

Strikes and lockouts begin to spread

by Vin Berg and Steve Komm

Each day, *EIR* receives reports of strikes, lock-outs, violence on the picket line in all parts of the country—labor strife of the type not seen since the 1930s. In Europe, such strikes are influenced by communists and KGB dupes among social democrats. That is currently not the case in America. Workers are seeing their jobs, wages, working conditions, and trade unions destroyed. The strikes represent desperate defensive actions in the face of unjust demands from employers—the direct outcome of the Federal Reserve's regime of usury.

'Strike as long as you want to'

In Toledo, Ohio, where the political mass strikes of the last depression began with 1934's famous Auto-Lite strike, Sun Oil refinery workers and AP Auto Parts workers are locked out by managements whose "give-back" demands amount to disbanding the unions, and are backed by gun-turrets protecting a scab labor force.

A one-day nationwide strike by the Teamsters against Interstate Motor Freight System was crushed May 16 when the Grand Rapids-based firm announced that it would liquidate its motor-freight operation rather than agree to a new Teamster contract. More than 1,500 Teamsters, including several hundred in the Toledo-based Local 20, were fired when they refused to agree to a 35% cut in pay and benefits. "They can have their strike as long as they want. They have no jobs, though," said a company spokesman. Interstate had demanded the contract concessions after filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy reorganization on April 11. The contract was not due to expire until April 1985. The company is now expected to sell its trucking operations to a non-union company.

The city of Pittsburgh is in the middle of more than a half-dozen such strikes, blacked out by the media. Twenty thousand leaflets were distributed by warehouse workers in the Teamsters union, fired by Gimbels department store and replaced by youths hired by a "subcontractor." The fired workers, virtually all over 40, and a majority over 54, were making \$7.50 an hour; the scabs will make \$4.70. Gimbels was recently bought by the British American Tobacco Company, whose negotiator told the employees that older workers have a duty to move out of the way and let younger workers have their jobs.

Security guards working for the Mellon Bank Center building, some former steelworkers, were also leafleting in the first weeks of May. Mellon management had "terminated" its contract with their unionized company a year ago, hiring replacements at the minimum wage. The Mellons have a history of union-busting going back to 1926, when Andrew and R. B. Mellon's Pittsburgh Coal Company machine-gunned locked-out mineworkers, launching the Coolidge-Hoover wave of union-busting.

At the same time, 500 paperworkers forced out on strike at the Papercraft Company's Blawnox, Pennsylvania factory demonstrated at a shareholders' meeting and at the Pittsburgh city council. The company had demanded the workers take a major pay cut and give up benefits and seniority, or the company would move operations to non-union plants in Illinois and California. The workers struck April 28; by that time, the company had already moved more than half the machinery out of the plant.

One hundred and twenty-five employees of the Shasta Steel Company in Coraopolis, Pennsylvania, represented by Shipbuilders Local 61, demonstrated May 1 against Judge Sylvestri, who had granted their employer an injunction against more than two of the striking workers picketing at one time, since more would "cause violence." Scabs had physically attacked picketers including the union president—but Sylvestri refused to hear evidence. Company owner John Shutey told workers there would be no union at the plant after the strike, and took out newspaper ads offering jobs of "workers who are now striking the plant."

The 'post-industrial' Combustion Engineering

In nearby East Monongahela, 600 workers at the Combustion Engineering facility are now waiting to find out if they will still have jobs at the end of the month. On May 11, talks between USWA Local 210 and management came to an end. On May 12, union members unanimously rejected company demands for "language changes" in the workers' contract, which was to have run through March-April 1985. On May 24, the company's board, dominated by Boston Brahmin families linked to Swiss financial interests, will meet in Windsor, Connecticut, probably to take the decision to move the plant south to non-union territory. The company's demands would have destroyed the seniority system, permitting anyone to be laid off or assigned to any job at any time, permitted free contracting-out of work, destroyed a standing vacation plan, and postponed a July pay raise to January 1985.

Combustion Engineering was a major nuclear-power components supplier—until the "post-industrial" financial policies of the very same families controlling the firm destroyed America's nuclear industry. The East Monongahela plant is the fifth or sixth shop to be hit in Combustion Engineering's drive against its labor force. It has also busted union shops in Tulsa, St. Louis, and Chattanooga, Tennessee, among other locations.