

emotions of 1870s Americans. We learn about the penny-pinching Mrs. Lincoln, ordering that briefs be made for her husband out of old White House sheets and pillowcases, and as a result "careless old Abe" walked around with the initial M, for Madison, monogrammed on his butt. Or of Debs' father, originally from the Alsace-Lorraine region of France, who loved his homeland and kept a bit of French dust among his belongings all his days, so that he could be buried with it upon his death.

But what of Debs? He roams in and out of this book, appearing in the first pages but then largely disappearing until the second third of the book. Young traces Debs through his childhood in Terre Haute, Ind., his early years working on the railroad, and his job as editor of *The Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*. But we do not ever reach, in any systematic way, the founding of the American Railway Union, the Pullman strike, the Industrial Workers of the World or the Socialist Party and Debs' many campaigns for the presidency as that party's candidate. Young's focus is more on the times themselves, from Wilhelm Weitling to the 1877 railroad strike, to reformers and utopians, than on Debs per se. She presumes that all these other events and personalities made Debs into the person he became, but too often these influences are not demonstrated.

Finally, while Young's approach to history is highly romantic and evocative, she does not put forward a nuanced vision of historical change and causation. A heavy air of inevitability hangs over this book. Figures like Samuel Gompers seem pre-ordained to develop in a certain way: From the first time she introduces us to Gompers, though he's just a young cigarmaker, she sees in him the man who will reject all radical ideas to become a labor conservative. More problematically, Debs seems formed in terms of his social and political philosophy virtually upon birth. After Pullman, she tells us, Debs "never again would be removed from the great crucible of social conflict," and more tellingly, she continues, "in a profound sense never had been outside it." Describing the power wielded by the likes of Marshall Field and George Pullman, Young asks:

"How could Debs not come into conflict with them although he was weak and they were strong?"

This presents a very different interpretation of Debs' evolution than those offered previously, and arguably it is a less accurate one. According to Ray Ginger's 1949 biography of Debs, still the richest portrait we have of him, his route from conservative member of a railroad brotherhood to radical politics is the most significant event of his early decades. Nick Salvatore's 1982 biography concurs. In the 1870s, for example, Debs was more conservative than Gompers, opposing strikes, boycotts and closed shops. By the 1890s this had changed: Debs had transcended craft unionism, and stood as the personification of a militant and broadly defined labor movement. A decade later, Debs was Gompers' worst

nightmare of a Socialist leader. It is precisely this leftward evolution that puts Debs at the center of U.S. history in the Gilded Age.

This is a shortcoming in a book that examines Debs' early decades, but it is perhaps not surprising. For this is Marguerite Young's book, and to her credit she maintains her presence in a graceful way at all times. If ultimately we hear her song more clearly than Debs', it is nonetheless a remarkable song to behold, one that brings alive the overlapping worlds of politics, labor struggles, utopian visions and reform strategies during an age of transformation. ■

Julie Greene teaches history at the University of Colorado. She is the author of Pure and Simple Politics: The American Federation of Labor and Political Activism, 1881 to 1917.

One Day Longer

By Craig Aaron

As a kid, I used to spend part of every summer with my grandparents in a sleepy, one-stoplight town on the banks of the Ohio River. Ravenswood, West Virginia, is the type of friendly, rural place where folks aren't ashamed to raise the stars and stripes over the garage, where they still get together down by the river for covered-dish din-

Ravenswood: The Steelworkers' Victory and the Revival of American Labor

By Tom Juravich and
Kate Bronfenbrenner
Cornell University Press
245 pages, \$29.95

ners, where no one locks their cars at night. It was quite a culture shock for a kid who spent the rest of the year in the big city and suburbs. But those weeks in Ravenswood were an education: I learned to bait a fishhook, cut a switch, shuck an ear of corn—and that there's still power in a union.

Growing up during the Reagan/Bush years, you didn't hear much good said about unions. It was a time of defeat and retreat: the air-traffic controllers,

Phelps-Dodge, Hormel. So in 1990, when my grandfather and 1,700 other members of United Steelworkers Local 5668 were locked out of the Ravenswood Aluminum Company, the stage was set for another painful, discouraging labor defeat. Only that's not what happened. As Tom Juravich and Kate Bronfenbrenner write in *Ravenswood*, their comprehensive chronicle of the conflict, through "a combination of strategic brilliance and rank-and-file fortitude" the Steelworkers actually won.

Though the authors are labor researchers at the University of Massachusetts and Cornell University, respectively, this isn't your prototypical labor studies textbook. Part tribute to the workers, part union strategy session, part international mystery, *Ravenswood* is an engaging, detailed (perhaps too detailed) look at an important turning point for the American labor movement. "Ravenswood was more than just a victory of aluminum workers in a small town in West Virginia," they write. "It demonstrated something that had been unclear for more than a decade—labor could still win."



Left: Fugitive financier Marc Rich. Below: The Steelworkers march back into the RAC plant after a 20-month lockout.

When Kaiser Aluminum opened a smelter and fabrication plant in Ravenswood in 1956, workers came from rural West Virginia, Ohio and Kentucky, staying for decades until they could afford the ranch-style homes, manicured lawns and extra-cab pickups of the middle class. For 30 years, there was labor peace. But by the late '80s, Ravenswood ran smack into the new global economy. Kaiser fell prey to corporate raiders and the West Virginia plant was sold off, eventually ending up in the hands of Willy Strothotte, a Swiss metals trader, and R. Emmett Boyle, a former plant manager with a grudge against the union who ran day-to-day operations. The plant was rechristened Ravenswood Aluminum Company, or RAC.

Boyle had one clear goal: to bust the union. The Steelworkers' contract was set to expire on Oct. 31, 1990. But during negotiations that fall, management began erecting a fence around the plant, covering transformers with steel-plate armor, installing video cameras and hiring a new security force. They bused in replacement workers and trained them at a nearby motel. Asking for major concessions and refusing to discuss health and safety issues, RAC hoped the union would strike so they could permanently replace the work force.

When the Steelworkers offered to keep working under the old contract, the company refused, declared an impasse in negotiations and locked them out. RAC figured if they could entice a few hundred workers to cross the picket line, the union would fold. But in nearly two years, only 17 workers returned to the plant as scabs. This solidarity was the foundation of the Steelworkers' win.

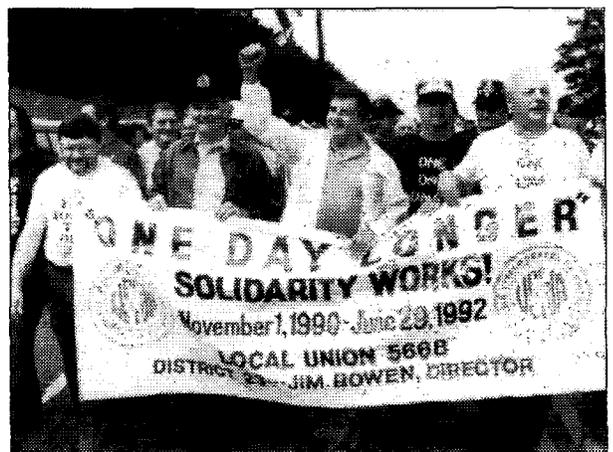
But solidarity alone doesn't win strikes. At first, the union stuck to traditional methods. They manned picket lines, filed complaints with the National Labor Relations Board and waited. But in the words of George Becker, then vice president of the Steelworkers: "Nothing was being done that would be effective in pressuring the company to return to the bargaining table." Indeed, Boyle had hired a thousand scabs and claimed that the plant was running at 90 percent capacity.

The union went on the offensive, developing a groundbreaking, multifaceted "coordinated campaign" that extended the proverbial picket line far beyond Ravenswood. Members of Local 5668 took off on morale-boosting road trips, leafleting at the Kentucky Derby and a speech by Boyle in Vancouver, British Columbia. They trailed every truck leaving the plant, and began pressuring RAC clients like Stroh's, Anheuser-Busch and Coca-Cola to avoid scab aluminum. Pointing to RAC's horrendous safety record—four workers had been killed at the plant during the summer before the lockout, after only two deaths in all the years before Boyle took over—the union pushed for an investigation by OSHA, which later hit the company with more than \$600,000 in fines.

But the union's real breakthrough came when they were anonymously sent a copy of an internal RAC audit, which clued them into the company's mysterious ownership network and connected RAC to international financier Marc Rich. Nicknamed "Aluminum Finger," Rich was said to control as much as 40 percent of the world's aluminum market. He would

normally have little to fear from a few West Virginia Steelworkers. But Rich was a fugitive, wanted by American authorities for evading taxes, mail fraud, racketeering and trading with the enemy. He was accused of illegally buying Iranian oil during an embargo and then selling the discounted oil to major American producers as his own for a tremendous profit. Rich also was suspected of smuggling oil into South Africa during apartheid and dealing in Iraqi oil during the Gulf War. Facing more than 300 years in prison and a \$750,000 reward for his capture, Rich stayed holed up in Zug, Switzerland, where he couldn't be extradited.

In Rich, the Steelworkers had found the perfect villain. Though they couldn't hope to wound him financially, there were other pressure points. "Obsessed with secrecy and privacy, he would do everything he could to avoid attention from the media," Juravich and Bronfenbrenner write. "Publicity was a threat to his ability to negotiate secret trade deals that danced on the edge of legality and corporate ethics. And most of all, publicity threatened his efforts to work out a deal with the U.S. govern-



JOHN HIMELRICH

ment so that he could return to the United States without going to jail."

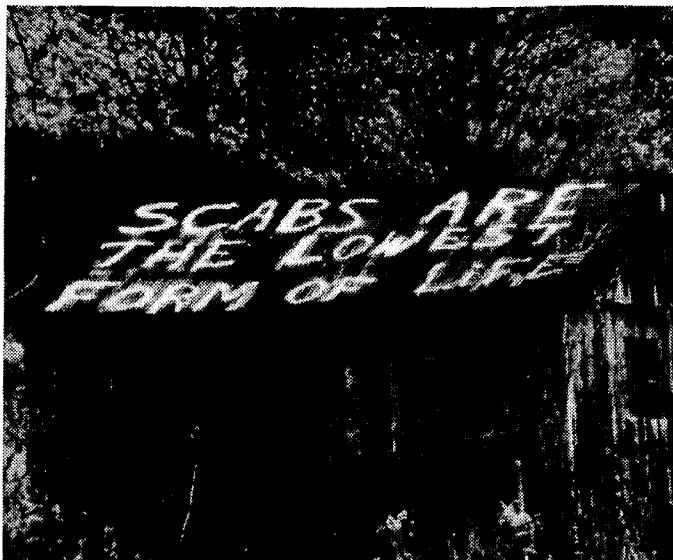
So in the summer of 1991, a small delegation of union activists, including a half-dozen members of Local 5668, went to Europe, traveling across the continent to demonstrate against Rich and to tell the story of how an infamous white-collar criminal was destroying working families to other unions and labor-friendly politicians. They passed out "Wanted: Marc Rich"

posters at a black-tie dinner sponsored by the London Metals Exchange and protested outside of Rich's headquarters in Zug, performing before international television cameras with papier-mâché puppet caricatures of Rich and Mother Jones. They headed to Amsterdam to meet with bankers who had extended credit to RAC, warning them of the millions the company owed the Steelworkers in back pay. When the union heard Rich planned to buy the Slovakian National Aluminum Co., Steelworkers President Lynn Williams sent a letter to Czechoslovakian President Vaclav Havel, asking him not to deal "with a criminal who represents the worst of Western capitalism." A month later, the deal was put on hold. "The union campaign was no longer costing Rich only his privacy and peace of mind," Juravich and Bronfenbrenner write. "The Steelworkers had proven that they could also interfere with Rich's ability to do what he did best—trade and invest behind closed doors."

By the end of the lockout, the union had initiated anti-Rich activities in 28 countries on five continents and derailed an attempt by Boyle to take sole control of the company. They wanted Rich to make a move to break the stalemate. Finally, he did. After the demonstration outside his offices in Zug, Willy Strothotte, backed by Rich, held secret meetings with the Steelworkers leadership to discuss whether a deal could be made with Boyle out of the way. Strothotte soon seized majority control of RAC, packed the board of directors and ousted Boyle. Steelworker Jim Bowen sent Boyle a fax saying, "How does it feel to be permanently replaced?"

Negotiations resumed and a new contract—calling for the firing of replacement workers, a \$1.25 an hour pay raise, a lump-sum payment of \$2,000 and a profit-sharing plan—was overwhelmingly approved by the rank and file. Triumphant, the Steelworkers walked back through the gates on June 29, 1992.

It was a big win, but the local didn't necessarily win big. The union had to



DAN STIDHAM

The victory at Ravenswood, Juravich and Bronfenbrenner write, "demonstrated that the new powerful yet diffuse corporate structures are not impenetrable to workers and their unions." With the lack of strong labor laws and growing corporate power, labor disputes can rarely be won anymore just on the shop floor or at the bargaining table. As in Ravenswood, it takes a combination of local determination, solidarity and creative militancy along with the implementation of a com-

prehensive, multifaceted, constantly evolving international strategy. Learning from the Ravenswood experience, unions should start researching corporate structures and potential allies long before a strike or lockout starts, not just after the traditional methods sour. Coordinated campaigns must harass and intimidate management from day one with demonstrations at shareholder meetings, pressure on OSHA and the EPA to investigate safety and health violations, appeals to banks not to finance deals under the threat of removing union pension money from the vaults, and help from still-strong foreign unions. In short, says Becker, now president of the Steelworkers, "escalate, escalate, escalate."

This July, the Steelworkers signed another four-year contract with Century Aluminum, which bought the plant in

Unions must harass and intimidate management from day one. As George Becker says, "escalate, escalate, escalate."

1995. But on Aug. 16, after Century tried to fire a worker who they said damaged a huge smelting pot, the union went out on a violent, 19-hour wildcat strike, throwing rocks and smashing windows and costing the company millions when it had to shut down one of its three potlines for several weeks. A few weeks earlier, Century had announced it was selling part of the operation to Pechiney SA, a French aluminum company, which in turn may merge with Alcan, the Canadian aluminum giant. It's unclear who'll be signing the workers' next paycheck.

prehensive, multifaceted, constantly evolving international strategy.

Learning from the Ravenswood experience, unions should start researching corporate structures and potential allies long before a strike or lockout starts, not just after the traditional methods sour. Coordinated campaigns must harass and intimidate management from day one with demonstrations at shareholder meetings, pressure on OSHA and the EPA to investigate safety and health violations, appeals to banks not to finance deals under the threat of removing union pension money from the vaults, and help from still-strong foreign unions. In short, says Becker, now president of the Steelworkers, "escalate, escalate, escalate."

Following this model, the Steelworkers won protracted contests at Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel and Bridgestone-Firestone Tire. Similar strategies are being used in a range of ongoing showdowns, including a nine-month lockout of 3,100 workers at Kaiser Aluminum in Washington State (see "Striking Back," Oct. 3).

But for me, the best endorsement for Ravenswood wasn't the book jacket blurbs from Noam Chomsky or John Sweeney. The last time I stopped in Ravenswood, my grandparents didn't want me to leave too early, so they might have time to go downtown and pick up a copy of this book. They were proud that Ravenswood was being recorded in the annals of labor history, where it belongs. ■

Green Collar

By Dean Baker

Global warming still may not be on the policy agenda in Washington, but the long hot days of summer put it in the minds of many people across the country. The vast majority of scientists agree that we must act soon to limit the damage from the accumulation of greenhouse gases. Yet little progress has been made toward achieving even the first steps laid out in the 1997 international agreement reached in Kyoto, Japan.

If the corporate executives in coal, oil and other polluting industries have their way, global warming will never appear on the policy agenda. These industries are concerned about threats to their

such as finance, health care, teaching or retail trade. In most of these industries, it is difficult to imagine how it would

An environmental economist shows that labor doesn't have to confront global warming with fear.

even be possible for environmental regulations to cost jobs.

But even in manufacturing, Goodstein documents numerous studies showing that job losses attributable to environmental regulation are minimal. A study by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, for example, found that the number of jobs lost due to environmental regulation has averaged less than 3,000 per year. By comparison, job loss in manufacturing has averaged close to 30,000 per month over the past year and a half. Even in the most extreme cases, such as coal mining in Appalachia and logging in the Northwest, it turns out that environmental regulation has not been the primary cause of job loss.

In the coal industry, the real culprit has been increased produc-

tivity, as strip-mining has replaced labor-intensive underground mining. Coal production has actually increased since 1980, while employment has fallen by almost 60 percent. In forestry, jobs have been eliminated by rising productivity and a shift of investment to the South to take advantage of low-cost labor. Employment in the industry had already fallen by nearly 40 percent from its 1978 peak before the first logging restrictions went into effect in 1991. By comparison, the jobs lost due to environmental restrictions probably will not even be one-fifth as large. But regardless of this reality, unemployed miners and lumber workers are likely to blame environmentalists for their fate.

As Goodstein points out, the national media have been willing to uncritically repeat the industry line on jobs and the environment, thereby building the myth and creating a political environment that is often hostile to environmental regula-

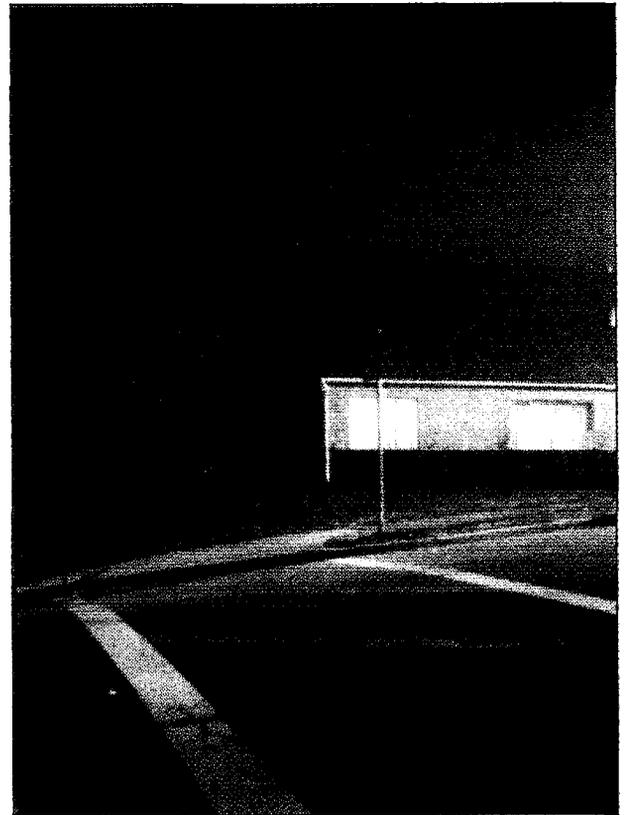
The Trade-Off Myth: Fact and Fiction About Jobs and the Environment

By Eban Goodstein
Island Press
195 pages, \$27.50

profits. But to make the political case, they've tried to take the nation's workers hostage, threatening them with massive job losses if steps are taken to curtail the emissions of greenhouse gases. Eban Goodstein argues compellingly in *The Trade-Off Myth: Fact and Fiction About Jobs and the Environment* that workers have little to fear.

Goodstein is an environmental economist (disclosure: also a personal friend) who takes both the environment and jobs seriously. He has worked with the Economic Policy Institute over the past six years to create a pro-labor environmental agenda. In this time he has done several important studies analyzing aspects of the jobs-environment trade-off.

As the title of his book suggests, much of this work involves dispelling myths. Recent polls have showed that close to one third of all workers fear that environmental regulations may cost them their jobs. Yet job losses that can actually be attributed to environmental regulation are relatively few. Currently close to 80 percent of workers are employed in service industries,



Untitled #2077 by Todd Hido, 1997. Chromogenic print. From *Sites Around the City: Art and Environment*, to be shown next spring at the Arizona State University Art Museum.