

LABOR NEWS VIEWS & BLUES

Compiled by Dan Marschall



Photos from the exhibit "On the Job" by the Illinois Labor History Society.

Setting limits for lead

On March 15, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) opened hearings on proposed standards for lead dust and fumes in the nation's workplaces. The regulations suggested by OSHA "merely sweep under the rug the real problems of lead poisoning," says Bob Holt, vice-chairperson of CACOSH, the Chicago Area Committee on Occupational Safety & Health.

"Its proposed standards would stop only the most obvious cases of the disease, those workers who become acutely ill, and would do nothing for the thousands of men and women who are suffering the slow effects of lead exposure, Holt says.

Lead poisoning is an insidious disease that affects all people in an urban environment to some extent. In addition, the government estimates that over 1.5 million workers are directly exposed to lead on the job.

Lead is most often breathed by a worker in dust or fumes, though it can also be absorbed through the skin. A blood test is most commonly used to determine the level of concentration in the body. As the lead level slowly builds, it causes fatigue, irritability, constipation, insomnia, loss of appetite and a host of other symptoms. Serious internal damage can result even if the outward signs are not that serious.

Women and blacks are most susceptible to the harmful effects of lead poisoning. Women workers with a relatively low level in the bloodstream have been found to have "an increased incidence of abortion, higher numbers of deformed children and more children who will die before the age of one year," CACOSH says. Black workers suffering from sickle cell anemia and a certain enzyme deficiency are at high risk from the anemia producing effects of lead.

But women and blacks should also not be "protected" from lead exposure by excluding them from certain jobs, CACOSH points out. The National Organization of Women (NOW) agrees. Rather, lead standards should be low enough that all workers are protected. "If we let OSHA set standards that do not protect ALL who are affected by the toxins in the workplace—women, men, fetuses, and sperm—in-



dustry will be given another legal excuse to eliminate women from the workplace," states NOW's Labor Task Force.

CACOSH and NOW demand that the standards be set at 30 micrograms of lead per 100 milligrams of blood, the level before serious physical damage is done. (City dwellers have an average of 20 micrograms in their blood from auto fumes and air pollution.) The government is proposing a standard of 60 micrograms per 100 milligrams.

To win its demands, NOW hopes to begin a letter-writing and petition campaign directed at the Secretary of Labor. CACOSH has started a comprehensive program in the Chicago/Gary area that includes educational efforts, assistance for lead poisoned workers in receiving compensation, and a fight against company doctors who have covered up lead poisoning cases.

Workers democracy conference

Workers' self-management, a long-accepted concept in the workplaces and corporate boardrooms of Europe, is quickly gaining adherents in the U.S. On April 1, the Association for Economic Democracy will kick off a three-day conference in Detroit to discuss workers' participation, job humanization and workplace democracy.

After the conference, the Association says it will choose three midwestern cities to set up pilot projects of worker-run offices or plants. Four such projects are now operating on the east coast.

Founded three years ago, the Association believes that industrial democracy—the participation in and control of management by employees—presents a viable solution to meaningless blue and white collar jobs and to high rates of unemployment. Their fourth international conference will be held this September in Paris.

The Detroit conference will feature an impressive array of speakers. Dennis Eardley, secretary of the Central Council at Britain's largest worker-run enterprise, will discuss workers' participation in that country. Jan Olsson of the Swedish Metalworkers union will talk about job humanization at Volvo. Conference organizers expect about 500 participants from trade unions, community groups, business and academia.

The conference will also include media presentations. The Dayton chapter of the New American Movement will present a slide show on working class sentiments in the city. Films about Volvo and European workers' participation will also be shown.

For more information, contact: Betty Plank, Special Action Affairs, Columbus Catholic Diocese, Columbus, Ohio 43215. Phone (614) 228-1110.

U.S. labor and Chile

How deeply was the American government involved in the military coup that overthrew Chile's Salvador Allende in September 1973? That question was raised anew this month when Brady Tyson, a U.S. delegate to the United Nations, expressed his "profoundest regrets for the role some government officials, agencies and private groups played in the subversion of the previous democratically elected Chilean government..."

The Carter administration immediately repudiated Tyson's statement and summoned the delegate back to Washington for a quick refresher course in diplomatic procedure.

In early February, the current practices of Chile's military regime was also the topic of an exchange of letters between AFL-CIO president George Meany and Sergio Fernandez, Chile's Minister of Labor. Fernandez appealed to Meany as an "unwavering and outspoken defender of human rights" to help secure the release of Huber Maros, a jailed ex-revolutionary leader in Cuba, in exchange for the release of a Chilean communist leader.

Fernandez claimed that the Chilean repression denounced in "worldwide Marxist propaganda" is actually "legal measures aimed at impeding the spread of Marxist terrorism in the country."

To George Meany's credit, he refused to buy Fernandez's hypocritical appeal. The viewpoint of the AFL-CIO has always been marked by a "singular objectivity," Meany replies, "the defense of human rights and trade union freedom" in Chile. Meany called for the full restoration of trade union freedom and human rights in the country and the cessation of the "various forms of interference, repression, and harassment..."

Meany's position on Chile appears to conform to the highest moral standards, but some observers find his words very ironic. Several studies and numerous articles have concluded that the AFL-CIO actually helped lay the groundwork for the military coup. This was done through the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD).

Founded in 1962, the AIFLD trains Latin American trade unionists and funds social projects, like housing developments, for unions that agree with the AFL-CIO perspective. It was formed after the Bay of Pigs fiasco, when John F. Kennedy decided to bear on the dangers that Castro...might undermine the Latin American labor movement." About 95 percent of its funding comes from the Agency for International Development (AID) and from the multinational corporations represented on its board of directors.

From 1962 to 1972, the AIFLD trained over 8,000 Chilean trade unionists in the AFL-CIO brand of anti-socialist, anti-communist unionism, these studies charge. AIFLD trainees played important roles in the economic disruptions that severely weakened the Chilean economy during the Allende years, including the



1973 truck-owners strike. They also participated in the maritime unions, the professional associations, and employer groups that provided the most militant opposition to Allende.

A year after the coup, when Gen. Pinochet had neither restored trade union rights nor released AFL-CIO-style unionists, the Executive Council denounced him as a "militaristic and oppressive ruler."

"It ill behooves George Meany to deplore the loss of civil liberties when groups that the AFL-CIO and the CIA financed helped to overthrow the democratic government of Allende," comments Sidney Lens, an author and former trade union organizer. "The AFL-CIO leadership always supports democracy in the abstract while working with the CIA to destroy it in life itself."



West Virginia wildcat strikes protest mine dangers

Wildcat strikes continued to spread through the Appalachian coal fields in early March, idling 40,000 of the 125,000 bituminous miners in the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). In northern West Virginia 17,000 miners in UMWA District 31 walked out over Eastern Associated Coal Corporation's removal of a union safety committeeman.

The roots of the West Virginia dispute go back to last December, when Eastern removed David Morris from the safety committee because he had declared that a communication failure in one mine placed the workers there in imminent danger. Morris' co-workers agreed that it was too dangerous to work when communication with the surface was disrupted. The union filed a grievance against his removal. In late February, the arbitrator upheld Eastern's action. This provoked a strike that quickly spread from UMWA Local 1570 near Blacksville, W.V.A., to the rest of the state.

Some of the miners in Local 1570 assert that the district's leadership did not aggressively pursue the grievance that triggered the strike. District leaders were ap-

parently aware of a possible conflict of interest with the arbitrator that could have led to an appeal of his decision. Union members charge that the arbitrator's past affiliation with Eastern Coal tainted his ruling.

Bobby Regan, Local 1570 Secretary, placed the real blame on the coal operators. "The companies are provoking the strikes, they know what will send the workers out," he says. "The company tries to divide those workers who are concerned with work conditions and those who are worried about the interruption of income."

In other parts of the state, miners wildcatted over company abuse of the seniority rules and over changes in sick leave policies.

In southwestern Pennsylvania, mine supervisors expelled a union safety committee during a mine inspection, touching off a strike of several thousand miners.

The wildcats indicate the importance of the local right-to-strike issue in this year's UMWA contract negotiations.

Information from Dennis Boyer, Blacksville, W.V.A.

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The FBI campaign against women

By Sidney Blumenthal

Part II

"My Dearest Sisters," wrote J. Edgar Hoover to a group of Maryknoll nuns in upstate New York who were fearful about the subversive intentions of feminists. "I have received your letter of May 27 with enclosures and understand the concern which prompted you to write. I appreciate your thoughtfulness and kind sentiments." The nuns were disturbed by the appearance of two feminists at Mary Rogers College, where they taught.

The feminists, identified by the nuns as "members of the Women's Liberation Front," had been invited by a professor the nuns suspected of having "some sort of connection with the UN." The Maryknoll sisters wrote Hoover with some pleasure that "the sisters were ready and gave [the feminists] a hard time.... Their talk followed the party line." The nuns also collected the literature the feminists distributed and mailed it along to the FBI Director. "God love and keep you all in the FBI," the sisters wrote reverently.

The FBI did not need such free-lance efforts to keep tabs on developments within the women's liberation movement (dubbed "WLM" by the Bureau). Extensive documents recently released under the Freedom of Information Act revealed an FBI program of spying on feminists from 1969 through 1973.

At J. Edgar Hoover's instigation the FBI sent informers into feminist groups, clipped newspapers that printed information on the movement and created dossiers on individuals who joined a wide spectrum of groups ranging from those supporting the Equal Rights Amendment to lesbian separatist organizations.

►Dangerous "women talk."

Hoover tended to see all social movements emanating from a common conspiratorial source, and most FBI agents attempted to buttress the aging director's views. Much of the material the Bureau accumulated on the "WLM" was perfunctory—briefings from informers on meetings, reports about the surveillance of feminists and notes about speeches made at public gatherings.

The veracity of the details the FBI garnered were never checked. One report

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about a Boston group, for example, states "[Name deleted] advised that Bread and Roses is a Communist Party USA oriented group which adheres to the interpretations of Marxist-Leninist theory as outlined by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics." Despite the FBI informer's insistence, Bread and Roses was not accepting instructions from the Kremlin. It was an early feminist group, with loosely defined socialist politics, and mainly engaged in what used to be called "consciousness raising." Another informer's report noted, "most of the discussion [at a Bread and Roses meeting] was general 'women' talk with little political discussion." Although this information seems to undermine the previous report both were duly filed in FBI records. In the Bureau's view, "general 'women' talk" might easily be classified as something "outlined by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics."

While J. Edgar Hoover was primarily preoccupied with the "WLM" intent to embark on violent subversion, FBI agents themselves occasionally strayed from this mission. At the Women's Rights Day rally held in Boston in 1970 agents carefully recorded that speakers emphasized the "need for daycare centers, equal employment opportunity and revision of welfare programs." One of these speakers was, they were sure, "a subversive." Details about the content of the speeches at the rally is scanty after that assertion. "Midway during the rally," the agents wrote, "male onlookers were diverted to a nearby fountain which had been taken over by female bathers." Were the agents referring to themselves?

►Concern with appearance.

Across the country, in Eugene, Ore., the FBI had planted an informer at the Pacific Northwest Women's Conference in 1970. The account of the meeting the FBI received expressed disapproval about the dress of the participants. "The women, in general, appeared to be hippies, lesbians, or from other far-out groups," the informer wrote. "Most of them were very colorfully dressed, but the majority wore faded blue jeans. Most seemed to be making a real attempt to be unattractive. The majority probably were from upper-middle class backgrounds. Some homosexual delegates openly expressed their tendencies in public. One of the interesting aspects of the delegates' dress was the extreme fuzzy appearance of the hair of the majority of them. Someone said this was gotten by braiding their hair in tiny braids and leaving it that way while it was wet until it dried. Then they would take out the braids. From the looks of their hair, they really didn't bother to try and comb it out afterward." Such were the unpatriotic crimes of feminists.

The most dazzling coup of the FBI intelligence effort conducted against feminists was the styming of a planned disruption of the 51st annual Women's National Republican Club luncheon at New York's Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in 1972 by five women. A cable from the New York FBI office to J. Edgar Hoover assured him that "potential pandemonium" had been avoided due to "very professional investigative work."

Informers inside a New York feminist

organization apparently told the FBI that five women intended to attend the luncheon where Pat Nixon, Nelson and Happy Rockefeller, and John and Martha Mitchell would be present. The women planned to make speeches denouncing Rockefeller's handling of the Attica prison uprising and President Nixon's conduct in continuing the war in Indochina. Then each of the protesters would release two rats hidden in their handbags. "The luncheon proceeded without incident," however, the FBI local office informed Hoover. The feminists were stopped at the door by watchful agents. There is no word in FBI documents whether the rats secreted in the women's purses were discovered, but an agent writing to Hoover did state, "During the course of the afternoon six rats were discovered in the hallways and telephone booths of the hotel and disposed of by the management." The FBI neglected to tell Hoover who the rats were talking to on the phone.

►Ended in 1973 by Gray—supposedly.

In January 1973 FBI director L. Patrick Gray terminated the Bureau's "WLM" mission. The San Francisco and Chicago FBI offices had been reluctant to spy on feminists initially, and from reports from other offices it appears that at least some agents were relieved to finish this assignment. The Boston office, for example, sent Gray a cable stating, "The following [names deleted] have advised that they have no current information concerning the Women's Liberation Movement. In view of the fact that no pertinent information has been developed in recent months concerning WLM further inquiry appears unwarranted at this time." Not a single criminal action had been uncovered by the FBI's surveillance of feminists.

L. Patrick Gray was deeply involved in other, more pressing matters by then. During the month the FBI intelligence program against feminists ended the Watergate burglars were convicted. The month before, on Christmas day, Gray burned sensitive documents about the White House Plumbers' activity given him by E. Howard Hunt. Because of this action he would resign in disgrace.

(Last of a series.)

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