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## Support The SLP!

By the time most readers of *The People* receive this issue, our editorial offices and the national offices of the Socialist Labor Party will be packed up and ready for the impending move to the party's new National Headquarters in San Jose, Calif.

Moving the offices will be a time-consuming proposition. Not only is it necessary to pack all the party's files and records, its literature supplies and library, the desks, other furniture and office equipment, but to unpack it all again to set up the new offices. And we will have to piece it all back together and have the new offices in working order far enough in advance to devote the time and attention needed to prepare for the November issue of *The People*.

That means we have our work cut out for us. It also means there won't be much spare time to attend to many other things that normally make up the daily routines of the editorial office, the subscription department, the business office, the shipping department or the national office.

But we aren't complaining. The move, which was forced on us by the whopping 80 percent increase in rent reported in our last issue, may well prove to be a blessing in disguise.

Indeed, the new facilities are superior to the present ones in many important ways, not the least being that they are one-third again as large and will cost the party one-third less in rent.

While the new offices with their lower rent will help to reduce the strain that other rising costs have placed on the party's financial resources, those savings alone will not be sufficient to eliminate the monthly deficits that have accumulated during the year. Those deficits have made it virtually impossible for the SLP to expand its activities, replenish its dwindling literature supplies, publish new titles, or to promote circulation of *The People*.

For these and many other equally sound reasons, the SLP has set a \$25,000 goal for its annual Thanksgiving season fund drive. Proceeds from this annual fund ordinarily would be devoted exclusively to *The People*. This year, however, the party's National Executive Committee has called upon the party's membership and all other supporters of the SLP to make a special effort to replenish the party's financial resources. Reaching that goal will ease the party's immediate financial problems and help to ensure uninterrupted publication of *The People*.

Please use the Thanksgiving Fund coupon on page six to help us stop the drain on the SLP's cash resources and to keep *The People* in print.

## Millions Reject Gore-Bush Even Before Election Day

In the presidential elections next month, the question of whether workers would be better off voting for the Republican candidate, George W. Bush Jr., or for the Democratic candidate, Albert Gore, is never really asked—or answered—in the major media.

Many workers know the answer. If the under 50 percent voter turnout for the 1996 election is any indicator—and there are those who say even fewer eligible voters will turn out for this year's election—vast numbers of workers will no doubt be voting with their feet for "none of the above." The Socialist Labor Party has an option for these workers: Why not work for a real change?

Workers know that the politicians' promises to make their lives better if elected have been made and broken many times in their lifetimes. In an article about eligible voters in one town, *The New York Times* described their feelings: "People here look at Al Gore and George W. Bush and see two men born to the country club, men whose family histories jingle with silver spoons. They appear, to people here, just the same."

"I don't think they think about people like us, and if they do care, they're not going to do anything for us," said a Greyhound bus depot cashier. "I don't think either one of those men running for president has ever had to worry about where their next paychecks are coming from," she added.

"They look the same to me," said a shift manager at a McDonald's restaurant who struggles to support herself and three children on \$5.15 an hour. "I don't even pay attention to those two, and all my friends say the same thing. My life won't change."

## The Firestone-Ford Fiasco

Posturing pundits and politicians have called for criminal prosecution of those responsible for the deaths and injuries caused by the silence of Ford and Firestone about hazards they knew existed months or even years before the scandal became public. Most surely know that such prosecution is highly unlikely under a legal system in which the courts, in deference to the profit interests of the capitalist class, routinely conduct "the country's most important product liability litigation...behind closed doors," as *Business Week* recently observed.

Firestone and Ford executives at first suggested workers at one or two plants might be responsible, but the truth eventually came out that the defects were

systemic, emanating from many plants, and that knowledge of the hazards went clear to the top of both companies, who callously conducted a coverup.

Capitalists routinely claim that they deserve the lion's share of the wealth created under capitalism because their "leadership" is essential to industry. They are in charge, and anything workers produce therefore rightly belongs to the capitalist.

Never mind that it is workers who daily operate the industries and services from top to bottom, and that the primary task a capitalist or one of today's capitalist-executives performs, if any task at all, is "not of a sort that di-

(Continued on page 7)

When one gets past all the rhetoric, mudslinging and vague, often meaningless promises issuing from the mouths of the "towering intellects" the capitalist class has chosen to finance as its major-party candidates this year, there really isn't much difference between the Democratic and Republican parties. They both support the capitalist system and serve the wealthy capitalist class that owns and controls the nation's industries and services. These twin parties of capitalism have only minor differences over how to best serve capitalist interests. But those differences have little or no effect on the problems plaguing the

majority of Americans who belong to the working class—because the capitalist system is itself the root cause of those problems.

Under capitalism, a worker's very livelihood depends on the hiring and firing decisions of the capitalist minority that owns the means of production. But employing workers is not the capitalists' goal. Their goal is to make the greatest possible profit, and they employ workers only to the extent needed to produce goods and services that can be sold at a profit.

Yet capitalists can only make a profit by paying workers a wage worth only

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## Verizon Strike Secures Place for Trade Unions

By Ken Boettcher

Last month, a 15-day strike by 86,000 telephone workers ended at Verizon Communications, the nation's largest telecommunications employer. The company was created this summer by the merger of Bell Atlantic (BA) and GTE. *The New York Times* reported that the contract signed between Verizon and the unions involved indicated "that organized labor still has a place in the New Economy." The unions involved in the strike were the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW).

The problem for workers is that the place the unions have in the so-called "New Economy" looks a lot like the place they had in the "Old Economy." If this strike is any example, that place is to promote the false concept that the labor contracts the unions broker serve the interests of both capital and labor. As a press release from the CWA itself put it, "This agreement assures Verizon the advantage of a stable workforce of the most highly skilled and ex-

perienced people, and in many ways it gives our members the ability to do their jobs even better."

One of the main issues in the strike was Verizon's attempt to keep unions out of the expanding area of wireless and Internet communications services—an effort it inherited from BA and GTE. As Myles Calvey, of Boston IBEW Local 2222, put it, "The companies' (BA and GTE) core business—wireline—is going the way of the blacksmith. Meanwhile, we're shut out of wireless."

With the signing of the new labor contract, the unions are no longer shut out of wireless—at least not as shut out as they were before. They now have cardcheck recognition and neutrality rights for gaining representation in Verizon's wireless and Internet services. Those rights ostensibly make it easier for the unions to gain a foothold in the new services and harder for the company to intimidate employees seeking to join a union.

But what of it? For argument's sake, assume that all workers in the new divisions were members of the existing

unions. What could workers expect? Clearly, they could expect no more than the settlement just negotiated.

The new contract, which the CWA has called a "path-blazing settlement," locks Verizon's workers into a three-year term during which wage increases will barely keep up with the rising cost of living. It does provide for incrementally increased health benefits, increases to pensions that will barely keep up with the cost of living, a "cap" on forced overtime at 7 hours per week for some workers and 10 hours per week for others, a profit-sharing plan with a \$1,000 annual limit, and 30 minutes a day during which customer service representatives and telephone operators can do less stressful work. The contract also promises that the company will have no layoffs, no job downgrades and no forced transfer of workers during its term.

The company can well afford to make these promises at a time when its business is booming. But like the auto companies and many other capitalist

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## GULF WAR SYNDROME

# Research Points to Possible Source of Veterans' Ailments

For years after the Persian Gulf War, the Pentagon and its British equivalent, the Ministry of Defense (MoD), denied the existence of any Gulf War Syndrome that has caused mysterious illnesses and hundreds of deaths among Gulf War veterans. Recently, they have acknowledged that something is causing illnesses, but have maintained that exposures to chemical or biological weapons were not significant enough to cause them. They continue to refuse to test Gulf War veterans for the presence of radioactive depleted uranium (DU), another possible factor in the syndrome. A recent report in *The Times* of London reveals the reasons for that refusal.

During the war, British and U.S. forces reportedly fired more than 700,000 shells tipped with DU to help them penetrate enemy armor. In a study of 17 Gulf War veterans by Dr. Asaf Durakovic, professor of nuclear medicine at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., and former head of nuclear medicine at the U.S. Army's veterans' affairs medical facility in Delaware, life-threatening levels of DU were found in the bones and urine of 70 percent of the veterans studied nearly 10 years after the war. Durakovic contends that tens of thousands of veterans are dying slow deaths from DU radi-



The People

ation poisoning. Results of the study were verified by four independent experts. Army engineers who removed damaged tanks and other equipment (armored with DU) from the battlefields, and medics who cut off the dusty clothing of wounded in field hospitals, were found to be disproportionately affected.

Durakovic said, "I doubt whether the MoD or Pentagon will have the audacity to challenge these results. I can't say this is the solitary cause of Gulf War Syn-

drome, but we now have clear evidence that it is a leading factor in the majority of victims." They may not challenge the results. But it's not likely they will embrace them quickly either. The ruling classes of Britain and the United States have much to lose if the role of DU in Gulf War Syndrome is ever accepted as fact. Iraq is not the only country littered with DU; so are Kosovo, Serbia and testing grounds in the United States.

—K.B.

## Field Reports

### SLP Backs Ohio Steelworkers

On Aug. 11, we drove down to Mansfield, Ohio, to distribute leaflets and *The People* at the AK Steel mill where the United Steelworkers have been on strike for nearly a year. The members of the union were locked out after the union-company contract expired. The lockout occurred even though the union members agreed to work without a contract. A few days after the members were locked out vans full of strikebreakers were brought in "accompanied by security guards dressed in military-style clothing with bloused trousers and boots." So the union members have been out ever since.

We drove into Mansfield and, as we came into neighborhoods near the mill, we saw many signs on lawns supporting the strikers and their families. We passed four striker posts set up along one of the streets parallel with the mill. The first station had no strikers so we left some leaflets and copies of *The People*. The other three sites were occupied by pickets and when approached the men took the material. There were many cars passing by and the drivers sounded their horns in support of the pickets.

We drove to the union hall and there were 30 or 40 members and spouses inside. There were large loaves of bread piled up on one table, and meals were be-

ing served for the members and families. At another table checks from strike funds were being passed out to union members. I was able to ask about the strike and explain briefly the SLP program. One man was not interested but all the others accepted our papers and leaflets and were interested. I gave a \$20.00 contribution to the strike fund in the name of the SLP.

Robert "Pat" Burns,  
Organizer, Section Cleveland

### SLP Supports MoMA Strikers

On July 13, I went down to the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in Manhattan to try and bring the SLP to the people who need it. Although I doubt I made any instant converts, the results were for the most part encouraging and enlightening. Handed out were about 25 copies of *The People*, including issues from the months of May, June and July, and about 30 packets of leaflets which I made up for distribution to the strikers and their supporters. The leaflet packets included one copy of each of the following leaflets held together by a paper clip:

De Leon examines every major argument—pro and con—on the union question, traces confusion on what unions can and cannot accomplish to its source in the American Federation of Labor, and outlines the general principles on which genuine and effective working-class unions can be built. One of De Leon's best.

48 pages—\$1.25 postpaid

NEW YORK LABOR NEWS  
P.O. Box 218  
Mountain View, CA 94042-0218

## Apartheid As 'Trivia'?

At a recent news conference, Republican vice presidential candidate Richard Cheney defended his voting record on apartheid.

Apartheid was South African capitalism's system of racial separation and oppression. Under capitalist apartheid, white people (regardless of class) lorded it over blacks and "coloreds." Worse, under capitalist apartheid whole generations of black South Africans were oppressed, and uncounted numbers were tortured and killed.

In response to a reporter's question about his 1985 vote against a House resolution that urged the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in South Africa, Cheney got his feathers ruffled. He branded such questions as "trivia," then quickly qualified his remark by saying that he voted against the resolution because it was attached to recognition of the African National Congress, which at the time was branded as a "terrorist" organization by the U.S. government.

Cheney apparently "forgot"—and continues to forget—that the system of apartheid itself was organized terrorism committed daily against the majority in South Africa. Cheney, together with the leadership of the Republican Party in Congress, showed his real colors by voting—at least 10 times—against economic sanctions that would have punished, if only trivially, the capitalist ruling class of South Africa for continuing its campaign of terrorism.

—K.B.

1. *Strike!*
2. *What's Wrong With the Labor Unions?*
3. *National Platform*
4. *What Is Socialism?*

In total I spent about two-and-one-half to three hours on my feet talking in depth with several of the strikers and strike leaders as well as helping them in their verbal attempts to turn people away from the MoMA and its book and design stores.

I was also briefly interviewed by a journalist from a Dutch newspaper named *de Volkskrant*. The nature of the interview (which lasted about five minutes) had to do with what the SLP is, and that the goal of our supporting the striking UAW workers was not only a show of solidarity against management but an attempt to get the workers to see the bigger picture beyond their own small battle. SIU principles were discussed as well as those of workers' democracy and the disuading effects of minor reforms. I also gave her a copy of *Facts About the Socialist Labor Party of America*, a leaflet packet and a *Socialist Industrial Union: The Workers' Power* leaflet.

John-Paul Catusco  
National Member-at-Large

## Do You Belong?

Do you know what the SLP stands for? Do you understand the class struggle and why the SLP calls for an end of capitalism and of its system of wage labor? Do you understand why the SLP does not advocate reforms of capitalism, and why it calls upon workers to organize Socialist Industrial Unions?

If you have been reading *The People* steadily for a year or more, if you have read the literature recommended for beginning Socialists, and if you agree with the SLP's call for the political and economic unity of the working class, you may qualify for membership in the SLP. And if you qualify to be a member you probably should be a member.

For information on what membership entails, and how to apply for it, write to: SLP, P.O. Box 218, Mountain View, CA 94042-0218. Ask for the SLP Membership Packet.

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### To Our Readers

The imminent SLP headquarters move will cause some delay in processing subscriptions, literature orders, correspondence, etc. The patience and understanding of our readers will be appreciated.

ROBERT BILLS  
National Secretary



## 'AIR RAGE'

# Profit Motive Pushing Workers to the Edge

By B.B.

Recent attention has been focused on outbursts of frustration and anger by airplane passengers, usually vented against gate attendants and flight crews, but even against pilots while airplanes are still airborne. Charges and countercharges have been leveled by travelers and air personnel, but ultimately the phenomenon of air rage offers another example of the degeneration of the social fabric of capitalism.

A spate of letters on the subject was published in *The Dallas Morning News*. Some letters cast aspersions upon supposedly uncaring and lazy flight attendants. Others railed against restrictive baggage rules, blaring loud speakers, narrow and cramped seating, long runway waits, foil-wrapped ham-and-cheese sandwiches on four-hour flights, early arrivals only to find gates occupied, and numerous other inconveniences that turn airline work and travel into harrowing experiences.

One former "customer service" worker and occasional air traveler wrote to say he had "run across a fair share of snippy or unconcerned flight attendants," but also to criticize those who laid "all the blame...at the feet of flight attendants..." A contributing factor, in his view, is "a definite increase in surliness, demanding attitudes and an inability to exercise patience among customers."

One 23-year veteran flight attendant came closer to the mark in a letter giving a graphic description of her work experience. "The fault for so-called 'bad service' does not lie with the flight attendants," she said. "Today's belligerent society and uncaring corporate relations with airline employees have escalated to our current atmosphere."

Concerning her work experience, she added: "I have had people ask me to lift suitcases filled with books to an overhead bin because it's too heavy for them. Do these people think I do weight lifting? I'm a 5'3" woman and if that bag is too heavy for them to lift, I know I can't either...I now have a herniated disk from helping with bags and my company fought hard not to pay me my compensation when I was hurt."

She added that she had "seen passengers refuse to put their seats back up

for takeoff and landing, get verbally abusive when we ran out of choices of meals. I've been handed dirty diapers, tissues that were used to blow noses and air sick bags that are filled with vomit. I've seen first-class passengers clip their toenails, put their bare feet on backs of seats, use our hand towels to wipe their arm pits (and then hand the dirty towel to me.)"

She further added, "The flight attendant very often works all day with no food. Our connections are often 40 minutes and that gives no time to eat. I've had many eight-hour (on paper) layovers which is more like six hours' sleep. The company calculates from the time the aircraft parks at the gate."

As one worker put it, "We do our best to keep a smile on our face, but it's getting harder and harder when management tightens their purse strings and our schedules..."

Thus, airline passengers and airline workers are depicted as two conflicting forces flinging charges at one another without a resolution.

What this particular group of letter writers failed to take notice of is that many of the surly and troublesome airline passengers are not vacationing pleasure seekers, but workers on the job. Many, for example, are sales people or consultants of some kind who are frequently sent on long and tiring journeys in pursuit of some transaction for companies that are as indifferent to the welfare of their employees as the flight attendant cited said her employer is to her and other airline workers.

Other airline travelers are workers who

have been grudgingly granted time off from work for family reasons such as illnesses, deaths, graduations and weddings. A family emergency combined with an employer's grudging resentment over lost work time obviously creates stress.

Still other travelers may simply be afraid that the deteriorating condition of an aging air fleet from which airlines seem intent on squeezing every last possible air mile heightens the danger of flying.

The division that "news" media such as the *Dallas Morning News* depicts between airline workers and airline passengers by its seemingly objective printing of letters from disgruntled passengers and overworked flight attendants, etc., is a false one. It is similar to the false division that the media claims to exist between the "public" and workers on strike. Almost all airline passengers are of the working class. The ruling class, which owns or charters airplanes so as not to rub elbows with the sweating multitude, stands aloof from many of the problems that their social system creates—this one included.

It is a fact, so pervasive and well-known that it has been given wide publicity even by the propaganda mills of capitalism, that our "prosperous society" is a society in which stress and emotional disorders of all kinds are on the rise. These are not natural phenomena, except that human beings naturally rebel against conditions that are detrimental to their health and general well-being. That the rebellion is largely subconscious, that it stems more from the physical and emotional incapacity of the human body to cope with the working and general social environment that capitalism creates than

from a conscious realization that these are social consequences of social conditions, social arrangements, indeed, the capitalist social system itself, is regrettable. It is a fact nonetheless, and only by a conscious recognition and acceptance of that fact can the working class ever hope to cure the social ailments that plague us.

As long as the propaganda mills of capitalism succeed in diverting attention from the real culprit, the capitalist system, there is little danger workers will rise to the recognition of the true nature of the antagonisms gripping society and despoiling its potential for cohesion.

That potential lies in the promise of socialism. Transportation for work and leisure is an essential requirement of modern life. To what extent socialist society, based upon production for use, will need the modes, speeds, frequency and technologies of the current forms of transportation are questions that will be decided democratically by workers voting within the industrially interrelated complex of industries throughout the land.

These questions will be settled by the natural intelligence of people with a view to the healthiest, safest, most environmentally friendly and socially useful transportation technologies, not on the basis of squeezing the most profits out of working-class hides.

But as long as workers fail to recognize that the tensions they reveal and the anger they express by thrashing out aimlessly and pointlessly at their fellow workers—in short, as long as their powers of observation fail to register the fact that the whole working class is victimized by these social conditions, and until they make a conscious decision to root out the cause—these problems can only worsen and make our lives increasingly unbearable.

## FBI Trains Against Repression?

FBI Director Louis Freeh has reportedly begun a new program designed to "teach of the failure of law enforcement to protect citizen's rights" in Nazi Germany. The program supposedly demonstrates, as one report put it, "the evil of law enforcement when it 'abandons its mission to protect people,' and becomes 'an engine of repression.'"

A lofty aim, indeed. But the FBI hardly has to harken back to the Holocaust for such an example. Its own illustrious history provides ample evidence of the repressive nature of law enforcement. It also attests to the fact that law enforcement agencies do not exist to "protect people," but rather to protect the private property of the ruling class.

In serving the interests of the capitalist class, the FBI has routinely trounced the civil rights and liberties of the working-class majority in general and of minorities in particular. It is now public knowledge that FBI agents often stood by while the KKK did its dirty work in the 1960s and 1970s—sometimes even assisting, as its undercover agents did in the KKK's 1979 massacre of antiracist activists in Greensboro, N.C.

Other outrages include the FBI's assistance in relocating Nazi war criminals after World War II, its wiretapping of tens of thousands of citizens over the past few decades and its COINTELPRO undercover disruptions, of the civil rights movement, the antiwar movement and a multitude of minority organizations from the mid 1950s through 1971. The public record also attests to the agency's continuing involvement in repression in its undercover operations against CISPES and other organizations against U.S. intervention in Central America in the early 1990s.

The agency's "virtues" apparently do not include a lack of hypocrisy. —K.B.

### 255075100 years ago

#### The Spotlight Shifts to Indo-China (Weekly People, Oct. 28, 1950)

While fighting still goes on in smoldering, war-blackened Korea, the focal point of world attention is shifting to another "trouble spot"—the jungle-girt, southeastern Asian country of Indo-China. There the forces of Moscow-trained Ho Chi Minh have begun a long-anticipated offensive by registering some smashing victories against frontier outposts held by the French Foreign Legion. As a result of these initial defeats, the French rulers of Indo-China have decided to withdraw from their frontier outposts, abandoning large areas to the "Democratic Republic of Viet Nam."

Editorializing on "the seriousness of the situation in Indo-China," *The New York Times*, Oct. 17, attempts an apologetic explanation for American policy in Indo-China. This policy is one of supporting the French by giving them "all the arms they need or can handle," but refusing to intervene with American troops.

The *Times* admits that there are "genuine elements of nationalism and civil strife" in the Indo-China situation. It also admits that "the French obviously have not won the populace to their side, nor have they convinced enough people that they really intend to grant independence, or the equivalent [whatever *that* is!], to the country.

But "the fact remains," says the *Times*, "that the alternative to the French and their weak choice for a ruler—the Emperor Bao Dai—is communism under Ho Chi Minh. American policy is the logical one of preferring a regime that can be changed by democratic processes...to one that will

have a firm Communist lid put upon it."

This is, of course, so much pious hokum. The American plutocracy—and the *Times* is its leading mouthpiece—knows that there is just about as much chance of change "by democratic processes" in French Indo-China as there is in Stalin's Russia. Indeed, an important reason for the ferocity of Vietminh rebels is the fact that their demands in the past have always been answered with arrests, torture and machine guns and bayonets.

The real reason for American policy, therefore, is not preference for "a regime that can be changed by democratic processes," but simply the fact that Indo-China occupies a strategic place in Southeast Asia, and its loss to forces allied with Communist China and Soviet Russia would be a severe blow to the West. This policy is in fact one of supporting a reactionary colonial power and one that is thoroughly hated by its colonial subjects and slaves. The fact that this support extends only to grants of arms, and not to the dispatch of troops, is the result of a number of political considerations among which the following deserve mention:

1. Sending American soldiers to fight in Indo-China would be extremely unpopular here at home.

2. Incidents have occurred, such as attacks on American sailors on the streets of Saigon, that have demonstrated an almost universal hatred of all white friends of their colonial oppressors by the Vietnamese people. Bao Dai has no following equivalent to a South Korean army.

3. To be conspicuously identified as the supporter of French imperialism would tend to give the lie to American claims of being anti-imperialist.

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## Nader and the Greens

Many so-called progressives are telling workers that a vote for Green Party presidential candidate Ralph Nader is a vote for Bush. They mean to say that Nader has no hope of getting elected, and therefore votes for him will do nothing but steal votes from Gore and help the more reactionary Bush get elected. Other "progressives" disagree, arguing as Barbara Ehrenreich did recently that "alternative politics" must be started sometime, somewhere and that Nader and the Green Party are as good a start as any.

But do Nader and the Greens really stand for "alternative politics"? For which class interests in society does Ralph Nader speak? Do Nader and the Greens promote something meaningfully different from their Republican and Democratic opponents?

Nader's central concern is the extent to which government and culture are controlled by "corporate" (capitalist) interests. Nader's speech announcing that he was seeking the Green's nomination and the Green Party's platform alike contain arguments that "corporate" power subside or be shared. They contain elaborate and extensive ways and means to limit lobbyists, reform campaign financing, set up watchdog groups, etc., that they believe would clean up the political process, curb the power of corporations and thereby renew democracy.

One need not know the particulars of his reform proposals to know they cannot work—even those that may not have been tried before. Even if it were possible to effect them in today's reactionary political climate, they could at best only force new pathways for the perennial political influence buying of the capitalist class. The key here is that they seek only to limit "corporate power." They believe, at bottom, that labor and capital have common interests that allow power sharing. They don't want "over-regulation" of the daily lives of Americans by corporate interests, but their reform proposals would do nothing to end plain old "regulation" by the same capitalist interests, because they deal exclusively with *political* changes.

Nothing Nader and the Greens propose would fundamentally alter the *source* of the capitalist class' political power and the real reason why "corporate interests" do regulate the daily lives of Americans—capitalist ownership and control of the means of life and the entire economy that arises from them.

The antisocial behavior of "corporate interests" begins not in the political sphere or in that other sphere of much concern to "consumer advocate" Nader—the marketplace—but, rather, at the workplace. There the capitalist class robs the working class of the majority of the wealth workers create. It is at the workplace where workers are deprived of any control over the content of production, conditions of work and disposition of their product.

Ultimate control over basic production decisions rests instead with the capitalist owners. Because the very object of capitalist production is to reap

maximum profit for these owners, and because competition further compels capitalists to exploit workers to the maximum and keep production costs to a minimum, antisocial behavior is systemwide.

In other words, it is the very nature of the system that causes capitalists to not only foster unemployment and constantly push down wages, but also to dump poisons into the environment, foster militarism, support oppression of workers at home and abroad, sell unsafe products, practice race and sex discrimination, and engage in all the other despicable corporate practices that a variety of issue-oriented groups call attention to.

In the face of today's massive and rapidly growing social and economic problems, to call for reforms that would merely change the face of the beast—its political adornments—rather than the economic and social relations that are the cause of the problems—is to attempt to build a movement that upon being built will be powerless to effect any lasting improvements in the condition of workers.

The only effective way we can address the antisocial actions of capitalists is as workers, not as "consumers" or "citizens." It is as workers that we create the wealth that is the basis of capitalist power in the first place. Properly organized, the working-class majority can place the means of production under social ownership and assert its right to take full, democratic control over the process of production and the disposition of its product.

In other words, workers can build the industrial democracy of socialism. In such a cooperative economic system, whose motive to produce would not be private profit but the meeting of the people's needs and wants, workers would have both the incentive and the power to eliminate exploitation, unemployment, poverty, race and sex discrimination, militarism, pollution, etc.—directly, through their own governmental bodies based right where they work.

Workers can have a socially responsible economic system when they themselves take collective control of the economy. The reform proposals of Nader and the Greens have nothing to do with such a change, and everything to do with trying to find ways and means to extend the life of a system that must be completely abolished if workers are ever to have effective access to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Nader and the Greens stand at bottom for the same narrow agenda and class interests as the Democrats and Republicans. Like them, the Greens' stand for continued private ownership of the means of production places them in favor of capitalist-class interests over those of workers. They seek primarily to paint a "benevolent" smile on the face of the beast that oppresses us all.

The response of classconscious workers to the Nader campaign should be marked by renewed energy and commitment to the socialist cause. —K.B.



A De Leon Editorial

## 'Freedom Of Contract'

This analysis of the "labor contract" is a supplement to the analysis in De Leon's Socialist Reconstruction of Society.

Ave, Eliot, Liberator!

(Daily People, Dec. 2, 1904)

"Private and Public Liberty!"

"Freedom of Contract!"

These were the blood-tingling exhortations that punctuated President Eliot's recent speech before the Economic Club of Boston. Of course, he was applauded to the echo by the enraptured employers present. Whose heart would not respond to the call of freedom, all the more seeing the steady approach of socialism, or what Spencer termed "The Approaching Slavery"? And shall a gathering of rotund and spongy employers, panting after more rotundity and more sponginess, be thought to be possessed of less responsive hearts, perchance no heart whatever?

"Freedom of contract" is a term of equity. It is weighty with meaning, sense and justice. According thereto a contract is not valid if the contracting parties are not absolutely free to enter into it, or refuse. A contract is even considered immoral, as against public policy, if entered into under duress. "Freedom of contract" means all this. But now, a perverse mob, leavened with the perverser leaven of socialism, is setting up its many-headed monstrosity, and interpreting the term in a novel way—a downright abominable way. It is claiming that hungry men, unable to reach mother earth, from whose womb of natural opportunities they are barred by the holders of the social opportunities (capital), are not in the condition prerequisite for entering into a free contract! The many-headed monster is setting up the theory that such hungry men are under duress when they con-

tract with an employer, that the employer takes advantage of their stress, and that the "wages-contract," thus entered upon, is no contract at all, no more than when the wayfarer surrenders his purse to the highwayman, who covers him with a bludgeon! The many-headed monster is even more impudent. It demands the establishment of conditions for what it impudently calls the "true" freedom of contract—conditions under which natural and social opportunities, land and machinery, being open to all, as the property of all, whoever contracts shall be at a par with whomsoever he contracts with! And in the meanwhile the many-headed monstrosity carries its monstrous impudence to the point of setting up artificial fortifications, which it unpatriotically names "unions" and from behind which it seeks to restrict the freedom all along enjoyed by the employer!

Of course, such impudent assumptions are enough either to disgust or to enrage the liberty-loving employer. His one-time freedom of whacking the lion's share out of his helpless workingmen is threatened to be put in chains, and even his one-time dearly cherished liberty, of calling the terms that he dictated to his workingmen "a contract," is being questioned!

At a season, so trying to the capitalist class, what could there be more opportune than the ringing voice of a liberator—the right man, at the right place, uttering the right word—and insisting that the employers' "struggle for private and public liberty" is the vital question of the day?

Salve, Eliot, Liberator!

## what is socialism?

Socialism is the collective ownership by all the people of the factories, mills, mines, railroads, land and all other instruments of production. Socialism means production to satisfy human needs, not, as under capitalism, for sale and profit. Socialism means direct control and management of the industries and social services by the workers through a democratic government based on their nationwide economic organization.

Under socialism, all authority will originate from the workers, integrally united in Socialist Industrial Unions. In each workplace, the rank and file will elect whatever committees or representatives are needed to facilitate production. Within each shop or office division of a plant, the rank and file will participate directly in formulating and implementing all plans necessary for efficient operations.

Besides electing all necessary shop officers, the workers will also elect representatives to a local and national council of their industry or service—and to a central congress representing all the industries and services. This all-industrial congress will plan and coordinate production in all areas of the economy. All persons elected to any post in the socialist government, from the lowest to the highest level, will be directly accountable to the rank and file. They will be subject to removal at any time that a majority of those who elected them decide it is necessary.

Such a system would make possible the fullest democracy and freedom. It would be a society based on the most primary freedom—economic freedom.

For individuals, socialism means an end to economic insecurity and exploitation. It means workers cease to be commodities bought and sold on the labor market and forced to work as appendages to tools owned by someone else. It means a chance to develop all individual capacities and potentials within a free community of free individuals.

Socialism does not mean government or state ownership. It does not mean a state bureaucracy as in the former Soviet Union or China, with the working class oppressed by a new bureaucratic class. It does not mean a closed party-run system without democratic rights. It does not mean "nationalization," or "labor-management boards," or state capitalism of any kind. It means a complete end to all capitalist social relations.

To win the struggle for socialist freedom requires enormous efforts of organizational and educational work. It requires building a political party of socialism to contest the power of the capitalist class on the political field and to educate the majority of workers about the need for socialism. It requires building Socialist Industrial Union organizations to unite all workers in a classconscious industrial force and to prepare them to take, hold and operate the tools of production.

You are needed in the ranks of Socialists fighting for a better world. Find out more about the program and work of the Socialist Labor Party and join us to help make the promise of socialism a reality.

# Joe Hill Myth Skewed By PBS Documentary

Joe Hill was the subject of a television "documentary" produced by KUED-TV, the Public Broadcasting System's outlet at the University of Utah. The documentary was produced last year, but found its way onto several PBS television stations for Labor Day 2000.

Joe Hill was a member of the Industrial Workers of the World—not of the original and genuine IWW founded in 1905, but of the anarchist IWW that usurped the organization's name in 1908 and proceeded to desecrate its Constitution.

Hill's claim to fame is partly that he was a songwriter, a poet and musician. Mostly, however, Hill was a drifter and self-styled hobo. He has also been described as a "union organizer," though he rarely held a job and it is not known that he organized anything for the anarchist IWW to which he belonged.

In November 1915, Hill was executed at the Utah state prison for a crime he may not have committed—a double murder in Salt Lake City in January 1914. Hill's conviction was based on circumstantial evidence. Since his execution in November of 1915, Hill has become a legend and martyr to anarchists.

The KUED documentary claimed that Hill's affiliation with the anarchist IWW was not known by the Salt Lake police and was not used against him during his trial. Hill had no known criminal record, no known connection with the two murder victims and no known motive for the crime.

"Whether he is guilty of murder or not, Joe Hill demonstrates the passion an individual can have for a cause," said Nancy Green, a coproducer of the KUED pro-

gram. "He was a man who represented the small guy against the big industrial machine."

"Some people said he had the soul of a poet and that he could never commit murder, while others claimed he had a dark side," Green added. "Even his closest friends said he was a mystery."

At best, this is uninformed sentimentality. There is no mystery about the anarchist IWW and what it stood for. As a member of that outfit, Hill was also an advocate of physical violence, petty theft, sabotage, "direct action," the "propaganda of the deed" and similar "Wobbly" tenets.

Socialists know that capitalist historians and the universities that produce them have contributed much to capitalism's efforts to misrepresent important organizations and individuals in the history of the socialist and labor movements. Daniel De Leon, for example, is frequently depicted as a "dogmatist," a "dictator" and the cause of the split that occurred in the socialist movement in 1899. (A recent example is provided by Seymour Lipset's latest book, *It Didn't Happen Here, Why Socialism Failed in the United States*, which we hope to review in an early issue.) Eugene Debs, on the other hand, is frequently depicted as an "enigma." De Leon is the "dogmatist" because he was uncompromisingly committed to the basic principles of scientific socialism, while Debs is the "enigma" because he was willing to compromise those principles for the sake of gathering votes. When a capitalist university identifies someone like Joe Hill as a "martyr" of the working class or a "hero" of the "revolutionary move-

ment," Socialists know enough to know that something must be fishy.

The revolutionary socialist and labor movement has produced many genuine martyrs and heroes. Joe Hill is not one of them. The most that can be said of him is that he may have been unjustly executed for a double murder that he did not commit. Regardless of his innocence or guilt, however, his trial, condemnation and execution had nothing whatever to do with labor movement. Unlike Morrie Preston of the SLP, for example, Hill was not arrested, tried and convicted of murder because he was defending the right to strike. Unlike Frank T. Johns, the SLP's 1928 presidential candidate, Hill did not sacrifice his life in the selfless act of trying to save a drowning child. Indeed, Hill explained his refusal to provide himself with an alibi on the night of the killings for which he was executed by claiming the bullet wound in his chest, which was pivotal in his conviction, was received during a quarrel over a married woman.

The original IWW founded in 1905 was a sound, socialist organization. It was based solidly on the class struggle, and it grasped the need for the workers to organize on the political as well as on the economic field. Its acceptance of political action was crucial, for this is what put the movement out in the open where it had a chance to reach the masses with its message, and lifted it above the nature of a conspiracy. By accepting the principle of political action it assumed a posture in accord with civilization. In effect, it stated thereby that it would strive for a peaceful revolution to socialism, and that it would

hold in reserve its economic power to enforce the fiat of the revolutionary ballot.

The IWW held this sound revolutionary position until 1908. However, from the outset the IWW was harassed by anarcho-syndicalist elements within its ranks, elements that rejected political action and that wanted the organization to embrace the theories and practices of anarchism. De Leon and the SLP-trained members fought this element to a standstill. In 1907, De Leon conducted a famous debate with the physical forcists in the columns of the *Daily People*. This debate was later published under the title *As to Politics*.

The IWW became the "bummery" at the 1908 convention, partly as a result of desertions (such as that of Eugene V. Debs who embraced the IWW wholeheartedly when it was launched), and partly because the conditions that produced the revolutionary upsurge in 1905 were temporarily ebbing. The IWW was not fulfilling its earlier promise. As the anarcho-syndicalist elements became bolder, solid proletarian elements, such as the hard-rock miners of the West, withdrew.

In the *Daily People* of Sept. 28, 1908, De Leon related in detail how one Walsh, an IWW organizer in the West who was an advocate of anarcho-syndicalist concepts, organized an "Overalls Brigade"...and to the tune of 'I am a bum, I am a bum,'... Walsh brought this 'brigade' to the convention." These self-styled "bums," elected by no one, lined the walls of Brand's Hall in Chicago, where the IWW's fourth convention was being held, and provided the claquers and strong-arm boys to back up Vincent St. John, William Trautmann and others in their scheme to prevent the elected Socialist Industrial Unionist delegates from being seated. To accomplish this, the IWW Constitution was brazenly violated, and any pretext was seized on. At the end of four days, the "bummery" was in full control.

Since 1908, the IWW has reflected bummary concepts and practices. It defended personal theft and sabotage and became in every respect not an organization of the proletariat, but the ideal of the slum-proletariat.

In short, with the 1908 convention the IWW lost its claim to being a revolutionary organization. It still accepts the same anarcho-syndicalist position that was adopted at the fourth convention when it threw the political clause out of the preamble to its Constitution. This anarcho-syndicalist position, by rejecting the premises of political action (a trial of strength at the ballot box and a civilized solution to the social question) ipso facto plants itself on the platform of physical force.

In *As to Politics* De Leon dealt prophetically with the consequences of rejecting political action.

"Let the IWW...strike out the political clause: that moment they will find out that the present revolutionary agitation conducted by the IWW will have come to an end. Having placed itself upon the plan which the Russian revolutionists are constrained to agitate on [i.e., conspiracy and agitation for a violent overthrow of the existing order], the IWW will be treated to a dose which it will have itself invited, a dose of Russian governmental terrorism. So far from having contributed to raise the tone of the country, the IWW will have helped the capitalists to drag that tone down...."

Joe Hill may have been one of countless working-class victims of class justice, of his own anarchist tenets, or a combination of both—but no more.

(John-Paul Catusco contributed to this article. A contemporary account of one IWW local's ghoulish attempt to profit from his execution will be found on this page.)

## IWW Would Take Cash to Shoot Hill

### Toledo Local Appoints Five Men to Offer State of Utah Services as Executioners of Fellow Worker.

(*Weekly People*, Nov. 13, 1915)

Toledo, Ohio, Nov. 2—The Bummery IWW has achieved its crowning act of infamy: it is willing to become the executioner of its own member, Joe Hill (Hillstrom), for the sake of the cash that is in it. That was decided at a meeting of Local 86, IWW (anarchist IWW) last Thursday evening. The cash, \$250, will be paid by the state of Utah to the five men who are chosen as Hill's executioners.

The fact that this Bummery local has chosen five men to do the job of killing their fellow member Hill does not mean that the state of Utah will accept them as the executioners. The fact that the Bummery local, however, has taken such a step is sufficient to convict it of the infamy. It has expressed the willingness and readiness to do the deed; that is enough to convict it.

The letter published below shows in detail just what this Bummery has done in this instance. The letter was written by Josephine Bates, secretary of said Local 86, and was published in the *Toledo News-Bee* of Oct. 3.

It may be as well to mention that Josephine Bates was for several years secretary of the Socialist Party of Toledo, but now she denounces political action with all the vehemence of an anarchist of the Haywood IWW stripe. The Jack Lever mentioned as one of the men willing to shoot Hill was a speaker for the Socialist Party during the recent campaign here, and

probably also a member of that party.

This latest act of these Bummeryites is certainly one for which no term sufficiently strong or sufficiently condemnatory exists. Degenerate is only a mild term to characterize the act; ghoulish, brutish and beastly come nearer the truth, with the beasts of the jungle eminently higher in comparison.

The letter in which the secretary of Local 86 stated the action taken was as follows:

To the Editor of the *News-Bee*: It may be of interest to the readers of your paper to learn about the unique proceedings which took place in the IWW meeting in Toledo on last Thursday evening. The case of Joe Hill (Hillstrom), IWW poet and songwriter, was up for discussion.

It will be remembered that Hill was convicted of murder and sentenced to be shot in Salt Lake City, Utah, at sunrise, on Oct. 1.

Strenuous efforts on the part of the IWW and other labor organizations to save the life of this man resulted in commutation of sentence for 16 days by Gov. Spry.

On Oct. 16, the case was reviewed by the state board of pardons and that board decided that Joe Hill must die on Nov. 19.

The IWW claims that Joe Hill is a victim of capitalist-class conspiracy, that he has not been given a fair trial, and that his guilt has not, in the slightest degree, been established.

They cannot hang us for educating the working class to want all it produces, so they seek to consume our funds and energies and to take our lives by trumping up

penal charges and fastening them upon us.

We have left no stone unturned that might save the life of our fellow worker, but the owning class of Utah has decided that he must die. Therefore Local 86, IWW, Toledo, Ohio, is of the opinion that if he must be shot, he should have the privilege of dying at the hands of his friends.

The state of Utah will employ five men to shoot Hill on Nov. 19. One of the five will aim a gun which is loaded with blank cartridges. None of the five knows whose gun carries the blanks.

Each marksman is to receive from the state \$50 to aim and fire at Joe Hill, and the one blank insures them all a free conscience and the unalloyed enjoyment of the money.

Lots were drawn at the IWW meeting, Thursday night, to select five members to go to Salt Lake City and ask the state of Utah to pay them \$50 apiece to shoot Joe Hill.

The lots fell to Ernest Smith, Rodney Mehling, James Callahan, Jack Lever and Fred Cooney.

These men will ride freight trains to Salt Lake City in order to save every penny of the \$250 for the revolution. They will ask for the elimination of blank cartridges and request that every gun be loaded to kill.

"If Hill must die, his death, even as his life, should contribute to the propaganda of industrial unionism," say the five men who will "hobo" their way to Salt Lake to demand that the state of Utah help finance the IWW by paying the friends of its victim \$250 to shoot him.

Let his blood be upon the capitalist class of Utah and their political henchmen.

Josephine Bates, Sec'y, 24 21st St.

# ... Millions Reject Gore-Bush

(Continued from page 1)

a fraction of the value of the workers' product. Thus, workers as a class can only buy back a small percentage of the products they create. Despite the consumption and investment of the capitalists, this limit on market demand gives impetus to the crises (or "recessions") that throw millions of workers out of their jobs. These periodic "busts" have always plagued capitalism because they are inherent in the system's class division and production for profit.

Production for profit and competition between capitalist firms also fuel unemployment as each firm strives to lower its "labor costs" by automating, otherwise stepping up productivity—and "permanently displacing" workers. And as unemployment climbs, the resulting "oversupply" on the "labor market" gives capitalists the leverage they need to drive down the wages of the workers still employed.

Thus, the capitalist system is the root cause of the persistent unemployment, growing poverty, falling real wages and general economic insecurity now assailing U.S. workers—an economic picture that the two major party candidates and other pundits have in Orwellian fashion called "unprecedented prosperity." Imagine a prosperity that includes the loss of 416,000 manufacturing jobs since 1998 and real wages that, despite small increases for some workers over the last two years, are still close to 1979 levels.

As *The New York Times* described one worker's feelings, "She hears Al Gore talk about continuing the nation's prosperity and she cringes. She hears George W. Bush talk about how

things could be done so much better, and she cringes again. She knows what the Republicans mean when they talk about good times, and she believes that it seldom includes a 31-year-old black woman who works in the heat and grease of a fast-food restaurant."

"They use people like us to get votes," she adds, "and they don't end up doing anything good for us."

That's because neither George Bush Jr. nor Albert Gore can possibly solve the economic problems that plague workers. These ills are so inextricably a part of capitalism that no government policy can solve them. Both Democratic and Republican administrations and congresses have sought to curb unemployment through massive government spending, running deficits to boost market demand and alleviate economic crises. But because such efforts didn't address the root of the problem, they could not curb it fully, or for long. Deficit spending produces problems of its own, creating inflation, driving up interest rates and slowing the pace of new investment and growth. Despite capitalism's record-length "prosperity," millions are still unemployed and millions more are working part-time jobs involuntarily despite past record deficits.

If the government doesn't use enough deficit spending, market demand would fall off and economic crises would grow worse. Yet if it engages in too much deficit spending, interest rates and/or inflation would soar, magnifying crises in another way. Neither Bush's promise to make tougher cuts in spending, while cutting taxes, nor Gore's tax plans can solve that basic dilemma. Both

Bush and Gore talk about using various tax incentives to encourage investment and continue "prosperity," but that does not solve the dilemma either. Even if investments to make U.S. industries "more competitive" did go up, the very process of becoming "more competitive" entails lowering "labor costs"—squeezing wages and eliminating jobs. There is just no escaping such contradictions under capitalism.

What would make a real difference is the establishment of a socialist system. By getting rid of private ownership of the means of life, production for profit, exploitation and competition, socialism would remove all barriers to full employment.

With the workers collectively in possession of the industries, and administering the economy to serve social needs, everyone would have the right to participate in production and to receive the full social value of their labor—instead of having most of it appropriated by an idle class of owners. All work would be materially rewarding. There would no longer exist the absurd contradiction of millions being kept out of work, living in want, while industrial facilities sit idle and goods pile up for lack of buyers.

In sum, by making the economy the servant of all the people, and not just of a class of self-interested private owners, economic security and material well-being for all can be assured.

The Socialist Labor Party urges all readers of *The People* to reject the Democratic and Republican candidates and join the SLP in its efforts to prepare more workers for the building of a better society. —K.B.

# ... Verizon Strike

(Continued from page 1)

enterprises have demonstrated in the past, should business not be so booming, most corporations find it all too easy to break the terms of their labor contracts with near impunity.

That is because the existing unions depend, as they long have, upon the political state to defend their rights in any conflict—a political state that has little interest in ameliorating workers and much interest in placating and advancing the interests of the class of capitalists that owns and controls the nation's industries and services.

Lacking industrywide organization and instead organized into competing craft unions that often wage separate struggles rather than uniting workers in one common struggle, the existing unions generally lack the power to back

up their own demands should capitalists genuinely seek to oppose them. Because they accept capitalist ownership and control of the means of life as a necessity, the business unions rarely demand more than the capitalists are at any given time willing to accept.

The present unions' limited and weak scope of organization, their divisiveness and faulty tactics, reflect their lack of a class-struggle perspective. Theirs is not the working-class goal, the supreme mission of unionism, of organizing workers as a class to abolish the capitalist system and its class of capitalist parasites that live off workers' labor. Rather, the existing business unions at most dicker over the terms and conditions of exploitation while urging workers to accommodate their exploiters—don't demand too much,

don't ask for more than the company can "afford."

Verizon workers waged a courageous battle. This time their struggle found the company's capitalist owners of a mind to grant a few demands. Market conditions for the products and services produced by Verizon workers figured heavily into that decision. But with business unions negotiating the "deals" between workers and capitalists, the other side of the negotiating coin includes wage and hiring freezes and production speedups.

There is no new economy—just a capitalist economy that despite superficial changes remains based on production for profit and oligarchic, capitalist-class ownership and control of the nation's means of life. It's the same economy that for more than a century now has offered workers only occasional and short-lived respites from increasing economic insecurity, poverty and misery. The union chieftains, with their labor contracts, help to fasten more permanently the yoke of wage slavery around necks of workers in order to thereby continue the privileged positions afforded them as merchandisers of labor power to the capitalist class.



E. Gentry for *The People*

## activities

Activities notices must be received by the Monday preceding the third Wednesday of the month.

### CALIFORNIA

#### Oakland

**Discussion Meeting**—Section San Francisco Bay Area will hold a discussion meeting on Saturday, Sept. 30, 1–4 p.m., at the Rockridge Public Library, 5366 College Ave., Oakland. Subject: "Capitalism at Work: Globalized 'Prosperity' Masks Increasing Poverty and Exploitation." Moderator: Frank Prince. For more information please call 650-938-8370.

### OHIO

**North Royalton**—Sections Akron and Cleveland will hold a social with open discussion on Sunday, Oct. 29, at the Burns' residence, 9626 York Rd., North Royalton. Begins at 1 p.m. Refreshments will be served. For more information call 440-237-7933.

### OREGON

#### Portland

**Discussion Meetings**—Section Portland holds discussion meetings every second Saturday of the month. Meetings are usually held at the Central Library, but the exact time varies. For more information please call Sid at 503-226-2881 or visit our Web site at <http://slp.pdx.home.mindspring.com>. The general public is invited.

### TEXAS

#### Houston

**Discussion Meetings**—The SLP group in Houston holds discussion meetings the last Saturday of the month at the Houston Public Library, Franklin Branch, 6440 W. Bellfort, southwest Houston. The time of the meetings varies. Those interested please call 713-721-9296, e-mail [reds1964@netzero.net](mailto:reds1964@netzero.net) or visit the group's Web site at <http://home.beseen.com/politics/houstonslp>.

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## Mexico Looks to the Future After Decades of PRI Rule

By B.B.

*"Governments need to have a vision toward the future....At times it seems like society has passed us by."*

—Vicente Fox

Following Mexico's presidential election earlier this year, the U.S. media showered accolades on the victor, Vicente Fox. Fox's electoral victory at the head of his National Action Party (PAN) ticket not only ended more than 70 years of unbroken domination of the Mexican state by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), but reflected the aspiration of the Mexican people to pull their country out of the grinding poverty and industrial backwardness that many associated with the entrenched, bureaucratic and antidemocratic PRI.

During the election campaign, Fox evoked a vision of Mexico rising out of its impoverishment to reach eventual industrial parity with the United States and Canada by means of increasing investments and profits for capitalists. He spoke of eventual parity of wages for Mexican workers with U.S. workers, of peace and prosperity for Mexico's indigenous peoples, and of launching "the mother of all battles" to defeat the country's drug lords and cross border smugglers.

Whether Fox is simply a harmless social visionary or just another opportunistic politician remains to be seen. Either way, Socialists must applaud the end of the PRI's domination of Mexico, which certainly was a key element in preventing the country's progress. We do not say this because we have any illusions about Señor Fox. We say it for the reason, as Daniel De Leon once expressed it, that the road to progress, and thus to socialism, is "through the valley of the shadow of capitalism." Socialism is not possible until capitalism has worked out all of its



Mexican President-elect Vicente Fox.

possibilities. If the Fox-PAN election success over the PRI means nothing more than helping capitalism work out one of those possibilities it must be seen as progress, with all that the progress of capitalism implies.

Among other things, Fox wants to expand the "visa programs that already allow American employers to import limited numbers of foreign workers" and channel them to "where the United States has a worker deficit now." This expansion is to take place contingent upon Mexico reaching certain economic and social goals. One among the latter is raising the education level of Mexican workers to match standards required by U.S. and Canadian employers.

Fox also urged the United States to use the billions it now spends to prevent border crossings on border economic development.

But the centerpiece of Fox's vision is his concept of open borders, "to the free flow of people and goods" between Mexico, the United States and Canada. He en-

visions the emergence of a North American Union similar to the European Union and claimed it was critical to Mexico's "survival."

Following his postelection tour of Canada and the United States to peddle his program, however, a more cautious critical tone emerged. Since the election, his border proposals have met with a cool reception among Canadian and U.S. capitalist spokespersons. His ideas have been referred to as "intriguing" and "interesting," which almost certainly is simply a diplomatic way of damning them with faint praise.

During his U.S.-Canadian visit, Fox met President Clinton, with vice president and Democratic presidential candidate Albert Gore, and with Gore's Republican rival, Texas Gov. George W. Bush.

"I understand that he's talking about very large ideas for a long period of time," said Gore. Bush said that he "fully agree[s] that the mission, the goal, has to be to narrow the wage gap between our countries."

have special clothing and your clothes should be washed separately. But we had to work in our street clothes.

For that they paid 400 pesos a week (about \$43). We had no union, and there was the same pressure for production as at Delphi.

Now I've been at TRW for about a month and a half. There's really no difference in the conditions—if anything, my situation now is even worse. You could say it's forced labor, considering how the foremen talk to the workers, and how much psychological pressure they put on people.

We work an average of 14-15 hours a day. There's no transport service, and we get off at 4 in the morning. Usually we have to wait until 7 AM before we can catch a public bus. And getting home costs 20 pesos. That makes a very big dent in your take-home pay.

My job is bending steel cables for seatbelts for GM, Ford and some European car models. The cable is about a centimeter thick, and I have to bend about 3,500 pieces a day. The pain in my hands is so bad I can hardly sleep at night—then I have to get up in the morning to do it again. I've asked to change to another position, but no one wants to change because whoever works in this job gets a lot of pain in their wrists.

I feel that in three or four years my hands are going to be useless. I've been thinking that I'll have to get another job. What else can I do?

They say work in the maquiladoras is

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By this, Bush, Gore and Fox undoubtedly meant to be understood as meaning that the low money wages of Mexican workers compared to American workers must be brought "up" to the "higher" American standard. As the *Dallas Morning News* recently expressed it: "At the heart of the matter, Mr. Fox repeatedly has said, is the wage disparity between the United States and Mexico that forces thousands of Mexicans north in search of better paying jobs."

However, this idea that foreign labor, particularly in industrially undeveloped countries, is "cheap" is one of the great economic myths of our era that will not stand up under close examination.

Only last year, for example, the United Nations reported that American labor is still the most productive in the world. The U.N. study added that what may be called a "productivity gap" within global capitalism is narrowing. The narrowing, however, is not between the United States and most of the so-called developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, but between the United States and certain other "advanced" capitalist countries, such as Germany and Japan.

What this "productivity gap" means is that American labor remains the cheapest there is. By "cheapest" we mean that it costs the American capitalist less to buy the labor power to get a certain job done than it costs the capitalist of any other country. This is true despite the higher money wages paid to American workers and the shameful overwork, exhausting hours and incredible low wages of workers in other countries. The reason is, of course, that the American worker's productivity is highest. Thus, when wages are reduced to piece-rate terms, it will be seen that the rates rise as productivity is less and fall as productivity is more.

American factory workers get more money wages than their Mexican counterparts—but it costs American capitalists less per unit of production than it does their Mexican counterparts.

This gives American capitalists a tremendous edge in the world competition for markets, and explains why most American capitalists are ardent advocates of "free trade." Thus, while the goods produced by workers from other countries rarely drive American products out of a market by their cheapness, American commodities frequently drive out the products of so-called "cheap foreign labor."

What is working to change this equation, of course, is modern technology. That explains why, for example, Japanese automobiles and some foreign steel products have made large inroads into American markets during the last 20 to 30 years. In general, however, American technology remains superior, with the result that American-made products continue to make many more inroads into foreign markets than foreign products make into American markets.

Advances that have made technology increasingly portable are making it easier for American (and other) capitalists to export or build whole factories in other countries, particularly in such strategically located places as along the long U.S.-Mexican border. As this portability of technology advances it has the effect of changing what were once national labor markets into an increasingly international labor market in which increased labor supplies relative to the capitalist labor demand is bound to drive wages down toward a common international level. This is what is meant when politicians such as Albert Gore, George W. Bush and Mexico's Vicente Fox speak of "wage parity" between countries like the United States and Mexico.

## Maquiladora Worker Tells His Story

*PNS EDITOR'S NOTE: Omar Gil has been a worker in several industrial plants on the U.S.-Mexico border since he was 19. A life of mind-numbing work under unhealthy and dangerous conditions eventually convinced him that he must work to change things. He tells his story to PNS associate editor David Bacon who translated it from the Spanish.*

By Omar Gil, as told to David Bacon  
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NUEVO LAREDO, TAMAULIPAS—I come from Mexico City. My father had a business there, a small bookstore. Then, because of the devaluation of the peso, his store went broke. I was 11 years old. My parents looked for work in Mexico City, but they couldn't find any, so they came here to the border, to Nuevo Laredo.

So I went to school on the border. My plan was to go back to Mexico City, to the university, to study physics and mathematics or law, but we didn't have the money so I had to go to work.

At first I began taking classes in air-conditioning to get training for a better job. I didn't intend to work full time, but to study and work.

But working in the maquiladoras, it's not really possible to go to school, mainly because of time. Also, the pay is low, and

my job is very insecure. I haven't lost hope yet, but I'm not 100 percent sure anymore. Now there are other factors as well. I don't have any time to rest, and I'm getting physically exhausted.

I've been in these factories since I was 19. Now I'm 26. I don't have time for any kind of personal life—I leave work so tired that on the weekend I don't want to go anywhere. All my personal development has been put on hold so that I can just rest. I feel like my youth has passed me by.

I got my first job in a maquiladora back in 1993, at Delphi Auto Parts. They paid 360 pesos a week (about \$40). There was a lot of pressure from the foremen to work hard and produce, and a lot of accidents because of the bad design of the lines. The company didn't give us adequate protective equipment to deal with the chemicals, and the union there did nothing to protect us.

From Delphi I went to National Auto Parts where we made car radiators for Cadillacs and Camaros. There was a lot of sickness and accidents there too. There were no ventilators to take fumes out of the plant, and they didn't give us any gloves so people got cut up a lot.

I worked in an area with a lot of lead. If you work with lead, you're supposed to