

THE STATE OF THE TRADE UNIONS

by Norman Hill

In 1989 the trade union movement finds itself embattled once again, as it has been so often during the 1980s. In recent months, it has been engaged in four hard-fought strikes whose outcome may affect the future shape of collective bargaining: the six-month-old strike against regional Bell companies by over 150,000 members of Communications Workers of America and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers; the United Mine Workers' strike against the Pittston Company; and the American Federation of Musicians' strike against 5 Las Vegas hotels that want to replace live music with taped music. In each strike, management is trying to erode basic gains in such areas as job security and health benefits. In the cases of Lorenzo and the Las Vegas hotels, management's goal is to destroy not only the benefits of union membership but the unions themselves.

Demands for givebacks do not apply only to these strikes. They have become part of the basic negotiating strategy of management across the nation, which has decided that it is open season on labor unions and the workers they represent. To make matters worse, a growing number of corporations are owned by financial manipulators rather than rational business managers. They aren't concerned not with the long-term well-being of the company but only with today's bottom line. They shut down plants without a second thought, and without even a first thought about the workers and communities they leave behind.

The battles are not restricted to the bargaining table and the picket line. While we in the labor movement have been hoping that the Bush Administration would be an improvement over its predecessor, so far it has been antagonistic to the interests of working men and women. Presi-

dent Bush refused to intervene to prevent the Eastern strike. He rejected Congress's \$4.55 minimum wage as too high, while pressing Congress to pass a cut in the capital gains tax that would give the wealthy a huge windfall.

Finally, we come to the Reagan Supreme Court. In a series of rulings earlier this year, the Court eroded both affirmative action and what or-tute, we believe that the answer is a resounding "No!" For one thing, the trade union movement has been scoring important victories. Four AFL-CIO unions in the expanding fields of teaching, health care, public service, and communications have grown by an average of 200,000 members in the past decade. At the bargaining table, unions at AT&T, Harvard University, and other organizations have won innovative child care provisions. Meanwhile, the Communications Workers, the United Steelworkers, and the United Food and Commercial Workers have successfully resisted efforts by management to shift medical care costs to workers.

In the political realm, candidates friendly to labor have continued, with labor's help, to do well in Congressional, state, and local elections throughout the 1980s. In the 100th Congress, which met in 1987 and 1988, many important labor-backed bills were passed. They included legislation providing for 60-day plant closing notification, banning random polygraph testing of employees or job applicants by private employers, strengthening the 1968 Fair Housing Act, and encouraging employers to give educational and legal fringe benefits to their employees. This year, the House rejected an attempt to gut the Davis-Bacon Act's prevailing wage requirements for defense projects. And the outlook is good for early passage of labor-backed legislation for affordable, quality child care, for family and medical leave, and for Hatch Act reform. Also, there will be a major effort in both houses of Congress to adopt legislation that would overturn the retrogressive Supreme Court decisions that I've already mentioned.

There is no question that the labor

movement is being challenged. And it is also true that our adversaries across the bargaining table and the political divide have far more material resources than we do. But at the Randolph Institute we know that truth and commitment can overcome wealth. In 1925 our founder, A. Philip Randolph, formed the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. But establishing the Brotherhood and winning a contract from the Pullman Car Company were two different things. The Company had millions of dollars at its disposal, while the Brotherhood had to throw rent parties at the end of the month to avoid being evicted from its Harlem headquarters. And the Pullman Company was not scrupulous about the tactics it employed. Loyal company porters were used as stool pigeons, so in many cities Brotherhood meetings had to be held in secret. Porters who supported the union were often suspended or fired, and retired porters who backed the Brotherhood sometimes had their pensions cut off. The Company also used the black church and the black press, which were mostly conservative back then, against the Brotherhood. And Randolph had no political clout at all. When he established the Brotherhood, he didn't have a single prominent politician in his corner. Yet 12 years later, in 1937, the union won its first collective bargaining agreement.

Many things accounted for the Brotherhood's victory. But key among them were Randolph's integrity, conviction, and determination. Decades ago, a journalist described Randolph as follows: "They say he is absolutely to be trusted, that he cannot be influenced unduly. He stands foursquare to all the winds, he stoops to no wiles or artifices to attain his goals. He is steeped in principle, and he has the complete certainty of a true reformer in the eventual triumph of his cause. He adopts none until he is certain it is morally right and that it will result in advantage to the entire community."



Anheuser-Busch, Inc., Brochure Salutes Nation's African-American Police Chiefs

Anheuser-Busch, Inc., recently saluted the nation's African-American police chiefs with the unveiling of a new brochure honoring these outstanding individuals. The four-color pictorial includes biographical information and career highlights on the police commanders in 17 major cities across the country.

"These men may answer to dif-

ferent names--chief, commissioner, director or superintendent--but two common threads bind them all," said Henry Brown, vice president, marketing development and affairs, Anheuser-Busch, Inc. "They all serve as commanders of police forces, and all of them are super achievers with an African-American cultural heritage. "Anheuser-Busch has been a long-

standing supporter of African-American law enforcement through the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (N.O.B.L.E.). Each of these outstanding individuals has been on the cutting edge of change, and we take great pride in chronicling the superior achievements of these 17 police chiefs," continued Brown.

ALBINA MINISTERS HOST BLACK UNITED FUND



Participating churches of Albina Ministerial Alliance hosted Black United Fund Sunday on September 17, 1989, a national event, in support of the Black United Fund of Oregon and its annual charitable campaign, which is scheduled to begin October 2, 1989.

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