

compensation, occupational health and safety laws, improved pensions and old age care programs, quality child care. We need laws regulating capital mobility and the economic and social chaos it causes. "This nation needs a targeted industrial policy -- just like our international trade competitors have," Winpisinger writes. "Corporate America says we can't have these things, that we can't afford them or that they'll wreck the economy. But Corporate America is lying to us. Our Democratic Socialist allies and trading partners have them and their economies are outperforming ours."

Peter Rachleff writes in *The Nation* that there are beginnings of change in the American labor movement. There are efforts to organize the unorganized, to give workers a voice, and to redefine the objectives of the already organized. There are organizing campaigns which resemble social movements:

Black Workers for Justice organizes communities and workplaces in the South, fighting police brutality and Congressional redistricting as well as workplace inequities.

Mexican drywall workers, many undocumented, are organizing in Los Angeles and San Diego to fight exploitive contractors.

SEIU's Justice for Janitors in Southern California and elsewhere targets building owners and contractors, using mass protests by workers' families, friends and neighbors. They have signed unprecedented contracts with major cleaning companies.

Other organizations of immigrant workers in cities on both coasts are self-help organizations as well as labor unions, particularly among Asian, Spanish and Haitian workers. The Chinese Staff and Workers Association has promoted independent unionization in the garment, construction and restaurant industries in New York City, while organizing support for non-union workers as well.

Community based labor organizations called Fuerza Unida and La Mujer Obrera in Texas are creating new forms and organizations and are inspiring progressives and union leaders much like Cesar Chavez and NFWA did 25 years ago.

In building trades unions, which have always prohibited their members from working non-union jobs, members are being trained as job site organizers to "salt" job sites and bring in new members.

The grassroots union democracy movement's most notable success was the Teamsters for a Democratic Union and their president, Ron Carey, who are now in control of that powerful and once corrupt union. Other unions are energizing their rank and file by shifting information, responsibility and power to it.

NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Act) has spurred some cross-border outreach and organization by Teamsters, UE, UAW and Communication Workers of America to workers and organizers in Canada and Mexico.

In December, after 17,000 coal miners struck, some for seven months, the United Mine Workers President Richard Trumka, also a reform candidate, signed a contract with some innovative features. The contract guarantees union miners the right to the majority of jobs in any new mine opened by a signatory company. Companies have a history of opening new mines under subsidiary companies to avoid unionization of those workers. The union also won a pilot project or "labor-management positive change program." In locals that decide to participate, the union will have the ability to change working conditions, scheduling, new mining techniques, health and safety issues and job security. Trumka says that the union will have complete access to information. The contract will eliminate mandatory overtime, increase the number of miners and make voluntary overtime paid at super-premium rates. They also won expanded training and education funds for themselves and their families, and pay and pension increases.

The lockout of 760 union workers at E. A. Staley Manufacturing Company in Decatur, Illinois, since June 27 closely followed the United Auto Workers strike at the Caterpillar Plant in Decatur, which lasted five months and ended in union capitulation. Like strikers at Hormel in Minnesota, UAW members are devising innovative strategies to counterbalance huge inequities in power and management's ruthless drive toward a "union-free environment." Union members have described Illinois as a labor war zone.

Workers in these fights organize support from their communities and from unions across the country. They map corporate networks and try to bring pressure on associated businesses, banks, stockholders and suppliers in defiance of Taft-Hartley prohibitions against secondary boycotts.

Teamster reform president Ron Carey had to fight off conservative old-guard Teamster officials and a federal court injunction to win the union's one day strike against United Parcel Service. 160,000 Teamsters walked off the job to force UPS to back off its demand that workers lift packages up to 150 pounds. (The previous limit had been 70 pounds.) UPS agreed to abide by the old standard until new rules of safe handling of packages could be negotiated; they also agreed to not discipline or fine anyone in the union.



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The current push among business executives and some in the Clinton administration like Robert Reich is for works councils or "Quality Circles" as keys to employee/management cooperation and increased productivity. Without union representation these can be used to get more work out of workers with no increase in pay, to divide employees and get them to inform on each other. Without union support and workers choosing their own representatives to these councils, management is unlikely to hear anything it doesn't want to hear. Without elected reps, rights to company financial and planning information, the right to enforce health and safety regulations and the right to co-determine how company training funds are spent, workers' councils will be company-dominated associations designed to project an image of participation without the actuality.

These efforts, which many union folks fear, could result in using workers' good ideas about improvements to lay off workers. Cooperation needs to be between equals. Pass legislation which will allow unions a level or pro-union tilt to the playing field and cooperation will be meaningful for them. Cooperation is self-destructive in the current rabidly hostile anti-union environment of Corporate America.

The State of Oregon Executive Department and agency heads are attempting to establish Quality Circles in state agencies. The relatively strong public employee unions are insisting on safeguards, worker election of reps and other protections for their members. In this situation, Quality Circles may benefit workers, administrators and the public.

In the post NAFTA climate, the upper echelons of organized labor are struggling with their stance toward the new administration and issues they feel strongly about -- health care, prohibition against hiring permanent replacement workers during strikes and overall labor law reform. The administration sent early signals of its willingness to compromise. Should labor coalesce around what it really wants -- a Canadian-style single-payer health care system, a striker replacement bill without crippling amendments (like the one proposed last year by Oregon Senator Bob Packwood which would require striking workers to go immediately to arbitration)? One faction of the labor movement says that labor should stake out its position to the left of the Clinton administration and agitate like hell for what it wants, even at the risk of alienating the President, leaving compromise to the politicians. There needs to be a counter to the barrage of blunt and sophisticated attacks already occurring around health care reform, which are sure to increase when the discussion moves to increasing labor's ability to organize and to win contract disputes.

An indication of the direction the AFL-CIO will choose appeared in *The Oregonian* on February 21. Headlined "Organized Labor Vows Big Push for Clinton's Health Care Plan," the article says that after receiving assurances that the President will not compromise on universal coverage and what Al Gore describes as "a benefits package that meets the needs of America," labor leaders agreed to support the administration's proposals. The article makes no mention of cost-containment,

which will be unlikely without excluding profiteering insurance companies from the program, and having federal and state boards mandate cost controls. It looks like labor's old guard is so happy to have even limited access to the Oval Office they will decline to risk any feather ruffling in this pro-business administration.

There are some good signs and some bad signs for labor coming out of the Clinton administration.

Good signs:

-- Clinton appointed a commission to evaluate America's labor laws. The commission includes previous secretaries of labor and academics who are sensitive to labor's needs, if not outright pro-union.

-- One member of the commission is William Gould, a professor of law at Stanford, who is Clinton's pick to chair the NLRB. He is the first African-American to do so. In his book, *Agenda for Reform*, Gould argues that well-run unions, freely chosen by workers, have a vital role to play in our society.

-- During the first session of the 103rd Congress, the House passed the Cesar Chavez Workplace Fairness Act, which prohibits hiring permanent replacements for striking workers. The Senate has not yet considered the bill. The President has promised to sign it if it passes. (I would like to see some leadership on this bill like that extended on NAFTA.)

-- Clinton signed the Family and Medical Leave Act early in his presidency.

Bad signs:

-- The passage of NAFTA, with Clinton's vigorous support, over the unanimous objections of the labor movement. NAFTA not only poses a threat to American jobs, but even more malicious is the treaty's ignoring of labor rights in the three countries.

-- Two members of Clinton's cabinet questioned the importance of unions. Labor Secretary Robert Reich said, "The jury is still out on whether the traditional union is necessary for the new workplace." Commerce Secretary Ron Brown remarked, "Unions are okay where they are, and where they are not. It is not yet clear what sort of organization should represent workers."

This despite all the evidence that unionized workers are more productive, even with their higher salaries and protective work rules.

Polls show that union workers vote in significantly higher percentages for Democrats than do non-union workers. It is in the administration's best interest to lead the battle for labor law reform, and to put government squarely in support of increased unionization of American workers.

Labor lawyer Thomas Geohagan, in his book *Which Side Are You On?: Trying to Be For Labor When It's Flat on Its Back*, says that we should consider the Wagner Act as a civil rights law. The right to join a union without being fired is a basic civil right being denied to blacks and other minorities, as well as whites.

Winpisinger again:

"We must put full employment back on the nation's political and economic agenda. We must be ready to change the regressive distribution of wealth and income, both at home and abroad. We must be prepared to make trade union rights universal human rights for the employed and unemployed alike. We must have the vision, the courage and the plans for conversion to restructure our political economy away from war and poverty, to peace and prosperity for all.

"This means we must be prepared to use government in the public interest, rather than to protect profiteering private interest. That requires breaking up the current phalanx of business, government and the judiciary aligned against worker rights and free trade unions. When all is said and done, it is a nation's labor policy that determines the kind of nation it is -- the values of its society: democratic or dictatorial; high living standards or mere subsistence; class division and conflict or equality and fairness."

Harry Johnson is a frequent contributor to the NCTE. He wrote a series of articles about *What's Wrong With* trade pacts (NAFTA in particular), economics, health care, welfare and education. He appeared as a poet for the first time in the *Times Eagle* in the Jan/Feb 1994 issue.

