

## Nigerian Anarchist Tour of the US

COMRADE SAMUEL MBAH, of the militant anarchist Awareness League of Nigeria and author of the book *African Anarchism*, concluded a successful speaking tour of the United States in November. Samuel's tour was sponsored by the Workers Solidarity Alliance (WSA) and by a number of local anarchist groups (including several affiliates of the Atlantic Anarchist Circle) and Industrial Workers of the World branches. Both WSA and the Awareness League are sections of the anarcho-syndicalist International Workers Association (IWA).

During his various talks, Samuel discussed the current political situation in Nigeria, the long history of repression and military dictatorship, and the various forms of resistance that have emerged there. He also talked about politics and political forces throughout the African continent. In presenting his book, Samuel explained that though the actual knowledge of anarchist history and theory in Africa is not widespread, there are strong communal and non-State cultures and traditions that have a close affinity with anarchism, and that could form a basis for a wider anarchist movement across the continent. While talking about difficult times and situations, Samuel retained a message of optimism and hope for the future.

During his tour, Samuel was able to visit New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, DC, Morgantown, Chicago, Detroit, Atlanta, Chattanooga, and LA. There were a number of other places that were eager to host him, but unfortunately time and the short notice of his arrival did not allow him to get to all of them. He spoke to groups of 15 to 100 people, and was also able to do a number of local radio and cable TV interviews, including some anarchist programs. Copies of his books were sold and donations collected along the way to help pay for the tour.

One significant point to note about this tour is that in a number of locations some of those attending, particularly members of the African-American and African immigrant communities, were first exposed to anarchism in any meaningful way through Samuel's presentations, and the movement here should use this opportunity to build on these contacts in the future.

While funds were raised, there are still some expenses from the tour that need to be reimbursed, and the Awareness League is still in need of additional funds to develop its computer and communications capability to assist its organizing efforts. Donations for this can be marked for "AL Fund" and sent to Workers Solidarity Alliance, 339 Lafayette St. Room 202, New York, NY 10012, or e-mail [wsany@hotmail.com](mailto:wsany@hotmail.com).

Copies of Sam Mbah's book *African Anarchism* are available for \$11 (postage included) from See Sharp Press, PO Box 1731, Tucson, AZ 85702-1731 (e-mail: [seesharp@earthlink.net](mailto:seesharp@earthlink.net)), or at your local anarchist infoshop.

— Steve Rabinowitz



## Bengali Workers Need Aid

*During last Summer, floods devastated this already impoverished land. Our friends from the National Garment Workers Federation and the National Shop Employees Federation in Bangladesh are still seeking financial assistance in an effort to aid workers in their industries.*

*Financial aid may be sent as follows:*

Amirul Haque Amin  
NGWF  
GPO Box 864  
Dhaka-1000  
Bangladesh  
tel: 88-019-340268  
fax: 88-02-9562562  
email: [unity@bdmail.net](mailto:unity@bdmail.net)

Zakir Hossain  
NSEF  
GPO Box 148  
Dhaka-1000  
Bangladesh  
fax: 88-02-9668506

Spring 1999

# Workers Solidarity

Newsletter of the Workers Solidarity Alliance



## Reclaiming May Day

May 1st, International Workers' Day, commemorates the historic struggle of working people throughout the world, and is recognized in nearly every country except the United States and Canada. This despite the fact that the holiday began in the 1880s in the United States, with the fight for an eight-hour work day.

In 1884, the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions passed a resolution stating that eight hours would constitute a legal day's work from and after May 1, 1886. The resolution called for a general strike to achieve the goal, since legislative methods had already failed. With workers being forced to work ten, twelve, and fourteen hours a day, rank-and-file support for the eight-hour movement grew rapidly, despite the indifference and hostility of many union leaders. By April 1886, 250,000 workers were involved in the May Day movement.

The heart of the movement was in Chicago, organized primarily by the anarchist International Working People's Association. Businesses and the state were terrified by the increasingly revolutionary character of the movement and prepared accordingly. The police and militia were increased in size and received new and powerful weapons financed by local business leaders. Chicago's Commercial Club purchased a \$2000 machine gun for the Illinois National Guard to be used against strikers. Nevertheless, by May 1st, the movement had already won gains for many Chicago clothing cutters, shoemakers, and packing-house workers. But on May 3, 1886, police fired into a crowd of strikers at the McCormick Reaper Works Factory, killing four and wounding many. Anarchists called for a mass meeting the next day in Haymarket Square to protest the brutality.

The meeting proceeded without incident, and by the time the last speaker was on the platform, the rainy gathering was already breaking up, with only a few hundred people remaining. It was then that 180 cops marched into the square and ordered the meeting to disperse. As the speakers climbed down from the platform, a bomb was thrown at the police, killing one and injuring seventy. Police responded by firing into the crowd, killing one worker and injuring many others.

Although it was never determined who threw the bomb, the incident was used as an excuse to attack the entire Left and labor movement. Police ransacked the homes and offices of suspected radicals, and hundreds were arrested without charge. Anarchists in particular were harassed, and eight of Chicago's most active were charged with conspiracy to murder in connection with the Haymarket bombing. A kangaroo court found all eight guilty, despite a lack of evidence connecting any of them to the bomb-thrower (only one was even present at the meeting, and he was on the speakers' platform).



and they were sentenced to die. Albert Parsons, August Spies, Adolf Fischer, and George Engel were hanged on November 11, 1887. Louis Lingg committed suicide in prison. The remaining three were finally pardoned in 1893.

It is not surprising that the state, business leaders, mainstream union officials, and the media would want to hide the true history of May Day, portraying it as a holiday celebrated only in Moscow's Red Square. In its attempt to erase the history and significance of May Day, the United States government declared May 1st to be "Law Day," and gave us instead Labor Day – a holiday devoid of any historical significance other than its importance as a day to swill beer and sit in traffic jams.

Nevertheless, rather than suppressing labor and radical movements, the events of 1886 and the execution of the Chicago anarchists actually mobilized many generations of radicals. Emma Goldman, a young immigrant at the time, later pointed to the Haymarket affair as her political birth. Lucy Parsons, widow of Albert Parsons, called upon the poor to direct their anger toward those responsible – the rich. Instead of disappearing, the anarchist movement only grew in the wake of Haymarket, spawning other radical movements and organizations, including the Industrial Workers of the World.

By covering up the history of May Day, the state, business, mainstream unions and the media have covered up an entire legacy of dissent in this country. They are terrified of what a similarly militant and organized movement could accomplish today, and they suppress the seeds of such organization whenever and wherever they can. As workers, we must recognize and commemorate May Day not only for its historical significance, but also as a time to organize around issues of vital importance to working class people today.

The last few years have seen several attempts at reclaiming May Day as a day of workers' struggle. In New York you can this year participate in the second annual *March for Workers' Rights & Human Dignity*. For more information, call the Global Sweatshop Coalition at (212) 473-3936.

This year also marks the second annual *Reclaim May Day* festival in San Francisco. Last May, five thousand people participated in this event to renew the honoring of International Workers Day. This year, housing, homeless, community, labor and historical groups will be coming together to celebrate and also to oppose the assault on the poor and working people of San Francisco. The event will be held in Dolores Park, Saturday May 1st, starting 11am.

### Bosses Ignore NLRB Ruling

The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) is supposedly a place for workers to file their grievances, but it seldom provides any real help. Even in the few cases where the NLRB rules in favour of the workers, its decision usually amounts to little more than a slap on the bosses' wrist.

As we write, the Detroit newspaper strike is continuing with no end in sight even though the NLRB ruled unanimously last year in favor of the strikers, charging the papers with causing the strike, refusing to bargain in good faith, and numerous other violations of the federal labor law.

The NLRB ordered the *Detroit News* and *Free Press* to hire back the remaining one thousand locked-out workers and begin bargaining. Still counting on Detroit Newspapers CEO Frank Vega's prediction that before the strike was settled everyone involved will be dead or gone, company lawyers announced another round of appeals which should push any final decision years into the future.

In the meantime, subscriptions to the two papers continue to decline while striker actions remain relentless with teams of workers chasing down scabs and management from their downtown headquarters to numerous out-of-town forays.

Source: *Fifth Estate*

### INS Raids Thwart Organizing

Sweatshops don't just exist in far off lands, they also operate right here in the middle of Freedomland. Domestic sweatshops are often staffed with illegal immigrants who are forced to work long hours for less than minimum wage. The big advantage with undocumented workers, in the eyes of the employers, is that they are too afraid of the immigration authorities to protest their working conditions or to organize unions. And if they start making trouble, the unscrupulous sweatshop owner need only make a quick call to the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service), who then raids the factory and deports the troublesome workers. Next day the factory might open up again with a new and more servile workforce.

Immigrant workers in several US cities are now organizing to fight back against this abuse of workers' rights. In New York, the Coalition for the Human Rights of Immigrants (CHRI) seeks to bring the INS raids into public view and raise a voice of protest against them. They have developed a rapid response plan to the raids, to demand that the INS let the arrested workers go and stop doing raids. They are also forming a Popular Education Project, that seeks to inform immigrants of their rights, so they can avoid falling into INS traps.

In October last year, the CHRI gathered more than 5,600 signatures on cards calling for an end to the raids, and pointing out how they make sweatshop conditions worse by discouraging workers from reporting abuses. A month later, the Department of Labor (DOL) and the INS signed a "memorandum of understanding" saying that in cases where a worker makes a complaint to the DOL, the DOL will no longer report the case to the INS. This shows that protests are having an impact, and that it's time to step up the pressure. To take part in one of these Coalition projects, or to report a raid, call 212-254-2591 or 888-57-LUCHA. They can also help get free legal representation for those detained in the raids.

*If you are held in an INS detention center, you can make collect calls to: Centro Guadalupano, 212-633-7108; and St. Brigid's Parish, 718-821-1690.*

In Detroit, a similar coalition has been formed. The Coalition Against INS Raids has held informational meetings in the Latin Barrio and protests at the INS offices. They can be contacted through the Xicano Development Center, 3570 W. Vernor, Detroit, MI 48216, tel: 313-841-0838.

### Unionized Maquiladora Closed

The only apparel factory in Guatemala with a union contract was abruptly closed two weeks before Christmas, leaving 500 workers jobless. The Camisas Modernas maquiladora factory produced clothing for Phillips-Van Heusen, who says it will continue to contract work to other non-union factories in Guatemala. Camisas Modernas workers waged a historic six-year struggle to obtain union recognition. Many of the union workers are now blacklisted by the apparel industry and have been unable to find work in other factories.

*Send messages of protest to Phillips-Van Heusen CEO Bruce Klatsky, 1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10104, fax (212) 247-5309*

### Protesting the Global Sweatshop

The New York based Global Sweatshop Coalition made Phillips-Van Hausen one of its targets for its second annual march to celebrate International Women's Day. More than a hundred activists braved pouring rain to march up Fifth Ave. and stop in front of stores that are linked to abusive labor. In addition to the Gant store (Phillips-Van Hausen's main outlet), the march also targeted the Gap, Disney, and Nike.

The protesters had brought drums and puppets, and activist musician "Tofu" entertained the crowd with movement songs such as *Solidarity Forever*. Protest leaders included Jim Keady, former assistant coach of the men's soccer team at St. John's University, who quit his job last summer after he was told he must use Nike sports equipment.



## Czech Anarchist faces 25 Years

*On November 27, 1998, two members of the Czech Federation of Social Anarchists were brutally attacked by a group of at least 5 neo-nazis. This attack lead to the firing of a legally owned pistol by Michal Patera.*

For defending his life, Michal was charged with "attempted murder motivated by ideological conviction." Michal is endangered by 25 years in prison, and expects to spend at least one year in "protective custody" before his case goes to trial. None of the neo-nazis faces even minor charges

This is the fourth time in few years the Czech authorities throws a victim of fascist terror in jail on charges of murder or attempted murder for defending his life. Anti-fascists Vaclav Jez, Pavel Hroupa, and well-known Czech sculptor Pavel Opocensky were all finally cleared of similar charges, but not until they had spent up to several year in custody awaiting trial. The Czech anti-fascist movement has also had to raise large amounts of money to cover lawyer fees.

In February NY WSA held a picket outside the Czech Mission to the UN. Your support is needed to help free Michal. Please write letters of protest to the Washington, DC Czech embassy. Their fax is: 202-966-8540. Write letters of solidarity to: Michal Patera (1976), PO Box 5, 14057, Prague 4, Czech Republic, or send them by email to Michal's defense campaign: sam20uj@axpsu.fpf.slu.cz

*Contributions to Michal's defense fund can be sent to Jacksonville ABC, 4204 Herschel St. #20, Jacksonville, FL 32210 (Make checks out to Justin Tichy)*

## Quitting Time!

No, we don't mean it's 5 pm, or whenever you finish work to go off and face the "relaxation" of commuting, paying bills and struggling to maintain a household. Nor do we mean time to leave your job, and to go to another one at which you're just as abused and neglected. Nor do we mean time to retire and spend your "golden years" stretching your pension dollars and worrying about what hits on Medicare the politicians are dreaming up now.

Rather we think it's time for the labor movement as a whole to think about quitting some of its bad habits and dependencies.

First of all, let's work on quitting our habit of getting suckered into putting our energies into endorsing and campaigning for politicians, all of whom sell us out sooner or later (as if they were ever on our side in the first place). For too long unions have given their support to elected officials who do little favors for one sector or another, while at the same time attack others whose support isn't as important to them at the moment. Whatever happened to "An injury to one is an injury to all?"

Also, let's work on quitting our dependence on the principle of "leaders" altogether. We pay for large salaries and all sorts of perks for union officials, who inevitably come to see themselves as the labor movement and the membership as cheerleaders for their personal priorities. Let them give up their \$100 a plate testimonial dinners and let's have a movement where the rank-and-file takes charge of its own destiny.

Finally, let's quit taking whatever the bosses hand out. It is time we begin to rely on our own resources, our ability to fight and to disrupt the machinery of buying and selling, leaving those who give the orders to talk to empty rooms.

But to accomplish all that, we need a labor movement based on the principles of direct democracy and of militant direct action. We need a movement that links the struggles of working people on the job to their struggles in the community – against police brutality, against failing schools and social services, for equal access to the resources of society. Most of all, we need a workers movement that has a vision of a society without bosses or bureaucrats, without power, profit or privilege.

We call that vision anarchist unionism. If you agree, if you just want to know more or ask questions, please get in touch. (See list of local WSA contacts on opposite page, or fill out and mail us the form to the right.)

### Who are we?

*Workers Solidarity* is published by the New York / New Jersey local of the Workers Solidarity Alliance (WSA). WSA is a national anarcho-syndicalist (anarchist unionist) membership organization. As such we believe that it is essential for building an effective anarchist movement and the creation of a genuine libertarian society to have a strong anarchist presence in the working class movement and to build organizations at the workplace and in the community that can bring about total workers self-management of the economy and society.

WSA is the U.S. section of the International Workers Association (IWA); the world-wide federation of revolutionary syndicalist organizations and unions. The IWA includes organizations in every continent of the globe, with new sections being welcomed constantly.

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website: http://www.iww.org  
(Not affiliated to the IWA)

### WSA on the Internet:

WSA websites:  
//flag.blackened.net/agonny/wsa.html  
//www.iww.org/~liam/wsa-sf.html  
//www.mobtown.org/wsa/

WSA also organizes two public e-mail discussion lists; one for WSA and one for IWA. To subscribe send a message to:  
wsa-talk-request@list.uncanny.net  
and/or  
ait-iwa-talk-request@list.uncanny.net  
and put the word *subscribe* in the subject line.

☐ I want more information about WSA

☐ I want to become a member of WSA

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

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Rm 202, New York, NY 10012