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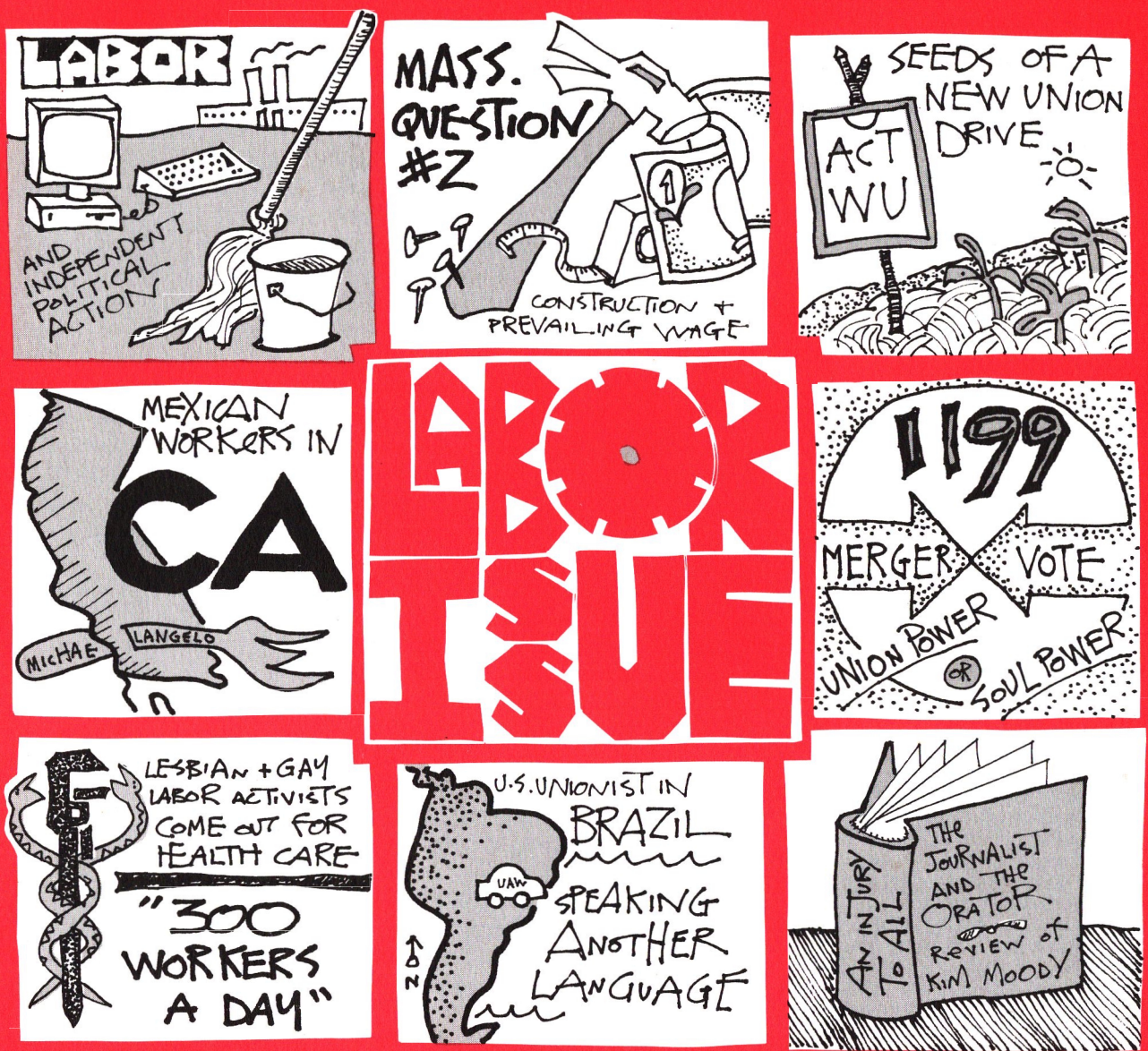

Forward Motion

December 1989
Vol. 8, No. 4

FORWARD MOTION is a magazine of socialist opinion and advocacy. We say socialist opinion because each FM presents analyses of important organizing work and reviews of political and cultural trends. We say socialist advocacy because FM is dedicated to a new left-wing presence in U.S. politics and to making Marxism an essential component of that presence. We share these purposes with other journals, but we seek for FM a practical vantage point from within the unions, the Black and other freedom struggles, the women's movement, the student, anti-war, and gay liberation movements, and other struggles. We also emphasize building working people's unity as a political force for social change, particularly through challenging the historical pattern of white supremacy and national oppression in the capitalist domination of this country.

In this issue

"New creative tactics born of desperate circumstances": This is the theme that emerges from our winter issue's look at recent struggles and current questions facing labor. This fall a Pittston executive castigated the United Mine Workers as the "last union in America to come to terms with the realities of the 1980s." By contrast, most labor activists believe the Mineworkers to be part of a first wave of union organizing *trying come to terms with the 1990s*. Four components of a revitalized labor vision run through the articles here.

First, an approach to coalition-building where labor not only puts its strengths to work for the interests of working people in general but treats its allies as equal partners. Singled out here are advocacy of national health care ("Socialists in Labor"), engagement in the AIDS crisis ("Lesbian and Gay Labor Activists Come Out for Health Care"), and occupational and environmental safety and health ("Three Hundred Workers A Day" and "New Unionism in the South").

Second, stepped-up labor independent political action. In his address to the AFL-CIO leadership, President Bush, thinking more of Poland than the United States, recently acknowledged labor as a "leading force for democracy." The irony of this statement coming from the likes of him to the likes of them aside, there *is* a new commitment among labor progressives to turn this slogan into reality. In the 1980s, labor was subjected to new affronts by the Democratic Party mainstream; but it was also prodded by the pro-labor populism of Jesse Jackson. One result is a new enthusiasm for independent political action and a greater openness to partnership with the national movements. "Labor and Independent Political Action," "Labor, the Black Community and the Vote No On 2 Campaign" and "The Journalist and the Orator" look at this development.

Third, serious new efforts to organize the South and Southwest in partnership with the African-American and Chicano/Latino communities. Organizing drives in these regions not only counter the decline in union numbers; they intermingle the national movements with the labor movement, enrich labor's fight for justice and freedom, and so invigorate the cause of unionism. "Unionism from Scratch," "New Unionism in the South" and "Lessons of Michael Angelo's" all probe this work, while "Union Power Or Soul Power" reviews District 1199's efforts at labor and Black movement unity in the Civil Rights era.

Last, new meaning for U.S. labor's international solidarity. The lead editorial as well as "Speaking a Different Language" both emphasize the need to "globalize" the labor movement in response to the changes in the organization of world capital.

Nestled in with this labor round-up is LocoMotion's first annual holiday gift list. Coming February: Malcolm X after twenty-five years.

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Editorial:

Socialists in Labor: Facing the 90s

The 1980s are going out much as they came in. If anything, the corporations have stepped up the pressure on working people in the United States. Their attacks have spread to the wage structures and social compact which stabilized relationships between the corporations and their employees since the end of World War II.

The "General Motors formula" of a 3% increase plus cost-of-living, a pattern in auto begun in 1947, has vanished. There and elsewhere, employers have successfully forced concessions to tailor wages and benefits to their particular industry or enterprise. Meant to take wages out of competition in an industry, pattern bargaining continues to unravel, forcing workers into a downward competition of who will work for less.

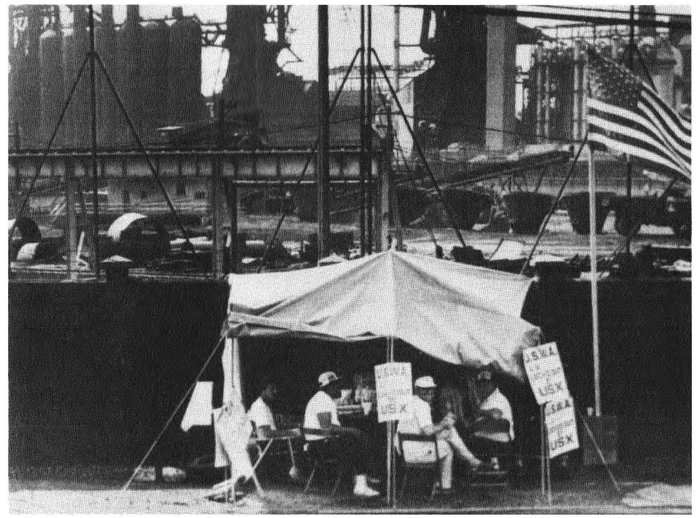
Even the hard-earned national contracts within a single company have deteriorated. In auto, the new and now dominant management systems called "jointness" or team-concept have led locals to try to underbid one another, offering concessions on wages and working conditions in return for investment and jobs. In electrical, the companies have started to cut up wage packages by division.

It has taken very strong efforts by the unions and their friends to continue to protect basic legislation, like the prevailing wage, and to prevent the further spread of Right-to-Work (for less) legislation. And on other fronts there have been major political setbacks. This year's compromise minimum wage bill opens the door for a sub-minimum training wage while leaving the wage floor well below the rate of inflation. Reagan-era destruction of health and safety laws has caused increased injury rates.

Globalization and Worldbusiness

The continued political domination of the Republicans and their Democratic sympathizers means that in the immediate future the overall situation is not going to change for the better. The defection of many Democrats to support Bush's welfare-for-the-wealthy capital gains tax cut is a recent example.

The rate of unionization of the workforce is still falling. While some unions are doing better than others, especially in the service sector, it



EFFORTS OF U.S. CORPORATIONS TO MAINTAIN THEIR ECONOMIC POSITION HAVE MEANT INCREASED ATTACKS ON U.S. WORKERS. IN 1986, USWA MEMBERS WERE LOCKED OUT BY USX CORPORATION IN BRADDOCK, PA AND BEGAN A VIGIL AT THE PLANT GATES.

does not appear there will be a real turnaround without drastic changes in the labor movement itself and/or major revisions of labor law. A 1983 Harvard study which showed that about one in twenty of the people who voted for a union got fired has been updated by several estimates which make that risk even greater.

Uneven development in the capitalist world has increased economic instability. The U.S. confronts competition from Japan, blossoming European unity and developing third world capitalists. And it is continually pinched by the anti-imperialist movements in other parts of the third world as well. Whether it is called globalization, worldbusiness or some other name, any road to strengthened U.S. business domination of international markets runs through increased attacks on the standard of living of U.S. workers and those in much of the rest of the world.

There are some countervailing economic trends, such as the likelihood of a labor shortage. A shortage will help those on the bottom of the working class who have been hardest hit by drastic cuts in social services and increased official racism. A labor shortage may keep McDonalds at $5 an hour, at least in some parts of the country.

The rapidly unfolding political and economic changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe offer U.S. corporations both dangers and opportunities. There could be new work forces to exploit, new markets to conquer, but also potentially new areas for bad loans and freer organized resistance. Polish workers resisted both Soviet domination and Polish martial law. Perhaps now we will see how willing the new Solidarity government is to make concessions demanded of the Polish economy by Western bankers and investors.

1989's Angry Autumn

In the face of all this, proposals by the AFL-CIO Executive Council to deal with the crisis facing organized labor have fallen by the wayside, useless. Does anybody know what became of the "associate member" organizing strategy? Did union Mastercards strengthen our movement?

Yet important changes are taking place at all levels of the labor movement, and the bitter strikes of 1989 are a good prism through which to view them. The strikes of the Pittston miners, the NYNEX (New York/New England phone) workers and the Eastern Airlines workers are all defensive, fought against the same kind of attacks which characterized capital's offensive in the '80s. The coal strike is over pattern bargaining (Pittston's effort to break out of the Bituminous Coal Operators Association pattern contract), while both the miners and the phone workers are fighting on the important new front of health care costs.

The corporations have started to cut to the bone, and

as a result have run into working class muscle. Each of these strikes has gone on for months, with the Eastern strike already ranking as the longest major strike since World War II. None are resolved as we write this article.

New creative tactics born of desperate economic struggle have been adopted by broader sections and higher levels of the labor movement. Paperworkers at International Falls, Minn., stormed into their plant and destroyed the property of the BE&K strikebreakers. Miners seized the Pittston coal processing plant and held it for three days while thousands of workers and supporters protected them from police, leaving only when they were promised amnesty and a congressional investigation of the Pittston Company. The phone workers have taken up the adopt-a-family form of strike solidarity, born in the "outlaw" Hormel meatpacking strike of several years ago. The independent clerical and technical workers union at Harvard University linked up with AFSCME in an organizing breakthrough.

New creative tactics born of desperate economic struggle have been adopted by broader sections and higher levels of the labor movement.

People who never thought of themselves as activists have been thrown into protracted and bitter struggle. Pilots and flight attendants, linesmen and operators have joined the miners in their traditional role in the front ranks of the movement. Thousands have joined the meatcutters, paperworkers, cannery workers and hospital workers who have waged bitter strikes in the last few years. They have gained experience in the practical effort and confronted important questions that a long and bitter strike raises. Also, a growing class consciousness has begun to develop for those involved in supporting these strikes.

In sum, the U.S. multinationals have responded to sharpened competition by the dismantling of the social contract of the post-World War II period. Both globalization and the dismantling of the wage structures of that social accord lead down the same road. The standard of living of U.S. workers is being lowered to increase U.S. corporate profitability and dominance. But in the last few years there have been two positive developments as well: increased, bitter rank-and-file resistance, and an increase in creative political and tactical thinking on the part both of rank-and-file activists and union leadership. New reform movement leaders within such unions as the UAW, Mailhandlers and Teamsters are promoting these positive trends.

Politically, the conditions for coalition-building have changed and have taken on a national dimension. The basic notion of forming an alliance between the Black movement in the United States and organized labor reached hundreds of thousands of new workers through Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign and his continuing involvement in labor struggles since then. Analysts have argued both that white working class voter support for Jackson was higher than might have been expected, and that it was much lower than it should have been based on Jackson's stand on issues important to working class voters. Both are correct.

Labor's New Politics

A major tendency of United States history has been for white labor to defend its position of relative privilege compared to people of color. Given this central theme, the alliance built between the Jackson campaign and a section of the trade union movement, generally among rank and file activists or lower level officials, was a significant gain. And as might be expected, those workers and their leaders who have been in the forefront of the defense of labor's standard of living were often the most receptive to Jackson's message.

In other words, Jackson's campaign helped couple militant activists from labor's anti-concessions movement with the political thrust of the Black movement. Certainly, this alliance tended to be one of convenience rather than one with any ideological glue. But in today's conditions of attacks on both organized labor and the Black communities, this minimal alliance could sink deeper roots and gain broader influence.

In addition, the last several years have seen other positive political steps, sometimes from labor's highest ranks. More internationals have come out pro-choice in alliance with the women's movement. The AFL-CIO has participated in civil rights marches with the NAACP, joined the national march for housing and supported the Spring 1989 AIDS march. Service sector unions such as AFSCME and SEIU have gained influence within AFL-CIO councils, bringing with them generally more progressive positions on international matters, such as anti-intervention in Central America.

The general tasks of socialists in the trade unions today are to strengthen the resistance to the corporate attacks; to deepen the connection between the workers movement and the Black liberation movement, including working to organize the South; to "globalize" the labor movement in the face of increasingly mobile capital and to promote pro-labor political initiatives in their various forms.

Right now, activists should go all-out to aid the miners' strike. This strike has consciously brought together what Jackson called "the spirit of John L. Lewis and Martin Luther King," in the sense that it has challenged the vicious anti-working class nature of labor law today with direct action and civil disobedience.

The CEO of Pittston Mine Co. has whined that "the mineworkers are the last union in America to come to terms with the realities of the 1980s." What this means is that, more than any other, the miners union has dug in to defend its bargaining power and standard of living. From top to bottom, the union has adopted an all-out effort to beat back the break-up of their master pattern, in full knowledge that if the miners at Pittston go down, the rest will follow in short order.

Time for National Health Care

The extraordinary Pittston strike may go on for as long as a year. But another major struggle, opened in contract talks, community struggles and legislative confrontations, will stretch deep into the 1990s: the struggle over health care costs.

While takeaways on health benefits have touched off both the mine and the phone strikes, the issue is much broader than that. Several years ago we criticized the acceptance of individually bargained health benefits in lieu of legislated national health care, a deal with the devil made by U.S. unions as part of the post-World War II social contract. Just a few years ago, you could hear union officials argue against nationalized health care in favor of contractually bargained health care, saying nationalized health care would take away a reason for union representation!

As is usually the case, short-sighted and selfish policies have come back to haunt the U.S. trade union movement. Without the moral and political mantle of standard bearer for all working people, the U.S. trade union movement is too weak and isolated to defend even its own contractual health benefits.

Several unions have started to take up the campaign for national health insurance dropped by the AFL-CIO in the 1940s. Whether the best model is that of Germany or Canada or something new will have to be explored. But it is clear enough that the model of South Africa, aside from the United States the only other industrialized country without a national health care policy, will not do.

A campaign for national health care puts the trade unions in good position to unite with the most exploited and neglected working class and poor communities, among people of color. In both inner cities and rural areas, maintaining people's health is being jettisoned as not cost-effective.

Labor activists are also beginning to make direct connection of labor health issues to the AIDS crisis (such as through a recent event sponsored by the Boston Gay and Lesbian Labor Activist Network featuring Cesar Chavez speaking on the grape boycott). And there is also a vital connection with the struggle for women's reproductive rights and health, newly spurred by the Supreme Court's Webster decision.

Properly carried out, efforts to win national health care will allow the unions to speak again in the interests of all working people, and to build unity between white working people and the movements of the peoples of color.

Ultimately our attempts to mitigate the exploitation of working people will fall short in the face of capitalism itself. For this reason, a constant task of socialists is to propagate socialism, to win more workers to socialism. The crisis of socialism, including the changes now sweeping Eastern Europe, make this difficult work. But the devastating situation of labor in the United States coupled with the seeds of new resistance have made the ground more fertile for spreading a new socialist vision.

In the Freedom Road Socialist Organization, we say that "the multinational working class is our home," the home of socialism as an ideology and a force in society. And it is the multinational working class with its allies which will ultimately put an end to the bitter cycles of crisis in which we find ourselves and create a more just and productive society, as the masters of our own fate.

—Labor Commission, Freedom Road Socialist Organization

Coalition-Building in Massachusetts

Labor, the Black Community, and the Vote No On 2 Campaign

by Jeff Crosby

Introduction

On November 8, 1988, voters in the state of Massachusetts passed judgement on Question 2, a business-backed proposal which would have repealed the Massachusetts "prevailing wage" law. This law requires state-funded construction to be paid at the prevailing wage in the area, meaning at union rates. In their effort to defeat Question 2, Massachusetts organized labor made unprecedented efforts to reach out and build a broad political alliance, including a major effort to work with the Black communities in the state.

To understand the relationship between the Black community and the unions during the campaign to defend the prevailing wage law, we have to look first at the history of struggle between the Black community and the construction trades over the racist exclusion of Black and other minority workers from those trades. We also have to understand what the prevailing wage is, where it came from, and why it is an issue of struggle today.

With that as a background, we can see that the effort made by the organized labor movement to reach out to minorities during the Vote No On Two campaign was quite extraordinary. We can also see that labor's sustained efforts to reach out to the Black community resulted primarily from first, the struggle of the Black community in Boston to break the color line in the building trades over the last 20 years, and second, the setbacks suffered by the building trades at the hands of the large builders during that same period. In other words, the changed attitudes that surfaced during the Vote No campaign resulted from the popular struggle that preceded it.

As part of the high water mark of the Black Liberation Movement in the late 60s, a struggle developed in Boston to break into the virtually

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THE THIRD WORLD WORKERS ASSOCIATION HOLDS A RALLY ON MALCOLM X DAY, 1979

all-white construction trades. In Massachusetts in 1968 the trades had less than 2% Black apprentices[1]. What developed was a mass movement combining direct action (leading to arrests) with coalition-building and efforts to attract allies from various sections of the Black and other populations. The key role in this period was played by an organization of Black construction workers, the United Community Construction Workers.

Boston's Black Community and the Building Trades, 1968-1988

The struggle centered on affirmative action hiring in federally funded construction, such as HUD housing, and in university construction projects where students served as allies, such as at Harvard and Tufts. The struggle also focused on differing models of affirmative action. The "Philadelphia Plan," which required "a specific minimum of Black workers in each craft at every stage of construction," was supported by Black community activists in opposition to the "Boston Plan," which replaced numerical goals with a call for a "good faith effort" to achieve affirmative hiring.[2]

The Third World Jobs Clearing House (TWJCH) was formed in 1975 to broaden the jobs fight by forming an alliance with Native American, Puerto Rican and Chinese community and worker organizations, and to challenge the union/contractor training programs which were not increasing minority job participation in any significant manner. The TWJCH was funded for $200,000 by the City of Boston, and after returning to street demonstrations at job sites, succeeded in getting more oppressed nationality workers hired for a period of about a year.

On May 4, 1976, after a confrontation between black demonstrators and white workers (including South Boston Marshalls)[3] at a job site, 2-3000 white construction workers converged on City Hall. Through violence and intimidation, they convinced the City Council to vote unanimously to cut the funds of the Clearing House. The complaint of the white demonstrators was, ironically, that the TWJCH was participating in demonstrations. In the first 5 months of the TWJCH's existence—before they started demonstrating—not a single job came in their direction, despite the city funding.[4]

This major setback, and the fatigue of some of the core of workers who had been involved since the early days of the United Community Construction Workers, led to another strategic advance. The activists from the TWJCH began an effort to enlist white Boston community organizations—rather than appealing directly to the white construction workers—to join in an effort to secure affirmative action in the construction trades for minority nationalities, women, *and Boston residents*.[5] Their effort was buttressed by research which showed legal precedent for a residential jobs requirement and that very few Boston workers were employed at area construction sites.[6] After a six month effort, a meeting of 40 organizations was brought together to form the Boston Jobs Coalition in 1977.

This introduction of a Boston residency quota for construction hiring was controversial among labor union officials. Professor Frank Lyons, a conservative labor educator from the University of Massachusetts, attacked it as "Balkanizing" the labor movement and the community.[7] This criticism, coming from an educator who

trained thousands of union officials and shop stewards in the Boston area over a period of many years, is extremely enlightening on the outlook of the labor officialdom.

Black activists had initiated a class approach in reaching out beyond their own ranks to the disadvantaged white workers in the neighboring communities, and they were attacked for being divisive! Having spent the previous decade running up against a stone wall trying to crack the building trades color line (and getting beaten and jailed in the process), these activists could only wonder where the white opponents of "Balkanization" were in 1968, when only 2% of construction workers were Black, or in 1975, when thousands of white construction workers trashed City Hall to keep the trades "for whites only."

"After the 1940s and early '50s, the building trades froze people out, built a fence around their house. And then we started to get beaten."

In addition, the unions in the building trades had always based their power in part on their ability to control hiring, unlike those in industry and service. Anything that would take hiring authority away from the unions was seen as a threat to their power.[8]

The BJC's efforts received a critical boost when Mel King, a leading activist throughout this entire period in the Black community, ran for Mayor in 1979 and made "Boston Jobs for Boston People" a key element of his campaign. It allowed him to campaign throughout the city, and the incumbent Mayor White actually endorsed the policy two weeks before the election. The Boston Jobs Ordinance became law under White and was successfully re-established under Mayor Flynn in 1984. Since 1986, it has been monitored by an oversight commission which shows significant progress in minority hiring.[9]

Two legal decisions during the early '80s also buttressed the continuing struggle. The first was "James Garret *et al.* v. Local 7 (Ironworkers)" in March 1980 which settled an eight year old discrimination suit against that union in favor of the plaintiffs and ordered drastic changes in the union's admission and training practices.[10] The second was a 1983 Supreme Court decision written by Judge William Rehnquist upholding the Boston Jobs Ordinance as a valid form of "parochial favoritism."[11]

This brings us to a point immediately preceding the Vote No on 2 campaign in the Spring of 1988. Following some significant improvement in the hiring practices in public construction, Chuck Turner of the Third World Jobs Clearing House describes the "primary concern" of the community activists as achieving "an agreement with the unions to train a sufficient number of workers of color, women and Boston residents to implement the policy."[12] Negotiations began between the unions and the Community Task Force on Construction (an alliance of Native American, Black, and Latino community organizations and contractors). A commitment was made to the community to provide actual membership statistics in each of the trades. But the figures were never delivered, and negotiations stalled once again.

Building Trades on the Rack

The full story of the development of the Building Trades in the decades before the Vote No on 2 campaign is beyond the scope of this article. But it should be recognized that the trades had seen the percentage of union versus non-union work decline precipitously over several decades. The Association of Building Contractors (ABC) had spearheaded a drive for non-union construction sites nationally which had reduced the percentage of union construction work to less than 50% by the early 80s, and driven the union strongholds back to the urban centers.

This caused some new thinking among construction union leaders such as Tommy Evers of the Ironworkers, Tom McIntyre of the Bricklayers, and newer faces such as Phil Mason of the Electrical Workers. Numerous efforts such as low-income home construction and labor donations to homeless shelters were launched by the trades to improve their image and power in the communities. Some leaders such as Evers took up support for the movement against apartheid in South Africa, while McIntyre became a major force in the housing efforts.

The traditional building trades were in a weakened position, under constant attack from both the union-busting contractors and the Black community activists. The more enlightened activists in the trades saw the handwriting on the wall and responded to the leadership provided by Black activists both on the construction jobs struggle and in other areas such as housing and

apartheid.

Evers, himself the defendant in the Ironworkers legal challenge mentioned earlier, referred to the old hiring hall approach and the newer attempts to build alliances when he told a Labor Studies Forum, "We in the building trades used to think mainly about keeping people out. Now we want to bring people in."[13]

Joe Nigro, General Agent for the Boston Building Trades, looked back over 40 years and said, "Question 2 never had to happen at all. After the 1940s and early '50s, the building trades froze people out, built a fence around their house. And then we started to get beaten." Interestingly, he pointed to the late '60s and early '70s as the point where "it started to get better, with the Boston Plan, or Drinan Plan."[14] Black activists, it should be remembered, had opposed the Boston Plan in favor of the Philadelphia Plan because the Boston Plan did not require specific goals and continuous monitoring of actual hiring and retention of minority workers on job sites. And Black activists like Chuck Turner and Mel King saw the 1976 City Hall demonstration by white workers resulting in the cut-off of funds for the Third World Jobs Clearing House as the height of racist reaction, the low point when "affirmative action was dead."[15]

Non-Union Contractors Probe the North

The "prevailing wage" law in Massachusetts was initially a law favored by contractors, and passed in Massachusetts in the 1920s. The contractors at the time saw it as a way to stabilize a chaotic construction industry. By the post-World War II period it had become part of the whole social contract of labor management relations which institutionalized organized labor in return for management control of the workplace and uninterrupted production. Piore and Sabel, in their survey of the current crisis of US industry, point to five structures of wage stabilization in the post-World War II period: the model UAW-GM contract of 1948, pattern bargaining, federal labor law which facilitated unionization, minimum wage legislation, and "wage setting mechanisms in the public sector, which linked the movement of salaries paid by the government to that of union workers." The Massachusetts prevailing wage law, linking publicly-funded construction to the union wage, is such a mechanism.[16]

As state AFL-CIO President Arthur Osborn viewed it, the anti-union Associated Building Contractors initiated their attempt to repeal the Massachusetts law in 1988 in an attempt to "probe the North." If they could win in Massachusetts, they could win anywhere. It would be a body blow to the construction trades and the labor movement generally.[17]

After eight years of Reagan, the ABC was not whistling in the dark. Their own polls showed potential, and newspaper polls left the outcome of the campaign in doubt right up to the vote on Nov. 8. They counted on public resentment against high-paid and clannish construction workers, and set out with the strategy of painting the Building Trades as a "special interest" while riding the anti-tax sentiment. Barbara Anderson and the Citizens for Limited Taxation, who had organized successfully for the "Prop 2 1/2" tax-limiting measure, were their natural allies. They hoped to unite with municipal good government types who would back the argument that it was high construction wages which prevented the construction of needed schools, libraries, etc. It was a powerful and well-financed message, and the ABC believed they would win until the last moment.[18]

The AFL-CIO defeated the repeal of the Prevailing Wage in an all-out effort of their own, meeting the ABC tit-for-tat and then some. They had a "layers" strategy, targeting four specific areas in sequence: the construction trades, who were directly targeted by the repeal; the rest of the AFL-CIO, their most natural allies ("Right-to-work laws are next"); activists, an amalgam of previously suspect types; and "the community."[19]

As a significant part of this effort, the building trades and the AFL-CIO approached the elected Black leadership, seeking their endorsement of the Vote No campaign. Consummation of the effort was to be a long time coming. In the course of six or seven meetings with the Black Caucus (of elected state representatives and senators) from Spring to October of '88, when agreement was finally reached, the history of the previous decades (and before) came home with a vengeance.

Labor-Black Caucus Meetings

The Massachusetts State AFL-CIO agreed to hire staff to do outreach work among women and people of color during the campaign. Although a Boston activist with good connections in the Boston progressive and civil rights movements was selected, Black labor activists and progressive elected officials were incensed that only one, white, part-time person was hired to reach out to those constituencies. Bill Fletcher, a Black United Auto Workers (UAW)/District 65 organizer who was also head of

the Community Task Force on Construction, Selma Johnson from the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Janet Walker from the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), and Domenic Bozzotto from the Hotel and Restaurant Employees (HRE) all lobbied Arthur Osborn for a full-time position and for the hiring of a Black or other minority nationality activist.

In response, the AFL-CIO upgraded the job to full-time, but a minority activist was never hired for outreach to the Black and other minority communities. Eventually Ron Martin, an AFL-CIO staffer who came in from Chicago to help with voter registration and happened to be Black, helped with the minority community outreach, although he had not been hired with that in mind.[20]

The conflict over staffing was typical of the relationship between the building trades and the Black activists and elected officials during the Vote No campaign. The trades saw the community outreach position as a major breakthrough, and made a point of emphasizing it at its training meetings with their overwhelming white, male, rank and file organizers. We need them, we're putting some resources into this, and don't call women girls, they would say. You might piss somebody off and lose them for the campaign.[21]

To the Black officials and labor activists, the fact that a minority organizer was not hired and that the one position became full-time only after a sharp struggle was another insult and an indication that, as in the past, minority workers would have to scrap and fight for every concession.[22]

Six or seven meetings took place between the Black Caucus and leading labor officials, running through the summer to October. Those participating in these discussions included Arthur Osborn, Joe Nigro, and Leo Purcell (President of the Massachusetts Building Trades) representing the trade unions, and State Representatives Gloria Fox, Byron Rushing, Augie Grace, Ray Jordan, Saundra Graham, and Shirley Owens-Hicks, as well as State Senator Royal Bolling, Boston City Councillor Bruce Bolling, and Robin Leeds (the AFL-CIO outreach staffer.)

Two issues were at stake. First, the building trades were anxious to line up Black leadership support for the Vote No on 2 Campaign while the Black Caucus was determined that the black vote would not once again be taken for granted. The second related issue was that the Black caucus wanted the building trades to provide specific numbers of Blacks and other minorities actually working in each specific trade. This, it should be remembered, was the demand being raised by the Community Task Force on Construction in the preceding months, to no avail. When the Building Trades representatives replied that they did not have the numbers to provide, the Black Caucus asked the unions to get them. Thus began a back and forth process that dragged on for months and nearly scuttled the negotiations altogether.

Activists in the campaign cited several reasons for the building trades' refusal to provide the numbers. First, they felt they had already made strides in affirmative action, and that a union job was inherently anti-discriminatory since it set a color-blind wage by contract. (The latter argument of course leaves aside the problem of getting into a union job in the first place.)

Second, the improvements in some trades were matched by virtually none in other trades, and the numbers of minority workers actually hired on the job, as opposed to apprentices, were not as good as the leadership had hoped. Trades leaders feared the numbers would be used against them in the future.

Finally, there was simply a question of power. The word "humble" was used by both sides more than once. In their own eyes, the unions were following a code of "do humble, do humble, do humble."[25] But spilling your guts to be judged by those who had been your most vocal critics for twenty years is a difficult step to take, no matter what new analysis may be guiding your efforts.[26]

The building trades' intransigence on this point incensed many of the Black officials, who naturally felt that this was contemptuous treatment by a supposed "ally." Byron Rushing, speaking at a forum that summer, made it clear that he felt nothing fundamentally had changed, and that the building trades were simply attempting a tactical alliance of convenience since they were under severe attack. "If they are not even willing to respect us with the facts and the numbers then what kind of negotiations, what kind of trust, what kind of alliance are we talking about?" An active supporter of Jesse Jackson in the Democratic primaries, he added, "We have to swallow Dukakis, I don't want to swallow this, too."[27] The talks were at a low point.

The Black officials also had people pushing them from the other side. Black community activists with clear memories of the struggles against racist exclusion from the trades were very skeptical of any cooperation with the union officials. Housing activists especially were not thrilled about keeping the prevailing wage, fearing that it would increase development costs in a community

"If the standard of living of one group of workers is on the line, then the standard of living of all workers is on the line. If wages are cut, then the quality of life in our community is cut. Prevailing wage is a minimum wage law. It's an equal pay for equal work law. The battleground for workers rights is the battleground for civil rights. When you cut wages you kill hope! Keep hope alive. Question 2 is bad for you. VOTE NO ON 2."

Reverend Jesse Jackson

Prevailing wage is a consumer issue, a community issue and an economic justice issue. Prevailing wage is a minimum wage law because contractors cannot hire anyone for less than the community wage standard. It is a pay equity law because it requires equal pay for equal work. It is an affirmative action law because it requires public oversight of company's hiring practices, insuring that contractors comply with their legal obligation to hire women and people of color.

JOIN WITH US TO PROTECT DECENT WAGES AND OUR QUALITY OF LIFE.

A. Phillip Randolph Institute • Boston Rainbow Coalition
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starved for housing starts and for social service-related construction. In addition, the Black contractors who benefited from minority set-asides were up against much wealthier, entrenched white construction firms, and were often not union outfits themselves. They, too, had no fondness for the union labor which increased their labor costs and had a history of excluding Blacks.[28]

Divisions in the Houses

Neither the Black Caucus nor the union officials were monolithic groups. Both contained those more prone to coming to an agreement, and those who were not.

It was Osborn who hired the community outreach staffer, not Purcell or Nigro. The latter two were lukewarm to the whole process, especially at first. Osborn, undoubtedly more sensitive to the public relations disaster that would occur if the discussion broke down altogether, was for releasing the numbers. In addition, unlike Purcell and Nigro, Osborn had to answer to the more progressive wing of the state AFL-CIO, generally based in the service and industrial sectors, not just to the building trades.

It was simply harder for the building trades leaders to commit themselves to affirmative action. They might be able to see (as did Osborn) that a strong alliance with Boston's Black community would enhance their image and political power statewide. But it also would undermine the privileges of being able to hand down your trade from father to son, that is, keeping the jobs white (and male). Whereas a disinterested observer might see it as only logical for the trades to ally with the Black community, to many near-sighted tradesmen looking out from the shrinking bastion of white union jobs, it might just as well look as though there were two different forces outside their fortress, the Black activists and the ABC contractors—*both* laying siege to take away their union jobs.

Among the Black officials, there were also two tendencies. Augie Grace and Ray Jordan grew to see their relationship with organized labor as very important. They both supported Dukakis rather than Jesse Jackson in the primaries. And they came from overwhelmingly white or mixed House districts in Burlington and Springfield, respectively. The others represented districts in the large Black community in Boston or nearby Cambridge.

All were supporters of Jesse Jackson, and many had been active in the social movements of the preceding decades. Some, like Rushing, had been directly involved in the efforts to break the color line in the building trades.

The Agreement and the Vote

In October, after several more painful meetings, the Black Caucus and the union officials came to an agreement. The Black Caucus endorsed the Vote No effort, and the trades agreed to some statements in support of affirmative action, to give some assistance to the Humphrey Occupational Trades Center (a high school in Boston's Black community), and to monitoring of the Boston Jobs Ordinance.

The numbers of Black and other minority workers in each of the trades and apprentice programs were never provided to the Caucus. They eventually decided to

"To win Question 2, rank and file construction workers had to ask their neighbors for help, and they gave it, particularly in low-income and black communities."

support the Vote No effort anyway. Some felt that they had no choice; others felt they would be in a better position to pursue affirmative action if they did support it, thereby gaining some reason to expect some payback from the trades. In addition, most felt that their long-term interests lay with the Vote No effort in any case, as part of a progressive agenda, even without a quid pro quo. But the concessions by the Black Caucus on this basis left the relationship between the labor leaders and the majority of the Black elected officials drastically weaker than if the problem of the numbers had been addressed directly.[29]

Organized labor and its allies won a tremendous victory on Nov. 8. The effort to repeal the prevailing wage failed by a 58% to 48% margin. Osborn announced that "politics would never be the same again in Massachusetts."[30]

Boston went against repeal in almost every part of the city, with only the wealthy and generally liberal Back Bay losing narrowly, with a 49% no vote. The largely white working class wards delivered strong no votes, such as E. Boston (74%), Charlestown (69%), South Boston (78%), and ward 15 in Dorchester (81%). But Boston's Black wards produced comparable or even larger no votes: in Roxbury's wards 10 (75%), 11 (79%), and 12 (85%), in the Dudley Sq. area's Ward 13 (77%), and in Dorchester's ward 14 (85%).[31]

Labor officials were not shy about acknowledging those kinds of numbers. "We owe a debt of gratitude to the minority community, and that is realized by all the building trades," said Joe Nigro. "To win Question 2, rank and file construction workers had to ask their neighbors for help, and they gave it, particularly in low-income and black communities. In that process, you begin to understand the needs and spirit of these communities," said Tom McIntyre of the Bricklayers.[32]

In the aftermath of the Vote No campaign, members of both sides of the negotiations made it clear that they fully understood the contradictions among their counterparts. The prevailing view among the labor representatives was that the Black officials owed support to the unions on this key issue because of labor's role as an ally in the civil rights movement, among other reasons. But according to a post-mortem in the *Boston Globe* following the vote, Byron Rushing "said the caucus agreed to back labor on the prevailing wage fight not so much because of its relations with the [building] trade unions, but because of wide labor involvement by unions such as the Boston hotel workers [HRE Local 26] and various public sector unions."[33] These would be the same forces who played the critical lobbying role with Osborn to make the community outreach position a full-time job, and who sought unsuccessfully to get the AFL-CIO to hire a person of color as outreach coordinator to the communities of color.

Osborn, in a speech at a forum analyzing the campaign and the coalition built during it, could not have been more clear on how he saw the forces in the Black caucus. Citing the high Black voter turnout in support of the Vote No campaign, he vowed to "continue working with Augie Grace and Ray Jordan to keep improving the numbers of Blacks and minorities in the Building Trades." Grace was speaking at the same forum, but Jordan was not. And it was Rushing who was the chairman of the Black caucus at this time. In an extraordinary public comment, Osborn added that labor and the Black Caucus had a "great relationship" coming out of the campaign, but also mentioned that "one person would not look at the figures, and it cost him or her dearly."[34]

To people familiar with the campaign, this was an obvious reference to Saundra Graham, from Cambridge. She had been among the most antagonistic of the Black representatives during the discussions, and was the victim of a stunning upset in her bid for re-election to the State House of Representatives on the same November day of the Question 2 vote. The AFL-CIO supported an unknown community activist named Alvin Thomson against her, providing pollworkers and other support. Graham was a long-time spokesperson for a number of progressive causes, and she had a number of difficulties in her re-election including personal problems and drastically overestimating her strength.[35] But Osborn here was clearly taking public credit for knocking out one Black representative in favor of another, more conservative candidate, also Black.

Labor's pragmatic political motto—"reward your friends, punish your enemies"—here took on the character of *white* labor determining Black leadership. White political power from whatever source dictating who will lead in the Black community is something with which that community has much experience, and has resisted in striving to determine its own political course. This will not be forgotten, and it exemplifies one of the significant stumbling blocks remaining in the developing relationship.

After the Vote: What Kind of Coalition?

If the difficulties of the Black Caucus/labor negotiations can only be understood in the context of the twenty years of struggle which preceded them, then the coalition that was formalized in the October agreement can only be evaluated by the events since the campaign.

Rushing said shortly after the vote that "further backing [by Blacks of the trades] hinges on how well the trades respond to the calls for expanding minority apprentice programs."[36] The Community Task Force on Construction again assumed the major role in attempting to work with the trades to increase Black and other participation by people of color.

Two series of events took place in early 1989 which posed and answered questions about the nature of the alliance that was created during the Vote No campaign. On Jan. 19, 1989, the US Supreme Court ruled in the Richmond case (Richmond, Virginia vs. J. A. Croson Co.). The court ruled that Richmond's set-aside of 30% of public construction for minority contractors should be struck down, since it was based only on a general history of past discrimination. Essentially, it ruled that unless a specific history of discrimination could be documented, a broad societal remedy would be in this case discriminatory towards the white majority. Ray Dooley, aide to Boston Mayor Flynn, said "it's clear the Supreme Court decision has thrust into jeopardy all sorts of affirmative action programs around the country."[37]

On Feb. 1, Jim Kelly, a former sheetmetal workers union official who is now a Boston City Councillor from South Boston, called for a legal review and repeal or modification of the Boston Jobs Ordinance, with its requirements for 25% minority hiring and 10% women hiring, as well as of Mayor Flynn's executive orders requiring minority contractor set-asides of 10% city-wide and 30% in heavily minority-populated neighborhoods.[38]

The gains which have been made since the first efforts by Mel King, Chuck Turner and others to integrate the building trades over twenty years ago are extraordinary...

On Feb. 18., a Dedham contractor moved in Suffolk Superior Court to strike down the Boston Jobs Ordinance and executive orders, citing the Richmond decision.[39] The contractors and opponents of affirmative action like Kelly hope that the Richmond decision will be the legal basis for unravelling every gain in minority employment in the building trades over the last 25 years in Boston.

But they met a response that would have been unthinkable 10 or twenty years before, and unlikely even one year before. On April 6, 1989, the Painters District Council #35, The Boston Building Trades and the Community Task Force on Construction held a joint press conference to announce the formation of "a broad coalition of labor and community leaders....to promote residency, affirmative action, and union hiring practices among Boston hotel owners and other private sector employees."[40]

Joe Nigro stated, "In the wake of Richmond vs. Croson, owners, developers, and general contractors must be constantly reminded of their obligation to affirmative action and 'minority set-asides'. The Building Trades in

Boston will continue to apply affirmative action goals through the 'Building Opportunities Program' and the Boston Employment Commission to ensure minorities and women are employed."[41] A specific campaign including a boycott was announced against the Marriott Corporation because it was hiring non-union, out-of-state workers and not meeting the standards described above.

Both labor officials and Black officials and activists tied the new coalition's effort to the successful fight against the repeal of Question 2. Bill Fletcher said, "When labor needed the support of the communities of color to beat back the conservative attack, people of color responded overwhelmingly. What we're looking for now is a new and equal partnership that responds to concerns of both sectors."[42] Augie Grace called the stronger relationships between the minority community and labor unions and the unions' commitment to affirmative action, local hiring, and 'minority set-asides' "the real victory of Question 2."[43]

Perhaps even more important than the press conference was the breakfast meeting that the trades leaders called with representatives of the Community Task Force, Black Caucus, and others two weeks before to continue discussions of affirmative action.

The preapprentice training to prepare minorities and women for the construction apprenticeships (announced by Joe Nigro at the press conference as the "Building Opportunities Program") is funded by a combination of state, federal and private sources at about $2 million, and is starting to take shape.

Of course many questions remain about the current status of the alliance. What resources will go into the Marriott effort beyond calling a press conference? Will the alliance hold, and what direction will it take, if the legal challenge to the Boston Jobs Ordinance and executive orders is successful? And while some of the figures on some trades have finally been made available to the Community Task Force, most still have not. Apprentice hiring numbers are still the benchmark used by most in the labor movement, rather than actual working members.[45]

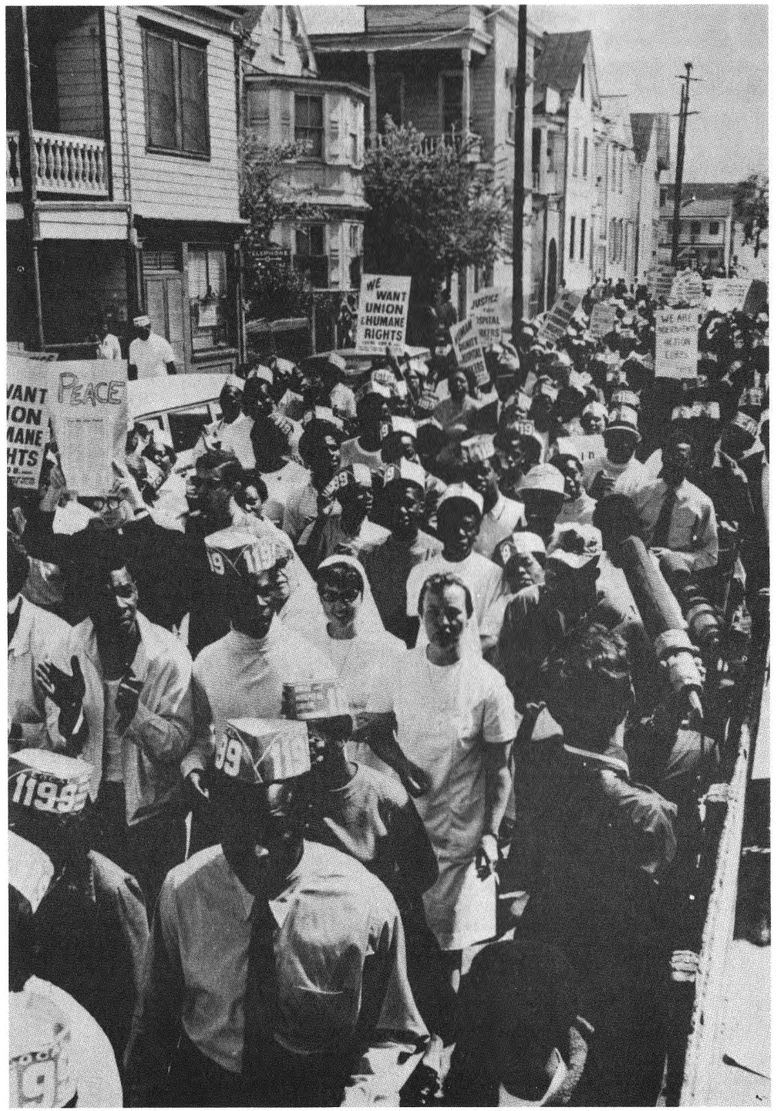
Perhaps most telling will be the ability of the new relationship to stand up under stress. Perhaps the Richmond decision and the efforts of people like Jim Kelly will provide that test, or another crisis like that which racked Boston during the school busing desegregation trauma.

It is important to understand that the progress currently being made is entirely in the context of what is known in Boston as the Big Dig, the massive construction which will be undertaken over the next ten years to build a third tunnel to the airport and to lower the central artery, the major highway through the center of the downtown business district. These two projects are estimated to cost billions of dollars and provide employment for 7-10,000 people.[46] Affirmative action in the midst of a gigantic construction expansion is obviously more acceptable to the trades than in normal times.
The gains which have been made since the first efforts by Mel King, Chuck Turner and others to integrate the building trades over twenty years ago are extraordinary. From opposing the affirmative action plans through stonewalling and racist violence, the trades have now officially lined up in favor of it, even actively in favor of it.

The choice for the building trades, and indeed for the labor movement overall, is becoming more and more clear. We can continue to defend a shrinking pie, based on the privileges of the skilled white sections of the working class. This is in part what brings us to the disastrous circumstances we face today. Or we can put real life and muscle into a new social justice unionism, which will have high on its agenda the eradication of privilege, putting us on a footing to defend our standard of living and set new goals for a just society in the United States. ■

Notes

1. Mel King, *CHAIN OF CHANGE: Struggles for Black Community Development* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), p. 171.
2. *Ibid*, pp. 175-6.
3. The South Boston Marshalls are a right-wing racist vigilante group that developed in opposition to desegregation busing in Boston in the mid-1970s.
4. King, *CHAIN OF CHANGE*, p. 190; Chuck Turner, "Sharing the Pie: the Boston Jobs Coalition," *Labor Research Review* VII No. 2 (Fall, 1988):81.81.
5. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
6. King, *CHAIN OF CHANGE*, p. 192; Jim Green, "The History and Politics of the Boston's Jobs Residency Policy" (Draft paper presented to the faculty of the Labor Center, Rutgers University, Sept. 30, 1988), pp. 19 and 38.
7. Professor Frank Lyons addressing stewards classes, Summer, 1980.
8. Green, "History and Politics," pp. 21 and 30.
9. Turner, "Sharing the Pie," pp. 85-6; Green, "History and Politics," p. 28. Green places the creation of the oversight commission in the Fall of 1985.
10. Candice S. Cason and Bill Fletcher, Jr., "Sensitive Matters," *Catalyst* V No. 17/18 (1985).
11. Turner, "Sharing the Pie," p. 85; Green, "History and Politics," p. 24.
12. Turner, "Sharing the Pie," p. 86
13. Green, "History and Politics," p. 33.
14. Joe Nigro, speech at College of Public and Community Service Labor Studies forum on Question 2, University of Massachusetts-Boston Downtown Campus, December 1, 1988, author's notes.
15. Turner, "Sharing the Pie," pp. 81-2.
16. Michael Piore and Charles Sabel, *The Second Industrial Divide* (New York: 1985) pp. 79-80.
17. Arthur Osborn, speech at CPCS UMass-Boston Labor Studies forum, December 1, 1988, author's notes.
18. *Ibid*.
19. *Ibid*.
20. Interviews with participants.
21. Training meeting of local union co-ordinators for Vote No on 2 campaign in Boston Sheetmetal Workers Hall attended by author, July, 1988.
22. Byron Rushing at forum on Black community and Question 2 sponsored by *Forward Motion*, UAW District 65 offices, July, 1988.
23. Interviews with participants.
24. Augie Grace, speech at CPCS UMass-Boston Labor Studies forum, December 1, 1988, author's notes.
25. Arthur Osborn, speech at CPCS UMass-Boston Labor Studies forum, December 1, 1988, author's notes.
26. Interviews with Janis Fine, staff organizer for Vote No campaign, Dec. 1, 1988, and Bill Fletcher, May 14, 1989, author's notes.
27. Osborn, CPCS forum, author's notes.
28. Rushing, *Forward Motion* forum, author's notes.
29. Fletcher interview.
30. *Boston Globe*, Dec. 10, 1988.
31. Joe Nigro, speech at CPCS UMass-Boston Labor Studies forum, Dec. 1, 1988, author's notes.
32. *Boston Herald*, Dec. 7, 1988.
33. *Boston Globe*, Nov. 10, 1988.
34. Osborn, CPCS forum, author's notes.
35. Fletcher interview.
36. *Boston Globe*, Dec. 10, 1988.
37. *Ibid*., Feb. 18, 1989.
38. Letter from City Councillor James Kelly to Joseph Mulligan, Corporation Council, City of Boston, Feb. 1, 1989, author's possession.
39. *Boston Herald*, Feb. 18, 1989.
40. Press release, Painters and Allied Trades District Council No. 35, April 6, 1989, author's possession.
41. *Ibid*.
42. *Ibid*.
43. *Ibid*.
44. Fletcher interview.
45. *Boston Globe*, Nov. 22, 1988.
46. *Ibid*.



HOSPITAL WORKERS MARCH IN CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA IN 1969.

1199 Merger Vote

Union Power Or Soul Power

On May 27, 1989, District 1199 ended its long-pursued ambition of creating "one big health care union" in the United States. 1199 had been organizing health care workers since the 1930s, had made the first national breakthrough in hospital organizing in the 1960s, and hoped to climax this with becoming part of the largest health care workers' union in America.

The best source on the historic rise of 1199 can be found in a newly-published book entitled, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone, A History of Hospital Workers' Union, Local 1199*, by Leon Fink and Brian Greenberg (Chicago, Univ. of Illinois Press, 1989). The book provides an honest examination of the tremendous strengths and critical weaknesses that affected the development of 1199. Much of the historical information in this article is taken from this book, and it should be on every trade unionist's must-read list.

As far back as 1978, 1199 had been pursuing a dream of uniting with the only other major union focusing on the health care industry, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). 1199 had hoped such a merger could stabilize its already turbulent organization and create an industrial union with the resources necessary to aggressively organize a rapidly expanding health care industry. The May 27th vote only partially fulfilled this dream.

1199's history was based on the unifying of two political movements, symbolized in the slogan *Union Power/Soul Power*. The May 27th vote, and the leadership divisions that precipitated that vote, represented the fracturing of that slogan. In a negotiated AFL-CIO compromise, members were allowed to vote state-by-state between SEIU and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), and this compromise made the national break-up of 1199 inevitable. It was a compromise negotiated by the top players, one that aimed to limit bloodshed, but one that responded more to the leadership's interests than those of 1199 members. It was perhaps the only conclusion possible, following close to ten years of vicious political fighting between leadership factions.

1199's historic growth from the 1930s to the 1960s was based on its willingness to break out of the narrow white, skilled confines of American trade unionism. It looked to organize sectors of the working class that most unions were ignoring: poorly paid service workers, mostly women, largely minorities. To accomplish this, it married itself to the growing Civil Rights movement of the '50s and '60s, and became one of the few unions that attached its future to the future of civil rights. The union's class struggle ideology of "them and us" (the bosses and the workers), passed on through the influence of the Communist Party, and the growing militance of the Black power movement allowed a flowering of 1199 in the early sixties.

Winning major wage increases, organizing quickly, winning the support of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and Roy Wilkins, 1199 stood at the zenith of this coalition in 1969. In that year, it set out to organize Charleston, South Carolina hospital workers:

> *We began to see that having made significant social and political progress we'd have to take on the economic question of full employment, of the right to organize, of increasing the minimum wage, of guaranteed annual income....Hospital workers came into the category of the working poor...And so the Poor People's Campaign was also the first opportunity we had in a national way to try to reach out, to form a coalition between blacks, Hispanics, native Americans and American Indians, the trade union movement, and, say, white workers in Appalachia and in the inner cities. It was really an attempt to overcome racial and cultural differences and move into a common economic effort to get our nation to eradicate poverty.*
> --Andrew Young on why the SCLC made Charleston, SC a priority, as quoted in Fink and Greenberg, p. 139.)

But the successes in Charleston were not clear victories, and future campaigns outside the South and outside the cities showed some serious problems in 1199's organizing.

As 1199 broke into the hospital industry, it based its organizing strategy on first organizing the lowest paid

workers in New York City, workers who were predominantly Black and predominantly female. Only after those wins did they broaden their horizons and begin organizing professionals.

Testing the Marriage

In the early years, 1199 centered its organizing in New York City and gave priority to organizing minority workers. The union was able to maintain its connections with the Civil Rights movement—the *Union Power/Soul Power* marriage. 1199 was in the forefront of fighting for the poorest section of the U.S. working class. They were able to capture the moral high ground in that struggle. But as 1199 moved into the 70s and out of New York, they hit against objective problems that tested that marriage. Outside of major urban centers such as New York, and particularly in professional titles, the work force was more white and more resistant to the appeal of the Civil Rights movement.

Also in the 70s, the health care industry was experiencing its first budgetary retrenchment, a foreshadowing of the "cost containment craze" we are in the middle of today. 1199's ability to win wage gains was drastically reduced.

Meanwhile, the leadership of 1199 was dominated by white males who came out of either the old pharmacy jurisdiction or from Communist Party connections. But the base of the membership was becoming more and more female and people of color. The leadership was beginning to represent different aspirations than some of its developing rank and file. President Leon Davis, founder of 1199, retained power for close to 40 years. He promised that he would pass his reins onto a member of color "when the time was right."

While encouraging and grooming young Black leadership (such as Henry Nicholas, Doris Turner, and David White), the leadership of the national union still maintained control in the hands of a few white males. Black leadership emerged, but without real training and only marginal authority. And as the leadership core shifted its emphasis towards the entire hospital industry, towards professionals and non-professionals, the focus on soul power was diluted. A professional "guild" was created to address the interests of professionals (read: white) as distinct from non-professionals (read: workers of color).

By the end of the 1970s, President Leon Davis recognized that 1199 would have to make some strategic changes if it was really going to realize its dream of organizing all of health care. They could not go it alone. It was in 1978 that Davis first discussed merger with SEIU officials. Merger talks moved quickly enough that the issue was all but settled by 1981. But the goal of one big industrial union reflected more the *Union Power* side of the 1199 slogan. Merger with SEIU had the support of the more left-leaning, white leadership, while Black leaders were split.

Henry Nicholas supported the merger and was to become the new division President when Davis retired. But Doris Turner, who represented New York, was afraid that the merger talks were actually a way to cut her out of ever gaining any real leadership or authority. Shortly before a Convention vote was planned to settle the merger issue, Doris Turner began organizing against the merger as a "racist plot." In Turner's eyes, the move to merge with SEIU was challenging the *Soul Power* aspect of the union's slogan. Doris Turner, along with Al Heapes (the president of 1199's parent union: Retail, Wholesale, Department Store Workers Union (RWDSWU) formed a bloc to stop the merger. The RWDSWU called off the merger plans, even as the 1199 membership was voting to support the merger in 1981, by a margin of 30,888 (for merger) to 9739 (against merger)!

And this marked the beginning of open warfare among the 1199 leadership. During the following eight years (up until the vote this May), the strife was mostly fought out between the New York faction led by Doris Turner and the RSDWU, and the national union led by Leon Davis and with the support of Henry Nicholas. In each round of the fight, charges of racism surfaced, as well as opposition to one industrial union.

Doris Turner's reaction to the *Union Power* slogan was to stop organizing professionals in New York. She introduced gospel singing in 1199 cultural events and portrayed the disagreements between the District and the National as those between the Black church and left-liberal white leaders. She supported Republicans, blocked with the conservative leadership of the RSDWU, all to maintain her leadership position. According to Fink and Greenberg, Doris Turner combined "black nationalism, business unionism, and an ethnic political clubhouse" (p. 220). She fired any staff loyal to the National office. She tried to cut deals in contract negotiations, deals that backfired, and left workers without raises for nearly two years. This failure to deliver the contract would later lead to her defeat in New York. But in 1981, Turner was still able to attack those leaders who supported an SEIU merger as racists, and organize the frustrations of Black leaders and rank and file members over the lack of power they had in 1199.

As the fighting degenerated, the Turner faction attacked the national union for being Jewish, left-leaning and racist. In turn, the 1199 national leadership organized to remove Turner and recapture New York. In 1984, Turner separated New York from the rest of 1199 and stayed with the RSDWU. The rest of 1199 became an independent local under the AFL-CIO with Henry Nicholas as president.

But even with this split, the same divisions within each new local began to recreate themselves. In New York, a slate lead by Georgianna Johnson, a Black social worker, ran and recaptured the union leadership from Turner on a slate that supported the ideal of one health care industrial union and merger with SEIU, and criticized Turner's deals in negotiations. In a last minute attempt to swing the election fight, Jesse Jackson sided with Turner as a leader of New York's Black working class. Turner lost decisively, and a new regime was installed in New York.

Yet, with this new slate in power, Georgianna Johnson soon began to feel manipulated and cut out of decision making much as Turner had. Within a short time, Turner and Johnson became allies, accusing the "one big union" slate leaders, again, of being benevolently racist. Again, the patronizing treatment of Black female leadership led to fights, attacks and public accusations.

The national union began to face similar problems as they pursued unions to affiliate with. In the end, Henry Nicholas sided with AFSCME, because he believed that there would be more independence, power, autonomy, and money for 1199 within the AFSCME structure (even if they did have fewer private sector health care workers). The remaining leadership was still wedded to the original idea of merging with SEIU (the largest health care union in the AFL-CIO).

As a result of a series of Executive Board meetings, votes, walk-outs, and court challenges that divided the 1199 leadership, the AFL-CIO was called in to see if an acceptable compromise could be reached to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. The final agreement was to let rank-and-file members vote state by state. These election campaigns carried charges of racism and white-bias in the SEIU-leaning leadership. The Nicholas-AFSCME faction were accused of wanting their "own deal" and an independent kingdom.

Once again, *Union Power* was seen as an obstacle to *Soul Power*. By placing the class struggle ideology of "them and us" in opposition to Black empowerment, by fighting to organize all of health care yet thwarting the emergence of Black leadership, the original Davis leadership had begun to liquidate the soul power through which they had grown. Henry Nicholas believed his fight for 1199 autonomy was a fight to protect its soul power.

The dream of a Black leadership taking over the helm of 1199 was a dream deferred. The two factions distanced themselves from what was best in the other. But in the final analysis, it was the failure of those in power, of the original leadership to keep true to the *Soul Power* part of the slogan that led to the eventual and repeated leadership fighting.

The story of the break-up of 1199 illustrates a major dilemma facing the labor movement. Unless leadership changes, unless there is a shift in power and authority, in the commitment to equality and the rights of workers of color, then rebellion will break out. The rebellion might lead to radical transformation or to destruction. But the explosion will happen.

It was not wrong for 1199 leaders to dream of one big health care union. SEIU was and is a union that can provide that center for organizing and be that industrial union. But the failure to acknowledge and promote leaders of color and female leaders who determine their own direction, who have the resources to determine their own fights, is a failure that the labor movement has made again and again. It is a fatal flaw in the U.S. labor movement, one that could be a source of its downfall. A dream deferred either withers away or it explodes.

To make it into the 21st century, unions will have to maintain both sides of 1199's slogan *Union Power/Soul Power*. How successfully labor meets this challenge may well be key in determining the future strength of the American working class.

This chapter in 1199's story is not really about SEIU or AFSCME. Rather it is a continuation of a story of divisions within America's house of labor. A house divided will always fall. ■

—Michelle S.

The author is a health care labor activist in Boston.

Organizing in the South

Unionism From Scratch

The following is an interview with Monica Russo, Southern-based organizer for ACTWU, the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union.

FM: Monica, from your experiences both in Georgia and here in Virginia recently, would you say that there are requirements for organizing in the South that differ from organizing in other regions of the country?
Russo: There are specific requirements for each situation you go into, and I don't think there are any formulas for organizing that you can impose on a situation. But a lot of northern companies have run down here for the cheap labor and the anti-labor laws and the anti-union environment. You are confronted with a lot of different scenarios than you would be outside of the South.

FM: To what extent do people's attitudes towards unions and the history of unions in the South come to bear on efforts to organize?
Russo: It really depends on where you are. For example, in Louisville and Waynesboro, Georgia, where S. Lichtenberg Companies are located, and at Samson and Delilah, there were very, very few unions in the area. There were some unions in Augusta, but that was some 40 or 50 miles from where we were organizing. People really didn't know much one way or the other about unions. To some extent, we got to define unionism to people from scratch and create our own culture of what unionism meant.

In other union towns, it can be another situation. I organized in New Jersey for a time, and there were Dominicans and Colombians and Puerto Ricans and Jamaicans and they already had a strong union background from their countries so that was another scenario. In Martinsville, Virginia, there are a lot of unions in the area, including

Interview for Forward Motion with Monica Russo by Gordon Dillahunt. Gordon Dillahunt is a labor activist and member of Black Workers for Justice.

BLACK WOMEN MAKE UP THE BACKBONE OF MANY SOUTHERN ORGANIZING DRIVES. HERE: ACTWU ORGANIZER MONICA RUSSO (FAR RIGHT) WITH ELAINE DILLAHUNT OF BWFJ (FAR LEFT) AND DEBORAH BROADY, A UNION ACTIVIST (CENTER).

ACTWU (Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union) shops at Fieldcrest. Here also you can take advantage of the positive aspects of union members' experiences and the fact that people have friends and neighbors and family members in unions. So it really depends on the situation as far as how the history of unionism affects your organizing campaign.

FM: So even though the South has the lowest percentage of organized workers, this doesn't mean in and of itself that you are going to have a difficult time.
Russo: I feel that in the South we have come up against such incredible obstacles that there is no obstacle too big. And every obstacle makes us work that much harder to come up with that much more of a positive vision for folks. I don't think that lack of unionization has been a negative for us at all. In fact, in some instances it can be a positive because we can really create what unionism means for people rather than relying on some negative experiences that union members have had here.

Southern Unions, Southern Politics

FM: What about the effect of current politics—local, regional and national politics? Can you see how they may be having some effect on people's attitudes towards working at a place with an organization representing them?
Russo: The Louisville and Waynesboro campaign was right during the primaries when Jackson was winning all over the place in the South. And that played really well in our organizing campaigns. Rev. Jackson wrote a letter to the folks at Samson and Delilah. It really gave people a lot of hope that they could win—not only win their election but that they could change their circumstances. In fact, it inspired people around there to endorse local candidates for election who would be more responsive to their community and to working people.

FM: The Samson and Delilah campaign seemed to have a direct relationship to politics in Berg County.
Russo: Mayor Emma Gresham [of Keysville, Georgia] was going through her first election campaign with her slate when we first got there, and it was really inspiring to the workers at Samson and Delilah for her to win. A couple workers got involved in her campaign towards the tail end of it. To see that she could win after such a long and arduous struggle was inspiring. Then when her victory was challenged but she still kept going—that was an excellent role model for the workers to keep on. They had a hard struggle too, and it's still going on now. They realized that change isn't going to happen overnight and they were going to have to stick with it.

FM: Do you see a positive role for elected officials?
Russo: Absolutely. They have inspired workers at Samson and Delilah to think about running for positions in the future themselves: for city council, or county commissioner and things like that. One guy wants to be sheriff. It has really given people new ideas about how to change their communities. Mayor Gresham was great in terms of that kind of thing.

FM: Unionizing addresses the issue of empowerment. In these areas of the South that are largely Black—many of them majority Black areas—it is a question of Black empowerment. Can you see a way in which these struggles for Black empowerment have a direct bearing on union drives and on the other hand how union drives have a bearing on the Black empowerment efforts?
Russo: Ideally a union drive is more than getting a grievance procedure so you can solve shop floor problems. I think a union drive is empowering working people in general to change any aspect of their lives. For example, Louisville where I worked was completely gerrymandered. The way the city limits were laid out, the Black communities were gerrymandered outside of the city limits. They didn't have access to any city funds, and they had to rely on county money. The majority Black community is called Wrens Quarter and it is right outside the city limits. They didn't have funds for street lights or for roads. They had no sidewalks, they had potholes everywhere. In fact some people still had outhouses. Some areas still didn't have running water, like in Keysville. [See *FM* 1/88—ed] But here they are right across the street from white neighborhoods with beautiful gardens and sidewalks and the city government paying for well-lit streets and everything else.

A few months before we won, the Delilah workers set up a community action committee. They decided that one of the first issues they would tackle was to go around town and count the number of fire hydrants in a Black neighborhood in the city limits. There was one about every six blocks, and you couldn't find it because of weeds. And once you did find it, it was all rusted out and didn't even work. Then they went through the white neighborhoods and there was a hydrant on every block. Well, I don't remember exactly, but the ratio was really ridiculous. And their fire hydrants were brightly colored and in well-mowed areas and working great. They decided to take this issue to the city council meeting.

The workers went to a few city council meetings first, just to get a sense of what the process was and figure out how they could even introduce such a point. They really didn't know how the meetings were set up and how people got to have a voice in them, except they knew the meetings were supposed to be open to the public. At a certain point, the council got a whiff of what they were doing, and the next day you had the city people going around inspecting the fire hydrants in the Black community and starting to install new ones. The community action committee didn't even actually get a chance to address the city council!

That's just one example. There were a number of changes that people were inspired to go after through the organizing campaign. And we didn't go in there and tell people they needed fire hydrants. That was something that the people felt was of concern in their neighborhoods, and they took it on themselves to go investigate it and change it. It was exciting.

Black and White Together

FM: How important are Black workers in terms of the organizing campaigns? I know it varies from place to place in terms of the percentage of the workforce and their percentage in the population but in general what have you found to be their significance in unionization overall?
Russo: In general, Black workers have a much better sense of the necessity of sticking together and are willing to open their arms to anyone who wants to get involved in the struggle as long as they are fighting for the same thing. And I think it promotes a real encompassing, participatory kind of strategy. Workers in general are very practical, and they understand the need for everybody, regardless of color or creed, to fight this one out together. But a lot of times, white workers will be a little harder to move to that point where they see that everybody needs to play a role.

Black women tend to be very active, but have a ways to go in assuming leadership. In Louisville, Black women composed most of the organizing committee, the real union leadership inside the plant. But when it came time to elect shop stewards, women were deferring right and left to the men. They would say, well, you know, I have my husband to cook dinner for and this and that. Even though during the whole campaign, they managed to do that and keep the campaign going too. We have a lot to work on in terms of self-worth—Black women, white women, all of us, really.

Situations where you have fifty-fifty work forces, Black and white, are one of the hardest to organize. It's much easier to organize an all white plant or an all Black plant. But this fifty-fifty stuff is a lot more difficult. You have to bring two groups together who a lot of times aren't used to being involved outside of just working side-by-side.

FM: The company uses that.
Russo: Oh, yes, they use that like crazy. But having Black and white workers together in these situations helps us begin to confront some issues of racism, starting on a one-to-one basis. People having to ride out and make house calls together, Black and white. Or if a white person has to go to a Black person's house to talk about the union, it opens new ground for improving race relations. Of course, I'm not so naive as to think that it is going to happen overnight.

Unions and the Community

FM: The church is a central institution in the South in most communities and it plays an important role in almost every aspect of life. What role can and do churches play in union organization?
Russo: The church is very important to people and it's a hard nut to crack a lot of times. A lot of churches have their own way of approaching problems and situations. The labor movement has been very poor in learning how to accommodate church involvement. The unions have their own way of doing things: get them on board our way or forget it. We have to do a much better job at developing a relationship and coming to an understanding of how each institution functions in society and in the community so that we can work better together.

Typically we come into a city or town where a drive is going on, and the union organizers say, "Hey, anybody who doesn't get on the union train isn't worth shit." We go in there and expect people to do it our way. It's really shortsighted, first of all. We go at the last minute knocking on the church door begging people to speak from the pulpit about how great the union is, but we haven't tried to understand their situation and their role in the community. We should instead share perspectives on what change is about and then encourage them to articulate it in their own way. So I think we are pitifully poor at learning how to work with the church and other community organizations. But I think that this is crucial in terms of really being able to organize workers.

A lot of times organizing drives can be really short-term: you know, let's win this election and then we'll cross the next bridge when we come to it. We pull out all the stops, we send all these organizers in, we pay all this money for copy machines and everything else to win the election. Then once we win, the organizers leave, the copy machines go out the door. You've raised everybody's expectations, and then they have to go back down and start from square one again, practically. I think we need a more long-term approach to building a union and building relationships in the community.

FM: Would that not even apply to a lost election? Or a pre-election period?
Russo: Absolutely. The election to me is the least of it. Winning says you have won one step, but I have seen great election victories where everything falls apart thereafter. You really haven't built anything that can withstand the next phase. We need to start getting more involved in the community and participating in community functions and not just in a self-serving way. That way, when we need some help on a campaign, people will remember that, "Well, the union was there knocking on doors for us." Helping each other out; that's what we are supposed to be about anyway.

FM: Here in Martinsville, it seems like the company is planning to use some of the churches in an anti-union rally coming up.
Russo: On Sunday, the company has planned a big Labor Day Rally, ironically. They are inviting some of the Black choirs in which several union supporters sing. All it is is an attempt to put some color into their event so it looks like a real, legitimate community affair. They want to say that it is in the community's interest not to support the union. Using the Black church to do it is really ugly, but that is what the corporations are masterminds of—using people.

Organize the South!

FM: It seems as though the trade union officialdom is really reluctant to put large resources into Southern organizing, as badly needed as it is. Many rank and filers who are activists and have a broader picture of things are trying to find ways to convince the leadership of their international unions to direct efforts at the South. Can you think of ways to put on this pressure?
Russo: I remember this question came up at the *Labor Notes* conference and Saladin Muhammad answered it very well. We need more than just coming down and visiting us and lending support down here. We need people within their local unions to really fight on the local level and then work their way up to try to get more resources put into Southern organizing. In ACTWU, we have had pretty good success at getting resources in the South, though it is a constant struggle.

We need to get the rank and file much more in-

volved. We need to get workers to appreciate the necessity of organizing the unorganized. It is easy to just sit back and rest on your laurels and feel great about the benefit package you got. Maybe some brother/sister projects would help, like having folks come down from the North to check out the situation in the South. We need to broaden the awareness of what really needs to be done to change the relationships in this society. The decreasing numbers of unionized workers in this country correlates to diminishing workers' rights, diminishing civil rights. Everything is going downhill and I think we can associate a lot of it with the disorganization and lack of organization of working people. The only way to get the resources is to provide more of an analysis of what is going on, perhaps through these exchange programs, and have people go back into their local unions and agitate from below.

FM: What has been your experience in getting locals that are already in motion to help those who are not?
Russo: Well for the Louisville drive, for example, we had an ACTWU joint board office in Columbus, Georgia. It is about three hours away from the Louisville and Waynesboro plants. The workers in the local unions in Columbus felt really strongly about travelling those three hours on the week-ends or actually taking leaves of absences from work to participate full-time on the organizing drive. In several different capacities, people were travelling that two-way highway to Louisville. It is a tremendous experience for people.

First of all, the rank and file in these established locals really made the campaign because they are able to communicate with people. They could say, "I work in a mill just like you do and I know what you all are going through, but it don't have to be that way." And really making an abstraction into a real concrete picture for people. Workers would talk about how they were dogged out and they didn't get the promotion they thought they deserved, and feeling really desperate and helpless. The local union member could say, "Look, that happened to me too. But I filed a grievance and we fought back, and I got that job I deserved because I had the most seniority," or whatever the situation.

This is a very powerful way of communicating. So much more powerful than a union organizer—a full-time staff person—going in and talking about the pros and cons of unionism. And furthermore giving the rank and file the opportunity to really develop their skills is critical for building the labor movement in general. People are developing organizing skills and learning to communicate with people who don't necessarily share their same background. It can be a tremendous boost for their own locals as well. When they go back, they can help folks appreciate how far they have come in their organized shop.

FM: They can say, "Look, if it were not for us being organized, this is the kind of shape we would be in."
Russo: I think it gives folks a better sense of their own history and how they got to where they are. A lot of times in organized shops the members will be complaining about how the union is not worth anything; not realizing the effort that was put in to get them where they are now. I think that going to an unorganized shop and seeing how hard the workers have to fight to get those decent, basic rights gives you more appreciation. It also helps you to want to fight harder to protect the rights you have already won. I think it is absolutely crucial in an organizing campaign to have rank-and-file involvement from other locals.

FM: What kind of difficulty do white supremacist organizations or individuals present concretely or potentially to organizing?
Russo: In terms of organized resistance I have never had any experience with the Klan openly coming to try to run us out of town or anything.

But there have been images that the company tries to evoke. In Martinsville, for example, the company dressed up hundreds of white women, mostly in little Tultex T-shirts [Tultex is the name of the company] and put them on the gates of the company. These people were not in the bargaining unit; a lot of them were office clericals who didn't have any right to vote. The company put them on the gates and created a really frenzied image of people screaming "Vote no." Workers did not even understand what they hated so much. I had several workers tell me that when they were driving up to work that they thought it was a Klan rally out there. So I think the company creates a lot of images that they know will hit people very deeply. Even though it's not actually a Klan rally, it evokes images of it.

Now in terms of individuals, there is no question that in these areas there are some really backward-thinking people. Of course, these people become victims of their own racism. It inhibits them from being able to move forward in society.

FM: Is it possible for white workers to follow the leadership of Black workers: either Black workers who are rank-and-file leaders or Black organizers?
Russo: Yes, it is definitely possible and you see it happening on a day-to-day basis. I rarely ever hear resentment from white workers about having Black workers be spokespeople or run union meetings even in plants that are fifty-fifty. Now it might be because they wouldn't dare tell me that. But I think it is encouraging. It is the union's responsibility to promote more of it. And I think a lot of times the union doesn't play the role that it should. It tries to go overboard in catering to the white workers, trying not to offend them, which I think is a big problem.

FM: A lot of people who are pro-union have this conception that the trade union movement is white men in the industrial sector of this country. Even in the face of changing conditions—many of these industries closing down, massive lay-offs, reduction in the number of union members, and so on—this image remains. What role do you see the Southern labor movement playing in terms of the continued life of the labor movement in this country, if there is to be a continued life, and perhaps in U.S. politics generally?
Russo: The majority of the unorganized workers in our mills—in the textile industry anyway—are mostly women and pretty close to a majority Black from my understanding of the statistics and from my organizing experience as well. The potential is there for women and Blacks to play more of a leadership role. But it is going to be a serious, serious undertaking and we are going to come up against a lot of resistance from the white leadership in unions. I mean, let's face it, no matter how progressive the union is, the leadership roles are all full of white men even though our membership is mostly Black women.

We need to start confronting these issues and demanding more responsibility. That is true for organizers, too. The majority of organizers are women—not a majority Black, though a lot of Black organizers are on our staff. Basically we do all the work that gives somebody else the credit and the glory. Now the credit and the glory is not all that important. But a lot of decisions are not made by us; they are made by the suited people that come in from out of town. So I think that overall in the labor movement, while we have made some progress, we have a long way to go. I think the potential is there, but we have got to do something about it and stop talking about it all the time.

One thing is that in these organizing campaigns we have a kind of tunnel vision. All we can think about is winning the election or whatever is on schedule for that day. We don't know what is going on out in the rest of the world. We're away from home, with few relationships in these communities, and all we think about is organize, organize, organize. We have got to start educating ourselves a little better about what is going on in the bigger picture and also about our history.

Helping working people have a better understanding of their history is what gives us hope for the future. It gives us something to really fight for rather than complaining all the time about how bad we have it, how horribly the company treats us, how we get abused all the time. We need a vision of how things can really be better. Something that is attainable, yes, but new images of what we are striving for. History helps us do that and I think we need a lot more working class education; educating white and Black about Black struggles, particularly in the South. We need a sense of our own history so we can do the right thing.

Organizing Against Schlage Lock

New Unionism in the South

by Saladin Muhammad

In March 1988, one hundred and fifteen Eastern North Carolina workers won a ground-breaking plant closing settlement from Schlage Lock Company, located near Rocky Mount.

A major manufacturer of door locks, Schlage is a division of the Ingersoll Rand Company, a major corporation with operations in eighty-one countries world-wide including South Africa. Like so many other non-Southern-based manufacturing companies, Schlage lock set up shop in North Carolina and throughout the South as part of a larger corporate strategy. The general aim has been to restructure major capital assets away from the strongest and most organized regions and industries of labor and into sectors where labor is the least organized, where raw materials and labor resources are available at the cheapest rates, and where racial, social, religious and political divisions and national oppression greatly divide the working class population.

Ingersoll Rand's Board of Directors is made up of executive officers and board members of other major U.S. corporations, including Uniroyal, K-Mart, Newmont Mining, RJR Nabisco, American Express, Shearson Lehman, Mobil, AT&T Technologies, JP Morgan, Prudential Insurance, W.R. Grace, and various other banks, insurance companies, and manufacturers. As we experienced first hand in the Rocky Mount area, these Boards of Directors interlock these major corporations into a united front against the interests and rights of Schlage Lock and other workers.

After only ten years in North Carolina, Schlage Lock began to construct new plants in Mexico. In the mid-1980s, Ingersoll Rand started disinvesting from its California and North Carolina plants—despite record sales in 1985, 1986 and 1987 in North Carolina and for Schlage Lock in general. Schlage officials never said unprofitability was a problem.

Saladin Muhammad is a member of Black Workers for Justice. This article was adapted from a presentation made at a workshop on "Organizing the South," May 20, 1989, at the Labor Notes 1989 Conference in Detroit, Michigan. You can contact BWFJ by writing to PO Box 1863, Rocky Mount, NC 27801 or call 919-977-8162.

SCHLAGE LOCK WORKERS DEVELOPED A SET OF DEMANDS AND AN AREA-WIDE WORKPLACE AND COMMUNITY-BASED CAMPAIGN AGAINST THEIR PLANT CLOSING.

A. Binta

Plant Closing Campaign Takes Shape

During massive layoffs in 1985, Schlage Lock workers first began to hear about the possibility of their plant closing. They started asking questions about the status of the plant, but didn't get any straight answers from management. In early 1988, some Schlage workers circulated a petition demanding severance pay and benefits, just as management was going to receive.

Afterwards, however, several workers who had signed the petition became afraid for their jobs and withdrew their names. The Schlage Lock workers were not unionized and had no internal organization of any kind to provide leadership against the threat of a closing.

Some workers then made contact with the Black Workers for Justice, a small Black workers organization with workplace committees and a network of members and contacts in several workplaces in the Rocky Mount area and throughout eight North Carolina counties. Seventy percent of the Schlage workers were Black. The campaign to build a popular mass struggle developed because of the unity of the Black community with the plight of the workers threatened by the shutdown.

A Committee Against Schlage Plant Closing emerged as the central leadership of the struggle. Its approach centered on building a rank-and-file workers organization, with a clear set of democratically arrived-at demands, a democratic decision-making process for the Schlage workers, and a basic leadership structure with co-chairs and working sub-committees. The committee built a popular, area-wide workplace and community-based campaign.

The Schlage workers also gained support among key public policy and workers' advocacy groups. These folks had other ideas about what form the organizing should take. Notably, they favored trying to form a broad coalition involving clergy, small businesses, elected officials and members of the local chamber of commerce. Making this approach the starting point grew out of lessons learned from plant closing coalitions in the North and Midwest, where plant workers belonged to unions which gave them organized representation within the coalitions.

The Schlage workers, however, had no pre-existing union, and the newly formed Committee Against Schlage Plant Closing, had not yet developed an organizational identity or the self-confidence of an independent support base. Given these differences, the coalition-first approach would have been a mistake, possibly weakening or eliminating the workers' leadership of the struggle. The workers would have become dependent on the limited legal approaches such a coalition could undertake, and the struggle could have been compromised by the restrictions placed on a coalition representing such divergent interests. Also, in North Carolina and North Carolina and throughout the largely non-unionized South, without a strong organized

leadership by the workers themselves, the coalition would probably have promoted an anti-union position. It would certainly have made it hard for the few local unions in the area to be involved.

The Committee Against Schlage Plant Closing therefore began to build its own support base through a petition drive. The Committee collected 6,000 signatures in four days supporting their demands. The committee also carried out job actions inside and in the immediate area of the plant, and it also leafletted other companies and churches in the area.

The coalition that did emerge consisted of people and groups who united with the mass activities of the Committee Against Schlage Plant Closing, some local Black ministers, some Black elected officials, Black community associations, public policy (worker advocacy) and rural health care technical assistance and support groups, a few local union representatives and Black political power activists in the local Jesse Jackson Campaign Committee. And even this was not a formal coalition, but more a group of allies of the Schlage struggle cooperating with each other and carrying out various types of support work.

The state AFL-CIO leadership and main unions in the state failed to rally to the Schlage Lock struggle. Support for the Schlage workers was provided by organizers from the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU-Southern Region), who were assisted by Black Workers for Justice in a local drive at a nearby company, and a few local unions with BWFJ membership involvement. But the silence from other unions weakens trade union organizing in the South. It prevents the association of unions with non-union workers and enables the anti-union historical conditioning to further alienate workers from unions.

Despite this, the Black Workers for Justice was always openly and proudly pro-union and sought to make the connection between the struggle for workers rights, including plant closing rights, and the need for unionization in the South. The connection was made in the form of an alliance between the Committee Against Schlage Plan Closing and ACTWU, which held joint activities during the latter part of March.

Favorable Context From Jackson Campaign

The Schlage Lock struggle developed within a political climate strongly influenced by the national Jesse Jackson campaign. This climate was helped along by the labor and Black political power alliance formed around the local Jackson campaign, which called for broad and multi-racial unity for a strong Jackson vote in the Super Tuesday primary as well as a "yes" vote for ACTWU at the Standard Products Company.

The local Jackson campaign served as a vehicle for building the united front of the movement for Black political power. Black people united by the local movement plus the national Jackson campaign provided a mass base for making the ACTWU/Standard Products union election a popular mass issue. The working unity of the labor and Black political power alliance came through in a local rally for Jesse Jackson. Thousands of two-sided flyers were passed out at all of the major workplaces, shopping malls and communities, by ACTWU staff and Standard Products workers, BWFJ members and supporters and local Jackson committee members, as well as ministers in their churches. The flyer had "Vote Jackson on Super Tuesday" on one side and "Vote Yes for ACTWU" on the other. More than 1,500 people attended the Jackson rally, held at an Ebenezer Baptist Church led by a locally well-known activist minister. A call to support Schlage workers was made at the rally.

The decision by ACTWU's Southern Regional leadership to endorse Jackson early was key in helping to challenge the racial polarization being fostered by Southern white political leaders of both the Democratic and Republican parties and by racist groups throughout the South. But ACTWU's efforts alone, without the endorsement of the AFL-CIO unions and other international unions, could not create a large enough movement of Southern white workers away from the hold of white supremacy, which continues to lead them to vote against their own class interest.

Pressure on Schlage Mounts

The main tactic of the Schlage struggle was a daily picket, reinforced with other high profile activities such as mass petitions, public hearings, picketing at city hall, press conferences and church programs. The strategy sought not only to put direct pressure on Schlage Lock Company, but to pressure the area economic power structure to hold it accountable for the actions of Schlage Lock. This required tactics which projected the development of a community-supported labor movement, making Rocky Mount appear unattractive for runaway shops. The aim was to directly influence the industrial recruitment strategy and timetable of the local and state economic power structure.

A. Binta

SCHLAGE LOCK WORKERS WERE SUPPORTED BY ACTWU'S SOUTHERN REGIONAL OFFICE AND ALLIED THEMSELVES WITH WORKERS ORGANIZING AT A NEARBY STANDARD PRODUCTS PLANT.

Schlage workers passed out flyers at area workplaces, calling on the workers to become concerned with the issues facing them as well as asking for their support for the activities and struggle of the Schlage workers. Interest in the struggle grew when Schlage workers revealed that seventeen of their co-workers had died of cancer, possibly caused by their unsafe exposure to dangerous chemicals, and that the company had contaminated soil and ground water in the area surrounding the plant. A May Day march was held under the banner of an "Area Wide Mobilization for Workers Rights and Economic Justice," bringing out three hundred people, with local ministers and union representatives speaking at the march. Jackson's Workers Bill of Rights was passed out to the people and read loudly in unison. A delegation of Schlage workers went to an annual stockholders meeting of Ingersoll Rand in Northern New Jersey and raised their demands before two hundred stockholders.

This put a lot of pressure on the area corporate elements. Comments were made by local business people that Rocky Mount was going to be listed as an undesirable place for companies to locate in North Carolina. Management began holding meetings with workers at several plants urging worker and management cooperation and posted notices in at least one plant listing what workers would be entitled to if their plant closed. Overall, the campaign was carried out in a way that helped strengthen nationally labor's challenge against corporate and capital flight.

Despite the efforts at Committee Against Schlage Plant Closing meetings to find ways of mobilizing more white worker participation and community support, the Committee itself consisted of only ten percent white workers. Efforts were made to have white workers pass out flyers at their churches, convince their churches to sponsor meetings and to get the white clergy involved. But white committee members were unable to build this sort of support. In fact, they faced constant pressure by relatives and friends to pull out of the struggle. They were told that Schlage was a Black issue, and that if anything came out of it, white workers would get their share without having to wage a struggle.

Major Demands Won By Schlage Workers

* One half week severance pay for each year of employment (demanded one full week)
* Early release of pension and stock benefits
* Full clean-up of contamination of plant and area soil and ground water
* Complete company paid medical examination for all workers (won one year letter).

The pressure was so great that even though the workers' committee was the Committee Against Schlage Plant Closing, the issue of the Black Workers for Justice changing its name began to surface among white workers involved. A change in the name was put forth openly for discussion at a Schlage workers meeting. The BWFJ essentially said that Black workers and Black people should not have to make changes just to accommodate white chauvinism. Black workers would not bend over backwards so that whites wouldn't have to try and overcome their prejudices toward Black people. The process

of discussion helped strengthen the white members of the Committee in dealing with the white chauvinist pressures they were facing.

Seventy-seven percent of the Schlage workers were women. As the main leaders of the campaign, women came face to face with male chauvinism from the local government, the economic power structure, and the clergy. At times, even their husbands would say that their wives were spending too much time away from home, and the women might get them in trouble on their own jobs if the boss knew they were letting their wives make trouble.

The women on the committee were a real inspiration for other women workers in the area and had an important influence on many male workers concerning the role that women should have in society. The women made it clear that workers in the South needed at least two incomes for their household to make ends meet. It became apparent that the struggle against male chauvinism is a requirement for organizing effective campaigns for unionization, and that more lead women organizers are needed.

When the Committee Against Schlage Plant Closing discovered that the ground water and soil were contaminated, teams of Schlage workers went door-to-door with flyers alerting people and calling them to a meeting. Through this action, the workers showed their capacity for overall community leadership.

The Schlage workers held a major public hearing with the assistance of Southerners for Economic Justice, a North Carolina workers advocacy staff organization. A major report was pulled together with the help of the Institute for Southern Studies; major research was done on the chemical contamination of the plant by the Clean Water Fund, a major public policy group; and a medical screening of seventy-nine Schlage workers was organized by the North Carolina Student Rural Health Coalition. Black Workers for Justice's *Justice Speaks* newspaper became the organ of the Schlage workers' campaign. They read and sold the paper proudly. The Community Health Collective, the committee setting up people's clinics in rural communities, developed a petition calling on people living in the area of the plan to demand a clean-up.

Permanent Pro-Union Organization

After winning their basic demands, the Schlage workers formed themselves into a permanent organization, Schlage Workers for Justice. This enabled them to continue to do unemployment work brought on by the plant closing. To prevent harassment for their involvement in the struggle, they also began organizing themselves at new work places hiring former Schlage workers. They began to identify new issues they will face and to constitute themselves as a core for building new rank-and-file workplace committees.

These workers are the seeds of a pro-union movement in the area. Their membership in the Schlage Workers for Justice will further shape their rank-and-file outlook, organizing techniques and resources, such as health and safety committees, shop papers and department networks and other factors which make union drives stronger and more successful. The further development of the Schlage Workers for Justice and workers associations need to be supported by the trade unions.

On April 28, 1989, the BWFJ and Schlage Workers for Justice united with the AFL-CIO's call to co-sponsor Workers Memorial Day. Workers built eighteen coffins in memory of their seventeen deceased co-workers and one for the unknown worker victimized by dangerous working conditions. The coffins were then lined up in front of the closed Schlage Lock plant alongside a major highway traveled by thousands of workers on their way to and from work. This was a pro-union mobilization carried out by non-unionized workers.

When we communicated our unity with the state AFL-CIO activities, the President responded by saying that they wanted a "dignified" memorial, not "1960s style protests." This was symptomatic of a constant rejection by the state AFL-CIO of building working unity with the Black Workers for Justice. Yet even with the AFL-CIO's foot-dragging, the campaign has shown that an alliance between labor and the movement for Black political power in the South is a necessary link in an effective strategy for unionizing the South. And only unionizing the South can change the balance in the current power relations which allows the South to be used to weaken all workers throughout the U.S.

Organize The South!

Amnestied Workers Organize

Lessons Of Michael Angelo's

by Maria Elena Mendez and Martin Eder

On May Day, 1989, the Mexican workforce at Michael Angelo's Gourmet Frozen Food processing plant in Vista, California, near San Diego, walked off the job. They carried hand-painted signs in Spanish declaring "Stop the repression," "No more robbery, no more injustice," "20% wage increase," "Better treatment-no discrimination" and "We demand solutions!"

These non-union workers had secretly begun organizing their protest the day after the company arbitrarily announced that the work day would now run from 9 pm to 5 am. The shift change had a drastic effect on most of the workers. Some would have to quit one of their two jobs, mothers with children would have to send their kids to sleep outside the home or pay sleep-in child care, and a great many of the workers would have to risk making the three mile walk to the bus stop in the dark. No shift differential was offered to the workforce, 80% of whom were still making minimum wage.

Workers and supporters called an informal press conference outside the factory to make their cause known to the public. Jesus Magos told supporters that "We are frequently short-changed when we work overtime...There are people working in temperatures below zero who are not even given gloves." "They treat us like animals. We are required to ask permission to go to the bathroom," added Amalia Fernandez who said women almost never make more than minimum wage. Jose Amado, who quickly became a prominent spokesperson told reporters that "the company has never listened to anything except their desire for profit. Now we must be heard." Amado cited the 48-hour notice on the shift change as an example of the company's "total insensitivity and mistreatment."

The company told a *Times-Advocate* reporter that the workers' claims were "out and out lies." Factory owner Michael Renna complained bitterly that troublemakers had destroyed his relationship with

The concepts in this article are the results of a collaborative effort among several Michael Angelo's workers and supporters. The article was written by Maria Elena Mendez, a community activist, and Martin Eder, a member of Freedom Road. The article is available in Spanish for $1.00 by writing PO Box 5383, San Diego, CA 92105.

Martin Eder

his employees. Workers showed news reporters a bulletin board with a handwritten message in English detailing the new graveyard hours. When confronted by the fact that 98% of the workforce spoke only Spanish, Renna fired back: "The legal language of America is English!"

Discrimination Against Mexicanos

The vast majority of Michael Angelo's workers were Mexicanos who had just recently received amnesty under the Simpson-Rodino bill. Renna, named "Entrepreneur of the Year" by the Chamber of Commerce, had built up a million dollar business in the last five years using almost exclusively undocumented Mexican labor. Like many other employers in the Southwest, Renna found it easy to get high productivity by pushing undocumented workers to their limit. Workers charge that Renna frequently broke wage and safety laws knowing that Mexicans could not legally defend themselves. In these circumstances, Mexican workers were easily intimidated and therefore seen as a docile workforce.

Upper management and office staff are 100% white. Plant supervisors are mostly white except for Chicano and Mexicano line supervisors with a reputation for being hardened task masters who could discipline Spanish-speaking workers. Job openings for new workers were only written in Spanish. For management, hiring Mexican labor became synonymous with higher profits from hard-working minimum wage employees. At the time of the strike, there was only one English-speaking production worker, Gilbert Rodregues, a Chicano. Speaking to a *San Diego Union* reporter, Rodregues labeled it "outright racism." "They pay me more because I know English...Their attitude is that there are a lot of Mexicans out there to replace us. They don't even provide a lunch room; we eat in the parking lot. They offered me a raise if I'd spy on the Mexicans; I told them to shove it!"

"Before we had amnesty, we never knew out rights," stated Norma Valdivia. "Perhaps we still don't know them, but we aren't going to let them treat us like illegals."

Self Organizers

One of the extraordinary aspects of the events at Michael Angelo's was that the workers organized themselves without a union prior to the strike. They pulled together a group of people willing to take action. Then with the help of the *Comite Civico Popular Mixteco*, a rights organization based primarily among Mexican Indians from Oaxaca, they drew up a list of demands for the strike they would organize. The demands outlined a solution to all kinds of abuses from the lack of lunch tables, to undelivered production bonuses, from free transportation of women workers during night shifts to across-the-board raises. The demands were so reflective of the people's own sentiments that it made the impossible a reality—a strike that was nearly 100% effective.

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The strike totally caught the company off guard. They threatened to replace everyone. No one re-entered as an individual. Workers did go back to work when they collectively voted to seek union representation before pressing for resolution of their demands. Within two days, the workers had enough cards signed for a union election.

The following day, the company set the tone for their campaign: they had a one-day lock-out. The next day security guards patrolled the premises and organizing committee members were subjected to metal detector tests. A sheriff was brought in to "look the people over." A day later, three active women were suspended pending an unspecified "investigation."

Two important members of the organizing committee were fired for failure to observe company rules. When the SEIU 102, the union the workers chose to organize with, filed NLRB charges stating that the rules were unpublicized, every worker was forced to sign a copy of the company policy (only available in English) before being issued their pay check. Several workers quit under the pressure.

Nevertheless, workers took their campaign into the community. Jose Amado told 400 Chicano students celebrating MeCHA's 20th anniversary at Mira Costa College, "We are not fighting just for ourselves, but for all our people who suffer as we do. We are going to need your help to win this one!"

Though the organizing committee and the union sponsored a number of meetings in the park and events outside the plant which consolidated strong supporters, there were others whose optimism weakened. In the final days of the union certification campaign, threats and scare tactics were used with regularity.

The union lost the election by three votes in what SEIU organizers Sabino Lopez and Eliseo Medina (both formerly with the United Farmworkers Union) called the dirtiest campaign they'd ever seen.

As of this writing, the SEIU is waiting for the NLRB to rule on several of the many cases of voting irregularities. But the situation had been made more difficult in the last six months by the turnover in the workforce and the demoralization that set in after Michael Angelo's, at least temporarily, triumphed over Mexicanos.

Lessons Of The Michael Angelo's Struggle

Build A Strong Organizing Committee: Michael Angelo's workers elected and created their own organizing committee prior to contact with the union and before their strike. The organizing committee represented various sectors and social groupings of the factory. This allowed for an effective strike and prevented the company from dividing the workforce.

The company was able to weaken the organizing committee by firing some key people. Since the organizing committee is the brain and heartbeat of the struggle, its vitality should be among the top priorities of any organizing drive. If individuals are fired, drop out or act unprincipled, they should be replaced as soon as possi

ble to maintain momentum.

The Organizing Committee Must Communicate: The Michael Angelo's coordinating committee gave insufficient information and education to the rest of their co-workers. Many workers felt they didn't know what was going on. Many didn't have the facts to refute company propaganda. There needed to be a lot more flyers and communication both from the organizing committee and the union organizers. There were too few general meetings for those who wished to attend.

Maintaining broad communication and participation is always difficult. The union's resources were small, and they even lacked typists who could readily produce Spanish materials. To the credit of rank-and-file workers, they began their own newsletter and put out some of their own flyers.

Choose A Union Carefully: The Service Employees International Union (SEIU Local 102) proved to be a union whose style and methods met people's needs. The SEIU had gained a good reputation in the progressive and Latino community precisely because they participated in demonstrations for equality and justice. Their organizers were Chicanos and Mexicanos who arose from the people's struggles. They organized picnics and *carne asadas* in public parks and shared the cultural values of the workers. Their style and method was democratic. Nevertheless, they could have helped develop more leadership and grass roots participation.

Workers Must Depend Upon Themselves: Prior to the strike, Michael Angelo's workers relied on their own efforts and organization. They brought in community support and recognized the need for a union to back them up. It is not surprising that there are many workers who are intimidated by a union. Unions appear to be an outside force. Many are slow to trust them. Once they had chosen a union to represent them, some people expected the union organizers to do most of the work. Valuable time was lost, while the union was trying to fully understand the conditions that the workers already knew about. Had the organizing committee maintained their initiative, they may have been able to prevent some of the problems that occurred.

Mobilize Community Backing: One of the keys to a victory of Michael Angelo's employees and a victory for all amnestied workers would have been a greater mobilization of community support. Participation of Chicano/Mexicano and Latino support is especially important. Several Chicano, progressive and socialist organizations did respond and played a significant role. More effort by those sectors could have tipped the scale in favor of the workers.

The Bosses' Discrimination Helps Us Fight: The struggle of amnestied workers is more than a conflict between workers and the owners. The fact that the workers were immigrants from a third world country allowed the company owner to think that he could mistreat his employees. The common oppression of Mexican workers in the U.S. as a nationality also provides a key to solidifying their unity against racist abuse.

While most of the strike's supporters recognized the important role played by nationality, none was able to fully utilize its strategic significance to build unity. We should have emphasized the rights of Spanish-speakers to total access to company rules in their language and exposed the racist nature of the company's actions.

There Are No Easy Victories: After the May 1st wildcat strike, many people assumed that a union victory would be easy. Momentum was lost and the company was able to gain the upper hand. The battle must be fought hard from the beginning to end. Even if we had been assured of a 51% victory, we should have fought hard for the hearts and minds of the other 49%. The stronger our majority, the stronger will be the ability to wield effective power.

Prepare People For The Counter-attack: In the last days and hours before the elections, the company launched a vicious attack using threats, intimidation, divide and conquer tactics, and "buying" certain individuals with promises of wage hikes. Since management believed they were going to lose they didn't care that their tactics were illegal. They threatened workers by suggesting that there would be a violent strike that would cost everyone their jobs and perhaps their family's physical well being. Union and political activists perhaps knew that many of these attacks would be used, but we did not adequately talk about them with the workers, who were caught off-guard. Had we accurately predicted these attacks, our credibility would have been strengthened and the company tactics would have been less effective.

Women's Leadership Is Essential: Mexicana women made up half the workforce and were fairly well represented on the organizing committee in its early stages. But three of the most active women were fired immediately following the strike, and the organizing committee was slow in replacing that leadership. In fact, it never fully re-established its ties to many women in the plant. This weakness in itself was probably enough to give the company its margin of victory.

Use The Public Media: With the help of outside supporters who understood the power of public opinion, Michael Angelo's workers were able to bring a great deal of pressure to bear on the company. Media exposure probably prevented more workers from getting fired and forced concessions.

In a two-month period more than thirty newspaper articles described the cause and the events at Michael Angelo's. Outreach in particular to the Spanish press was a way in which literally tens of thousands of other newly amnestied workers read about the example being set at Michael Angelo's. The majority of these articles were the result of the initiatives taken by supporters to contact the press. While newspaper owners will normally identify themselves with company owners, building relationships with individual news reporters, as was done in this case, can often result in sympathetic coverage.

We always told the media the truth. The company, on the other hand, got caught lying to the press. Our credibility grew while the owner became discredited. If the struggle develops to the point where a consumer boycott of Michael Angelo's Gourmet Frozen Foods is necessary, this work will have set important foundations.

Place The Struggle In A Larger Context: Progressives and socialists helped some of the leading people understand the broader significance of their struggle. But this message did not effectively reach the rank-and-file or enough of those involved in the Chicano/Mexicano and labor movements.

Michael Angelo's was the first example of amnestied workers defiantly standing up against discrimination and super-exploitation. Much more attention needed to be focussed by the progressive movement to help assure that this first spark would not be extinguished. Placing this knowledge in the hands of other amnestied workers could ignite their creative efforts.

Activists inside and outside the plant should prepare themselves to focus coordinated efforts on critical struggles that arise among the people. These are the weak links in the chains of oppression. Their example should be spread far and wide. In unionization efforts like the one at Michael Angelo's, it is important to realize that the issues are far more than simple economics. At the root of the May Day strike was a recognition of racial discrimination and discrimination based on nationality. Recognizing the oppression of women workers also was key to victory.

Facing harsh working conditions, amnestied workers (over one million in the U.S.), the still undocumented and new immigrants make them an important source of militancy. But their tenuous situation makes it very difficult for these workers to boldly step forward unless there is a great deal of back-up. Similar conditions exist in thousands of small and medium-sized workplaces across the country. Labor and other activists must ready ourselves for the organizing challenge this vital part of the working class presents. ■

Labor And Independent Political Action

by Bill Fletcher, Jr.

There is a lot of excitement among labor progressives these days concerning independent political action. For the first time in years there seems to be serious discussion underway regarding labor's role in developing an independent progressive agenda. Several different factors sparked this development. The work of individuals such as Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Secretary-Treasurer Tony Mazzochi in promoting the idea of a labor party; the work of the National Committee for Independent Political Action in support of the Rainbow; many activists in N.O.W. who are looking for a new way; and the independent and credible candidacies of people such as Vermont's Bernie Sanders all have contributed to a changed climate.

The main factor influencing the context of this discussion, however, has been the Black electoral upsurge of the 1980s, and particularly the candidacy of Jesse Jackson in '84 and '88. These genuinely mass campaigns proved that there was an audience for a progressive, populist message and that people otherwise alienated from the political system were looking for answers. Had it not been for this real movement, the work of individuals and organizations would have come to nothing.

None of this is to say that the progressive social movements are on the verge of forming a new party. But heightened discussion among progressives from various movements is shifting from emotional rhetoric to impassioned strategizing.

None of the Above...

Several years ago a Richard Pryor movie came out in which his character had to spend millions of dollars in a limited amount of time. He decides, among other things, to run an electoral campaign, calling on the voters to reject both of the other candidates ("none of the above..."). In fact, U.S. elections have become victories for "none of the above" in the sense that those elected by-and-large do not represent any sort of voter mandate. The last presidential election was a startling example of this, with one of the lowest voter turnouts in history. In fact, the candidate who won was none of the above.

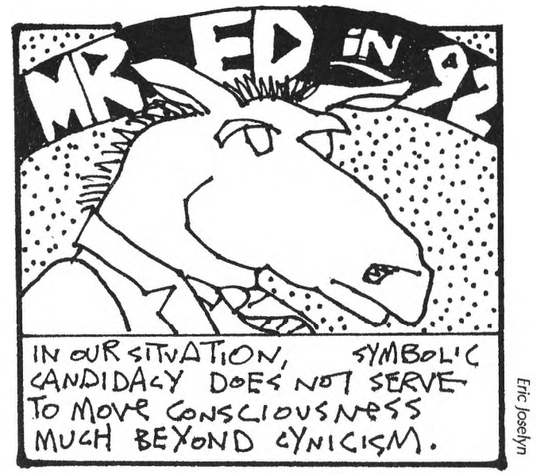
Voter dissatisfaction is legendary and is often noted by way of commenting on the need for a new party. But the transition from voter dissatisfaction to a *progressive* third party is a mammoth jump. There are many reasons why people do not vote or register to vote, only some of which are progressive. Many will not enthusiastically rally to a progressive alternative, at least not immediately. U.S. voters are very pragmatic and tend to be attracted to candidates who take themselves seriously, run their campaigns professionally, and at least act as if they have a chance to win. For this reason, symbolic candidacies will not move consciousness much beyond cynicism.

Even a well-supported candidate, however, will face multiple obstacles. Those engaged in serious efforts at independent political action will likely need to challenge U.S. electoral laws and regulations in order to open up the possibility of winning.

A good example of this was Jesse Jackson's '84 focus on the run-off primary in the South, which weakened the possibility for Black candidates to achieve victory. In addition there is the "winner take all" system of elections in which a candidate who gets more than 50% takes the election, and the opportunity for a small constituency to gain any political representation is weakened. Besides these formal structures, there are, of course, fraud and gerrymandering, both of which are utilized regularly to disenfranchise, and thereby discourage, oppressed nationalities from participating in the political system.

At the same time, and contrary to many bourgeois commentators, U.S. voters are also looking for their candidates to represent a vision. Ronald Reagan, for example, was one of the most ideological Presidents since Franklin Roosevelt and that ideology did not hurt his candidacy. His vision was thoroughly reactionary. But in other cases, such as that of the late Chicago Mayor Harold Washington or Rev. Jesse Jackson, the vision is one of a progressive alternative.

Progressives promoting independent political action must therefore be concerned about several factors: viability (i.e., presenting a serious candidate rather than a protest candidate), tackling election laws (determining



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under what conditions a progressive should run and whether or not it should be inside or outside the Democratic Party) and vision (articulating something which you sincerely want people to believe in).

Independent or Democratic

Furthermore, we are undergoing a period of political destabilization. Competing coalitions *within* both the Democratic and Republican parties are trying to shape the post-Reagan USA. For that reason, any progressive politics will have to be flexible and experimental. Keeping these factors in mind, progressives are now debating whether or not conducting a struggle within the Democratic Party forecloses the possibility of real independent political action. Would it in fact lead people back into the clutches of the Democratic Party establishment?

At this moment, Jesse Jackson as well as many others are operating on the assumption that the Democratic Party itself can be transformed. Perhaps it would even become a "party of minorities," the alleged words of an unnamed Jackson aide (see James Ridgeway and Thulani Davis, "Black Politics Hits a BUP in the Road," *Village Voice*, 9/26/89).

Such a scenario assumes certain points which cannot be taken for granted. For one, the exclusion of the conservative and neo-liberal forces from the Democratic Party would end the Democratic Party as we now know it. This raises what may be a simplistic question: What

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then would be the Democratic Party? Would it be the party of those who remain or would it be the party of the Democratic Leadership Council (aka the Sam Nunn group)?

Also, it is highly unlikely that the Democratic Party right-wing would abdicate power without leaving great destruction in its wake. We have seen from countless examples that the Democratic Party establishment is, generally speaking, willing to shoot itself in the foot rather than face the loss of control of the Party apparatus to insurgents on the Left. This is true whether one looks at the fifth columnists in the Democratic Party who helped destroy the McGovern campaign or at the false promises of the Dukakis campaign coming out of the 1988 Democratic Convention.

At this political moment there need not be an essential difference in tactics between those favoring a third party and those favoring the Jackson road.

Those on the Left who insist that the only road for progressives is one of taking over the Party must answer the question of what practically speaking that will mean, particularly given the class forces which dominate that party. Are they advocating that we push out the far right of the Democratic Party to have a party of Mario Cuomo or Teddy Kennedy?

However fine a line we are walking, progressives still face the challenge of making independent political action real. To some extent it has become so already with the Black electoral upsurge of the 1980s. But if, for a moment, one agrees with the assumption that there is a wide jump from voter apathy/discouragement to acceptance of full-blown independent political action, then why is any level of participation in the Democratic Party anything more than a detour?

It is perhaps precisely because progressives have not come up with sufficient answers to the problems of the electoral system that our road forward must involve some level of serious participation in the Democratic Party. The former mayor of Burlington, VT and nationally-known activist Bernie Sanders may be correct when he notes that this will not inspire many presently discouraged or non-voters, but it is a necessary means to an essential end. Consider for a moment the impact of the Jackson candidacies. Besides the rise in voter registration, the candidacies themselves were independent voices within the context of the Democratic Party. They received the attention which they gained precisely because it was a Black-led populist insurgency within the Democratic Party. Particularly in the 1988 campaign, it could not be viewed as a symbolic protest candidacy.

Activity within the Democratic Party at this stage helps to force a contradiction between the progressive forces inside the party and the disenfranchised constituencies they often represent on the one hand, and the conservative and neo-liberal forces on the other. At this political moment there *need not* be an essential difference in tactics between those favoring a third party and those favoring the Jackson road. In both cases breaking the consensus is a necessary step.

For these reasons the activity of Left and progressive forces inside the Democratic Party has nothing to do with bringing wayward lambs into the Democratic Party fold. Rather this activity is about building up forces for a battle. In this light, we need feel no compulsion to woo the discouraged voter and the non-voter by consensus-building and smoothing over political differences. The growing class polarization in the USA as well as the increases in national oppression and the oppression of women necessitate candidates who will take clear sides and will indeed speak as tribunes of the people.

Within the Labor Movement

The labor movement has its own electoral impediments. With the notable exception of the Teamsters, organized labor has been tied into the Democratic Party for years. This is the historical result of what has come to be known as "Gomperism." The term dates back to American Federation of Labor founder Samuel Gompers' break with other turn-of-the-century unionists like Daniel DeLeon over the question of the appropriate role for labor to play in the political arena. Gompers held that labor should not form, nor did it need, a party to represent its interests. To paraphrase a famous slogan of that era, labor had no permanent friends, nor permanent enemies, just permanent interests. In reality, this meant supporting whichever pro-capitalist party better served "trade union interests."

Despite the massive *political* attacks labor faced in the early part of this century, Gompers and the AFL stood fast in their position. For many of these years the only opposition to Gomperism was militant abstentionism, most notably represented by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

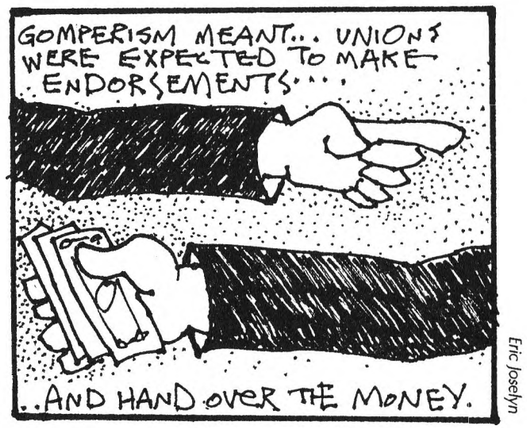
The strength of Gomperism resulted in rank-and-file labor's political disenfranchisement. While support of Democratic Party candidates is generally expected, political participation is basically limited to the union's political action or legislative committee. The union is expected to make endorsements and give over money. Rarely is the membership consulted or involved in the actual decision-making regarding a candidate or issue. Certain exceptions do exist, of course, though they tend to arise when labor's *immediate interests are in danger*, as in last year's Question 2 campaign in Massachusetts to protect the state's prevailing wage law.

A dwindling number of workers look to their union or the labor movement generally for actual political guidance. Statistics indicate that the AFL-CIO still influences more than half of their members on voting day, but keep in mind this figure only takes into account those who vote at all.

These are not easy problems for labor activists to tackle. Even in labor's glory days in the late 1930s, union activists were forced to admit that their influence over the community-related activities of their membership was weak. One former UAW activist in the Chicago area related the story of a debate held with Congressman [William L.] Dawson, a Black congressman during the 1930s. Dawson proclaimed that when the workers were in the shops they were "his" (i.e., under the unions' influence), but when they were home in the communities, they were "mine" (ie., under Dawson's influence).

Building working class awareness of the necessity for independent political action therefore must not be viewed as something apart from the work of building the hoped-for renaissance of labor. Rebuilding the labor movement as a militant social force must be connected to the promotion of a practice which favors independent political action. In the absence of this orientation, pro-independent political action work will remain the preserve of a few well intentioned individuals. At best, it will mean that only a portion of labor's current members will support candidates outside the traditional sphere, and this will be seen and portrayed as simply maverick activity.

For reform movements in the unions, independent political action cannot be viewed as the work of the political action committee. To that extent Tony Mazzochi's view of building a labor party on the basis of the unions



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has strength. In other words, the institutional apparatus of the union movement should be sought out as a base for independent political action.

Can Labor Do It Alone?

Many contemporary proposals for the form of U.S. independent political action are based on models from Western Europe and Australia. There the labor party was built or is today seen as the direct political arm of the trade union movement.

There is no basis to apply this model to the USA. First of all, our current trade union leaders, still following in the path of Samuel Gompers, show no indication of challenging their Democratic Party partners. More important, given the overall weakness of the labor movement plus the virtual lack of consistent motion in favor of independent political action within it, relying on the labor party model dooms alternative progressive politics.

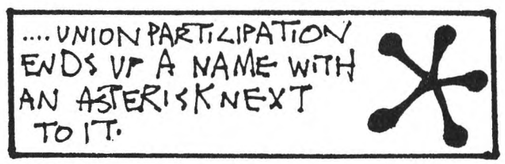
The Left must look instead to where independent politics has a sympathetic home and where there is evident motion in that direction. In the United States, the national movements (African-American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, particularly) serve as the actual base for independent politics, and it is toward these movements that labor progressives should direct much of their work. This proposition does not dismiss the labor movement as a source of mass progressive politics. But labor should not expect to see itself in the lead, and the form of independent politics must be shaped by the national movements.

Steps and Obstacles

So what can labor progressives do now to encourage independent political action? Perhaps the first and most immediate issue to address concerns coalitions. The labor movement has been willing to be a subordinate partner of coalitions with the bourgeoisie. When it comes to other progressive social movements, however, union leaderships often exhibit a different and more sectarian practice. The solution here goes beyond arguing the positive and essential nature of coalitions, and there are some real problems to address.

For instance, how do unions join in coalitions with issue organizations? This question, raised by Tony Mazzochi, has been debated heatedly in the independent Black trade union movement in South Africa. Mazzochi and the Azanian trade unionists have different takes on the question, but it is at root very similar. Unions are themselves coalitions of workers representing various political tendencies. They do not form to address a particular issue nor do they have a conscious ideological orientation. They have within their ranks individuals who often do not even want to be in a union. This is dramatically different from members of an issue-centered organization who explicitly join because of the purpose of the organization. When unions join coalitions, they must be conscious of this problem and ascertain whether their participation represents the mandate of the membership. Otherwise union participation ends up meaning another name on a paper, and often a name with an asterisk next to it--"for identification purposes only".

This is not to say that labor should resist coalitions. Rather it means that a struggle must go on openly within the ranks of the unions around political issues. There must be an effort to win the members to a set of views which, when summarized, provide a mandate. Votes at Executive Boards simply do not signify anything. Participating in an election, for example, should follow from lively debate over the merits of the candidates. Some unions have this practice now, though this has become rarer as the years have gone on.



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Mazzochi worries, as have several leaders of the South African trade union movement, that union participation in coalitions will lead to becoming swamped by issue-centered organizations. This is a reasonable concern, though, not to be cavalier, it is equally a concern of most organizations from the national movements when engaging in coalitions with largely white groups (a point which is rarely discussed by white activists). There is no guarantee against something going wrong. At the same time, a clear mandate of the members on a set of political concerns or agenda will give a leadership the guidance it needs to participate actively and with effectiveness in any coalition.

Promoting visionary progressive politics is essential given the growth of cynicism, nihilism and hopelessness among the disenfranchised in our society.

At this time, unions also need to experiment with new forms of political organizing. One such model is being discussed in Atlanta where there are efforts to build a workers *association* (not a party!) which can address issues outside the workplace. Organizing members politically where they live around issues which they face as community residents, consumers and as workers could shed a different light on the unions and the union movement as political institutions. This form of activity is important so that labor involvement in *any* form of politics, let alone *independent* politics, is more than the involvement of a small group of committed individuals.

Third Party Now?

Voter dissatisfaction must be channeled in a progressive direction. Protest candidacies have only a limited impact and generally do not encourage the already discouraged. Unless there is a period of great and militant upsurge, they can, even inadvertently, promote cynicism.

For this reason, discussion of the immediate formation of a third party is premature. This is certainly true if the formation of such a party is to include a significant section of the labor movement.

Right now, labor progressives interested in indepen

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dent political action should be concentrating on developing the set of independent politics necessary to galvanize nonvoters and progressive voters. Developing this set of politics means engaging in electoral battle with opponents who represent more-of-the-same or worse. Progressive, populist politics must have leaders and spokespeople who legitimize the views which many of us hold. This, among other things, is the strength and importance of Jesse Jackson. The politics he espouses turns progressive rhetoric into common sense.

Developing the progressive alternative must also mean developing organizational accountability for those who represent the new politics. Simply running progressives for office will not help to build a movement. Progressive candidates need to be identified and trained, but they must also recognize that if they get out of line or cease to represent the constituency which got them elected, they will lose support. This means organization, but not necessarily an immediate third party.

The Look of a New Politics

In a situation where vast sections of organized labor are wedded to the Democratic Party, it is most effective to win the progressive sections to a set of politics and an organizational vehicle without trying to force their immediate break with the Democrats. This was the importance of the notion of the National Rainbow Coalition as an organization which operated both inside and outside the Democratic Party. In other words, the line of demarcation over whether to be inside or outside need not be immediately drawn. For this reason, should Jim Hightower's Democratic-Populist Alliance organization get off the ground, it might be an important organizational vehicle for independent politics despite the fact that Hightower himself sees no need to move in the direction of a third party. The point is that independent, progressive politics along with a mass-based organization can provide grounding for a third party orientation.

The receptivity of sections of labor to the Jackson '88 candidacy indicate that there is a basis of support for an alternative to the standard politics of the two major parties. Promoting visionary progressive politics is essential given the growth of cynicism, nihilism and hopelessness among the disenfranchised in our society. The reorientation of the labor movement necessitates a fight on the economic front—on the shop floor, through contract negotiation, and so on—but it also must involve a new approach to politics. Part of this will involve new forms of organization, but the other part involves a break with Gomperism and a shattering of objectively racist presumptions that labor (read, white men) must be in the lead.

The transformation of the workforce into a far more multi-national class and the strength of the national movements indicates that a new partnership must be built on entirely new terms. Thus, independent politics will not be the rebuilding of the Populist Party of the 1890s, nor the LaFollette Movement, nor John L. Lewis's Labor's Non-Partisan League, nor even the American Labor Party. It will need to look more like the 1968 Poor People's Movement, the Pena mayoral candidacy in Denver, the Harold Washington movement or Jackson's candidacies. It will represent a new deal among the oppressed or it will represent nothing at all. ■

UFW's Chavez Speaks at GALLAN Event

Lesbian and Gay Labor Activists Come Out for Health Care

by Harneen Chernow and Susan Moir

On Friday, October 13, 1989, the Gay and Lesbian Labor Activists Network (GALLAN) of Boston, Massachusetts presented a benefit for the United Farm Workers and the Fenway Community Health Center, a primarily lesbian/gay health center. Never before had the lesbian and gay community and the labor community publicly joined in coalition to produce an event, and never before had the straight left in Boston attended a lesbian or gay event in such numbers. The evening was wildly successful. It had cultural diversity and great politics. Everyone had a great time and it made a lot of money.

The event, titled *Allies For The 90s: United For Health*, was conceived by a member of the lesbian community, Jennifer Firestone who "was tired of seeing the separation between labor and gays and lesbians." Upon hearing the idea, GALLAN joined in as presenter of the fundraiser. As one GALLAN member stated, "We live in these two communities and we are tired of the rampant homophobia which exists in the labor and left communities here in Boston. We felt that by sponsoring this benefit, we would have the opportunity to do some extensive education and to bring people together."

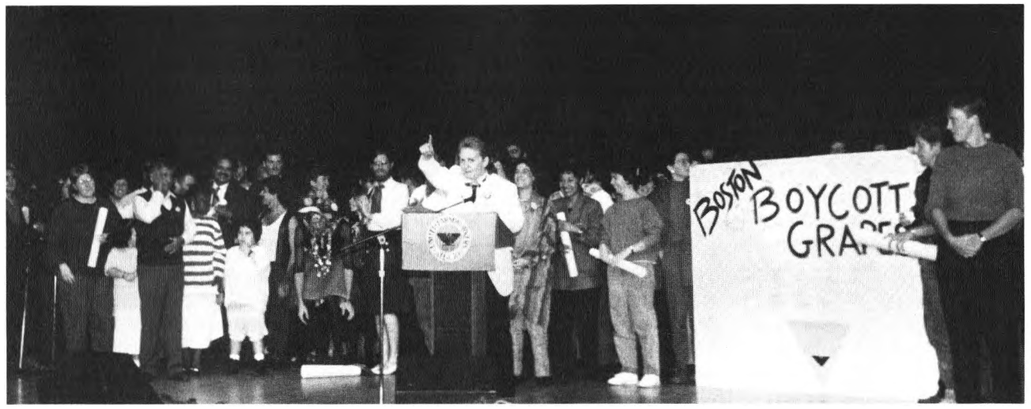
In the early stages of planning the event GALLAN members were surprised at the amount of skepticism and lack of solidarity they received from many straight labor activists. Although GALLAN (which is primarily lesbian) includes many respected labor leaders/activists in the greater Boston vicinity, support from the straight left for GALLAN's outreach efforts, with a few exceptions, ranged from tepid to negative. It was only after the event that the straight left opened up to the connection between gay/lesbian struggles and their own. GALLAN is hopeful that the straight left will evaluate its difficulty in responding positively to a group of lesbian leftists organize a major labor event, and that the event will stir up some discussion of homophobia in the left.

United For Health was about coalition-building. It was about looking beyond one's own community and making connections to another. The event was designed to unite both communities around health: the AIDS crisis in the lesbian/gay community and the health crisis that farm workers are exposed to in the fields through the use of toxic pesticides. By focusing on a concrete issue—health—GALLAN members hoped that both communities would begin to see their common issues and to view each other as allies.

Harneen Chernow is a labor activist living in Boston. Her first introduction to labor was organizing a Lesbian/Gay Caucus of workers with District 65, United Auto Workers at Boston University, to try and get "sexual orientation" in their contract's non-discrimination clause. She then became an organizer for District 65 and is now working with Women in the Building Trades.

Susan Moir has been a school bus driver, and part of the lesbian and labor movement for the past ten years. She is a member and steward with United Steelworkers of America, Local 8751, the Boston School Bus Drivers Union.

Susan and Harneen are both active participants of the Gay and Lesbian Labor Activists Network, and were on the Benefit Steering Committee for Allies For The 90s: United For Health.



Ellen Shub

The growth of the Gay and Lesbian Labor Activists Network has been a process of exploration and pushing boundaries, of re-evaluating old relationships and building new ones and of publicly claiming legitimacy in strange new places.

Allies For The 90s:

The program for the event was simple yet entertaining. Representatives from GALLAN and from the Fenway Community Health Center gave welcoming remarks. Next came The Flirtations, a gay multi-racial *a cappella* singing group from New York. The video, *The Wrath of Grapes*, was shown and followed by a speech from Cesar Chavez, President of the United Farm Workers, who flew in from California to attend the event.

The evening ended with a Grape Boycott Roll Call. Representatives from over 90 gay/lesbian organizations and businesses, women's groups, Black and Hispanic community groups, solidarity organizations, progressive political groups and labor unions came up on stage to sign onto a large Boston Boycotts Grapes banner and shake hands with Cesar. "Our goal was to have the audience leave with one concrete thing they could do to carry on the feeling that night, and that was boycotting grapes," said Nancy Marks a member of GALLAN and the Benefit Steering Committee.

GALLAN and the Benefit Steering Committee had been working for months doing outreach to organizations throughout the greater Boston area, encouraging them to sign on to the Grape Boycott. For many of the non-labor groups this meant going through an internal educational process about the Grape Boycott, workers' rights and unions in general. The diversity of the groups signing into the boycott was a sign of how successful the outreach had been. Although many individual labor activists lent their financial support to the benefit, union support came primarily from the dozen progressive-led unions in the area. The lesbian/gay connection proved too difficult and controversial for most of mainstream labor.

GALLAN, however, was persistent in its outreach to mainstream labor. Multiple mailings and phone calls were made to over one hundred unions, labor councils and the state AFL-CIO. The strategy was that, even though mainstream labor would not come to the event,

they would know that something important had happened. This strategy paid off when a crisis brought together the most unlikely of allies: the queers and the construction unions.

A Building Builds Bridges

In the midst of organizing for the event, the Fenway Community Health Center broke ground on a new $3.5 million facility. The $2 million shell of the building is being constructed by one of Boston's most notorious slumlords, Harold Brown, in exchange for huge tax breaks from the city and priceless public relations benefits. One month before the benefit was to happen, the Fenway's representatives informed GALLAN that Brown was using non-union labor to construct the building. When GALLAN asked the Fenway if their $1.5 million completion of the interior building would be built union, they were told the decision had not been made and would not be made until some unspecified time in the future. GALLAN informed the Fenway that the Fenway's portion of the construction would have to be built union or the benefit would be cancelled.

What followed was an intense nine days of labor education for the Fenway Community Health Center. GALLAN embarked on a process of bringing the Fenway to an understanding of the importance of union labor in maintaining the standard of living and quality of life of Boston's working class, including the lesbian and gay workers who are the Fenway's main clients and supporters.

The upshot of the nine day struggle was a meeting facilitated by GALLAN between the Fenway's finance administrative people and the Greater Boston Building and Construction Trades Council. As a result, the Fenway has committed in writing to constructing the interior of the building with union labor. In addition, they are collaborating with the Building Trades Council to pressure Brown to use union labor in building the shell. The Building Trades Council publicly thanked the Gay and Lesbian Labor Activists Network for its work in securing this important union job, made a substantial contribution to *Allies For The 90s: United For Health* and sent a representative to the event to come on stage and join in as an endorser of the Grape Boycott.

Farm Workers Life Expectancy: 49 Years

*** The average income of a migrant farm worker is $2,475 per year--and that figure may be an over-estimate.**

*** Farm work is the third most dangerous occupation in the United States, in terms of death and injuries.**

*** Migrant farm workers account for 16% of job-related deaths and 9% of disabling work injuries, even though they make up only 4.4% of the U.S. workforce.**

*** Malnutrition among children of migrant farm workers is ten times higher than the national average.**

*** The life expectancy of a farm worker is 49 years, compared to 73 years for the average American.**

Source: *Ammo*, January 1986. Published by the UAW, *Ammo* is available for just $1.50 a year from UAW, 8000 E. Jefferson, Detroit, MI 48214.

The growth of the Gay and Lesbian Labor Activists Network has been a process of exploration and pushing boundaries, of re-evaluating old relationships and building new ones and of publicly claiming legitimacy in strange new places. This process is not unfamiliar to most lesbian and gay people. It has been dubbed "coming out." What follows is GALLAN's Coming Out Statement, delivered at Allies For The 90s.

The Gay and Lesbian Labor Activists Network (GALLAN) would like to welcome you all here this evening. GALLAN is an organization of working lesbian and gay people. Our membership includes rank-and-file union members, local union leadership and activists, and union staff and officials. We are part of a growing number of lesbian and gay labor activists across the country working to make unions and the labor movement more inclusive and responsive to our issues. And we are working to educate the lesbian and gay community about the role and relevance of labor.

Tonight GALLAN comes out. We present our premiere public event: **Allies For The 90s: United For Health**.

Why are we United for Health? The AIDS epidemic has made health a central issue in the lesbian and gay community and in the communities of color. Homophobia and racism—this has been the response to the AIDS crisis. And it has shown us once again that we are expendable people. As workers and union members, we see everyday that health is secondary to profit. That is what the United Farm Workers Grape Boycott is about. It symbolizes the struggle for a safe and healthy work life, a life free from toxic pesticides and free from the dangers of new technology and stress-related illnesses. It symbolizes our common goal for a healthy life for ourselves, our families and our communities. These two very different communities, labor and lesbian and gay, are here tonight, united in their goal for health.

And why should we be **Allies For Health**? *Since the Stonewall riots of twenty years ago, lesbian and gay men have come together in a powerful movement. Since the AIDS crisis began we have faced government and medical neglect. That neglect has let more than 50,000 people die of AIDS. Die because we are gay, because we are poor, because we are not white, because we shared needles. The lesbian and gay community has responded with love, motivation, community education, and by building institutions such as the Fenway Community Health Center. We have organized to save ourselves, and we have organized with style!*

And the labor community. For over 100 years, unions have fought to improve the lives of working people. Unions give people the right to participate in making decisions that effect their work lives. Unions are about empowerment, about each and every one of us having a voice in our workplace. And while in the last decade we have seen an assault on unions and working people, progressive labor has responded in force. We have come together to build a labor movement based on diversity and democracy. A movement both inclusive and representative of all working people.

These two communities have much in common. They represent groups of people who have consistently been treated as expendable. They have engaged in long struggles for recognition and an increased voice. They have met with the success that comes with determined struggle and served as models for other communities. And they now face health crises that jeopardize lives.

The most important piece of this benefit has been the dialogue and the raised awareness that each community has gained of its connection to the other. Coalition building is risky. It's leaving the homey place of our own issues and going out into the streets, to dangerous places with people we don't know and don't think we like. But we have to do it. It's movement building. Our coalition tonight is represented by the range of groups who have signed onto the Grape Boycott. While this is a benefit for the United Farm Workers and the Fenway Community Health Center, we have reached out beyond the labor and lesbian and gay communities to the broadest spectrum of progressive forces in the greater Boston area.

The Gay and Lesbian Labor Activist Network is proud to be the presenter of this event and proud to have brought these two communities together publicly for the first time. We hope you will be inspired by tonight's program to expand your own concept of **Allies For The 90s**.

Organizing for Workplace Health and Safety

Three Hundred Workers A Day

by Joe Alley

Over the past several years, organized labor has shown a greater tolerance and support for new ideas and solutions to rebuild the labor movement. With union membership hovering around sixteen percent, the need has never been greater. While there have been some organizing gains in the past few years, these have generally been offset by an expanding labor force and a steady number of union decertifications.

Among the few bright spots that have come out of this situation are several new organizing initiatives. Unions such as ACTWU (Clothing and Textile) and UFCW (Food and Commericial) have had important successes in organizing mainly minority workers in the South and developing strong links between the workplace and the Black community. A promising new campaign being initiated by the Service Employees Union is aimed at building a grass roots coalition for a national health care plan.

The focus here is another big development—the increased organizing around the issue of workplace health and safety. As early as 1971, the Department of Labor identified this as the second most important issue to American workers. More recently, a survey by a New York consulting firm identified it as the top concern of U.S. workers. Yet the significance of this issue is still greatly underrated and underappreciated.

AFL-CIO Survey

A recently-released survey by the AFL-CIO backs up the need to focus organizing efforts on working conditions and fair treatment on the job. The survey consisted of interviews with lead organizers from 189 elections. All were bargaining units of 50 or more workers. Among the more notable conclusions were that, when working conditions and fairness were the central issue, more than two times as many elections were won (69%) than when wages were primary (33%). (Low wage workers making under $5 per hour were still much more likely to organize than "higher" paid workers.)

Furthermore, units with large numbers of women and minorities were significantly more likely to unionize than units with a preponderance of whites and males. This includes units with a large majority of undocumented workers (though few were examined). By a 50% to 40% margin, service sector workers— who now make up about 75% of the national workforce—were more likely to organize than workers in manufacturing .

Union Rate (Non-Agricultural Workers)

Sweden	92 %
Denmark	81 %
UK	59 %
Germany	44 %
Canada	37 %
Japan	33 %
U.S.	17.3 %

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Union Membership in 1987," 1/22/88

Tellingly, where there are no prior union members the success rate is 39%. Where former members make up *more* than half the workforce, the success rate *drops* to 29%. For organizers who often get barraged with leaflets highlighting the dismal track records of unions, this is no surprise. In many ways unions themselves have become a major barrier to organizing new unions.

Organizing Around Health & Safety

So what's this all mean? It means the situation cries out for new ways to organize and to strengthen existing unions. Activists must find issues that expand beyond the traditional bread and butter—issues that broaden labor's support, especially among women, minorities, and also professionals (who will make up half the country's workforce by the end of the century). Health and safety is clearly one such issue.

A good example can be found in the meatpacking industry. Over the last decade, union busting and speed up have led to a horrendous increase in the injury rate in packing plants. A major problem is carpal tunnel syndrome, a crippling disease of the wrists caused by continual hand motion, especially at rapid speeds. Recently, the UFCW won a couple big victories. After a five year campaign by a local in South Dakota, John Morrell & Co. was hit with a $4.3 million fine from OSHA for willfully injuring their workforce. Soon after, the union won recognition at a plant owned by IBP, a notorious union buster, by nailing the company on several major health and safety violations.

Many employees in the service sector are also looking to unions as a way to solve their health and safety problems. A VDT organizing project has begun in California to organize office workers, and last year, 1200 office workers won an election at the University of Cincinnati. Among their major concerns were VDT hazards and fumes that were polluting the air inside several buildings. An active health and safety committee was formed in the midst of the campaign, and the union has since gotten some good health and safety language at the bargaining table.

Even the recent loss by the UAW at Nissan in Smyrna, Tennessee holds some interesting lessons for the labor movement. Despite the fact that the UAW was trying to organize workers making $4 above the area average (most of whom were carefully screened for any union bias), the union made an impact by focusing on the brutal work conditions in the plant. Many workers who were out on workers' compensation or were permanently disabled, were involved in the campaign, and some changes, such as more hirings, were made by the company in response to the campaign. The vote may well have been closer if the UAW wasn't forced to speed up the election due to the company's plans to hire 1700 more workers.

Gains Reversed

A major union-led effort pushed through the Occupational Safety and Health Act in 1970. Incredibly, this was only four years after unions gained the right to even *negotiate* with employers over health and safety. Yet, like so many rights won by unions in this country, the Department of Labor did more to complicate the law than to enforce it.

For their part, unions gave away enforcement rights to the government and often settled for contract language that only looked good on paper. Little effort was put into strengthening workplace health and safety committees and pushing OSHA to expand its coverage

Joe Alley is a Midwest labor activist.

to the public sector.

Now in the 80s, OSHA has been gutted, and the number of job injuries and illnesses have skyrocketed—one more success of the Reagan administration in getting government off the backs of the employers.

Companies are only too happy to avoid correcting workplace hazards. At most, they might have to pay out workers' compensation or maybe get a slap on the wrist from OSHA. It should come as no surprise that the system of workers' compensation was initiated by the asbestos industry—fearful of lawsuits by workers exposed to the deadly fibers. Today, the system still doesn't do much to force employers to correct hazards, nor does it offer victims a legal avenue to go after the employer. Worse still, 10,000 people are still dying every year from asbestos because in the early 1900s, manufacturers like Johns-Manville covered up medical studies warning of its deadly effects.

The National Safety Council estimates that 11,000 workers are killed on the job each year. Over 100,000 workers die each year from job-related disease and injuries, a figure that approaches 300 workers every day.

Nor are the so-called "new and clean jobs" in the service sector exempt from serious health and safety problems. Asbestos, indoor air pollution, VDT hazards, stress (which now accounts for 14% of all worker compensation claims), infectious disease and violent assault on the job are all part of the reason why workers are becoming "sick and tired" of their jobs. Since many of these hazards are chronic and difficult to spot, it makes it even harder for workers to win their claims.

High Cost Of The Reagan Recovery

A major part of the reason for the huge increase in job illness and injuries is that American workers are working under the Intense stress of job speed up and unsafe conditions. This is the "other" story behind the so-called recovery—the cost to the workforce. While unemployment has dropped, workers are dropping too—the victims of a relentless drive to turn out more work with less workers. Within one year during the heart of the recovery (1987), the injury rate increased a whopping 16%; the economic cost of workplace disease and injury jumped from $34.8 billion to $42.4 billion!

In steel, for example, employment has been cut in half since 1980, yet overtime hours have doubled in the last five years because employers don't want to invest in

a larger workforce. The nursing industry is so understaffed and overworked that temporaries are paid more than the permanent workforce (minus the benefits, of course.)

In a small but typical sweatshop right outside Chicago (comprised mainly of Hispanic women) the SEIU is waging an internal organizing drive at a large plastic plant. Six workers have lost fingers there in the past three years because management won't fix or turn off the machines when they get jammed. Pushed to work faster, workers are forced to reach in by themselves to keep production moving, often at the cost of their fingers. This scene is being repeated endlessly in different ways around the country.

An article in the *Wall Street Journal* backs the conclusion that the huge jump in permanent work place disabilities (from 60,000 to 70,000 workers between 1986 and 1987) is not mainly due to a bigger labor force. The number of injuries and illnesses per 100 employees jumped by a staggering 5% within that same one year time. Clearly, it has been provoked by the intensive effort by employers to boost the level of productivity in the workplace. Related to this problem is the use of large numbers of temporary and part-timer workers who are seldom trained or intended by the employer to become permanent. Currently, the number of workers who fit this category stands at a whopping 35 million.

Growing criticisms of OSHA for its failure to enforce safety in the workplace have led recently to some highly publicized fines, especially against meatpacking companies like Morrells and IBP. Though the fines aren't all they seem to be after final settlements are made, OSHA would not respond at all without considerable pressure. This is no surprise: it has always taken tragedy and subsequent outrage to get the government to pay any attention to workplace safety. When 78 workers were killed

in the Farmington Mines (after many prior deaths as well), only then did miners win the Mine Safety Health Act (MSHA). When 28 died in Pennsylvania from Legionaire's disease, only then did we start to hear about indoor air pollution.

A Key Issue For The 90s

Today, there is a growing consensus among a wide section of labor, politicians and health specialists that changes are needed. On a national level, one of the few areas where labor has made gains during the Reagan era has been around health and safety. In the past two years, such victories include expanding the right-to-know law, regulating asbestos, and winning protection for thousands of workers exposed to infectious disease on the job. (Little known in the wake of the AIDS epidemic is that more than 200 workers—mostly in health care—die every year from contracting Hepatitis B on the job.)

On the judicial front, courts are allowing employers to be prosecuted for negligence in correcting hazards. This decision came out of a Chicago factory where one worker was killed and many seriously injured because management willfully covered up hazards associated with cyanide.

Locally, unions are finding that many smaller victories can be won by mobilizing workers around this issue, especially given the difficult economic climate these days. One typical example occurred recently at a coupon-processing plant outside Chicago. After workers were exposed to toxic chemicals from a spill, the union first forced the company to empty the plant and then won back pay for the six hours they had been docked. The company had tried to claim that the accident was "an act of God."

Naturally, most companies don't want to spend money on health and safety, yet it tends to be an issue where they are more vulnerable to union and public pressure. Last year, the AFL-CIO established Workers Memorial Day on April 28 to commemorate those killed or hurt on the job. One of the better initiatives started by the AFL-CIO, it will become an annual event.

Also, new alliances between labor and the community are building important links among groups that traditionally have had little to offer each other. The vision of workers clashing at the plant gates with environmentalists over jobs has begun to gradually diminish. Though workers are still blackmailed to choose jobs over health, there are more instances of unions working closely with environmental and health groups. Recent corporate campaigns at BASF and Phelps Dodge are cases in point where unions have joined with environmental groups to pressure the company to "clean up its act."

This alliance will become even more significant as the infrastructure of this country continues to crumble. Bridges, pipelines, sewer systems, and toxic chemical

BOSTON-AREA LABOR GATHERS ON APRIL 28, 1989 FOR WORKERS MEMORIAL DAY TO COMMEMORATE THOSE KILLED OR HURT ON THE JOB.

storage drums are all showing serious levels of deterioration. Workers are generally on the front lines, in an ideal position to reach out to many other sectors of the population. Very often, these environmental hazards are located in poorer communities—ranging from hazardous chemicals to faulty pipelines to overfilled, toxic landfills.

This, like the fight to protect lives and health on the job, will be one important way that the labor movement can regain its proud reputation among the American people. ■

Note: *for the ten-page "AFL-CIO Organizing Survey: 1986-87 NLRB ELections," write to AFL-CIO Department of Oragnization and Field Services in Washington, DC. (If you prefer, send a large self-addressed envelope to FM with a check $2.00 to cover postage and handling.)*

A U.S. Unionist In Brazil

Speaking A Different Language

by Marybeth Menaker

Last February I traveled to Sao Paulo, Brazil, for an international conference of autoworkers. Participants from fifteen countries were hosted by the Brazilian Metalworkers Unions of the Sao Paulo region and the Transnational Information Exchange. The panel discussions and workshops were a unique opportunity to gain an international perspective on issues facing autoworkers and labor in general.

The conference touched on the hot issues of management strategy and economic pressures facing the international labor movement. Almost everyone had some experience with team concepts or other "jointness" schemes. Europeans grappled with how best to prepare for the consolidation of the EEC in 1992. North Americans compared notes with Mexican workers about capital flight and sweatshops south of the border. Black South Africans gave accounts of courageous and militant organizing in the face of fierce repression.

But as educational as the conference was, my sharpest lessons were drawn from the few days I spent with Brazilian autoworkers before the conference. The string of impressions I'm left with is a sketch from an organizer's notebook: a North American beginner's lesson in international solidarity.

GM San Jose

Conference participants divide up according to corporation. I tour with GM workers from Belgium, Brazil, England, Mexico and West Germany, joining the delegation at the office of the Metalworkers' Union of Sao Jose dos Campos.

The GM plant in Sao Jose is the largest in Latin America. There they build Kadets and Chevettes, with 50% to 70% built for export. At the union hall we meet with about twenty-five workers from the plant.

We are told of a successful strike in 1985 which won the Sao Jose

Marybeth Menaker is a Boston-area autoworker. She has been active for many years in the reform movement at GM Framingham.

aworkers forty-three stewards. In conjunction with other Metalworkers' strikes, it also shortened the work week to forty-four hours. In Brazil, unions are permitted to organize only by region as opposed to industry-wide. Combined with the open shop, this makes their victory particularly remarkable.

Thirty-three of the strike leaders were fired for their efforts. While a few have won back pay, none are permitted anywhere near the plant. A member of our delegation is one of the thirty-three, and two others have come to the meeting. These progressive unionists have strong ties to the Central Unica dos Trabalhadores (CUT), the more progressive of Brazil's two labor federations. CUT in turn has strong ties to the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT).

At a certain point the discussion begins to lose me. A few things may have been lost in translation. Mostly, though, my brain is mush after spending the night on an airplane. And I am uptight about being the Yankee who arrived a day late with too much luggage and no knowledge of Portuguese.

I had been hoping to just slide by until I get my bearings. No such luck. I am the only GM delegate from the U.S. and the only woman. I hardly blend in. And when it is time for the Brazilians to ask their questions, I suddenly feel like the only foreigner in the room.

Explaining U.S. Labor

"What do U.S. workers think about the Brazilian debt?" they want to know. In Brazil this is the most urgent of topics. All but the far right, from the political parties to the CGT (Brazil's conservative labor federation) have taken a stand against paying the external debt. It's a basic issue to Brazilian workers, who see most of what they produce exported to pay the debt.

All I can do is reinforce what I fear are their worst stereotypes. I tell them that in my experience, except maybe the most advanced, U.S. workers don't think much about the Third World debt. The Brazilians laugh. Here is their biggest weapon against U.S. capital, the natural enemy of U.S. labor. How could it manage to go unnoticed?

I try to explain that the leaders of most U.S. unions, certainly the top office holders of the UAW, no longer have the interests of the workers at heart. That U.S. workers have been robbed of their history. I try to point to the positive by talking about the growing reform movement in auto.

"But what about the *political* struggle," someone asks. There are nods of shared curiosity.

How do I explain what I've been doing in an auto plant the past twelve years in terms of the "political struggle"? It's taken that long to build a local caucus committed to building union democracy. The fact that this coalition includes socialist-minded workers as well as Republicans and born-again Christians reflects some of our best political work. But I know that's not what they're asking.

I emphasize again the national reform movement in auto. How our hope is to turn the union back into an organization that will fight for the workers before considering corporate profits. But this is inadequate, too. They want to know how workers are using their power to shape their future as a class, their role in society.

How do I explain what I've been doing in an auto plant the past twelve years in terms of the "political struggle"? It's taken that long to build a local caucus committed to building union democracy.

What can I point to? Certainly not the UAW's "Buy American" campaign. All I can do is mumble something about disarray on the Left and a lack of class consciousness among the workers. And add some hope about growing solidarity among various unions. And feel like I have the franchise on economism.

After the meeting a Sao Jose worker comes up and looks me dead in the eye. Through a translator he asks me if I am a union official or part of the opposition. "Opposition," I say. He smiles and shakes my hand. "Opposition," he says in Portuguese to a group standing behind him, and others now come up and shake my hand too.

All the delegates are lodged with local workers. My host family is very unusual. Antonio and Lucia Maria share a five room house with their two young daughters. The house is long and narrow, attached to neighboring houses on each side. Some of the walls and floors are still concrete, but they live in relative comfort. They also have a VW bug and a telephone. Antonio would like to finish the house some day, but he can't on an autoworker's wages.

He wants me to know that he did not get these things by working in the auto plant. It is only due to some good fortune his father has had that they has so many comforts. We don't have access to a translator while he tells me their story, so I'm not sure exactly what the good fortune is. But I know that most Brazilian workers don't live this well. I noted throughout the rest of the trip that the few GM workers who own cars certainly cannot afford GM products.

On the second day we all pile onto a bus at the union hall and head for the beach. The idea is for the delegation just to hang out with autoworkers and their families. Everyone begins to loosen up on the two-hour ride. Lucia Maria tries to teach me the samba, but I am a slow learner.

The political discussion is constant, too. One of our Portuguese/English translators is a young university student. He asks me what political party I belong to. I tell him that I don't belong to any. He absolutely cannot believe this. It's inconceivable that someone active in the labor movement with an understanding of imperialism would not belong to a party.

I point out that there is no U.S. parallel to the Workers' Party. PT is truly broad-based, having taken the mayor's office of four major cities including Sao Paulo, the second largest city in the world. They are also putting up a serious contender for the presidential election this November, though people fear the military's reaction should he win.

But the translator has heard of parties in the U.S., the Socialist Workers' Party for one. I tell him that this party and others have remained small and failed to build a true base among workers. I also share some of the sectarian history of the 1970s, with its excess of "pre-party formations" and self-declared parties.

Still, there must be something, he insists. I tell him that there is much discussion about building a labor party in the U.S., but I don't see that happening until the progressives gain more influence and control in the unions, and are able to unite with other groups. He is quiet, but not satisfied.

Antonio is more interested in labor history and culture. He is fascinated by a piece of lore I share with him about the early days of organizing in the U.S. tobacco fields. The workers used to pay readers, I tell him, to read to them in the fields. And not just political documents or union news, but literature of the time. Later, at his home, he makes sure to show me the books he has on various subjects: politics and art.

...there is much discussion about building a labor party in the U.S., but I don't see that happening until the progressives gain more influence and control in the unions, and are able to unite with other groups.

Before and after our trip to the beach, we eat at a retreat built by the Metalworkers' Union in the southern coastal region. It has modest cottages, a bar, a game room and a dining room. It's a short walk from the beach and a very pleasant place for workers to visit. Antonio and his family will vacation there at the end of the month. It will be their first vacation in several years.

Joining in the Struggle

We begin the next day at the GM plant at the crack of dawn. The delegation joins with the Metalworkers of Sao Jose in leafletting the workers on their way into work. The flyer announces the conference, to show international solidarity. It also has two short blurbs about German autoworkers taking action, including work stoppages, in support of workers at VW in Mexico and Mercedes Benz in South Africa.

The back of the leaflet contains a comparison of conditions for workers in Brazil, England, Japan, the U.S., and West Germany. It covers the work week, salaries, and how many hours a worker must work to buy goods. For example, a U.S. worker needs to work 19 hours to earn enough to buy a color TV. A Brazilian must work 280 hours.

Workers arrive by the busload, dozens of buses at a time. GM used to provide the bus service. Then, at a quality circle, a worker suggested that the workers pay for the bus as a cost-cutting measure. Now they do. We shove the leaflets through the windows as the bus makes its final turn toward the main door. Most workers take them readily.

We return an hour later to get the next (staggered) shift. In the interim the sun has come up. GM security has also noticed us. Two guards come out to us and tell

us that we must stop until they can get approval from their superiors. The metalworkers say that the "approval" is a red herring to waste time. We simply move to the road outside the plant to catch the buses.

The union will circulate much more literature in the next month to build for a two-day general strike in March. The CGT has joined the CUT in endorsing the strike, though I get the impression that the CUT is doing most of the active building for it. The strike is against the government's Summer Plan, an economic policy which has imposed a real wage cut of 50%.

Like Plants in the United States

Later that day we are taken on a tour of the plant. We begin in the air-conditioned office of the plant manager, who welcomes us and proudly gives us a few statistics: the facility employs 12,000 in two foundries, a stamping plant, a parts depot, two assembly plants, three engine machine shops and a sewage treatment plant.

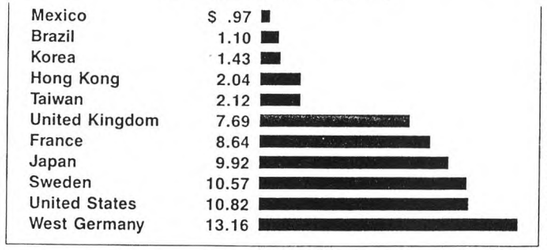
Out on the floor it's oppressively hot for walking, let alone working. The assembly plants look very similar to the plants in the States. The same orange railings, quality signs, stacks of parts bins. I learn that it's the same in the other delegates' countries. Once in a while there is a sign in English, a reminder of the colonial relationship at the heart of production here.

A union official is permitted to accompany us on the tour. It's a good opportunity for him to get out among the workers. There is no full-time representation in the plant. In fact, there is very little visible union presence. One exception is the newly-formed health and safety committees, which the union is trying to use to their best advantage. Outside the plant cafeteria I notice that one of the Brazilian activists we met at the union hall is holding a clipboard. They've managed to get him onto one of the committees and now he has more access to the floor.

There is also little visible management presence on the floor: far fewer foremen than I'd see at my plant. The union members tell us that the company prefers to use spies and psychology to keep the workers in line. They've recently put in little recreation areas and a few potted plants to promote a "happy family" atmosphere.

In the Kadet truck plant, we tour the body shop. I mention that I used to spot weld. This amazes the delegation: women don't do this work, even in West Germany. In Sao Jose the only women in the plant work in the cafeteria or sew seat cushions. The Brazilians are

Manufacturing Wages In Dollars Per Hour
(1987, converted by the exchange rate)



from Labor Research Review 13

even more amazed, though, when they learn that I have worked in the paint department. This becomes the first thing the union official mentions when he introduces me to workers.

When we see the paint department I think I have a clue to their shock. There is no spray booth. Painting goes on right on the floor. Without proper ventilation, heavy fumes fill the air. We can hardly breathe in the foundry, either, between the paint and the fumes. Teams of workers operate enormous presses. The presses look dangerous, as if they could swallow us up whole.

When we get to the end of the tour we again talk to the plant manager. He asks for questions. It's our stab at international solidarity. Why is the noise level so high? Why do Brazilian workers make only a dollar and change per hour? Why is the air so dirty? Why will you not rehire the 33? Mostly, we are a group of long-time radicals who are having a little fun with a manager who asked for it. Only the young student translator thinks it is a waste of time.

Later we learn that there has been a fatal accident at the Volkswagen plant in Sao Bernardo that very day. A worker has had his head crushed in a stamping press like the ones we had seen at GM. The VW delegation to the conference was touring the plant (though not the accident site) at the time. They witnessed a spontaneous demonstration of 10,000 led by workers who walked out of the plant to protest accident.

Ford delegates were close enough to rush to the demonstration. One of the U.S. delegates tells me about an exchange with a Brazilian worker: As the streets of Sao Bernardo, a PT stronghold, filled with people, his Brazilian companion commented, "You must see demonstrations like this all the time in the United States." All my friend could say was "No."

Our last night in Sao Jose, like most of our nights in Brazil, is filled with singing, dancing, and *pinga*, the national killer alcoholic beverage. About 30 of us take over a Sao Jose pizza parlor. Each of the delegates is sung to, sung about, danced with and asked to sing as a guitar is passed around. We hear Brazilian folk songs, British rock, and a strange Portuguese/German rooster imitation. There is a genuine warmth, a sense of camaraderie and international solidarity that has developed among us in just a few days.

When it is time for me to get on the bus, Lucia Maria is crying, even though she speaks no English and I speak no Portuguese. Somehow, through sign language, my broken Spanish and sheer will power we have managed to communicate. Antonio speaks of feeling that now they have an American daughter, even though I suspect I am older than both of them. They hosted the Mexican delegate and me, and they would have hosted a dozen more, to their own sacrifice. I have never been welcomed so warmly or treated so well anywhere. I think I could pop up in Brazil five years from now and be welcomed as warmly. All the delegates feel the same way about their host families.

There are other stops before and after the conference. All the delegates (including those from the other corporations) meet with the Mayor of Sao Bernardo. Not only is he from the PT, but the vice-mayor was an autoworker for 23 years. We also meet the mayor of Sao Paulo, a woman from the poor northern region who was thought, even by some within the PT, too radical to win the election. We meet with some Sao Paulo city councillors and are given an overview of the PT. It's a broad coalition; many Left parties work within it, with the traditional Communists relative late-comers. They run candidates on all levels and are based in the rubber fields as well as the factories.

We are taken to CUT headquarters and told about the ongoing work in building for the general strike. We are asked to encourage our unions to send international messages of solidarity in support of the strike. The organizers seem nervous about its success.

Brazilian Working Class Consciousness

At the conference I find myself seeking out the delegates from Sao Jose, especially the delegate who is one of the 33 fired autoworkers. It often takes a lot of patience for us to communicate with each other without access to a translator; yet more than once we talk late into the night. We talk about the different natures of our struggles, organizer to organizer, and come to understand each other very well.

One night toward the end of the conference I commiserate with a West German delegate about the state of the movement in our respective countries. I tell him that in the States we have all these things within our union structure that the Brazilians would die for: full time union reps, a closed shops, nation-wide contracts. Yet these hard-won gains are rapidly being handed back by the unions' top bureaucrats. The West German agrees. The whipsawing we've experienced in the U.S. has cut across all of Europe, and is likely to get worse in 1992 when the new EEC is complete.

We marvel at how, with a history of military regimes, and the constant threat of armed repression, the Brazilians meet the political struggle head-on. It's the higher class consciousness of the Brazilian workers. It's the different history of a Third World nation. It's seeing English signs in your Brazilian workplace. Even at the conference the Brazilians are pushing for more political content in the workshops, though they need the nuts and bolts information presented there too.

Our hearts are with the Brazilians in their political approach to the tasks ahead of them. Yet I know well that if we were to talk in these terms in our plants and locals at home, we would be standing in a corner talking to ourselves, no matter how "correct" we are. I've grown to respect this German delegate a great deal, so I'm comforted that his reaction is the same as mine; I don't have a personal monopoly on economism.

My last letter from Brazil tells me that the general strike was 70% successful. Moreover, it led to a series of smaller strikes, including the occupation of an auto plant, which defeated the Summer Plan. The government even instituted a policy which raised salaries in order to stave off the growing strength of the Workers' Party. The economy still faces runaway inflation and mass poverty, but the PT candidate, Lula, has dropped some in the polls.

The PT must walk a tightrope between organizing for fundamental change and inviting repression. As one PT representative put it on a recent trip to the U.S., "If we make a mistake, we are not talking about decades of repression. We are talking about centuries." Yet, after getting a peek at the Brazilian working class, I have faith that it will produce heroes equal to the tasks ahead. ■

BOOK REVIEW

An Injury to All: The Decline Of American Unionism
by Kim Moody

(Verso, 1988, 376 pp, $16.95)

The Journalist And The Orator

by Charles Sarkis

Kim Moody is one of the two or three best-known radical labor journalists in the country. As a staff member of *Labor Notes*, he has covered many of the major labor struggles of the last decade and taken an active role in fostering support for embattled strikers and union oppositionists. There are few people better placed to survey the state of the unions, and none from whom a full-length analysis of the "decline of American unionism" would be more welcome.

Among the several major exceptions to the advanced capitalist pattern that the U.S. presents, the weakness of the union movement ranks right below the absence of a labor party (see Mitchell and Weiss, *A House Divided*, 1981, for a still pertinent discussion of this absence [available through FM—ed]). The strength of the unions in Europe and elsewhere has waxed and waned in the post-war era, but in many industrialized countries hit a peak in the late 1970s. Not so in the U.S.: alone in the advanced capitalist world, the U.S. has seen a continuous decline in the percentage of workers represented by unions over the last thirty years. But if organized labor has been in slow decline for some decades, the current free fall is qualitatively different, and began after the 1974-75 recession. There is no more important topic in U.S. politics than this collapse, and the heart of Moody's book covers the decimation of union power since that time. It makes compelling reading.

One of the peculiarities of the U.S. scene is that there is a large section of a small Left that knows very little about the unions, and appears to believe that they needn't bother to learn. As long as that continues, that portion of the Left is very unlikely to gain much influence in national affairs. Moody is especially good at putting to rest some beliefs about the collapse of organized labor common to many progressive activists indifferent to labor.

One of those beliefs is that the decline of union members stems from the advent of a new society in which no one makes anything anymore. Union members have declined therefore because the jobs that union members do have disappeared. This would be news to many people still working in manufacturing, but the closures of plants throughout the Northeast and Midwest give it a certain plausibility. What post-industrial society hasn't yet explained, imported cars and electronics equipment would. But though manufacturing jobs have declined in the last ten years, the decline in the percentage of union members in manufacturing has greatly outstripped the drop in those jobs. In 1953, 42.4% of the workers in manufacturing were unionized. Manufacturing declined as a proportion of the workforce in the next twenty-five years, but in absolute terms manufacturing jobs continued to increase through most of the 1970s. By 1980, however, the percentage of union members in manufacturing had already fallen to 32.3%, which represented a fall of 24% over those twenty-seven years. But after 1980, the process accelerated dramatically. The percentage of organized workers in manufacturing fell another 30% in the next five years, going from 32.3% to 24.8%.

Labor's Shrinkage

There are several remarkable features to this shrinkage. For twenty years, people on the left-wing of the labor movement watched with alarm the drop in union density (usually measured as the percentage of the total workforce or the total non-agricultural workforce belonging to unions). Nonetheless, for most of that time, the numbers of union members increased, mainly because of the vast wave of unionization of local, state and Federal employees; it was just that the number of non-union employees grew faster. Already in the 1960s and 1970s, however, the absolute number of union members had begun to fall in the private sector. But in the last decade, the absolute number of union members of all kinds has actually dropped, and dropped significantly, while the overwhelming number of new jobs created have been in non-union situations. The result has been a dramatic worsening in the already disadvantaged position of labor in its confrontations with capital.

Leading the dive for twenty years have been the unions in private industry, most notably productive industry. Once the rise in public employee unionization had ended, which it essentially had by the end of the 1970s, the decline in private industry was bound to appear more starkly, which is another way of saying that labor's troubles began long before Reaganism. Even so, the decline is startling, and no less astounding than the overall drop is the rout of unions in certain traditionally heavily unionized industries. Industries that formerly represented the bastions of the U.S. labor movement have managed to reduce union representation to a minority of their workforces.

No individual number is as tragic as that for mining. Like all numbers of this type, the figures for mining hide individual misery and hardship, and there is little hardship in this country quite like the hardship of non-unionized miners. From 1953 to 1985 mining went from 64.7% unionized to 14.6%. But other industries chalked up almost as dramatic figures. For the same period, transportation went from 79.9% to 37% unionized; construction went from 83.eight% to 22.3% unionized. Workers produced things, and companies sold them, but unions were increasingly out of the picture.

Class Struggle Against the Unions

Union density is of course only one measure of the strength of organized labor. But other measures, such as the steady decline in the number of union victories in NLRB elections since the early 1950s, underline the gravity of the problem. Unions now lose more elections than they win, which means that current trends in union organizing hold no hope for a reversal in labor's decline. Though the total numbers of workers decertified remains small, there has been an ominous increase in union decertification elections.

The weakness in the unions' position did not come about simply because of long-term, impersonal economic trends. Unions got weak because U.S. companies never completely accepted their existence, and set about planning and organizing to weaken them. Long before Reagan fired the PATCO strikers, corporations had plenty of federal and state encouragement in reducing union leverage, most notably through the National Labor Relations Board. There is some debate about whether corporations' successes over the unions in the last ten or twelve years represent a new phenomenon, a qualitatively different corporate offensive, or simply the result of an anti-union momentum visible in the 1960s and already picking up speed by the 1970s. Moody is of the first opinion, but there is also considerable evidence the other way, that after earlier victories the companies simply got strong

enough to do what they wanted all along. Regardless, there is no doubt that employer organizations, union-busting consultant firms, and individual corporate strategists have openly orchestrated creation of an increasingly "union-free environment," in their phrase.

The class struggle waged against unions has brought U.S. corporations a long-sought prize, namely, the destruction of industry-wide pattern bargaining, and with it, wage standardization in individual industries. No major industry-wide pattern agreements still hold in the U.S. So-called competitive bargaining has grown in their place, even among unions where it would have been thought inconceivable, such as the UAW. In the 1980s bidding wars broke out between locals and regions of the UAW, and "whipsawing" local against local became a joint GM-UAW enterprise.

Through the two Jackson campaigns, it is African-Americans above all that have demonstrated their disposition to political alternatives, and then set about contacting the unions.

The growth of large non-unionized sectors of private industry, and the growth of non-unionized sectors of conglomerates with histories of unionization in other sectors, have reflected the new posture of labor in the U.S. That posture is not simply defensive; it is, despite the heroism of workers at Hormel or Phelps-Dodge or Watsonville, one of retreat. In tire and rubber, electrical machinery and petroleum refinery, the corporations on the cutting edge of those industries are less than half union. For the business class, financial success is now viewed as incompatible with the continued existence of unions, and each individual conglomerate's victory over its workers is viewed as reason for other companies to gain the same competitive advantage. The outlook for labor has become so dire, that were it not for public employee unions at the local, state and federal level, the very existence of organized labor as we have known it in this country would be in serious doubt.

Coming to Terms with Business Unionism

As they detail the recent decline in labor's position, the middle five chapters in Moody's book describe the sorry response of the major federations in attempting to reverse it. Those chapters, particularly the one on the crisis of industrial unionism and the growth of "general unionism" (for an example, see the article on the division of 1199 elsewhere in this issue) are well worth the price of the book. But in addressing activists in the labor movement, Moody wants to do something more, to provide an explanation about why unions have become so weak, and how they might regain initiative in the struggle with corporate power.

In my opinion, his explanations do not succeed very well, even bearing in mind that this is a general overview of U.S. unionism, intended for a wide audience. Moody's book is, as he says, a product of the *Labor Notes* experience, and in the foreword he calls attention to the activity of the International Socialists in explaining the evolution of his perspectives. To some degree, the difficulties with his analysis reflect a persistent weakness in the politics of those organizations.

For Moody, the main culprits in organized labor's decline are "business unionism," and the "bureaucratic structure of bargaining in general." In his view, "...the AFL-CIO's inability to respond effectively must be explained...above all by the concept and practice of business unionism" (page 15). And for Moody, the most salient feature of business unionism is that it leaves the dominance of capital "unquestioned." This is alright as far as it goes, but it does not go very far.

It is true that the dominant ideology of U.S. unions in the post-war era has been "business unionist." It is also true that the present unions have proved woefully ineffective and often fundamentally uninterested in combatting capital's new power. However, it is not enough to say that business unionism leaves the dominance of capital unquestioned, since a number of labor movements in other countries are *in the main* dominated by union philosophies that for all practical purposes also leave the dominance of capital unquestioned. The willingness to accept capitalism does not explain why U.S. unions have proved so much weaker than those in any other major capitalist power.

Further, pointing out the weaknesses of business unionism does not explain why business unionism became the ideology of organized labor in the first place. Nor does it explain why alternatives to it have so far proved too weak to supplant it. In the midst of organized labor's precipitous decline, why haven't alternative perspectives—social unionism, class struggle unionism, social-democratic unionism—caught fire?

"As soon as the movement has a base..."

The well-organized opposition of the state explains some of it. Company and union repression directed against militant unionists explains some more. But part of the problem might have to do with how social unionists have analyzed the problem and approached the task. For Moody as for any Marxist, the touchstone of *not* accepting the dominance of capital is political opposition to the representatives of capital, and that means organizing a different political party. References to the need to break with the two party system and organize a labor party run through the book. For the most part, however, they are just that, references. Moody does not take the arguments of those skeptical about such a task very seriously, and spends no time on the obstacles the U.S. political system places in the way of third party efforts. Instead, he reiterates the traditional labor party position. It's a good position, but the idea of a traditional labor party is largely irrelevant unless and until you have an analysis why the U.S. never had one, and why the traditional advocacy of a labor party never led to creating one. Then we all might try something different.

Moody does not recognize the problems with that traditional advocacy, and his analysis of why it has so far failed amounts to little more than saying that the labor bureaucrats have ignored it. He shows that there was much talk about a labor party before and after the Second World War, and one citation he gives of a radical labor party position is revealing. Moody quotes a pamphlet from 1948 written by Jack Ranger, a socialist writing for the Workers Party (an ancestor of the International Socialists). "...Ranger proposed that progressive unionists form labor party caucuses in their local unions. Then, *'As soon as the movement has a base among the unions*, try to draw in representatives of other organizations in the locality that might naturally be disposed to a labor party—consumers' cooperatives, the Farmers' Union, parents groups, tenant leagues, Negro organizations, etc.'" (emphasis added). Moody comments on this quote that, "The concept of a political alliance with other working-class and oppressed groups was central to social unionism" (page 59). But with modern white ears or ancient African-American ones, we cannot help noticing that Negro organizations trail this list of other organizations that "might be," just might be, disposed to a labor party. Sometime after the parents groups, nestled in right before the "etc," representatives of Negro organizations were to be contacted "as soon as the movement has a base among the unions."

Cobwebs have obscured the faces of those Black people waiting for that telephone call. And this brings us, inevitably, ineluctably, to Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition. Because since Jack Ranger and the Workers Party, the shoe is on the other foot. Through the two Jackson campaigns, it is African-Americans above all that have demonstrated their disposition to political alternatives, and then set about contacting the unions. The book jacket promises "A detailed analysis of the Rainbow Coalition's potential to unite labor with other progressive groups..." There is a truth in advertising problem here, because beyond a few pages that narrate Jesse Jackson's campaign, I could only find three pages that offer any analytic remarks about Jackson's strategy, and those are rather perfunctory and rhetorical. The index only lists two mentions of the Rainbow Coalition, and though a few others occur in the text, there is no discussion of its problems or potential.

The general impression conveyed by Moody's book in these few passages is that he wishes Jackson would just go away. Moody offers no analysis of the new realities revealed by the Jackson campaigns, no analysis of what white or Black labor activists should do about the Rainbow Coalition (if anything), and no program for influencing Jackson himself. There may be some circles where this is viable advice, but elsewhere it is simply not a serious program for labor activity. That Moody does not sense this more strongly may be due in part to the fact that his admirable knowledge of the labor movement does not appear to extend to the South or to Black labor, and indeed the acknowledgments to his book do not point to much contact with African-American unionists or strategists.

Kim Moody is one of the two or three best-known radical labor journalists in the country. Kim Moody has covered most of the key labor struggles in the North and West of this country in the last five years. Jesse Jackson is the best-known speaker at labor rallies in the country. Jesse Jackson has addressed the strikers at most of the key labor struggles in this country over the last five years. It is a shame that the radical labor journalist appears to have stopped taking notes at the moment when labor's current orator stood up to speak.

Note: We received the following letter on events in China just after our last issue went to press. Interest has been expressed in a follow-up to that issue's special China section, and we encourage other readers to contribute.

Dear Forward Motion,

Recent events in China have strengthened the capitalist cry that socialism is dead. The Western press paints the pro-democracy movement as pro-capitalist, and this assessment is backed by the Chinese government's claim of the same thing. To gain some clarity, socialists must begin to make a class analysis of the struggle which goes beyond the shallow observations of the mass media.

While aspects of the economic reforms have been positive, in the main the changes have created a new class strata of rich peasants and capitalist entrepreneurs. While some of the new rich became wealthy through hard work, most amassed wealth in the same manner capitalists have always used: corruption, graft and opportunism. In addition to these new elements, State managers and Party officials were able to use their increased power to expropriate wealth. Out of this economic field grew the political alliance of liberals and conservatives which rules China.

Sharp contradictions exist in this camp over the pace of changes and in particular over changes in the superstructure. Western commentators often repeat that political reforms have to follow on the heels of economic reforms. The real content of this observation is that a new economic class will always demand political power to match its economic muscle. In essence that is what is behind the demand for political democracy by the liberal wing of the Party, which I believe represents the new economic strata. The conservatives also support the economic changes and have used the reforms to become wealthy. But they fear losing the political hegemony which is the base of their power.

The student/worker demonstrations correctly raised the demand for more democracy. Of course when millions of people mobilize, you get a lot of different ideas and perspectives. Certainly there were some who idealized capitalist democracy, and certainly the liberal wing of the Party attempted to use the demonstrations in their struggle for power. But in the main the demands for democracy were brought up within the specific context of the struggle against corruption, inflation and nepotism. People wanted free speech, free press and the right to demonstrate in order to protest the widespread abuse of power. In effect their protests were aimed at the new class elements and corrupt Party officials created by the reforms, not as a voice of these new elements. Clearly the slogans against corruption were what won the support of the working class. And clearly it is the working class which has received the brunt of the repression and executions.

To me it seems many people are confused by the liberals' support for democracy. We look at the attempt to build socialism through central planning and political authoritarianism and can see the historic errors of this Stalinist mode of development. Now we see market socialism and political democracy enter the stage, but this formula is as unbalanced as the first. I believe what is developing now is a form of social democratic capitalism, a market economy in which inequalities grow, a state that attempts to provide some social support, matched with political pluralism. But this system will see class differences grow wider not smaller. Neither Stalinism nor market socialism combines democratic centralism in a socioeconomic formula. Only a centrally planned economy can hope to map growth based on economic equality, protecting the interests of the poorest and most disadvantaged from the ravages of the market. But this must be matched by a socio-political system of democracy. A democracy which involves the masses and guarantees their right to speak out and act, a democracy which includes both electoral and mass participatory forms. Only in that manner can a balance develop to correct over-centralization in the economic sphere which, as history shows, leads to a political dictatorship in the social sphere. Within this context, as a secondary aspect, a partial market can develop around some consumer goods and food supplies.

As a last note I think it's important to point out that Mao was the only leader who went outside the Party to legitimatize political power in the hands of the masses. He understood the need to break the political hegemony of the Party to safeguard socialism. I think the old man was right about Deng after all, and even given all the errors and problems in the Cultural Revolution, it may do well to look at that experience once again. For now I believe the present leadership in China will be similar to Janos Kadar, the Hungarian Party leader who took over after the Soviet invasion of 1956 and led the Party until 1988. Kadar was hated by the people, but he allowed the slow and steady changes of market socialism to advance. Hopefully the Chinese people can avoid such a fate and build a system which truly serves the people.

—Jerry Harris, Chicago, IL

LOCOMOTION
for the holidays

by Dennis O'Neil

This being the year-end issue of *Forward Motion*, Locomotion herewith runs its first annual holiday suggested gift list. What I've done is select a range of records, mainly released in 1989 or late '88, which I think are both genuinely interesting and generally accessible (or as my friends say, "None of that weird shit you're into, eh?"). A few cautions. First, this isn't a *Best of 1989* List. There's way too much stuff that I haven't heard. Second, this isn't a political list. I've left out anything likely to offend sensibilities more refined than my own, but I've also omitted stuff whose main merit was political correctness or insight. Third, don't even try to use this list to buy records for teenagers. It can't be done by adults, so give 'em anything and let 'em trade it in for whatever they want. Finally, let's not have any left sectarian carping about Crispness, Hannukah, Kwanza, or what have you. Remember, Mao Zedong's birthday is December 26.

Sunshine On Leith, The Proclaimers. For some reason, a lot of my favorite stuff this year has been kinda, umm, folky. Probably I'm just getting old, but maybe folky is just getting good again. It's certainly getting around—Phranc, who calls herself "your average, All-American, everyday, run of the mill, Jewish lesbian folk-singer," has a number which claims that today everybody wants to be a folksinger.

These guys are brothers and Scottish nationalists. This is not a political inclination full of instant gratification as they point out with bitter humor in "Cap in Hand," an anthemic lament about Scots passivity in the face of English outrages. The only other political tune on the album is bleaker still, ending with the musical question,"What do you do when democracy's all through?/What do you do when minority means you?" They find love a good deal more rewarding, though its gratifications aren't necessarily immediate either:

Dennis O'Neil is a regular contributor to Forward Motion.

But I would walk 500 miles
And I would walk 500 more
Just to be the man who walked 1000 miles
To fall down at your door.

Their voices which on first hearing appear a little rough actually blend and then scuff against each other with considerable art and they sneak in some lovely bits of harmony like the yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeahs in the title song. In the spirit of truth in labeling, I must mention God. The deity, the Christian version, is a frequent though relatively unobtrusive presence here. What is it with these Celtic rockers? Van Morrison has been at it for years and his new album, *Avalon Sunset*, his best in this decade, contains several of his by now standard impassioned love songs to Jesus.

Live Music. Hey, fuck a damn album, anyhow. Take someone to go see a live show someplace. Twice this month I went to catch bands I knew virtually nothing about and had never heard and got seriously rocked both times. For the record, the first was The Scam, four young guys from Memphis whose foundation is state of the art post-punk but are good enough to bust into challenging free jazz passages without ever losing direction—and their fifth member is Robert Palmer, a clarinet-playing rock critic who's even older than me. The second was a nine piece outfit called the Les Miserables Brass Band. Horns and percussion. There's not even a bass; an incredibly funky tuba keeps the pulse through a repetoire which ranges from Pakistani wedding music to James Brown, every bit of it danceable. I can't say how either band would sound on record. Their respective managers never came through with the promised tapes and promo stuff.

Raw Like Sushi, Nenah Cherry. Rap is the single most interesting musical development of the decade. It speaks with a uniquely authoritative voice to and for Black youth, and you can dance to it. This list also recognizes that a lot of folks still find it weird, harsh, alienating. Which makes Nenah Cherry a good place to start. She is a product of the globalization of rap. Five years ago nothing from outside the five boroughs of New York was mandatory listening. Now Miami and the L.A. area have highly influential styles. Cherry is a step further. She's part American, grew up and records in England. Perhaps it's the fact that for her rap is a received and adopted style, not part of a culture she grew up in, that she has produced a record non-rap fans find easy to get into.

And she gets you right into it: "Would you stop that (bleep) scratching and give me a beat." What follows is a rap about not getting used, broken up by a sung hook, "No monkey man can win my love" that you'll be humming even as you try to figure out exactly what is a "Buffalo Stance," the song's title. If you haven't listened to much rap or hiphop, things may get a little disorienting. The liner notes don't list the familiar guitar, bass, drums—try playing and programming, D.J., and beats. These are the building blocks of hiphop. The music is patched together from short pieces electronically sampled from other songs. Cherry, for instance, makes good use of Marvin Gaye's "Inna City Momma," a persona she assumes for some of her cuts.

Her rapping style, while not as fluid and sophisticated as US rappers like Salt n Pepa, MC Lyte or Antoinette, is strong and assertive. Not surprisingly, it focuses on questions of sex, love and relationships, but the underlying concern is maintaining her identity, even when she's dumped. The final cut, "So Here I Come," caps off the album nicely. Cherry starts as a young girl going off to school in a beautiful green dress. Her thirst for knowledge crushed by the system, she looks for fulfillment in relationships and learns to do it on her terms. The album ends as sharply as it begins: "I came already. Stop it."

Freedom, Neil Young. 1989 was a big year for dinosaurs. You had your big Who tour. You had your big Stones tour. (I saw the latter at Shea Stadium. Envious Locomotion readers can share this experience in the comfort of their own homes. Just play the band's new tape, *Steel Wheels*, real loud about two rooms away and watch the ant farm your nephew got last Christmas.) It was also a year in which at least three aging rocksters produced albums with strong and angry takes on the state of the USA today. John Mellencamp's *Big Daddy*, what I've heard of it, is sorta sour. Lou Reed's *New York* is strident and obvious. Old Neil comes through like a champ though, his bitterness fueled perhaps by a sense of betrayal.

He spent much of the '80s as a Reagan supporter, as befits his class position as a very large scale California landowner. Though he was active in Farm Aid, I think it was the clammy touch of the Invisible Hand itself that steered him from the path he was on. First his record company *sued* him to force him to make his albums more commercial. Then his anger at the wholesale buying up of songs and bands by big advertisers led him to write "This Note's For You," a cranky defense of rock's meaning for its artists and audiences, which MTV tried desperately to censor. So now Young is snarling out:

We got a thousand points of light
For the homeless man
We got a kinder, gentler, machine gun hand

That line is from "Rockin' In The Free World," which opens and closes *Freedom* (shades of Young's masterpiece, *Rust Never Sleeps*—and this has a lot of *Rust*'s magnificent fuzzy sound; play the sucker **l o u d**). Freedom crops up here again and again, and almost every time it is not merely conditional, it's poisoned. A cop taking a fat payoff from a ten-year-old crack dealer says, "It's good to be free." Crack is the other thread running through the songs here, the first album with a real take on the crack/cocaine plague. It is the key to Young's transformation of "On Broadway" into, to bite a line, an ode to dread.

You may be getting the idea that this is not a particularly perky record. Damn right. If you want perky, go buy a New Kids On The Block record. I understand that Neil has started performing "Ohio" again as the twentieth anniversary of the Kent State massacre approaches. He dedicates it to the students killed in and around Tiananmen Square.

Three Feet High And Rising, De La Soul. Rap, the most vital musical development of the last ten years, continues to mutate away. In honor of its tenth anniversary on vinyl, 1989 saw two important new strains come to the forefront. One, L.A. gangster rap, had been prefigured by the likes of Schooly D and developed as a form since '87 by King Tee, Ice-T and others, but really hit the big time with NWA. That stands for Niggers With Attitude and they're not kidding. Because their particular attitude is a mixed bag and their sound both unrelenting and unvaried, I'm not recommending their album. You should, however, be aware that their cut "Fuck Tha Police" is def enough to be the first song ever officially condemned by the FBI, and if you're reminded of the Panthers and Off The Pig, well, word!

De La Soul is from the opposite end of the country and a very different ideological jumping off point. From Amityville, Long Island, this trio could be called suburban rap, and not the weak shit produced by DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince, whose strongest following is among young teens and pre-teens. These guys have captured a huge audience with a whole new sound and outlook. Like George Clinton in his P-Funk heyday, Pace Master Mase, Posdnous and Trugoy the Dove create their own universe with its own laws, language, and style. It draws heavily on the hippy, flower power ethic of the sixties, but without the retro reverence which characterizes too much of the white tiedie Deadhead crowd. The language of the raps is rich, convoluted, wacky, pun-filled. The topics are everyday living: love, school, the evils of crack, teevee, all rendered fresh through the delaspectacles. Plus which, the samples they bite are not only on the rhythm tip but wittily chosen. Their biggest hit, "Me Myself an I" is built on a chunk of Funkadelic's "(not just) Knee Deep." The final point about De La Soul is that they are gutsy and think big. They set out consciously to pose a challenge to the existing b-boy conventions of rap—ho posturing, gold dookie chains and leather, etc.and if shifting currents of street fashion on the streets of NYC this summer were any indication, they've made as big a dent as anything this side of *Do The Right Thing*.

Brazil Classics 1: Beleza Tropical. If rap is the big news in rock and roll for the 1980s, worldbeat is an honorable second. One of these days Locomotion will take a longish look at the appropriation of a globe's worth of popular culture and the dicey issues of cultural hegemonism, denaturing, homogenization, commodification and so on it raises. (For those who can't wait, the conclusion is that on balance it's a fine thing.) In the meantime you might as well sit back and enjoy this terrific collection on the Fly/Sire label of the cream of Brazilian *tropicalismo*, a musical movement which arose and thrived as a countercurrent under the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil from 1964 through the mid-'80s. Since I don't know any Portuguese and I bought the cassette which doesn't have any translations, but does have four more songs than the record, I haven't got the faintest idea what these men and women are singing about. I plan to find out, but for the meantime, I'm not suffering much and I kinda doubt you will.

This compilation was assembled by David Byrne of Talking Heads, whose cohorts have borrowed riffs and rhythms from some of these tunes. As Byrne points out, "We have come to associate lightness, subtlety and easy rhythms with shallowness and music without guts." This equation is totally refuted by the cuts on this album, few of which get any heavier than what we are fed on this country's "lite rock" radio stations, but damn, what a difference! A second and third album, compiling classics of *samba* and *pagode*, dance music of the urban poor around Rio, and *forro*, Northeastern dance music, are

due out soon and I'll buy 'em sound unheard.

Lucinda Williams. I'm cheating. This baby came out last year and I still can't get enough of it. For my money, Williams cold shuts down every other new woman singer/songwriter I've heard—Tracy Chapman, Michelle Shocked, the Indigo Girls, even k.d.lang.

The first song, "I Just Wanted To See You So Bad," establishes her direct unadorned writing and country-twang voice. It's about being obsessed with someone, not the melodramatic *Fatal Attraction* kind of thing, but the kind that can suddenly make you feel like you're living in some life which was sitting right next door to yours, even though you didn't know it was there. Next up is one of the best country and western slice-of-a-working-woman's-life tunes you'll ever want to hear. Williams' roots are in the blues as her powerful cover of Howling Wolf's "I Asked For Water (He Gave Me Gasoline)" demonstrates, but country themes, blues roots, folkish acoustic guitar to the contrary, this woman is a rock and roller. Listen to the bass line on the let's give it another shot love song "Big Red Sun Blues" or the inexorable erection of defenses against heartache on "Changed the Locks." Whew. If you're looking for this, you might find a shorter 12" e.p. entitled *Passionate Kisses* that her label, Rough Trade, put out this year. It contains some other powerful covers of traditional blues, but not one of the songs I've been raving about here is on it. Hold out for the real item.

Low Road. "Hey, you make 'em all sound like I should get 'em, but I never heard of *any* of these guys except for Neil Young and he sings funny," I hear some of you whine (sounding rather like Neil, actually). Well, Locomotion isn't thought of as the Thidwick the Big Hearted Moose of rock and roll columns for nothing. Here is a no-fail, *time-tested*, if-they-ain't-dead-and-cremated-they'll-tap-their-toes type selection for you to lay on the happy recipient of choice. The folks at Rhino Records have released not one, not two, but three slabs of wax entitled *History of New Orleans Rhythm & Blues*. Choose between 1950-58, 1959-62 or 1963-70. NOLA, with its mongrel colonial pedigree and strong Black intelligentsia, has been a dominant force in U.S. music on and off for a century. But forget the historical materialism for a minute. This is great stuff, classics cheek by jowl with oughta be classics. The former include Lee & Shirley's "Let the Good Times Roll," Frankie Ford's "Sea Cruise," Aaron Neville's "Tell It Like It Is." In the latter camp we find Guitar Slim's "The Things I Used To Do," "Time Is On My Side" (the one the Stones bit from Irma Thomas), and the immortal Jesse Hill, whose "Ooh Poo Pah Doo" contains the wonderful cry of love: "I won't stop tryin'/ Til I create confusion in your mind." ■