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a journal of Class Struggle tactics and theory

Democracy

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For revolutionary change in North America

42,000 Teachers on Strike, Defy Return to Work

by the Victoria Anarchist Collective

increases.

A History of Strike Breaking

The British Columbia Teacher's Federation went out on strike Friday, bringing over 42,000 of their members onto the picket line in an action deemed illegal by the Labour Relations Board and strike-busting legislation brought in by the BC Government. The indefinite strike means 600,000 students are out of classes, as the province's elementary and secondary schools closed.

Public sector unions working in education-related fields have vowed to support the BCTF. Over 25,000 Canadian Union of Public Employees support workers, and numerous other workers from unions such as the BCGEU, are refusing to cross the picket lines.

The wildcat strike, being declared as a political protest by some within the union, comes after the Government's representatives effectively refused to collectively bargain with the union. In September, teachers voted 88.4% in favour of a strike mandate. The Government's response on Monday was to introduce Bill 12 - a piece of legislation forcing teachers back to work under the same conditions for a year without negotiation.

In the face of draconian measures making any strike by the BCTF an illegal act, the teachers voted 90.5% in favour of strike action on a second vote on Wednesday. On Friday, teachers flooded the picket lines as political activists, students, unionists, and members of the community came out in force to support the strike. Public reaction has so far been strongly in support of the strike.

The Teachers are demanding a return to collective bargaining rights in the province, and their fight is one of demanding fundamental rights to freedom of association through unions. Their chief bargaining demand is reduced class sizes and the restoration of services to students that have been cut by the Government. They are also demanding an increase in wages, while the Government has clearly stated they want no increases, meaning the value of wages will actually fall in the face of cost-of-living

The dominant political party in BC, the BC Liberals led by Gordon Campbell, has a history of strike breaking and aggressive privatization of public assets. In April and May of 2004, the Campbell government imposed a 14% pay cut and massive privatization on the Hospital Employee's Union, triggering wildcat sympathy strikes throughout the province. Although the HEU strike was eventually put down through a controversial deal orchestrated with the trade union bureaucracy, resentment towards government remains high across the province.

While the BCTF's strike is about freedom of association and collective bargaining, it is also a fight over the future direction of the public education system. The core demands of the teachers revolve around restoration of student services and the reduction of class sizes. There is also the question of privatization, as the Government has pursued an aggressive policy of privatization and union-busting throughout the public sector. There are strong indications the government may move towards privatizing elements of the public education system if they are able to win in their fight against the teachers.

Political Response

The New Democratic Party led by Carol James, currently the opposition party to the BC Liberals in the provincial legislature, is currently seen by many as the chief political opposition to the Government's policies. However, during the 90's the NDP majority government steamrolled over the BCTF during two consecutive terms.

While the NDP seeks to gain political mileage from the conflict by publicly issuing statements of support for the teachers, they have refused to concretely support the illegal strike. Carol James, the leader of the party, has indicated the teachers should "obey the law" when it comes to defying back-to-work legislation imposed by the government.

There is also skepticism over the role of the BC Federation of Labour, who have recently stepped into negotiations with the government over the dispute. While the BCFed backs the BCTF, many work-

ing people remember the BCTF's sellout of the HEU strikers in May of 2004. The BCFed's refusal to organized resistance to the assault on trade unionism pushed by the government in 2002 also puts in doubt the bureaucracy's commitment to supporting the strikers.

While the Campbell government calls for strikers to "return to work" and for "respect for the rule of law", they are increasingly facing accusations of unfairly applying the law. In the case of Telus workers who have been on strike against the private-sector telecommunications company for weeks, the government and courts have consistently refused to punish corporate management for using replacement workers in clear violation of the Labour Relations Code.

Support for the strike remains strong throughout the province, with both the Government and BCTF digging in their heels for a show down that could determine the future of the public education system and collective bargaining in the province.



Saul is a member of the Victoria Anarchists Collective, a member collective of NAF. He is also a rank and file member of the British Columbia Government Employees Union.

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Military Service: A Poor Choice

by Ella Powers

The people in the United States with the least opportunity are sacrificing the most in terms of military service. The Department of Defense (DoD)

acknowledges in their analysis of social representation (May 2005) that people who enlist in the military have a lack of financial resources and do not feel that they have been successful in their education, or that they have control over their lives. Military recruits are not drawn to the military through

a patriotic desire to serve their country, but because of a lack of self confidence and few opportunities. Current military recruiting practices are appropriately characterized as an economic draft.

Recruiters intentionally seek out areas with depressed economies. The characteristics of those targeted include: lower family incomes, larger family sizes, and less educated parents. These under appreciated men and women are suddenly desirable. No attempts are made to recruit in the more affluent schools, with college bound students.

The newest surge in recruiting is of non-citizens. Citizenship is not required for enlistment, though legal status is. Citizens are preferred because non-citizens are not allowed to serve in some high security jobs, and those involving nuclear weapons. However, in the current climate recruiters are urged to enlist non-citizens, and in fact they make up 40 to 50% of new recruits. Typically recruiters are preying on the less privileged in our society, who are not allowed to be a part of the prosperity of this country, but are asked to risk their lives.

Because the military realizes that their personnel are not serving based on altruism and patriotism, they fear that retention will be low in the face of increasing demands. Military spouses, when polled, have reported that the rigorous schedules and repeated and unpredictable deployments are "major problems" in their families. This is one reason recruiters are not making their goals.

After the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 the nature of military service changed. At the time, military analysts believed that the patriotic fervor would lead to more volunteers. However, recruitment has become more difficult because of the unpopularity of the war in Iraq, long deployment overseas, and well publicized casualties. The majority of Americans consider the war to have been a mistake. The number of African American and women recruits have decreased since 9\11. This low retention, paired with more difficulty recruiting, results in desperate recruitment tactics.

By June 30th of this year there were an equal number of desertions already, as in the entire year of 2004. They are losing people and using up people. Twenty-five percent of non combat deaths are suicides. In 2001 the number one cause of death in the army was suicide.

Recruiters are salespeople. In order to make their goals, they exaggerate the money that is available for college. Only 2\3 of recruits receive any college

funding. Despite the extensive advertising to the contrary, only 12% of male recruits and 6% of female recruits report using their military training in civilian jobs. Also, the military is not an equal opportunity employer. Latinos make up 10% of the military, but 20% of front line troops. African-Americans make up 20% of the military but only 5% of high-ranking posi-

tions. Furthermore the military practices the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" in terms of sexuality. Women rarely have access to high ranking positions, and are likely to experience sexual harassment and/or rape. These are some of the main facts that are misrepresented

by recruiters and in military propaganda.

They also do not tell recruits that they have a window of time to change their mind after enlisting. This is important because they are sometimes signing up students years before they are eligible for service. This is called the

Delayed Entry Program (D.E.P.). People should know that until you report for Basic Training, you are not in the military. If you decide not to join after signing up with D.E.P. you are not required to have any further contact with your recruiter. If you don't go, you are not in the military.

This war is about opening up new markets and opportunities for rich businessmen. The billions that have been spent so far in Iraq come from working people, and we will not see the benefit. We will feel the loss of lives, and the crumbling social structure. It is not the military and police that are being cut, but healthcare and education. Our basic civil liberties are threatened, and our children's information is not private in their schools. It is time to take action.

Without the facts about the current military situation, youth and parents cannot make informed decisions. Four billion dollars per year is now being spent on military recruiting in schools and public places. With

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all this, it is important to show the other side. Portlanders have joined other cities in educating students about the reality of current military life. This is an important part of stopping the supply of bodies flowing into Iraq, and ending the war. Many people

do not know that for seven years Portland students were not exposed to military recruiters at school. Their personal information was not given out to the federal government and the private company that stores and controls it. With "No Child Left Behind", the Bush administrations education law, release of student information is mandatory unless the parent or student opts out. This law also requires that schools allow recruiters access to students in their high school or state college. Now, in Portland the recruitment issue is becoming paramount to the anti-war movement. The Portland Anti-Recruitment Coalition began actions on the first day of school this year, and are continuing to educate students on this issue, and to train them to organize in their schools and communities.

There are two parts to the work, student and parent participation. The student organizing is currently focused on workshops in classrooms and youth forums.

The parent\ teacher work is on limiting recruiters by lobbying the school board and increasing PTSA (Parent, Teachers, Student, Association) participation on this issue. If you would like to take part in this work, please contact pamrcoalition@yahoo.com and come to our October 22nd Clinic at Augustana Lutheran Church on NE 15th and Knott, from 10am to 2pm (in Portland). Everyone is welcome!



Ella Powers is a Portland Public School teacher. She is a member of the Firebrand Collective, a member collective of NAF.



Military Recruiter at Benson High, in Portland.



Resources for Young People About Alternate Options to Joining The Military

For pre-enlistment, military and draft counseling:
GI Rights Hotline: 1-800-394-9544

www.objector.org-The Central Committee for

Conscientious Objectors

www.WarResisters.org

www.centeronconscience.org

War Resisters League, Portland Chapter-503-238-0605

Check out options to the military:

(from the Military and Draft Counseling Project)

For Job Training-

The Private Industry Youth Employment Institute-

503-280-1058 www.yei.org

Bureau of Labor and Industries

(apprenticeships and

training)-503-731-4072

www.boli.state.or.us

The Job Corps Program 503-326-6800

www.nw-jobcorps.com

For Volunteer Service

Programs:

Americorps-local and national service

www.americorp.org

Northwest Service Academy

www.northwestserviceacademy.org

For College Financial Aid: ask local community college counselors

"The Student Guide"-free from

U.S. Dept of Education

1-800-433-3243

www.collegeispossible.org

www.college-scholarships.com

www.collegenet.com/mach25

for additional websites, call 503-238-0605



The Company and the Unions Who Help Them

An Anarchist Perspective of the AMFA Strike

On August 19th 2005, the Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association (AMFA), representing both the mechanics and cleaners at Northwest Airlines went on strike. As of the day of this printing, the strike is pushing its 50th day. The company is in bankruptcy, the AFL-CIO and the CTW (Change to Win) Federation have given no national level support for the strike and the International Association of Machinists (IAM) are currently scabbing the struck work.

The strike began over dramatic cuts proposed to the union's membership. The company wanted them to take a 20% cut in pay, a loss of workers from 4,400 workers down to roughly 1,100 and a 25% hike in medical premiums. This action would have effectively destroyed the union. Striking was the only option. NWA spent the last 18 months preparing for the strike by training replacement workers and getting backdoor deals with other unions to not honor the picket line.

So what of the other unions? Did they honor the picket line; did they help shut the company down? The answer is sadly, no. The pilots union took more and more cuts as time went on in a desperate attempt to save their pension, but as bankruptcy set in, those efforts had failed. The flight attendants union has suffered the most as the strike went on. They have lost a majority of their jobs to outsourcing; they got slammed with huge pay cuts and are on the verge of losing their union - just like the mechanics. The flight attendants were the closest union to going on a sympathy strike, but the vote failed by only rallying 51% support.

The other union on the premises, the IAM was the union that AMFA originally broke away from. Instead of putting past politics aside, IAM's leadership stuck with the company and made a backdoor deal with the devil. They promised not to honor the strike so long as they got roughly 30% of the work back under the IAM. In Seattle, there were even IAM organizers out the trying to organize the scab workforce. It's sad to see this type of thing that only seeks to divide the workers and help the bosses in the long run.

Ever since day one of the strike, there has been support from the Northwest Anarchist Federation (NAF). Some of the good things about that has been constant picket line support, building community through relations with the strikers and making direct action possible within the area we live. We thought that it was really essential and a big key to have a constant presence along the picket lines. It helped build some trust with the strikers - many of whom this was their first strike and the very first with AMFA.

Seattle was one of the more difficult areas to mobilize support from outside the union. First off, the Seattle local is one of the smaller of the NWA

striking areas. Detroit has roughly 600 strikers, Minneapolis has over 1,000 but the rest of the mechanics and cleaners are spread through the other 20 or so locals. Seattle started out with only 103 strikers. The AMFA lines were really thin; they had 4 hour picket duties so they were really pushed to their limits. So one of the most forefront issues we had to tackle was getting more people out on the lines.

After organizing more of a strike support base, we rallied people to come out every friday. Mostly this work just involved letting other goups and individuals know what was going on so that we could coordinate picket line visits. This was effective in a few ways: First, the strikers felt as though they we getting more community support. A show of force on the lines can really do wonders for the morale on the lines. Second, it serves to reinforce the picket lines. Slowing down trucks at the main hanger, a larger presence at the terminal, it all helps to bring more publicity on a very direct level to the strike by the mere principal of having a larger show of force. Another effective force in

the strike came from bringing in sympathetic union members to walk the line.

With a few of our members in the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) it was fairly easy to help bring about national support throughout all the shops. We were able to help get a motion passed at the General Assembly, even if its mostly a paper show of support, it really did some good to bring some attention to AMFA's struggle.

Other mainstream unions were extremely difficult to get any kind of support. The main support for AMFA has come out of Detroit and Minneapolis: the UAW gave over \$880,000 directly to the workers on strike and a number of other unions have given really direct support on the local level. Seattle however saw very little - if any support. The local Teamsters branch honored the picket line and refused to cross while the ILWU (International Longshoreman and Warehouse Union) showed constant support out on the line. Building solidarity between other unions dur-

ing strikes has been a tremendous challenge that needs to be addressed not only within NAF but within other organizations as well.

You can expect a full look back and steps for success in the future. In the mean time, the strike is still going on and workers are getting closer to losing everything. Do

what you can to really help support this strike and fight not only for workers at NWA but workers in every industry. special thanks to the Front Line Collective, the ILWU, and the IWW for coming out to the line.

Drew is a member of the Anarchist Communist Union of Seattle, a Local Union of NAF.



Industrial Experience

by Arthur J Miller

Got called in for a night shift Tote job, that is working a Totem container ship. After about four hours the foreman comes by and tells us that we may have to work over tonight, well most of the time when they say that it means having to work over after an 8-hour shift, but this is different, we were already working a 12 hour shift and they wanted 14 hours because the ship had to sail at 2 am and the crew had the cooler out of one of the four main engines and we had to have four large pipes connected back up to the engine before they sailed, or they would have to sail on just three engines. So what ever happened to the 8-hour day?

I can't turn down the dispatch because I'll lose my unemployment, lose my seniority and place on the work list. The union don't give a damn about what we think about long hours because they make good money off them by our working dues.

We finally got called down from our other job to hook-up the pipes to the engine. The foreman had left and the only leadman was a welding leadman. Nice guy but a little too gung-ho and he did not know much about pipes. He was a bit worried about getting the pipes connected in time because I told him of the trouble we would have because the pipes were connected to expansion joints. Expansion joints are rather like accordions, you install then with braces weld to them compressed and after the fit up you take the braces off, and before you take them out you should weld new braces on them because if you don't they will expand when you take the pipes off them and they are hard as hell to get back in again and it takes time to compress them again so that you can connect the pipers.

Any time I start a pipe job I first look at it and figure out how I am going to do it and possible problems that must be overcome. Part of that is having a

very clear idea on how I am going to rig the pipe and see the possible problems there. The welding leadman sees one pipe still hooked up to the overhead chainfall that runs on a trolley. This is set up to pull parts out of the engine and is rather large, it would take two people or more to pick it up and it had a five-ton load limit.

The leadman gets another fitter to help start pulling the pipe over without watching what they are doing and they break off a sensor pipe off the main pipe. I told them to wait for a moment and I would help. The first thing I noticed was that the pipe was not rigged correctly because the strap was straddling the pipe rather than coking the pipe. What this means is the pipe could slip. So I said we had to have someone on both ends of the pipe so that it would not slip out of the strap.

So we start moving the pipe down the trolley to where it needed to go. I was watching out for other parts on the pipe so that they would not break off and keeping my end of the pipe steady. Well the leadman was pulling the chainfall down the trolley which he had not checked out before hand and he was not watching the chainfall. All of a sudden the pipe and the large chainfall come crashing down on me. What the leadman had failed to notice is that when the ship's crew pulled the engine's cooler out and after they had pulled that pipe off to the other end of the trolley they had cut out a section of the trolley and they had not put that section back up. It was like a train crossing a bridge with a section of the bridge out, and the only place the train could go is down.

So there I was knocked to the deck with my whole left side of my body smashed up. A big old gash on my collarbone bleeding and swelling up like a golf ball. I could barely move my shoulder and had pains in my side and back and a cut on my head. They thought my collarbone was busted and maybe my shoulder (turned out I have hard bones and nothing did break). They got me out on to the main deck but

the ship did not have a way to get me to the front gate and the could not let the ambulance in the terminal, I guess either because of so-called homeland security or because that may cause a delay in the loading of the ship. So they called up for a longshore truck to come up and take me to the gate. Half way to the gate the union rep. stopped the truck yelling at the driver as if he had committed some great crime. What it turned out to be is that they could not pull a truck off the work on loading the ship even for an injury. There I was in the trucking all smashed up and bleeding hearing this damn union rep. yelling about the only thing that mattered was getting the ship loaded.

This little story has a point to it. Trusting experience and knowledge is far more important than wanting to do things without such experience and knowledge. My industrial experience would not have allowed that "accident" to happen because I knew better than to just doing things without knowing the impact and dangers of my actions. Had I been the person to start rigging that pipe over I would have looked down the line to see if there would have be any problems because it is a part of my job to do that. Had I been a few inches closer inline to where the chainfall had dropped I would be dead, smashed like a bug on a windshield because someone acting without knowing the possible impact of their actions. As it was I was only hit on the left side of my body.

That is why in most things I trust the experience and knowledge of those in industry over just theoretical abstractions. In my industry trusting experience can be the difference of life or death. If nothing else it makes a big different in getting the job done and done right. That is why I speak out against things like the CIC plan. Like that leadman tonight the CIC does not know the impact that its plan will have on our organization because the CIC plan is not based upon industrial experience. And like what happened tonight because that leadman did not know what he was doing the CIC plan could lead us off a cliff and the whole damn thing could come crashing down on us.

So here I sit hurting like hell but too much on my mind that I have to speak before I rest..



Montreal's Workers Solidarity Network: Class Struggle Unionism

Patrick: What is the goal of the Workers Solidarity Network?

Nicolas: We try to promote solidarity within the labour movement. This is a broad statement but it is applied in different forms like strike solidarity, direct action case work and helping with union drives. We want to prove to ourselves and workers in general that it's possible to fight the bosses with or without an established union. Fundamentally, what's needed is to make a list of demands and grievances and act upon them collectively. This can be done in a traditional union framework or in non-conventional frameworks that some struggles require.

We want to popularise what we call "un syndicalisme de combat", which translates to solidarity unionism or class-struggle unionism in English. The basis of "le syndicalisme de combat" for us to establish tangible rank n' file power before entering into a conflict with the bosses. It is no use to strike when the struggle is not led by the rank n' file, when it is completely controlled by union leadership. What's needed is active participation by all workers and an understanding that true labour power comes from there and not from the negotiations table.

We don't pretend to be more important than we are. And we don't want to take the place of existing unions. Usually what we propose is double membership, both within an established and legal union and within the Workers Solidarity Network. We believe trade unions and the current the labour movement can be radicalized from within, so we don't see the need to establish a more leftist/syndicalist union that would out seed the business and reformist unions. However, we do think it is important for rebel workers and the non-unionized to have a specific point of convergence in the movement, that 's why we formed the Workers Solidarity Network!

Patrick: How are you organized?

Nicolas: Membership is very loose. All you have to do is agree with our platform, respect our constitution, pay 10\$ in annual dues and come out to actions once in a while. Obviously some members attend meetings more frequently and take up more coordinating tasks, but this is not integrated into our formal structure. The only positions we have in the network our treasurer (who also keeps track of membership) and external coordinator. Both of these positions are unpaid. As we grow, it's looking as if more positions and/or committees will be created, such as a legal

committee and a agit/prop committee, for example.

We hold general assemblies once a month. Every member has an equal say in these meetings. Tasks are mandated and these mandates are immediately revocable if we feel the work isn't being done in a proper fashion. It's pretty much basic direct democracy, I guess.

What's needed is active participation by all workers and an understanding that true labour power comes from there and not from the negotiations table.

Patrick: What type of actions do you take part in?

Nicolas: One of the things we do is strike solidarity. When strikes and lockouts happen, we go out to the picket lines and support the workers as an organized group. It's surprising how much this basic practice is lacking in the labour movement. Usually when strikers see us their reaction ranges from being pleasantly

surprised to all out astonishment.

Another thing we do is defend our members interests and rights in their workplaces. In these moments we truly act as a union. One action that kick-started the network was a mass visit to a boss who hadn't paid the training hours of one of our members. 40 people visited him at his pizzeria at supper time on a Friday night demanding the unpaid wages. It took about 10 seconds to get the money! What a great feeling of satisfaction that provided...especially since this worker is an undocumented immigrant who didn't trust legal and official processes to settle his grievance, we were his only recourse.

Finally, we help with union drives. Well, we are currently taking part in our first union drive, to be more precise. Usually, pro-union workers get identified very fast by management during union drives, that leads to isolation and harassment. We are thinking we can help out with scouting at the workplace and with house visits. This will be done in collaboration with an established and legal union.

Patrick: Why is an organization like the Workers Solidarity Network needed?

Nicolas: I think I've brushed this before, but again, mainly to radicalize the labour movement and defend the interests and rights of non-unionized workers.

Patrick: What suggestions do you have for workers who want to start a similar organization?

Nicolas: Be patient. The Workers Solidarity Network came out of a long process of supporting strikes and discussions on how unions can become more democratic and combative and how, we as working people, can actually start winning some fights against the bosses after a few decades of defeats. At the same, set specific goals. When we first founded the

network in February 2005 (before that discussions were had amongst smaller groups of labour activists), we set the goals of adopting a platform and a constitution, producing a pocket-sized pamphlet on basic rights, studying the labour code and publicly launching the network on Mayday. All of these goals were achieved. Now we are focussing on specific campaigns. Throughout the summer we supported the strike at the Omni Hotel in Montreal, that ended in a victory for the workers against a boss who's the 4th richest man in Texas and a personal friend of George W. Bush. As I said, we are helping with a union drive. In late October 2005, we will hold our first Orientation Conference. We have been invited by a leftist student union to give talks in schools about basic rights.

Anything is possible if you organize right and you are committed to what you are doing. Thank you for the interview. Good luck with Firebrand and your activities in Portland!

Nicolas, Workers Solidarity Network member

"A fighting union!"

Workers Solidarity Network

rst.wsn@gmail.com, 514-859-9092



Patrick Star is a rank and file member of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters, Local 247. He is also a member of the Firebrand Collective, a member collective of NAF.



Anarchy In New Orleans?

by PJ

Death and devastation. A chemical factory explosion. Fires rage & tempers rise. Days without food, water, medical supplies. Capitalist media around the world screamed the headline 'ANARCHY' today.

It's very important to the war-makers, lawmakers, and oil investors to submerge the real definition of anarchy: mutual aid without government, cooperation in solidarity, and ORDER. Their authoritarian control is deeply threatened by their own complete failure to meet basic needs. Their authority has rested on the divides of class, on misogyny and racism. Capital's media pitches images of black men with bags as 'looters', while a lighter-skinned man is carrying something he found.? They didn't get pictures of the corrupt police, allowed into WalMart for 'relief measures' instead loading their car trunk with DVD's and dogfood. The rulers have no humanity, only profit interests. They continue madly pouring billions into war, while expecting 'charities' will bail out New Orleans.

Law is not order. Bush knew that levee would fail in at least 2001. Those who 'chose not to evacuate' were the poor, black, elderly... while the rich had long left for their second homes, safe hotels and elsewhere. But it doesn't stop there, as the ruling class seem determined to make things even worse. Now the Governor of Louisiana brings in the National Guard, many young shell-shocked soldiers freshly

returned from Iraq, 'M-16's locked and loaded,' she says about their killing capacity, 'and I expect they will.' They are sent in like so many other mercenaries, first to protect private property. [Remember that through the poverty draft, the south has already suffered among the heaviest casualties in Iraq, where doubtless many boys sit tonight wondering why they can't just come home to help their families and neighbours, whether they themselves will make it out alive.] A decent journalist from Toronto is nearly shot on sight for taking pictures of flagrant police brutality.

If this was anarchy, there would be neighborhood bases established much earlier to coordinate relief. Direct action toward liberation. Many people actually said it was the looters that first distributed food and water. Perhaps capital will not be able to recuperate. Possibly, finally, the bosses and their media lap-dogs may not escape the people's wrath on this one. Will it become widely understood that another world is possible?

"Disasters like this can only be met when

ordinary people begin to work together on a human level, to the best of their abilities helping each other to get through, instead of relying on highly bureaucratic and irrational social abstractions to save them," as 'Shevek' put it to Indymedia, "Then there will actually be anarchy in New Orleans."

Justice? Just us. Get organized.



This article is from Strike! The english language newspaper of the Northeast Federation of Anarchist Communists. www.nefac.net



New Orleans SWAT protecting private property instead of assisting in the rescue efforts

Labor Law and the US Labor Movement

An interview with Dave King by Ella Powers

Ella: How does labor law effect workers in the United States?

Dave: Labor law is the foundation that the whole structure of labor relations is built on. The way I look at it, labor's strength is the ability to withhold labor. That's what makes us strong. We do the labor, we do the work, and if we stop it really screws things up. And, so that's our power, the power of a strike. And if you look at labor law, I'm not talking about the NLRB (National Labor Relations Board) so much, but the process of mediation and all that kind of stuff that goes on during negotiations, and when a contract is being struggled. It's all about preventing a strike. A strike is so serious and so bad that we don't even use the word strike. We call it an "unfortunate situation". We're here to prevent an "unfortunate situation". And the mediators say, "we're here to prevent an unfortunate situation". And we go, "Do you mean a strike?" Yes, that is an unfortunate situation. And after all, no one wants a strike, everyone is hurt by a strike. Our workers loose wages and companies loose productivity, and blah, blah, blah, blah..... It's all about that.

Ella: So, you're saying that it is not the workers that loose when a strike occurs, but the employer?

Dave: Yes, in most cases, and another part of the strength of workers is that people get passionate, but they get passionate when they get passionate. Somebody gets fired and it pisses everybody off. Some injustice happens and it's just the straw that broke the camel's back, and people are ready to raise hell. But, labor law is structured to prevent anything from happening at that time when people are

pissed. "No, no, no-we have cooling off periods." We have to go through the process organizing the union, we have to have a NLRB election, we have to do.... da ta da. All this crap you have to go through to prevent people from acting when they feel like acting.

Ella: What are ways that labor laws work when there is a strike?

Dave: Well, one thing that happens during a strike. There's laws, laws, laws- all kinds of laws to prevent an unfortunate situation. But, if you do go out on strike, it doesn't matter what happens. I actually saw a guy get run over by a car, a scab on a picket. The scab went in, got out of this car. Way back in '69 or '70. Labor was much stronger then. Cops were standing there because we had been stopping scabs a lot. The were standing right there- watched this guy get run over. The scab got our of his car, walked into work, and nothing was ever done. The guy was in the hospital for months from that. And I tell Laurie(my wife) when she was out there at Williams' control when they were on strike, because these professional scabs, they know, they'd run over you and nothing is going to happen to them. And if you piss them off, they're just having a bad day, or whatever, they can run over your butt. They often are professional scabs . Professional scabs are semi criminal type people that are available to break strikes. They'll go where they need to go, and they demand pretty good money. They will fly them around and run them through a picket line. There were some professional scabs, I'm sure at Williams' Control and the guards were special strike security people. I was talking to one of them. These security companies have teams that are available for strike. Those guys out there were not very loyal at Powells' and they were really

pretty friendly, Pinkerton guys. There is no labor law when it comes to a strike. You have the right to be run over.

Ella: How does labor law influence the activity of unions?

Dave: The structure of labor law determines that unions are going to be organizations that are threatened by workers being organized. That's what it really is. If the workers are organized independent of the leadership of the union, then they may force an unfortunate situation. And the union doesn't have the control to stop it. Also, union leadership, which means the staff, is really inconvenienced by an unfortunate situation. It's a difficult time for them, and they are scared of it. Unless they are totally on top of it and organize it themselves. But, it takes them out of their daily routine.

Labor's strength is the ability to withhold labor. That's what makes us strong. We do the labor, we do the work, and if we stop it really screws things up. And, so that's our power, the power of a strike.

And in their defense, I don't see the people in the leadership of the labor movement as the problem. Their behavior and the way they act, and who they are, is a lot determined by the law they have to operate under. And it may be, that leadership is selected, and you have people that are willing to work and able to work, negotiate a contract because it's Nov. 3rd, or whatever, and it's not a big thing. It selects out people who are able to lead and respond to the feelings of the rank and file. Those people are not appropriate to be running a union. The rank and file doesn't go by the dates and times and procedures, and delaying tactics of the law.

Ella: Can you think of a specific example of these types of problems in business unions?

Dave: So, that goes to the extent of a friend of mine, Jeff, Mr. Anarchist, who worked for the city. The city workers were all fired up to go on strike, and they were so fired up that they were able to maintain their head of steam through all of the delaying tactics. And they were ready to go on strike when the negotiations broke down, and when they came to an impasse. When the contract expired, they actually went on strike. But, their leadership and the city came to an agreement that they had already rejected (it was right after 9/11). They just maintained that agreement and kind of crammed it down people's throats. The union leadership went out and took the picket signs away from the people. My friend was involved in this whole process, because they'd been going through take-backs for years and years, and still are. At that time, we were at the end of ten years of prosperity and growth, after Clinton was in. The city was growing and booming like crazy, but the workers were living on the level of take backs. "Oh, we can't afford it", like during the depression in the 80's. So, my friend, Jeff, and we know him to be a person who really does not believe in a lot of beauracracy and hierarchy. Jeff found himself as a building rep for a big building in the city. He was very much a rank and file activist, and leader in that building. He used email very effectively, to communicate. They went through a whole process where they changed the leadership in the local. They got much better leadership. Basically they kept pushing, pushing, pushing to get a decent contract for a change-to get caught up, and to overcome some of these take-backs as much as they could. So, Jeff got involved and was elected to be some kind of representative. Because he was smart and paying attention to what was going on, he became kind of the go-to guy in that building. You got a problem, go to him. He was a

recognized leader that came from rank and file agitating. He knew how to solve problems, and this and that. He told me one time, "I understand why union officers want to sit on their desks and do nothing. It's so overwhelming the amount of bullshit you have to do. Filing grievances and being timely. It's such a big deal with grievances. It's basically all for the convenience of the company.

Ella: As a building rep for my teachers union, I have noticed that the grievance procedure takes long enough to make it practically useless in many cases. It's usually much better to try to solve the problems at a building level, instead of going to the union. What are other ways this model of unionism weakens workers?

Dave: From a mental health point of view,

unions have to defend the workers. The transit union had to defend bus driver that raped a retarded girl on his bus. He did it, there's no question about that. Legally you have to do that, even if you don't agree with it. A friend in California, we were talking about unions one time and she said, "there's the legal union, and there's a natural union." A natural union is the natural, spontaneous or not, act of people sticking together. People as people, supporting each other. And the natural union wouldn't defend a rapist. The people would not support a rapist. He'd done it before. It was for sure. It's really helpful to think in terms of a natural union versus the labor law. What would we do if we were just a natural union, like before when unions were illegal. People rose up and struck and fought like hell, from the turn of the 1800's through the early 1900's. Unions are required to defend everyone. There's good things about that. There's some negative things. Because there's an element of the working class that have mental illness, and real needs for support from other people. They don't get along with other people, and they end up going to the union and filing grievances. Stewards and committee men, because they deal with this part of the working class, they get cynical about it and they're not aggressive about it. The grievance structure for solving problems works in the favor of the employer because the alternative to the grievance structure is action. And that almost always works in the favor of the workers. Because if there's an action and you fail, you learn from it. If there's an action and you win, you succeed. In each case you learn from it. You learn who you can trust

and who you can't. What are good ways to go about it. How many people you need to have behind this. You launch something, actions, you are able to learn from mistakes and that can always be good. With grievances the power is not in the hands of the worker. Yeah, people get discouraged and quit, and they blame it on the

The NLRB, the National labor Relations Board, that forces labor law on corporations, and unions. Anti-labor people have refined it over the years, in order to prevent an "unfortunate situation" (a strike).

union.

Ella: Please describe the history of unionism and how we got to this point.

Dave: There a was a lot of very powerful unionism, but unions were illegal. They were considered a trust, in restraint of trade. They equated companies sticking together with unions sticking together. That's the main thing, well hell, capitalism is going to make something work, and the Wagner Act was passed in 1935. Ever since then the labor movement has been in decline. Well, there was still a strong labor movement into the 40's and I think W.W.II and some other things kind of confused the labor movement. But, all that time, business has been trying to define and make unions work for them. That's what they've developed. Labor's been pretty ineffectual at being able to prevent labor law changes that go against them, from Taft Hartley. It was passed by Congress, and then Truman vetoed it, but he didn't fight the override. And labor fought that. They fight it, but they haven't succeeded in fighting these changes to labor law. And now, it's like the labor board is anti-labor. The NLRB, the National labor Relations Board, that forces labor law on corporations, and unions. Anti-labor people have refined it over the years, in order to prevent an "unfortunate situation". That's the main thing. You can get mad, or



upset all you want, just don't do an unfortunate situation. Don't stop work, because that is power and we don't want you to have any power.

Ella: *What keeps you focused on the struggle to build a powerful labor movement, when there are so many obstacles?*

Dave: What sustains me is what Chairman Mao always said, "Where there is repression, there is resistance." When people are being pushed down, they will rise up and fight back. The challenge for us is to work with that and fight back in a way that makes it the most effective, the best organized, and the most powerful. I believe, and I think the government believes that there will be a huge uprising.

That's why that had a roundup in April to practice. When there is an uprising, they think they can round up the leadership, and it will go away. In April, it was in the news, there was a roundup of 10,000 Americans led by the US Marshall Service. The idea was spawned by this new attorney general named Gonzalaz. The US Marshall Service coordinated this roundup, and they were all

escapees and bail jumpers, failure to appears. Some kind of fugitives. They did it in a week. And it wasn't like a man hunt deal where they had to go and search for them. They knew where they were. They just went and picked them up and put them in jail. They probably booked them and released them again. It was on NPR (National Public Radio), but somebody sent me something on email. And the only reason I can see for them to do that- it isn't that they wanted those people. They aren't people the system really gives a damn about because they're working people committing crimes against other working people. So, they leave them in the community and when they want them, they go and get them. But, this was to practice to pick us up when there is an uprising. They think that by decapitating the uprising, they will stop it. Look at the battle of Algiers, it isn't right, but it's what they think. We're the ones, the active lefties.

Ella: *Some workers are currently building flying squads, and other workers organizations where we would not have to rely on unions. What are your ideas about this?*

Dave: I've read about the Wobblies, the Industrial Workers of the World, their hall would be a center where people would gravitate that wanted to organize. And a lot of organizing came out of that. The Spruce Strike was a really good example of that kind of organizing in the Northwest during WW1. They needed spruce to make airplanes. First because it's real flexible light weight wood. They made the frames to make airplanes out of it at Boeing. The workers, they called them timber beasts, they were really treated like animals. Mostly immigrants from various different countries, and so many different languages. They lived in camps in the woods and they would work their butts off. The only good thing about it was they fed them a lot because they had to eat really good to do that much work. If you want a workforce you have to feed them. One of their big problems was they had to provide their own bedding. The company provided a lousy mattress, literally with lice. And no blankets. So when these guys quit and they went to town they had to carry their blankets, and if you saw a guy on the streets carrying his blankets, chances are he had money on him because he just left the job. And they would get rolled and robbed by thugs on the street. They were very vulnerable because they had to carry their blankets. That was the big demand that they had, that the bunkhouses would provide bedding. And they wanted the 8 hr. day. They were working way over 8 hours. They were working from can't see to can't see, and they wanted 8 hrs. So they, during the war, and this was a war production, but the wobblies went ahead and called a strike. So the government threw all the leadership in jail, and that's what destroyed the union- there struggles during W.W.I. And that was a big one in the Northwest. All the leaders are in the slammer and the workers are on strike. They stayed on strike, pretty much. So the companies and the government formed teams called Loyal League of Loggers and Lumbermen, they formed this organization of patriotic loggers, and the army. They would go and try to harvest the spruce, so the workers went back to work. They would get back to the soldiers and they would tell them what it was about. The soldiers were workers too. So, the soldiers stopped being very productive. They weren't very productive anyway because they didn't know anything about logging. They screwed up production by the soldiers. The loggers themselves would do really stupid stuff. The foreman would say, "okay, log that hillside and when

you get done bring everything back to the camp." So they would do things like dismantle the railroad and take the trestle apart. They would just royally screw everything up and get themselves fired. Loggers in the next camp down the road were doing the same thing, and they were getting fired too. The roads were just chaos. Whole crews would be walking down the road looking for another job. And there would be another job, because the next crew would be fired also. The soldiers would be walking up and down the road too, they called that soldiering. The loggers would call that huigering, screwing everything up. I actually was working in a psych ward and got an alcoholic in, with DT's and he was talking

about, "the day when we burnt the mattresses". That was another thing they did- take all the mattresses out and set them on fire. They were lousy and it was their demand for bedding. "The day they burnt the mattresses, that was the day. Boy I'll tell you what." This was the early 60's and that happened in like 1915, or something like that. A kid

that lived with us was camp logging in Alaska and he used a phrase 4 L mother fucker, about something, and that is Loyal League of Loggers and Lumberman. That was what they called them, the 4 L mother fuckers. So that strike, it was amazing, that struggle, and it was all done by the rank and file. So it was the union that taught the rank and file how to self organize. And that's what I think we need to do, what we need to do now. Teaching the rank and file to organize themselves. In lieu of the fact that labor law

prevents that.. It's not the problem of union bureaucrats, it's not their fault, it's labor laws fault. Union bureaucrats fall into it and get terrified of rank and file organizing because they loose control. And they do loose control, and a lot of times the rank and file will screw up. The union people could loose their jobs. Sincere people loose the union. The union could be broken by strikes that can't be won. People strike because they're angry and don't think about if they're gonna win it. What are you gonna do to prevent the scabs from coming in and taking the work? And right now that's a big fear. You know you need to think hard about going on strike, because under these conditions, how are you gonna win it?

Ella: *That's a great lesson, workers need to be self organized. How do you see the US labor fitting in with the rest of the world?*

Dave: The Iraqi workers that came to Portland were really amazed that the American people were supportive of them. Because of the way our troops act and the way our government acts, most people in the world think that Americans are not deserving of any kind of solidarity. Also, the WTO, in Seattle went a long ways to waken up a lot of people in the world that there are people in this country that are with the rest of the people in the world, and are not with our government and our corporations. We need to have some more Seattles.

Ella: *What do you see as the next step in organizing workers?*

Dave: A key thing is lots of people. A lot of people ready to go. And we need to be aware that we need to break the laws. And when they site an injunction on picketing, you have to ignore it. You have to get around it. There's ways to get around. The worker centers picket out of solidarity, and the union may be terrified that they'll get caught up in a suit. And they probably will get caught up in a suit. They have to be prepared to fight it out and win it. That's what we did at the Frye Strike (Frye roofing on Eon) They had plants all over the country, a bunch of us just joined the picket line. We were more class conscious, aware people. So, we're more effective at turning the situation around. Usually we'd fence in the scabs cars. And, so there's a gate behind the fence. If you can get to the gate, and picket the gate. You have a few people, 5, 6, 10 people walking across the gate slow. And these people need to be pretty athletic because you need to be able to get out of the way quick. Also, pretty perceptive. You want to be able to make eye contact with the driver. You want to be aware of when you're going to get run over. And that Frye strike a lot of people rode the hood of the car. In that case your only hope is the windshield wipers. You've got to hold the windshield wipers to be able to keep yourself from falling off of the hood of the car. These guys would drive into the wall and try to slam people over the wall. The car would hit the wall. They would slide in and try to hit the picket and bash into

the concrete wall. So, you have people doing that and you have other people who are charming and articulate talking to them, while they're held there. Explaining to them that you're taking out job. This is a strike and some of these people have been working here all of there lives. And all there trying to do is get a little bit of decency from this company. This company is a rip off. They're going to rip you off just like they're ripping the people out here off, and you shouldn't do this. We'll help you find another job.

Ella: *What are other tactics when a strike is occurring?*

Dave: People will do rolling pickets. Students will do that. it's a very logical thing. Students did that during the first Gulf War. I was working at MLK and Alberta and I heard all this noise outside. The windows were up high. I hopped up on a sofa and there was a sea of kids, and what had happened, was when the war started, kids just walked out of Jefferson High School and they were running around from school to school telling kids to shut down the school. And downtown was a mass of high school kids. That's the kind of thing that people can do, you have to violate labor law. That's part of labor law too, you can only have two pickets at a gate. Well, how will you stop scabs? you can't. That's the reason why they do it. You have to violate that, and unions- I think there needs to be two levels of workers organizations. The legal unions that do what they do, and then a rank and file movement that supplements that and is able to work, it doesn't see the unions as enemies, just sees them as good people who are tied up, and will do the other stuff that needs to be done. To do what the unions will not do because they can't. That's what workers need. I think a lot of honest, healthy union people will recognize that. They may not publicly say they support it.

Ella: *It seems like working people in the US have forgotten how to struggle.*

Dave: Because everybody is used to business unionism since the 50's. CIO unions kicked the militants out in the 50's and it's been 50 years that we've been living with routine business unionism. And nobody has experience with class struggle unionism.

It pervades how unions function everywhere you look. Employers have been able to adjust labor law to take power away from workers and make it convenient for themselves. And everybody accepts it the way that it is because it is so pervasive. Yeah, I think it would be really good to start workers centers. It's gonna be hard to take on a movement where we're breaking

the laws, and exposing labor law for what it is. There's also a lot of minimum wage workers. We are starting from a position of weakness, and a lot of unions formed around being mad around the company because of what the company did. They are formed around defense. And there was a period of labor peace in the 50's when

unions were getting what they wanted, but that was stopped with Reagan. It's getting more and more so.

Ella: *Thanks for your time and perspective. Is there anything you would like to add?*

Dave: I'm really excited to be doing this interview because I've told people the problems with labor law for years, and we've got to violate it. And it's just too much and people don't know how to approach it.



Dave King is a labor activist, retired mental health worker, gardner and craftsman, that lives in Portland, Oregon.

Ella Powers is a Portland Public School teacher. She is a member of the Firebrand Collective, a member collective of NAF.

NORTHWEST anarchist federation

THIS IS NAF!

The Northwest Anarchist Federation is a bi-national organization based in the Pacific Northwest coast of North America. We are opposed to all forms of capitalism and the state. We are fighting for a revolutionary movement that has the power to challenge and win the struggle against politicians, employers, and bureaucrats. We believe that genuine solidarity and direct democracy is the only way that working people will overcome oppression. Our vision of the world is one where people manage their own lives through directly democratic self-organization



If you are interested in joining or networking with NAF, get in touch with the local nearest you.

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POPULAR ASSEMBLIES NOW!

The Labour Peace has Ended

While the post-war period brought about a relatively stable climate in which collective bargaining was widely recognized as a basic right, these days workers are increasingly forced to break the law in order to assert their rights to a fair contract. It has become evident time and time again that the provincial government will only respond to the demands of working people if we collectively withdraw our labour power. The government has done all it can to undermine this possibility, passing legislation in direct violation of international labour standards, freezing our funds, imposing enormous fines, and threatening to imprison us. When free collective bargaining has become an exception rather than a rule, it is time to reevaluate the traditional strategies of labour unions.

History Repeats Itself

In a climate of increasing repression, the organization of job action through hierarchical structures has proved inefficient if not downright counterproductive. The union leadership provides a head that can be easily lopped off. The enormously disappointing events of last April show how the aspirations of strike workers can be quietly betrayed behind closed doors.

Moreover, the official leadership of a constituted body provides an easy target in the transition from legal to illegal job action. If they are arrested, who will pick up the slack? The escalation of job action depends on the diffusion of participation and communication across the membership as whole, reaching out to other workers and the broader community. This can best be accomplished through the constitution of decentralized networks and organization.

Grassroots Traditions

In order to effectively mount a sustained opposition to the current provincial government, it is necessary to build networks of support beyond the hierarchical structures of a single union. The popular assembly presents a model that has been effectively utilized around the world in resistance to privatization, deregulation, and contracting out. It has been very effective in coordinating action through decentralized and directly democratic methods. Assemblies have formed in factories, neighborhoods, schools, and villages, enabling organization in a transparent fashion, utilizing mandated and recallable delegates.

In fact, the most successful sustained struggles in recent years have all drawn on models of popular assembly. In Latin America, for instance, such grassroots organizing models have emerged in workers movements across the continent. In 2000, plans by the Bolivian government to privatize water, raising rates by up to 300 percent,

were successfully stopped as thousands came together under the slogan "All power to the Popular Assemblies!". Likewise, in Argentina, popular assemblies effectively challenged the Structural Adjustment Policies of the national government, constructing a powerful movement from below to ensure that the social system is not further eroded.

However, such organizations are also cropping up close to home. More recently, over 250,000 students shut down the college and universities of Quebec in opposition to the provincial governments cuts to loans and bursaries. In every school, general assemblies were organized in which all students were invited to make decisions regarding the course of action on a weekly or even daily basis. Through these assemblies, they were able to effectively coordinate large scale and illegal actions such as occupations.

Creating New Possibilities

As we are increasingly pushed to coordinate job actions in this province, building solidarity in the face of a common threat, we are constantly scrambling to build and rebuild networks. Where are people needed? How can we get more people involved? We are dependent on the same sources of information as decisions are effectively made behind our backs. In order to build a sustained opposition in the face of increasing repression it is vital that we construct formalized networks of organization and decision-making. The popular assembly presents an effective model for coordinating our activities in a decentralized and transparent fashion building on our diverse capacities together in active relationships rather than awaiting our orders from on high. But we cannot wait for others to create these networks, *we must create them ourselves.*

-Victoria Anarchist Collective- British Columbia



TEACHERS! STUDENTS! PEOPLE OF BC!

———Stop The Campbell Government!———

The Provincial Government has once again attacked the fundamental right of free association of Unions in British Columbia. Using the Legislature and Labour Relations Board, they have declared illegal the defiant stand taken by teachers.

This is not the first time the Government has attempted to legislate workers back to their jobs. The latest action taken by the Campbell Government is part of a long term push to break the union movement in BC. It is clear that this latest move by the Government benefits the Private Interests of Business and defies the Public Interests of People of BC.

In April and May of 2004, the HEU, CUPE, and several other unions stood defiantly against the Rule of Law imposed by the Government and held their ground for several days. During this period the people of BC came out in strong support of the strikers, and a General Strike was on the horizon. Even though their strike was betrayed, the power of Resistance was clearly demonstrated in the massive popular support they received across the Province.

We cannot support the Rule of Law. Even now, Telus defies that very same law by bringing in replacement workers to break the TWU strike. It is clear that the government only enforces the law when it benefits the Private Interests of Business. The Public Interests of the People of BC cannot be realized by supporting the arbitrary application of the law to one group over another.

The sympathetic rhetoric of the NDP cannot help us. They couldn't push the BC Liberals from power. They supported the sell-out of the striking HEU workers. Even now they have publicly stated their support for the Rule of Law.

The fundamental rights of the People of BC are under attack by the Government. In a democracy, workers don't get ordered back to their jobs. *We must collectively, and with a united voice, Fight Back.*

The People of BC must escalate protest actions, strikes, and civil disobedience against the government. We must demand:

The Immediate Repeal of Bill 12, The Anti-Teachers Legislation Passed by The Government



Stand In Solidarity With BC Workers

NORTHWEST ANARCHIST FEDERATION

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