

Will labor go for a New Bretton Woods?

by Marianna Wertz

Increasing labor ferment in the United States and abroad is hitting at the worst aspects of the global financial crisis, including outsourcing, privatization, wholesale firings, and cuts in services. However, none of the numerous strikes has yet taken up *the only real solution* to the causes of that crisis, to demand the New Bretton Woods system which Lyndon LaRouche has insisted must replace the bankrupt International Monetary Fund (IMF)-centered globalization monster. In the days and weeks ahead, as the crisis intensifies, these labor actions will have to move in the direction LaRouche has specified, or be crushed.

The leading edge of the ferment in the United States are the strikes against General Motors by 9,200 members of two United Auto Workers locals in Flint, Michigan, begun on June 5 and 11, which have shut down virtually all of GM's North American auto production. The real, though not official, issue is the large-scale plant shutdowns and layoffs that GM has already carried out, and threatens to escalate, in order to "compete in the global marketplace." There are now an estimated 175,000 layoffs resulting from parts shortages. GM has lost more than \$1.2 billion, and is continuing to lose about a \$80 million a day.

But the GM strike, as serious as it is, is just the tip of the iceberg of growing anger in the working population here and abroad against the hideous effects of the financial elite's globalization and privatization policies. In Russia, where IMF policies have resulted in starvation and widespread loss of life, striking miners are again blockading the Trans-Siberian Railway, demanding wages that are months in arrears. In South Korea, where mass layoffs have been mandated by the IMF, a general strike is unfolding. In Puerto Rico, a commonwealth with local autonomy under the U.S. flag, an unprecedented general strike by a half-million workers shut down the capital of San Juan on July 7-8, protesting the planned privatization of the state telephone company.

In the United States itself, in addition to the UAW strike, a major demonstration against privatization occurred in New York City on June 30. An expected 10,000 construction workers turned into 30,000 angry hardhats, protesting the award of a \$33 million transit contract by the city to a viciously non-union firm, Roy Kay, Inc., despite the fact that the firm has been indicted repeatedly for its illegal practices. The demon-

strators, calling for the ouster of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, tied up midtown Manhattan and disrupted business during the morning rush hour. A union source reports that similar actions are planned during the summer at large non-union construction sites.

Organized labor has also recently launched offensives against two other heads of the globalization hydra: the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and managed care. On July 13, the United Steelworkers of America (USWA) joined the Made in USA Foundation in an unprecedented Federal lawsuit, challenging the constitutionality of NAFTA, on the grounds that the treaty which created it should have been subject to a two-thirds ratification vote by the U.S. Senate, as called for in the U.S. Constitution. USWA President George Becker declared at a press conference announcing the suit, "We are taking this legal action today because NAFTA has been an unmitigated disaster, not just for our members, but for working people throughout North America."

Then, on July 15, the AFL-CIO launched a nationwide grassroots campaign to pass a strong Patients' Bill of Rights quickly in Congress. AFL-CIO President John Sweeney denounced the practices of managed care companies for chiseling on health care for working Americans and promised a hard-hitting campaign, including TV and radio spots in Democratic and Republican Congressional districts, going into the November elections.

GM strikes: 'No' to globaloney

Larry Mathews, co-editor of the newspaper for striking UAW Local 651 in Flint, discussed the issues behind the GM strike in a recent interview with this news service. "We need protectionism," he said. "Our best hope at this point is that we'll wake our government up and they'll take action to ensure fair trade and not free trade. Our country cannot stand to lose all of the manufacturing jobs that are here, to Third World countries, and then ship all those products back for sale here with no import tax or no punishment for leaving, so to speak, in the first place. . . . There's not a country alive that can survive with service jobs only. I quite frankly don't see where we're going to have even service jobs around here if you take the manufacturing base away."

Mathews noted that General Motors has 53 Delphi Automotive Systems Division plants in Mexico alone, where workers average \$1.10 per hour income, not even enough to buy the cars they manufacture. Mathews's local represents Delphi workers in Flint, where the average wage is around \$22 per hour, not including overtime and benefits.

With four additional UAW locals threatening to strike once the Flint strikes are ended—whenever that is—it looks to be a very hot summer, indeed. If these and other labor actions take up the real issue—the need for global financial reorganization in a New Bretton Woods system—they could give the globalizers a run for their ill-gotten money.