychological barriers to resistance. "Walls of steel, walls of fire, walls that crush your heart's desire. Walls of

silence, walls of illusion, walls of blindness, walls of elusion," croons Pietaro.

This theme of wilful ignorance and complicity is echoed in the sorrowful *Contrasts*: "Dissent is shunned. Thought is crime."

"People learn to tolerate what you feed them," declared the title track, *Revenge of the Atom Spies*. "Is American pride just so fragile, that government lies must be so agile. They deny what they don't know, close their minds and just say no."

But Flames of Discontent does more than bemoan the tragedies of today and yesterday, they call for action.

"With endless corporate wars, they've overspent our trust. They're closing all the doors, dissent is a must," calls Pietaro in *Injustice*. The *Ballad of the Big Wind* calls for nothing short of revolution: *Big Wind*, blew away New Orleans, through lives and homes and reality. Nothing was done by the fortunate son, storm this right-wing regime.

The Flames of Discontent are hard at work, promoting this new CD, playing the *Dissident Folk and Arts Festival* in Beacon, New York, in October, and have dates set in the New York cities of Kingston, High Falls, Poughkeepsie, and Woodstock in November. Joining Pietaro and Towers will be new drummer Angelo Moscarelli to give the group's live performance more of a rock edge.

To find out more about the Flames, visit their website www.flamesofdiscontent.org.

but no-one thought anything of it if you had to stay past the end of your shift to talk to the boss about something he had all day to ask you. And there were all the hours you spent talking about work, or just thinking about it when you weren't there. [...] It was a weight you carried behind you constantly like a cinder block chained to your leg."

Armstrong's book is a laugh and in no way politically sensitive. But it makes clear that if we are going to make our working lives anything other than a soul-killing, time thief, resistance to cynicism and apathy is essential.

Review

Wages: cynicism isn't enough

John Armstrong, Wages, New Star Books, Vancouver, 2007, 213 pages, paperback, \$21.

Behind every punk musician-turned-journalist are dozens of god-awful jobs. This is the essence of John Armstrong's memoir about his work life, *Wages*.

From his first job, as a rabbit cage cleaner, to his last job in the book as a journalist at a major Vancouver daily newspaper, Armstrong, former member of Vancouver's punk rockers, *The Modernettes*, brings a mix of cynicism and humor to his memoir. It's safe to assume that this book is yet another attempt to make a living, following up his punk rocker memoir, *Guilt of Everything*.

Armstrong is conscious of his working class background—and sees no advantage, due to his parents' faith in capitalism and God, despite their own "litany of bankruptcy and abandoned homesteads. [...] My family were Irish/English immigrants and took a perverse country pride in being treated badly; how hard you worked and how little you got for it were a point of honour," he said. When his uncle started up a dairy farm, a dairy conglomerate put him out of business. When he moved to mushroom farming, a mushroom company did the same. Capitalism wasn't working for his entrepreneur uncle.

Steeped in this family culture of passive acceptance and blind optimism, it is no wonder that his job history is marked

with funny and horrible anecdotes, related through the cynicism of bitter experience. He rebelled in many small ways as an individual. He went on welfare. He fooled around on the job. He stole. He tried to work as little as possible.

But the thought of collective resistance or organizing on the job is never considered. Resistance, it seems, interferes with survival, even though, as Armstrong says repeatedly, there are always jobs out there. Even in the one job as a paper boy where he discovered that he couldn't get fired no matter how incompetent he was (the boss would have to do his route), it was an opportunity lost for organizing. Without the support of his parents or a local union or even a solidarity group on the job, I can understand why not.

When he did sign his first union card as a journalist, he was happy to do so. "I was fairly thrilled to sign the thing. I'd been a staunch unionist my entire adult life. Of course, I'd never belonged to one before." However, for Armstrong as for so many other workers, union membership means protection from being fired, not as an opportunity to assert job control. Still, Armstrong doles out working class wisdom wittily which is worth repeating.

On a job's worth: "I could see the flaws in this scheme—shot from your bed by a blaring alarm at a ridiculous hour in order to do things no-one in their right

mind would want to, and all for a paltry sum of money promised sometime in the future."

On the value of work: "The value of the dollar was exceedingly high, in terms of getting it, and exceedingly low for what it brought you."

On paying off debts: "The world conspired to keep [his parents] in debt and it was created and organized for just that purpose."

On how coercion defines work: "Work is what you are made to do by others, whether by threat or promise. Work can't simply be defined as toil, it's anything with a boss added to it and your own consent subtracted."

On capitalism's indifference to legal and illegal trade: "[D]ope was an example of the founding principle of capitalism—find a need and fill it. That the economic system itself created the need [of people trying to forget their exploitation as workers] was just the evidence of its inherent beauty, a closed loop and a captive market."

On journalism: "You needed a serious head injury to write the shit and brain damage to live yourself after it was printed. It was the literary equivalent of sorting turds by hand..."

On the eight-hour day: "[T]he idea of an eight-hour day was an utter lie... I still had to get up an hour before I had to be at work. Show up five minutes late in the morning and there was an inquisition

Armed men break strikes in Philippines

Free trade zone uses counterinsurgency tactics at strike of Wal-Mart supplier

Filipino workers' rights activist Arnel V. Salvador said his government's labour ministry, local government, police and military were "conniving" with union-busting employers with free trade zone employers at a presentation on Tuesday, October 11, in Ottawa, Canada.

The presentation, organized by the Ontario Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines, is part of a three-city tour featuring Salvador that includes Montréal and Toronto.

The tour is designed to inform and gain the support of working class Canadians for Filipinos' right to organize, according to Salvador. He is the deputy executive director of an independent Workers Assistance Center (WAC) based in Cavite, in the northern part of the Philippines archipelago. The WAC had targeted workers in the government-owned and operated free trade zone in Cavite which employed 65,000 workers, with over 80 per cent being women, in 267 factories.

The Cavite free trade zone provides employers tax-free and duty-free status on the goods they produce. Salvador said that the government established the zone to "showcase that there are jobs" in the Philippines and deal with the critique that there are not enough jobs. By government statistics, only half of the working population have full-time jobs while the remaining 16 million people work part-time, as street vendors and in the informal economy.

The centre, founded in 1995, initially had success in organizing in the free trade zone, forming up to 50 unions. However, in 2000 and 2001, the government and employers cracked down on what they called the "communists", with a combination of government complicity and employer impunity with incidents of threats, firings, beatings, kidnapping and the murder of at least two union organizers.

Salvador presented two organizing drives that demonstrated how hard workers had to fight to organize their workplace.

A two-year organizing drive had resulted in union certification at Wal-Mart supplier Chong Won Fashion and Phils Jeon Garments, both Korean-owned factories, employing 800 workers. The court confirmed that each factory's union had sole bargaining rights and ordered the employers to negotiate a contract. However, the labour ministry, as is common, sent no one to enforce its decision. The employers' "insistent re-

fusal" to negotiate, said Salvador, forced the unions to strike simultaneously and press for recognition and a contract on September 26, 2006.

"The workers realized that they have only themselves to depend on," he said. "No strike has ever won a legal case." They set up shelters outside of the factories and picketed for 24 hours.

While government officials, the police and military are prohibited from interfering in a strike, the free trade zone's own police force (PEZA) and local police confronted the picketers in riot gear, beating them and injuring dozens of people. Salvador showed photo after photo of union members' bruises, including the union president, Resurreccion Ravelo.

"Under the law, the police have no right to disperse a strike," he said. Police also seized company and free trade zone identity cards, required to enter the zone. At one point, security guards ran the union president out of the zone, chasing her with a shotgun.

For three weeks, the police used the "food blockade" counterinsurgency tactic in order to starve the strikers into submission or to force them to leave.

The police and employers continued to escalate the violence against the picketers.

Nine months after the strike started, in June 2007, a factory manager armed 800 scabs with scissors and led them into the zone. Plainclothes police were among them, said Salvador, and they attacked the strikers' encampment, attacking the union members and tearing apart the tarps that protected them from the rain. Still, the workers maintained their picket, until the men in ski masks came.

On June 10, 20 men armed with army issue M-16 assault rifles appeared at the Chon Won Fashion factory at 3 AM, telling the picketers that if they didn't leave, they would be dead by morning. One day later, a similar group of armed men visited the strikers at the other encampment, kidnapped the strikers and left them, alive and terrified for their life, in the free trade zone's garbage dump. If they returned, said the masked men, they would die the next day or disappear.

Salvador said he believes the government and employers let the armed men into the zone so they could break the strike. "If they could filter the strikers [at the gates], why couldn't they detect 20 people with high-powered rifles?" asked Salvador.

Iranian sugar cane workers strike

By John Kalwaic

Workers at Iran's Haft Tapeh sugar plantation in the southern province of Khuzestan, Iran have struck for unpaid wages.

Sugar workers in Shush City say they have a trade union representing them and want an independent, democratic trade union to represent their interests and get the wages denied to them. The 2,000 workers have alleged that a "sugar mafia" is operating in the industry and is influencing the government to adapt bad policies. The government has made promises to the workers about the unpaid wages, but have kept none.

This is the sixteenth strike in two years at the plantation. The plantation is threatened with bankruptcy due to a heavy debt load. Trade liberalization has reduced a 140 per cent tariff on imported sugar to four per cent. Management did little to prepare for the tariff cut so without it the factory's future is in jeopardy.

Most of these workers are from the Ahwazi Arab minority who consider themselves an oppressed group, in a nation which is predominately Persian.

"Iran helps Arab nations such as

Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine. Why can't they help their own Ahwazi Arabs?" an Iranian worker told Radio Farda.

The British Ahwazi Friendship Society published a report that the Iranian government is using "foreign" militants, including members of Lebanon's Hezbollah, to crush the strike.

With files from the IW.

Fired Thai Garment workers strip protest

By John Kalwaic

In a Bangkok suburb, laid off garment workers from the closed Modal garment plant protested their lack of severance pay by stripping to their underwear, setting their uniforms on fire and wrapping themselves in protest banners.

The garment company said it had to close because it couldn't compete with cheap foreign imports. In turn, the government promised the workers their severance pay amounting to 24 million baht (US\$763,000) after the factory closed.

The 300 union members protested in front of a government building



Arnel Salvador of the Workers Assistance Center in Cavite, Philippines, spoke in Ottawa, Canada about strike-breaking in free trade zones.

The death and kidnapping threats forced the workers out of the zone, but "the strike only ended in the strike area" and the unions are carrying on their campaign outside the free trade zone's walls.

The Chon Won factory has since declared bankruptcy, leaving 400 workers jobless. It is arguing in the courts that it owes the workers nothing as they had been already terminated. When the WAC contacted Wal-Mart to pressure its supplier to deal with the workers' demands, the multinational said it couldn't do anything about a closed factory.

The Phils Jeon factory continues to operate.

Salvador is not optimistic that the strikers' hopes for a job and pay will be fulfilled. The Philippines supreme court has since ruled that the union is the rightful representative of the workers. However, the bosses continue to ignore it.

"[The government and courts] don't enforce rulings in favour of the union, but they do enforce rulings against the union," said Salvador. Combined with the armed attacks, police interference, and a culture of impunity, organizing is an uphill battle. To find out more about Philippine workers' day-to-day struggle to organize in free trade zones, visit www.wacphilippines.com.

Egypt: Occupation win for textile workers

By John Kalwaic

Egypt is experiencing another wave of strikes to demand payment of unpaid wages and bonuses, among other issues.

The latest occupation was at the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company in Mahalla el-Kubra, north of Cairo. It is the second occupation this year, the May occupation of Spanish-owned Mansoura-España Garments Company by women textile workers over raises that would provide a living wage and eight years of missed May Day bonuses.

Workers in the key Egyptian textile manufacturing industry are becoming more militant and daring, which is

worrisome for Egypt's one-party state that has prohibited strikes or opposition parties. The government controls the only legal trade union the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU).

Despite this situation, the workers won the Mahalla strike. The strikers included all workers at the factory, from officer workers to managers to laborers, except the board of directors.

The Egyptian government is now trying a new approach to these strikes by "giving in" and acquiescing to the workers' demands.

However, consolatory action seems to be failing to pacify the workers. Success is breeding hope and more strikes. Often when workers pressure their boss for earned back wages or promised bonuses the bosses, public or private, make promises and then renege. The only thing that seems to work is direct action, sit-in strikes, pickets and factory occupations.

The government blames Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, for being behind the strikes. However, bread and butter issues are driving the strikes.

At the Mahalla plant, workers were waving their membership cards from the ruling National Democratic Party saying, "we are not Brotherhood, we are not opposition" while on strike.

With files from the IW.

Burma protests: Is India looking the other way?

World's largest democracy faces a test of its beliefs over its capitalist interests

By Jason Fults

On October 6, 2007, people in dozens of cities around the world took to the streets in solidarity with activists inside Myanmar, also known as Burma. The aim of these actions was to both call attention to 45 years of harsh military rule and to put an immediate global spotlight on the upsurge of protest within Burma in recent weeks.

Dubbed the "Saffron Revolution," these are the largest and most vociferous demonstrations that have taken place inside the country since the protests of August 1988, which ended in a military coup and the massacre of thousands of civilians.

As in 1988, the current protests within Burma were catalyzed by increased economic austerities imposed by the Burmese government, but quickly assumed a pro-democracy character given the harsh suppression of any form of public dissent.

Organizers are now demanding, in addition to economic relief, national reconciliation and the release of movement leaders such as May Win Myint, Dr. Than Nyein, and Aung San Suu Kyi. Myint and Nyein have been imprisoned without a trial since October 1997, while Suu Kyi has spent more than 11 of the last 17 years under house arrest.

Predictably, the Than Shwe regime's response to the protests has been violent, resulting in hundreds of injuries and at least nine deaths. Many activists are calling for immediate intervention by the international community. In particular, organizers have implicated Burma's main ally, China, as well as multinational corporations doing business in Burma. October 9 was an international day of action against Chevron for its ties to the Burmese government, and a global advertising campaign has targeted the Chinese Communist Party for its support via "investment, imports, and armaments." Somewhat overlooked in this focus is the important role of Burma's other major neighbor, India.

In addition to long-standing cultural ties, India and Burma have a shared political history, dating back to their former integration under the British Empire. Sizable numbers of ethnic Indians continue to reside in Burma and Burmese in India, again owing to the upheavals of colonialism and its aftermath. Burma served as a headquarters for the Indian revolutionary Subhash Chandra Bose and his anti-colonial Indian National Army from 1943-5, thus playing a significant role in India's struggle for independence.

What role will an independent, democratic India play in the modern-day struggles of the Burmese people?

While India's response to the Bur-

mese government's crackdown in 1988 was decidedly pro-democracy, in recent years New Delhi has become much more pragmatic in its relations. Cooperation with Burma is in fact a central facet of India's important "Look East" policy, and India continues to increase its military, diplomatic, and financial ties to the Than Shwe regime, often at the expense of the Burmese democracy movement.

High-level diplomatic relations have grown significantly between the two countries, and India's former Minister of External Affairs Natwar Singh declared India's desire for a "long-term partnership" with Burma in 2005. India is currently seeking to expand its bilateral trade with the country, has extended millions of dollars in grants and loans, and is engaged in several joint development projects. Indian oil and natural gas companies also continue their explorations in Burma unabated.

Might these deepening economic ties somehow compromise India's purported interests in supporting the growth of democracy in the country? Mani Shankar Aiyer, Minister for Development of India's North Eastern Region, thinks not: "We have long been champions of democracy. We haven't compromised on that, but ground realities are ground realities."

India's Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Murli Deora, who paid a visit to the Than Shwe government within days of it opening fire on nonviolent protesters, was even more straightforward: "We have a good understanding with the military junta and we are confident that our companies will do big business there in the direction of seeking energy security for the country."

Military relations with Burma have also grown, and serve multiple purposes for India, including securing both countries' borders and counteracting China's increasing influence in the region.

Earlier this year, India's Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee promised a continued flow of military equipment to Burma. The two countries have also conducted joint military operations along the Indo-Burma border with the



Photo by Jason Fults

Burmese expatriates and Indians protest the military repression against protesters in Burma.

aim of neutralizing separatist groups that have been troubling India on its northeastern frontier. Yet, these actions not only lend legitimacy to Than Shwe's government, they also subvert United States and European Union bans on military imports into Burma, with India acting as a middleman for the transfer of Western technologies and expertise. Further, India's military aid (along with the handful of other nations which continue to arm Burma) undermines both armed and nonviolent resistance movements within the country, thereby prolonging the lifespan of the Than Shwe government.

Not surprisingly, there is no evidence of any October 6 protests in China, but India's rich civil society has begun to step up to the plate. Activists in at least three Indian cities have staged solidarity demonstrations. A small protest march and rally took place October 6 in central Delhi, followed by a candlelight vigil that evening at nearby India Gate. The recent

tumult in Burma is receiving significant media attention, and numerous Indian opinion leaders are calling on the country to increase diplomatic pressure and pay attention to more than just its own short-term interests. In response, Indian leaders are attempting to negotiate a tricky middle way which will encourage reform in Burma without jeopardizing India's own economic and security goals.

Whether Burma's Saffron Revolution will indeed bring about substantive change in the country, or give way to business as usual, remains to be seen. What is imperative, however, is that we not give Burma the "Las Vegas treatment" and turn away. Despite Than Shwe's attempts to quash Burmese civil society and isolate it from the outside world, what happens in Rangoon will not stay in Rangoon. The international community must act in solidarity with the people of Burma, and any actions that solidify Than Shwe's grip on power are a crime against humanity.

Chinese strikes rise in 2006

By John Kalwaic

Chinese strikes and labor unrest are on the rise, according to the *Green Left Weekly*.

In August, 5,000 workers at a mobile phone company in Shenzhen, southern China, struck to protest increased hours. The same month, 800 miners struck to save their pay when the privatization of the mine turned into the misappropriation of funds. Transport workers at the Qingyang Municipal Transport Company struck to protest privatization. Overall, China's Ministry of Labor and Social Security reported that 2006 had 447,000 labor disputes, a 42 per cent increase from 2005.

The government statistics do not include unofficial labor disputes, which don't go to arbitration. These informal strikes have been steadily on the rise since the 1990s when the government rapidly increased its pro-capitalist reforms. There is only one legal union in China outside of Hong Kong and that is the All-China Federation of Trade Unions. Controlled by the ruling communist party, the union's purpose is to pacify the workers rather than represent their interests. Government police and private security have frequently fired on and repressed Chinese workers on strike.

There are three groups of workers who are agitating for change.

The first group is workers and pensioners from state-owned factories in the north. These workers fear losing their factory to privatization, having its

assets looted at the risk of losing their jobs or pensions.

The second group is young workers working in foreign-owned Dickensian sweatshops in China's southern coast. These employers want to work their employees to the bone as they produce goods for developed countries.

The third group is casual construction workers who migrate from job to job. Many workers are seeking refuge from rural poverty and often return to their homes in rural areas. They come seeking temporary relief but find they are often overworked and underpaid.

Hong Kong has right to strike

Hong Kong is the only place where strikes are legal. The Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions is an independent labor union. The HKCTU is now currently involved in a strike in the food service sector and fast food outlets protesting for better wages.

Chinese workers have been portrayed in the western media, as dutiful servant of China's economic reforms but this is far from the truth. China's workers are organizing for their rights and have been since the day the government started its economic reforms.

These reforms have created a lot of wealth for foreign entrepreneurs and party bosses but, predictably, the money has not trickled down to the people.

With files from the IW.

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By Mike Pesa

Solidarity with Salvadoran anti-privatization activists

Thirteen people are facing charges of up to 60 years in prison in El Salvador for trumped up “public disorder” charges stemming from a peaceful protest against water privatization in the Salvadoran municipality of Suchitoto.

On September 2, police violently charged the protesters, injuring over 75 and arresting 14 (one of whom was later released). Police chased away children trying to treat the wounded. One of the arrested individuals almost died in jail from a wound sustained during the protest.

The arrested protesters are being prosecuted under an “anti-terrorism” law that was modeled after the Patriot Act. The September 2nd protest was organized by the Salvadoran water workers union (SETA) in response to the ruling ARENA party’s attempts to “decentralize” the water supply by encouraging local governments to turn over control of water supply and service to private companies. Water privatization schemes in other parts of Latin America have been disastrous for unionized water workers and low-income residents alike. The IWW responded to the crisis by demanding the immediate release of the Suchitoto 13, an investigation into the police brutality that occurred, and an end to government-sponsored privatization schemes. The 13 have since been released and are currently free pending their trial. The trial was originally scheduled for the first week of October but was postponed for six months.

On September 26, two ISC representatives and members of the Philly General Membership of the IWW participated in a lively demonstration outside Philadelphia’s City Hall. The rally was organized by a diverse coalition of solidarity organizations and included street theater, a rock band, and a lot of leafleting. As the rally wrapped up, a critical mass bike ride began to gather and the two events fed into each other. Local media was on hand.

The Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) sponsored an international week of action to free the Suchitoto 13, October 6-13. The ISC is keeping abreast of the situation and is in direct communication with leaders of the Salvadoran Union Front which SETA is a part of.

Demanding the release of imprisoned Salvadoran health care union members

The International Solidarity Commission sent a letter to the Salvadoran government demanding “the immediate release of—and the dropping of all charges against—eight union members belonging to the Salvadoran General Hospitals Union (SIGEESAL)” who were illegally detained during a nonviolent protest against health privatization in El Salvador. The ISC also urged government leaders to “abandon their ill-conceived plan to privatize the national health care system and to create—in the words of Health Minister Guillermo Maza—a ‘zero unions’ environment”. The eight unionists have since been freed but the ISC remains very concerned about the increase in police repression against union members and anti-privatization activists in El Salvador. In the past few years and especially in recent months,

there have been disturbing signs that the human rights commitments established by the 1992 Peace Accords are being seriously undermined and that the Salvadoran right is plunging the nation back into its troubled past.

Defending Argentina’s underground railway workers

The ISC passed a resolution declaring its solidarity with the embattled workers of Buenos Aires’ underground railway system (the *subte*), who are represented by the Unión Tranviarios Automotor (UTA). The resolution condemns a recent offensive against UTA delegate Néstor Segovia and urged Metrovías, the U.S.-owned company that runs Argentina’s *subte*, to put and end to the intimidation. In the resolution, the ISC also “joins the *subte* workers and their delegates in decrying the company’s lack of investment in this incredibly important public service” and pledges full support for the actions of the UTA. ISC delegate Rhiannon Edwards remains in Argentina and is closely monitoring the situation there.

Supporting occupied bike factory in Germany

The ISC sent a letter of support to the workers of an occupied bicycle factory in Thuringian Nordhausen, Germany and to the anarcho-syndicalist Freie Arbeiterinnen-und Arbeiter-Union (FAU) which is backing the occupation. The resolution calls upon the management of the corporate managers of Bike Systems GmbH the German government to recognize the workers’ cooperative and its claim to the factory. To finance their struggle, the workers are building “strike bikes” to sell to supporters. To learn how to purchase a strike bike, contact the ISC at solidarity@iww.org.

ISC invited to visit Haiti

The ISC has been invited by the Confédération des travailleurs haitiens (Confederation of Haitian Workers) to send a delegation to Haiti and learn about the struggles that workers are waging there. The CTH represents workers across many industries and describes itself as “one of the few [Haitian] unions not bought off by the US State Department.” They are trying to gain more international publicity for their campaigns. You can read their website and blog in English and French at www.haitilabor.org. The ISC is in dialogue with the CTH and is considering the feasibility of an official delegation to Haiti in the near future. Any IWW member who is interested in being part of such a delegation should contact the ISC immediately at solidarity@iww.org.

The ISC “behind the scenes”

The ISC does a lot of “behind the scenes” work. Some examples from this past month include: conducting research on electronics manufacturer AVX (which is union-busting in El Salvador) and the unions that represent its workers in the United States, planning a major printing of IWW materials in Bangla, strategizing for the delegation to Mexico, searching for delegates for an upcoming conference international solidarity conference, putting Salvadoran and Bangladeshi union leaders in contact with each other, and sending faxes and emails in response to actions from around the world.

ILWU protests racial profiling



By John Kalwaic

Members of the International Longshoremen Warehouse Union, ILWU Local 10 in Sacramento, California, struck and picketed their job after members were arrested for “obstruction of justice.”

On their return to work, African-American dockworkers and members of ILWU Local 10, Jason Ruffin and Aaron Harrison, were arrested by port security guards. The guards asked for their identity cards. When they gave it to the guards, the guards asked for more, so the two men asked the guards for identification and attempted to call their union representative on the docks where they worked. The guards called the police, who on arrival maced, assaulted and arrested Ruffin and Harrison. Members of the ILWU Local 10 were infuriated by this incident and 150 members gathered outside the Sacramento courthouse to protest their treatment.

This is not the first time ILWU members were targeted by police and government officials because of their progres-

sive stands against the war in Iraq. The ILWU has also been involved with many other progressive causes such as solidarity with the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa in the 1980s and the civil rights movement against racial discrimination and racial profiling in the United States.

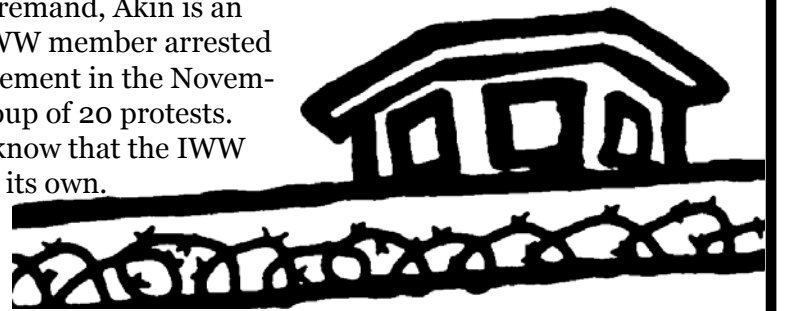
The ILWU Local 10 also rallied behind the cause of the Charleston 5. The Charleston 5 were members of the ILWU’s more conservative east coast sister union, the International Longshoremen’s Association, ILA Local 1422, who were arrested during a strike in Charleston in 2005. The ILA Local 1422 has written letters of solidarity to the ILWU Local 10 in solidarity with the picket against the arrest of Ruffin and Harrison.

Longshoremen work long hours under dangerous conditions, many of their leaders have been killed while on the job. The workers also face constant harassment from the port security as part of Bush’s Patriot Act.

Write a postcard to Akin Sari

In jail on remand, Akin is an Australian IWW member arrested for his involvement in the November 2006 Group of 20 protests.

Let Akin know that the IWW never forgets its own.



Send postcards to: Akin Sari, Melbourne Assessment Prison, 371 Spencer Street, Melbourne, 3000. Victoria, Australia.

