

The Current Strike Wave and the Mass Strike Process

- A Special Report -

July 28 (IPS) — The Rockefeller family has launched a calculated, political attack on the North American working class as part of a broader worldwide assault. By forcing a global credit crunch through financial manipulations, Rockefeller has altered the terms of battle between employers and the trade unions. The current and future extension of credit to already heavily indebted corporations and municipalities is now tied directly to their ability to enforce brutal austerity measures, measures designed to reduce the standard of living of the working class throughout the advanced sector to the genocidal level of Brazil.

In this context “normal” trade union struggles are impossible. The terms of the agreements have been dictated in advance — by David Rockefeller’s banks.

The wreckage of the North American trade union movement is strewn from coast to coast. But the fighting spirit of the class is not broken. The working class wants a fight. How they will fight is therefore, the all important question: will workers expend their anger in futile, isolated trade union actions which can only further their own destruction, or will they organize a mass political movement capable of breaking Rockefeller’s stranglehold on the world economy.

Over the past month, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and other media regularly briefed by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency have published numberless fanciful tales of a powerful labor upsurge, “the biggest strike wave since World War II,” caused by workers’ desire to “catch up with inflation.” In this they have been aided and abetted by both union bureaucrats whistling in the dark and outright counterinsurgency agents in the trade unions, notably Rockefeller lap-dog Jerry Wurf, head of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

The Real Picture

The so-called strike wave is a series of small, isolated **provoked** strikes scattered throughout the continent. Out of the 588 strikes in progress reported by the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service in mid July, almost 95 per cent involved less than one hundred! Singled out for major strike activity have been the construction and municipal sectors — areas which have been decimated by the credit crunch. With the *exception* of lockouts and set up strikes in the automotive sector led by Rockefeller agent Leonard Woodcock’s United Autoworkers union (UAW), the strike wave has bypassed heavy industry.

Other strikes have for the most part been located in small light manufacturing plants and machine shops and small construction sites. Many of the firms in these areas

are near bankruptcy and have been denied additional credit as poor risks.

Pure Lies

Despite the press reports to the contrary, inflation is **not** the issue behind the strike wave. Rockefeller’s efforts to “Brazilianize” the working class lie behind **every** strike. Workers are being forced out on strike by inhuman plant conditions that have hiked the rate of industrial accidents to depression levels, by the bone crushing speed up and productivity demands being wrenched from a reduced workforce — 20 per cent increase in some GM plants over one week; all these **demand**ed by Rockefeller’s banks as collateral on current and future loans.

The so-called strike wave is a series of small, isolated *provoked* strikes scattered throughout the continent.

The “wage explosion” heralded in the *Washington Post*, the “escalating pattern of settlements” chronicled in the *New York Times*, are fabrication. Most strikers have settled for wage “increases” of around 8 per cent, sometimes as high as 10 per cent, often not far from the old Pay Board figure of 5.5 per cent. In a period of 20-30 per cent inflation — even the bourgeois media are reporting these figures, disdaining the obviously fraudulent 12 per cent rate publicized by the Federal government — workers are actually taking a substantial cut in real wages. At best they are fighting a rearguard action to minimize the extent of the cut.

The character of these strikes — small, isolated, easily crushed — is perfectly defined by three small strikes in the Buffalo region. The strikes, at a Fedders electrical plant, a Hewitt Robbins rubber plant, and the West Vaco paper factory, occurred within miles of each other, but until informed by Labor Committee organizers, workers at each plant did not know the other strikes were going on. Each plant felt as if the hundred odd workers there were the only people fighting — fighting a losing battle. Their isolation was not geographic, but political. The hopelessness of this kind of action was brutally confirmed for workers at the Hewitt Robbins plant, when the company announced that they were closing the plant permanently.

How well this strategy is working can be seen by examining strike patterns in the construction and municipal sectors, the two major areas of strike activity in the recent period.

**The Great Construction Lockout:
"Plenty of Work — in Alaska"**

On May 16, Teamster cement drivers in a six county area around Chicago went on strike, supposedly for higher wages. A lockout situation developed immediately, as major sites began to close down; two weeks later, when the lack of concrete and brick deliveries made itself felt, construction on Chicago's major artery, the Dan Ryan Expressway was halted and all commercial and residential construction ceased. At the same time in downstate Illinois (Peoria) Teamster Local 627 and thirteen other downstate unions struck over wages and a cost-of-living escalator clause. Construction was immediately halted in 80 downstate cities; 25,000 construction workers were idled. A total of 300,000 to 400,000 workers were locked out in the state of Illinois alone.

At the same time in Montreal, 35,000 construction workers were in the midst of an alternating lockout-slowdown pattern; 15,000 more were out on the West Coast, and industry-crippling strikes had already occurred in Kansas City, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati.

A representative of the Rockefeller controlled First National Bank of Chicago gave away the game plan when he told IPS, "We anticipate a radical reshaping of the construction industry following this strike." Busting the building trades was critical for Rockefeller, to secure cheap labor to build the fascist infrastructure for his new energy development projects.

As reported in IPS, he had already laid the groundwork by wiping out the lending power of the Federal Reserve's regional banks, centralizing control of credit in the New York Federal Reserve Board — chaired by David Rockefeller. Since building contractors depend heavily on short term credit to finance their operations, Rockefeller had a stranglehold on the construction industry.

The Chicago bank official consequently greeted the widespread bankruptcy of small and medium sized contractors predicted by the Chicago Residential Employers Construction Council with complete equanimity, pronouncing it "unfortunate" while rejoicing that "big contractors like Tishman aren't getting hurt." Meanwhile, the Employers Council and the newspapers were blaming the "strike" for the gutting of the industry.

Bechtel's Role

The big firms in the Association of General Contractors, run by the CIA's Bechtel Construction Corp.,



"weren't getting hurt" for a reason. They had actually provoked the lockout in the first place, and knew what to expect. The Association had set up the Territorial Insurance Co. of Hamilton, Bermuda to "protect insured contractors against actual losses sustained at job sites when work is wholly or partially suspended by a strike or lockout..." In short, an employers strike fund. The company called this "a key element, along with broader area bargaining, multi-association bargaining...to produce the economic balance required for improved labor relations."

"Broader area bargaining" and "multi-association bargaining" were taking place under the aegis of institutions like the Chicago Construction Coordinating Council, set up by Bechtel vice-president John O'Connell. The Council controls all Federal funds for construction in the Chicago region and is tied to the National Council for Productivity, a co-participation brainwashing unit composed of labor, management and government representatives. The Chicago Council pushed to set up a Mid-American Regional Bargaining Association, which would establish centralized collective bargaining in the region; seven unions, including carpenters and painters, had already agreed. Rockefeller's Nazi Labor Front was developing.

The setup was so obvious that even George Meany, President of the AFL-CIO was forced to react with some radical rhetoric. On July 9 the AFL-CIO Department of Public Relations issued a press release in which Meany blamed Rockefeller for driving up interest rates and "clubbing residential construction into a depression."

Meany's shocked recognition of the enemy was prompted by his fear, perfectly justified, that Rockefeller was destroying his power base in the AFL-CIO Building Trades Council.

Meany's incurable class collaborationism surfaced later when IPS interviewed AFL-CIO executive Nat Goldfinger, who outlined Meany's "solution" to the problem. "We advocate selective monetary controls based on priorities....The Federal Reserve should direct commercial banks to allocate credit for housing, community facilities, etc. rather than for gambling casinos, land speculation, conglomerate takeovers, and foreign subsidies." Priority credit controls, the instrument of Hitler's fascist economic planner Hjalmar Schacht, are now championed as well by social fascist Congressman Henry Reuss (D-Wisc.) who wants funds channeled into construction of Rockefeller's phony energy development projects.

In Illinois, such projects are not far off. Governor Dan Walker, a Rockefeller Democrat is planning coal gassification projects in southern Illinois and his huge \$2 billion highway program suggests he has mapped out his autobahn from Chicago to the gas ovens downstate.

**As one New Jersey worker put it,
"There's plenty of work —
in Alaska."**

Death of the Building Trades

The Chicago cement drivers strike is now settled, and workers in the various craft unions are limping back to the job — if they can find one. During the recent strike wave, a full third of all building trades jobs have been wiped out!

Moreover, it appears that the crafts have lost their vaunted power to regulate the size of the total workforce by controlling the apprenticeship programs. It has been the conscious policy of contractors to eliminate many of the higher paid, skilled positions and replace them with larger numbers of lower-skilled crafts. In the carpenters union, this means the replacement of higher paid journeymen and apprentices with permit workers — workers who have failed the rigid apprenticeships tests, as 90 per cent of all workers do every year. When they become apprentices, permit workers receive wages at the bottom of the pay scale regardless of the number of years experience they have had.

Previously the union had insisted that on-site ratios of one apprentice or permit worker to every ten journeymen be upheld. Carpenters in New Jersey have told IPS that the actual ratio is closer to one half — and growing.

Simultaneously, there are reports from industry sources of an "on site" increase in the number of laborers, the lowest paid most labor intensive of all the crafts.

Workers searching for a solution to their problem face contradictory rumors being circulated around construction sites about the future of their unions. One rumor says the locals are going to be subdivided according to minute job breakdowns, an obvious move to destroy the building trades by promoting more fratricidal jurisdictional disputes. The other says that all trades are to be amalgamated into one general construction union; the Midwest Regional Bargaining Association and other such counterinsurgency creations are obvious steps on this road.

Unable to face this Rockefeller "critical choice," desperate workers are voluntarily relocating themselves. Laborers in Rochester told IPS that many of their comrades have already picked up and moved to Arizona to work on dam projects. As one New Jersey worker put it, "There's plenty of work — in Alaska."

"Class-Conscious" Agent in Municipal — The Case of Jerry Wurf

On July 19 AFSCME head Jerry Wurf, a counterinsurgency creation of Nelson Rockefeller, declared himself the leader of the strike wave in a press conference in Washington D.C. Thirty AFSCME strikes have already occurred this year; 500 contracts are coming up for negotiation between now and the late fall.

Under these circumstances, Wurf did his best to banish memories of his lifelong advocacy of co-participation brainwashing programs and his notorious redbaiting; he came on as a fighting champion of the whole working class.

"I'm telling you you're going into a depression," Wurf barked. "The victims of that depression will be the workers. Public workers are in the vanguard of what is becoming an aroused labor movement. (There is) a class consciousness among workers in this country I have not seen in twenty years. It will be a long hot August and September."

Under Wurf's leadership, the AFSCME international had recently refused to cooperate with the Labor Committees and workers organizing for a municipal debt moratorium for striking AFSCME police and sanitation workers in Baltimore, the only sane response under the circumstances. Wurf preferred to cheer on the police fascist countergang Revolutionary Union's provocative trash-ins; he officially invited the RU to organize for a strike rally.

What municipal workers were facing was starkly dramatized in the negotiations between the government of New York City and firemen and sanitation workers a few days before the Wurf press conference.

New York's debt service payments have soared from \$1.1 billion to \$1.6 billion in the last year.

The club Rockefeller is using against city workers is the rapidly escalating debt of state and municipal governments across the country. In Philadelphia, for example, municipal debt service payments have tripled in the past three years, rising from \$33,700,000 in 1972 to \$77,700,000 in 1973 and an estimated \$110,000,000 in 1974. In New York debt requirements have risen by nearly 50 per cent in one year.

Mayor Beame ordered negotiations in N.Y. to resume, after a two week lapse, at the height of the tension in Baltimore. In that fashion he gently reminded workers that the front page "riots" in Baltimore could, if absolutely necessary, be replicated in some form or other here.

The settlement followed hard on the heels of the city's outraged refusal to pay the whopping "7.92 per cent plus the Statue of Liberty" interest rate demanded by David Rockefeller's Chase Manhattan Bank as the price for floating a record \$438 million in long term bonds. In effect, Rockefeller told the city "No more long term loans, except at prohibitive rates, You're on a short leash until you do a job on city workers."

Rockefeller's Blackmail

Forced to borrow on a short term basis, the city on the day of the settlement, managed to obtain \$800 million repayable six months from now at a mere 8.58 per cent interest, the highest rate ever paid by the city government. Four such "loans," totalling \$3.2 billion, are necessary to get New York through this fiscal year.

And this incredible blackmail was an offer the city couldn't refuse; the next day's *New York Times* revealed that "there was no possibility of cancelling yesterday's sale, given the city's immediate cash needs." The city was, in fact, paying back the money it borrowed at 7.19 per cent last August! It is this process that has sent New York's debt service payments soaring from \$1.1 billion to \$1.6 billion in the last year.

The city will face the same crisis in January, when the notes come due. That's why Beame announced before the negotiations that sanitation workers and firemen would get no more than New York transit workers got last April; as it turned out they received a settlement identical to the transit workers' — 14 per cent wage increase over two years, a modest COL, and productivity.

Despite the playup in the local press about "fabulous" wage increases, the workers were forced to take a cut in real wages. As if to rub it in, Herbert Bienstock, the New York regional director of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, sadly announced that real wages had dropped at least 4 per cent during a recent period.

Meanwhile, hospital workers, members of Local 1199, have only a "gentlemen's agreement" with the city's near bankrupt Hospital Corporation.

When confronted with that situation, an 1199 official remarked pathetically, "Don't be a prophet of doom." The Hospital Corporation, however, has already stated that they will make no assurances about their ability to pay.

Elsewhere in the U.S. obviously provoked walkouts are now in progress, with the counterinsurgent AFSCME operation, as in Baltimore, right in the thick of the action. Although the Ohio public workers strike was sparked by a Teamster wildcat, the strike was quickly spread to mental hospitals and liquor stores by AFSCME. Sixty state troopers and 140 National Guards, specially trained in prison work, are operating the Lucasville State Penitentiary after a riot, during the prison guards' strike there. Lucasville was the birthplace of the Ohio State Prisoners' Union, organized by law student Jay Twohig in 1973; Twohig has talked about emulating the Patricia Hearst kidnapping carried out by the brainwashed Symbionese Liberation Army. Thus there is the strong possibility that the riot was a deliberately engineered measure.

In the Buffalo Department of Public Works AFSCME local 264 voted on a strike July 24, following weeks of job reclassifications and layoffs and the halting of "rolling out" — using handtrucks to move garbage cans. A rank and file caucus of 200 workers, called To Install Pride, has apparently already precipitated a slowdown and is agitating for further militant action.

Baltimore municipal workers settled for even less than the workers in New York City. They also got a bonus: Police Commissioner Pomerleau has now fired 91 probationary police officers, demoted 29 and transferred 59, including most of the union negotiating committee. A \$90,000 fine was leveled on the AFSCME sanitation local; the international made no move to help. The local head of AFSCME's police union, Rapinotti, was fired. The union response: "Our guys don't say anything, hopefully he'll slow down and give the Governor time to move." This while Maryland Governor Marvin Mandel was making it clear that he backed Pomerleau's actions.

More of the Same

Elsewhere the "public workers vanguard" is being crushed in equally brutal fashion. In Illinois, Governor Walker has promised to cut AFSCME state workers' pay increases of \$100 a month won earlier this year to \$50. In

Rochester the city has decided to win back an increase it granted municipal workers during an April strike — by imposing a fine on every union member, and deducting it from their paychecks.

In Philadelphia, jobs are being cut back through attrition and 13,000 Neighborhood Youth Corps \$2 an hour jobs have been created for the summer, while AFSCME Local 427 has agreed to work overtime again as part of its regular work schedule. In nearby Wilmington, Delaware, AFSCME Local 320 is still trying to renegotiate last winter's contract, in which it agreed to cut down sanitation crews from 5 men to 3. Now the physically exhausted local is begging for the fourth man back.

And in San Francisco, site of last spring's so-called general strike of municipal workers, pay increases have been held up by civil court action in which it is charged that the raises are illegal. Newspapers are calling for passage of the Feinstein Amendment, a new law to "remove wage excesses" received by city workers.

Through all this municipal leadership has said nothing — well almost nothing. Wurf wound up his rousing flag-waving call to arms in Washington with a plea to Congress to pass "proposed legislation that would provide voluntary binding arbitration for state and municipal workers." In other words, he proposed that municipal workers turn over their unions to Rockefeller labor mediators William Usery and Theodore Kheel.

The Contracts Are Worthless

The actual content of any contract signed by workers today is productivity agreements and layoffs. If this isn't enough, the contracts will be torn up and Brazilianization will be implemented at an even faster pace. The recent history of the United Auto Workers (UAW) provides the paradigm.

Under the leadership of CIA agent Leonard Woodcock, auto workers settled for a 4 per cent wage increase and more of the co-participation, organizational development brainwashing of which Woodcock has been the pioneer. In return they got an agreement which included so-called voluntary overtime. Now many auto workers are "voluntarily" working 60 hour weeks, and the union is actively encouraging local, one-at-a-time Apache strikes, to promote more speedup, more layoffs. At the Lordstown General Motors plant, the union allowed more than 4,000 grievances to pile up while management wrenched a phenomenal 20 per cent increase in productivity out of a reduced workforce. Then suicidal strike authorization was delivered to the workers. In Framingham GM a similar situation was provoked.

In Chicago, scared young students — 90 day "recycling runners" — replace older workers on vacation. Pressmen are now working 10 hours a day,

seven days a week. Line speeds have increased 25 per cent in a month. Sixty dollar bonuses are given for speeding up your fellow worker. One worker was killed in his punch press, the safety unlocked to speed production. Workers are paid for laying themselves off. Thirty per cent of the entire auto workforce has been fired in a year.

In other basic industry, the story is the same. Steel is a hell of "internal recycling," in which job classification and seniority no longer mean anything; more and more workers join the low-wage labor gangs every week. Tens of thousands of garment workers have been wiped out in a year, as the decaying industry target of a nationwide "strike" by the Amalgamated Clothing Workers (ACW) in the spring, is bled to the limit to support worthless real estate mortgages held by Rockefeller's New York City banks.

Meanwhile, newspapers and broadcasters portray the strike wave as a blow against President Nixon's Herbert Hoover style economic policies, thus hoping to motivate the speedy passage of social fascist labor legislation such as Sen. Mondale's NERA bill and Rep. Reuss's Equal Opportunity and Full Employment Act.

The Mass Strike Process

As we stated, the North American working class is not beaten. Behind the strike wave headlines, an actual mass strike ferment is building day by day. It is reflected in the numbers of workers reading, discussing and selling *New Solidarity*, newspaper of the National Caucus of Labor

**Behind the strike wave headlines,
an actual mass strike ferment
is building day by day.**

Committees — the relative few stepping forward now to commit themselves to building a mass political organization, and the far greater number for whom the Labor Committees are the indisputable authority on the labor movement, but who have not yet taken the responsibility for creating the organization they recognize as their only chance for survival.

Labor Committee penetration of the working class is dramatically shown by two recent developments. One was the startled reaction of Ernie Mazey, head of the Detroit American Civil Liberties Union and brother of UAW executive board member Emil Mazey, when he found out about Labor Committee presence in midwest auto plants. Mazey pointed out that this penetration was greater than that of UAW organizers in the mid 1930's in the period before the sitdown strikes which built the union into a power. The second was the response of

Wilbur Hobby, chief of the North Carolina AFL-CIO, to the U.S. Labor Party petition drive which gathered over 18,000 signatures in his home state. Hobby called a special conference to announce that he was not affiliated with the Labor Party, a clear indication that he realized who was leading the working class in the south out of their long nightmare of organizationless wage slavery.

Continual police harassment provides a further index of Labor Committee influence; there is no doubt whom the CIA and the Wurfs and Woodcocks fear. In the last month there have been at least 25 separate instances of police harassment and arrest of organizers selling *New Solidarity*, on such charges as "soliciting" and "peddling without a license." More than half a dozen instances of FBI harassment of parents and friends of Labor Committee members have occurred since the late June FBI raid on Labor Committee offices in Detroit.

New Solidarity presently has a circulation of 60,000 per week, with an estimate ten to fifteen workers reading every copy. One hundred and forty eight workers are part of the newspaper's sales network, several hundreds more are part of a briefing network which provides daily international reports on the development of Rockefeller's worldwide attack on the working class.

In the week ending July 22, 1,000 copies of *New Solidarity* were sold by workers and unemployed in *New Solidarity* sales and briefing networks. Each worker in the *New Solidarity* sales network spreads the ripple effect of his self-knowledge of the working-class capability for organization and program to run the economy for itself. One worker asks a worker in the sales network, "Where do you get those papers? I want to sell them too."

In a Flint Buick unemployment center, a shop steward approached *New Solidarity* distributors: "Look, you're not selling these too well. Here, let me help you." He then proceeded to sell almost 100 papers himself, creating a heated discussion in the center around the Rockefeller Brazilianization strategy.

The Communists

Workers who sell *New Solidarity* are known as the communists. Workers in a Cleveland auto plant told *New Solidarity* distributors deployed from the Labor Committee regional office, "No thanks, I already got this paper from the communist inside the plant."

And around the country, *New Solidarity* becomes the

coalescing point for the "roundtable" political discussions.

Each week reports come into the National Operations Center of scores of hidden briefing networks and discussion groups.

These discussion groups merely represent the nodal points of working class self-organization. From them the word spreads throughout the plants, throughout the schools, throughout the working class residential districts.

This rapidly expanding sales and briefing network around *New Solidarity* is not enough.

A Political Machine

The international organizing for a debt moratorium around the strike of municipal workers in Baltimore, as the precondition for the immediate survival of the Italian working class, and as the first step in preventing the collapse of agriculture in the industrial sector requires the escalation of this sales and organizing process on the part of political workers.

The organizing and "hidden" sales and briefing **networks** must transform themselves into a **working class political machine**.

Thus political workers must act upon the knowledge that the sales networks are the transmission belt which transforms organic leaders into self-conscious mass leaders.

This process has begun in cities across the country, but only consistently in Philadelphia, Detroit, and Chicago. In New York City in the week ending July 22, five workers immediately advanced from selling *New Solidarity* to join the Labor Committees. In Chicago, each person on the sales network attends educational and international briefings.

The case of a Philadelphia welfare recipient organized through a briefing network established in a West Philadelphia ghetto by another welfare recipient represents the kind of struggle each political worker knows that he or she must go through.

Across the continent, the sales and briefing networks represent the now nascent chain of command and communications lines between revolutionary leadership and millions of workers who are quickly becoming ready to move.