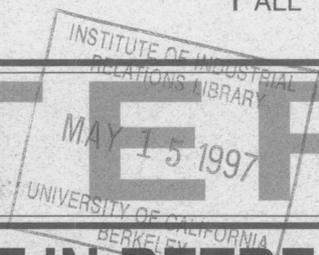


# REPORTER



## CONFRONTING THE GOVERNMENT IN RETREAT: LESSONS FROM BRAZIL

Peter P. Houtzager

The Rural Workers Union Movement in Brazil is facing a government that has retreated from many areas of social and economic policy that are of vital interest to its membership. Under the pressure of international lending agencies and domestic budgetary pressures, since 1989 the Brazilian government has been slowly privatizing or simply eliminating public agencies and enterprises. In other cases budget cuts have been so deep that agencies simply shirk much of the work they are legally mandated to do. The Movement has responded to this challenge in two ways that may have some lessons for labor movements in other countries. The Movement is developing innovative strategies to increase its capacity to exert influence on government policy both at the national level and within particular agencies. First, it is organizing annual "periods of mobilization" called *O Grito da Terra Brazil* (the Cry of the Countryside). Second, it is entering into limited partnerships with government agencies.

The Rural Workers Union Movement in Brazil is probably the largest and most confusing of its kind. It represents an estimated nine million members, spanning several labor categories—from agricultural wage laborers in sugarcane plantations, to sharecroppers engaged in subsistence agriculture and small farmers integrated into agro-industry. There are approximately 3,200 unions that cover the country's entire territorial stretch, 27 state level federations, and the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG). CONTAG itself is affiliated to Latin America's largest labor central, the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT). The labeling of the movement is deceptive, a majority of its members are actually small farmers. The union movement has

always defined itself as a political representative of "rural workers" and has focused on expressing members' demands and pressuring government. Its political activities can be classified in four categories: (1) mass mobilizations; (2) lobbying different segments of government at state and federal levels; (3) participating in government institutions, like public commissions and boards; and (4) electing union leaders, or people sympathetic to the Movement, to Congress, state legislatures, and municipal chambers.

The most innovative strategy the Movement is developing to confront privatization and the decrease of government services is the *Grito da Terra*. The *Grito* is an intensive two to four week period of union mobilization across Brazil—a general strike of the countryside. The target is government, and in particular the public agencies responsible for a broad range of issues and services vital to union members—from social security to rural credit and land issues. There are two tactics: negotiation and mobilization. In the first, union leaders begin negotiations with various public agencies, simultaneously at the three levels of government (local, state, and national). The labor federation of the northern state of Pará, for example, may negotiate for more extension agents with the public extension service (the government agency which provides technical assistance to farmers on such questions of agricultural production as seed types, fertilizers, crop prices etc.), while local unions attempt to work out deals with local extension offices and CONTAG leaders discuss the issue with the Minister of Agriculture. The reason for this multi-front approach is simple. Agricultural policy (and other policies as well) are by-and-large made in the capital city

*Continued on page 3*

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The Center for Labor Research and Education presents a two-day conference:  
**Labor in the Global Economy, Working in the Americas (page 2)**

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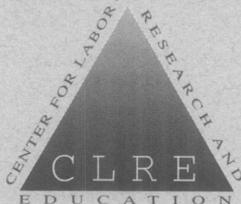
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## FROM THE CHAIR

In this issue of the Labor Center Reporter, we have three articles on global cooperation. John Sweeney, Richard Trumka and other leaders of the AFL-CIO have called for greater cooperation between labor leaders in the US and those around the world.

The Center for Labor Research and Education continues to focus our attention on labor in the global economy. It is our goal to sponsor three global conferences over the next three years. The first (see below) will feature global cooperation in the Americas. Next year, we will focus on issues in the Pacific Rim and in 1998 on issues in Europe. The conferences will address issues important to all workers, both public and private sector, and will have input from faculty as well as labor. The University and unions have a unique opportunity to strengthen our relationship by exploring areas of common interest. We are excited by these challenges and hope you will join us.

-Bob Redlo

## LABOR IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY, WORKING IN THE AMERICAS

November 21-22, 1996, Hs Lordships Restaurant



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- Miguel Vega, President, CONTEVECH Executive Member, CUT Chile

For information and registration, please call (510) 642-0323.

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## BRAZIL

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Brasilia, but implementation is often hampered by state and local bureaucratic bottlenecks and ill-will. In addition, recent steps to decentralize public administration have given state and local authorities greater control over services vital to rural workers.

The second tactic of the *Grito da Terra* is mobilization and public pressure. When negotiations at one government level stall, pressure is brought to bear on all levels. In the first national *Grito da Terra* an estimated 100,000 union members participated in mobilizations across Brazil. When banks in the northern state of Pará refused to release credit destined for small farmers, union members and community supporters occupied the banks, bringing significant parts of the regions' financial sector to a standstill. Congressmen elected by the union movement use more subtle tactics to convince government officials to enter negotiations and to spur the government bureaucracy into action. A noteworthy feature of the Movement is its ability to mobilize the support of community members who do not belong to the Movement, including local clergy and even mayors. It is able to do so because the Movement is organized within rural communities, rather than in workplaces.

Along with the *Grito*, unions are pursuing a second innovative strategy in response to the government's privatization and elimination of public services by entering into partnerships with public agencies. Paradoxically, government cut backs in many agencies are creating new and unexpected opportunities for unions. Public agencies have lost their guaranteed revenue base and many are scrambling to find allies, usually client groups, that can support their claims in the budget battles. An important feature of these partnerships is that unions work with their own consultants and technical specialists to develop and propose policy alternatives. When, in the northern state of Pará, EMATER (an agricultural extension agency) lost 90 percent of its budget, Pará's union federation responded in a vigorous manner. It took on the role of political coordinator and brought together union members, extension agents, and agronomists from non-governmental agricultural research institutes to formulate new approaches to small farm agriculture, marketing of crops, and easier access to credit. It also fought hard to get the Pará state government to provide sub-

stantial funding for the agency. As a result, the Movement has become an important ally to EMATER in Pará, using its political clout to protect the agency's share of public money and helping to redefine its mission.

The strategy the Rural Workers Union Movement is developing in Brazil to confront the privatization and downsizing of essential services presents some important lessons for labor movements in other countries. The ability of unions to defend the interests of their members depends significantly on their capacity to influence public policy. To be effective in negotiation and mobilization campaigns, a labor movement must gain the support of the larger community of which it is a part, thereby mobilizing greater resources and support. To be effective in a partnership with government, unions must develop capacity to manage technical information and propose their own policy alternatives, placing them on par with public officials. The "shrinking" of the government may provide new opportunities for labor movements to influence social policies. A mix of new pressure tactics, such as the *Grito* and alliances with

particular government agencies, can enable labor to take advantage of changes in government to win substantial results.

particular government agencies, can enable labor to take advantage of changes in government to win substantial results.

*Peter P. Houtzager is a graduate student in the Political Science department at U.C. Berkeley.*



*The Brazilian strategy of building partnerships with government agencies is a tactic that is also being pursued by some Bay Area unions in response to threats of privatization or downsizing here. SEIU 790 has formed a partnership with the Union Sanitary District and AFSCME has a partnership with BART. These partnerships with government are the subject of the December 2nd discussion at CLRE's Labor Management Partnership Task Force meeting. Call Kirsten Snow Spalding at 643-6815 for details. -Editor*

# THE GAP CAMPAIGN: ENFORCING LABOR STANDARDS ACROSS NATIONAL BORDERS

*Jill Esbenshade*

On December 15, 1995, the GAP, Inc., an enormous multinational corporation with production in over 40 countries and annual sales of over \$3.5 billion, signed an unprecedented agreement with the National Labor Committee (NLC), a small New York based organization. The GAP agreed to independent monitoring of labor conditions at its subcontracting factories in El Salvador. The agreement was brought about by a year long struggle of workers in El Salvador's maquila plants (where items such as clothing or electronics are assembled for export) and a highly publicized solidarity campaign of consumer and investor pressure by unionists, religious groups and labor and human rights organizations in the United States.

The GAP's acceptance of the concept of independent monitoring was a groundbreaking step towards manufacturer responsibility for worldwide conditions of production. Within the subcontracting system that now dominates manufacturing, multinational corporations have no legal responsibility to the workers who actually produce their products in subcontracting maquilas. The campaign against the GAP paved the way for other international campaigns such as the campaign focusing on Kathie Lee Gifford's line of clothing for Wal-Mart.

El Salvador was a natural site for the first corporate campaign about a manufacturer's international responsibility. The Salvadoran maquila sector has grown tremendously within just a few years. When the Salvadoran civil war ended at the beginning of 1992, only one free trade zone existed there,

employing 6,500 workers. In the following two years, four more zones opened and now more than 60,000 workers are employed in El Salvador's free trade zones. Maquilas have thus become a focus of union organizing efforts as well as of general public debate inside the country. Perhaps even more significantly, a large network of groups interested in El Salvador already existed in the U.S. (These groups were formed during the Central American solidarity movement of the 1980s and early 1990s.) The National Labor Committee (NLC), which coordinated the campaign, originated from within the U.S. labor movement in the early 1980s with the goal of changing AFL-CIO support for U.S. intervention in the region. Thus, the NLC came to the GAP campaign with strong ties to union, religious and human rights networks and was able to draw on this support in its strategy of publicity and consumer/investor pressure.

U.S. unions played a key role in the GAP campaign, which swung into full force in the summer of 1995 with a national tour by two Central American teenagers who worked in GAP subcontracting maquilas. One of them, Judith Viera, had been fired from a Taiwanese-owned plant in El Salvador, Mandarin International, after workers unionized. The young women gave their first presentation at the annual AFL-CIO convention. Individual locals of the Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE) arranged subsequent events in their own communities, including tour presentations, picketing of GAP stores, press conferences and letter writing cam-

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## INDEPENDENT MONITORING

*Jill Esbenshade*

### **What is Independent Monitoring (IM)?**

An attempt to keep multinationals accountable for the conditions under which production occurs by providing independent verification of conditions in subcontracting facilities to the multinationals themselves and to investors and consumers. The information is gathered through direct surveillance of the factory, review of payroll and other company accounting, and interviews with the workers.

### **What is monitored and who monitors?**

Independent monitoring is still a vague concept which could be implemented according to different sets of interests and with attention to different types of violations. In El Salvador, monitoring is carried out by a local coalition of workers' rights and human rights activists who insist that all conditions must be monitored — including the right to free association (i.e. unionization). In the United States, where monitoring of subcontractors is carried about by private companies hired by the manufacturers themselves, Cal Safety, the largest of these firms, does not monitor the right to free association. It investigates compliance with wage and hour regulations and child labor laws. However, a textile industry employers' group, the Compliance Alliance, has proposed that garments made in factories monitored by Cal Safety carry a label indicating that they are made in compliance with labor standards. The public must be aware that a monitoring group could pick and choose the labor conditions it monitors and compliance with these could be misrepresented as compliance with all internationally recognized labor standards.

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## GAP

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paigns to the GAP.

While the U.S. campaign focused on child labor (which is common in maquilas), the labor dispute in El Salvador arose as a protest over mistreatment and unpaid overtime and benefits. Women at the Mandarin plant complained of frequent yelling by supervisors, punishments such as being forced to sweep all day in the sun, regulated bathroom visits, incredible pressure from production quotas and overtime extending to 23 hours. In response to the union activities, Mandarin International fired hundreds of workers.

The reinstatement of these workers, and particularly of the union leadership has been the crux of ongoing negotiations between Mandarin, the GAP and the independent monitoring group which formed in El Salvador to monitor conditions at Mandarin International. The independent monitoring group — composed of one international union staffer, one human rights leader and two priests — found significant improvement in the physical conditions of the plant, but criticized Mandarin's repeated failure to reinstate fired unionists. In August, 1996, the monitoring group officially withdrew in protest. On September 19, ten months after the signing of the New York accord between the NLC and the GAP, Mandarin agreed in writing to re-hire six union leaders on October 15.

Mandarin signed a statement committing to re-hire the unionists only after GAP officials visited El Salvador in early September, pressuring Mandarin and promising to increase orders. The GAP itself was moved to action by the interruption of independent monitoring. The company, which markets a young, liberal image, had been touting independent monitoring as proof of its progressive business

practices. In fact, in November 1995, when the GAP first conceded to charges of labor violations at Mandarin, they pulled all orders from the plant. The organizers of the GAP campaign prioritized pressuring the GAP to keep production in the plant and deal with the labor conditions, rather than simply moving production to another subcontractor. The GAP reinstated some orders but not all. Mandarin had used this loss of business as an excuse not to re-hire workers fired because of the labor dispute.

The NLC scored an important victory when it forced the GAP back to El Salvador. The campaign compelled the GAP to negotiate ways of dealing with labor violations rather than washing its hands of the incidents. The maintenance of production is essential to creating an atmosphere in which organizing in maquila plants or even denouncing violations is possible. In El Salvador, other maquila plants have closed after organizing campaigns, leaving the workers on the street. In August of this year, the owners of another maquila, GABO, responded to workers unionizing by fleeing the country overnight, leaving behind 400 unpaid and now unemployed workers. It is estimated that for every 300 workers organized, 1,000 jobs are lost in El Salvador's maquilas (due both to firings and plant closures). Knowing these odds, workers are understandably resistant to organizing. Only a commitment by international solidarity campaigns, and the multinationals they focus on, to pressure factory owners to remain in the country and deal with labor disputes can give workers any sense of security.

Forcing the multinational to keep production in the country also helps undermine the charge that local unions and workers themselves are dupes of U.S. unionists who only want to see jobs returned

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## IM

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**What is the relation of monitoring to unionization?**

Monitoring is often sold to manufacturers as an anti-union tactic; the assumption being that if minimum legal standards are met, unions would have no basis for organizing drives. While this is clearly a false assumption, monitoring could undercut organizing by insulating the manufacturer from public and government scrutiny. On the other hand, independent monitoring — if its implementers view the right to free association as a basic condition of labor — has the potential to fortify workers' ability to pressure the employer.

**What is the relation of monitoring to government enforcement of labor laws?**

Independent monitoring could buttress governments' ability to strictly apply their own labor laws. However, in some contexts, independent monitoring has been promoted as the privatization of a government function. It should not be seen, or used, as a substitute for the functions of labor departments or ministries, which include receiving complaints, enforcing compliance and revoking operating licenses. Governments cannot rely on independent monitoring inspections to replace its own and monitoring should not be used as a justification to exempt any manufacturer from government scrutiny or more generally to restrict needed increases in labor inspection personnel or budget.

# SILICON VALLEY FIRMS OFFSHORE IN IRELAND

*Seán ÓRiain*

Silicon Valley is one of the most densely concentrated areas of high technology industry in the world. Its most prominent firms have a global reach. Since the mid-1980s, many Silicon Valley firms have established operations in the Republic of Ireland. Of the almost 400 U.S. companies in Ireland, approximately 30 are from the Bay Area. In 1995 Bay Area information technology companies employed about a quarter of the estimated 42,000 total information technology employees in Ireland.

## **Why Ireland?**

Locating in Ireland is not simply a matter of low labor costs. Ireland offers companies a base within the European market and competes intensely with countries such as Scotland, England, Wales and Holland for the same companies. Ireland guarantees companies a 10% tax on profits until 2010 (instead of the normal 38%) and provides grants for training, employment and capital investment. A young, well-educated workforce provides low cost, English-speaking professional and manual workforces. For example, disk duplication work carried out in Silicon Valley by undocumented immigrants is done in Ireland by a stable, fairly well educated workforce. The cost of a computer programmer in Ireland is about 1/3 to half that of a programmer in Silicon Valley. The unemployment rate of 14% keeps wages low; emigrants returning with experience from abroad also increase the demand for jobs. The development of a world class telecommunications system and the emergence of a sub-supply and contract manufacturing and assembly sector has also attracted U.S. companies in recent years.

American companies locating in Ireland are not always moving those jobs out of the United States. Often companies want the advantages of serving the European market from within the same time zone and cultural area and never have any intention of building the facility within the U.S. Although Irish operations can probably handle work as complex as that done in Silicon Valley, the multinational companies are reluctant to transfer research and development and crucial production processes far from the head office in the United States. So there is at least the potential for both regions to benefit from the growth of international markets.

## **Labor Relations**

The multinationals keep industrial conflict in their Irish operations at a minimum through a combination of the stick of threats to leave Ireland and the carrot of pay and working conditions better than the Irish average (although still well below U.S. levels) and a more open and casual environment than in traditional Irish workplaces. The multinationals are importing their management strategies as well. Most of the 122% increase in temporary and contract workers in Ireland between 1987 and 1994 has occurred in multinational companies. Such practices are spreading into Irish high tech companies and the sector as a whole.

The Industrial Development Authority, the government agency which organizes investment in Ireland by foreign companies, used to facilitate closed shop agreements between incoming multinationals and the major Irish unions. However, both unions and government authorities are finding it increasingly difficult to unionize multinational companies. One study

showed that, while 12 out of 15 non-U.S. multinationals established in 1988 were unionized, only 4 out of 23 U.S. multinationals had union representation. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions has had limited success in promoting local labor-management cooperation as an alternative to non-union management. The only major U.S. information technology company in Ireland with a unionized workforce is Apple.

Ireland's policy of wooing foreign investment through tax incentives and few limits on corporate behavior has been in place for 30 years and is only now showing any kind of sustained national economic growth. These policies cost Ireland dearly, however. Foregone tax revenues, heavy spending on financial incentives and grants and huge investments in education and in telecommunications were all required before Ireland could become a competitive location. Low taxes and low reinvestment of profits in Ireland results in a net transfer of income from the public sector (wages and taxes) into the private sector. Moreover, some of the perceived economic growth is just on paper. Companies declare as much as possible of their revenues in Ireland to take advantage of the low tax rate. Two thirds of Microsoft Ireland's \$2.25 billion revenues in 1995 came from actual sales and the other third came from the routing of Microsoft's financial operations through Ireland. The costs to Ireland of this kind of development are heavy and the rewards uncertain.

## **Increased U.S.-Irish Economic Interdependence**

The arrival of multinational companies has boosted economic growth in Ireland and made the Irish economy more dependent on the prosperity of U.S. technology re-

gions such as Silicon Valley. U.S.-based technology companies, including some of the biggest names such as Intel, Microsoft, Hewlett Packard and IBM, have replaced the European textiles, furniture and food companies which dominated the Irish economy in the 1960s and 1970s. Employment grew overall in Ireland between 1985 and 1996, but it grew exceptionally fast in foreign-owned manufacturing. Full-time employment in all foreign-owned manufacturing companies in Ireland grew by 42% between 1986 and 1995 - when manufacturing employment worldwide was falling. Employment growth in international services such as software and financial services was even faster. Although the numbers involved are small by U.S. standards (Ireland's manufacturing workforce is just over 300,000 people), the growth is exceptional.

The Irish operations are directly linked to Wall Street. When Intel's profits were less than expected at the end of 1994 and its stock dropped, 250 Irish contract workers were laid off. The Irish government has actively pursued U.S. technology companies in a range of sectors (such as computers and peripherals, data communications, software, components and call centers) in order to lessen the impact of recession in any one industry.

### **International Capital, Employment and Organizing**

The challenge for labor is to regulate economic globalization, put effective social standards in place and make multinational corporations accountable to their employees. While preventing jobs from moving overseas can be an essential defensive tactic, it cannot be the basis of a common solidarity with employees in countries like Ireland, where unemployment rates are very high and there is a desperate need for jobs from any source.

When companies and investors have global links so must labor. At first these might consist of networks where information about conditions, company plans and organizing strategies is exchanged. This kind of information-sharing could counter the spread of company disinformation about the performance of other plants, information often used to pressure workers. E-mail can be a very useful way to link together workers who do not share the same workplace (even if they are in the same region), e.g., temporary and contract workers and telecommuters. It would be relatively easy to extend these E-mail networks across national boundaries. E-mail can also boost international grassroots participation as individual union members can make their voices heard.

These information-sharing and communication links should eventually lead to more direct international contacts between unions. The experience of labor-community alliances in Silicon Valley could be very useful to Irish organizers interested in pursuing these strategies. Early warnings as to difficulties within a company or changes in strategy could also be helpful to both regions. These links could eventually lead to coordinated organizing campaigns and support for campaigns in other regions. Some international union federations and cooperation agreements already exist. The challenges of dealing with multinational companies are huge. The solution lies in replacing the competition between workers in different countries with cooperation and solidarity.

*Seán ÓRiain is a graduate student in U.C. Berkeley's Sociology Department. This article is based on his dissertation research. He can be reached at [oriain@qal.berkeley.edu](mailto:oriain@qal.berkeley.edu) or through the Labor Center Reporter.*

## **GAP**

*Continued from page 5*

to the United States. In El Salvador, such accusations culminated in high government officials publicly denouncing workers' advocates as "traitors" and calling for the death penalty to be imposed on those who were Salvadoran nationals and deportation for those who were foreigners. The accusation of manipulation is so ingrained in the debate that competing Salvadoran unions even accused each other of simply acting at the behest of U. S. unions.

It is vital that U.S. unionists prove solidarity with unions in other countries by pressuring manufacturers to keep production in the factories and to deal with working conditions and labor rights violations. This means that U.S. unions must realize that jobs are not returning to the United States, but that by supporting organizing efforts globally the conditions for workers both here and abroad may improve.

*Jill Esbenshade is a graduate student in the Ethnic Studies department at U.C. Berkeley. This article is based on pre-dissertation research funded by the Inter-American Foundation and U.C. Berkeley's Center for Latin American Studies.*



*Charles Kernaghan of the National Labor Committee, will be the lunch speaker at the Labor and the Global Economy conference. (See announcement on page 2.) He will talk about the process of putting together the GAP campaign and the Kathie Lee Gifford campaign and will answer questions from local labor leaders about problems and potential gains for labor in this form of international solidarity work.*

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C A L E N D A R

*For more information on these upcoming events, please contact Ezinda Franklin at (510) 642-0323*

**BAY AREA LABOR STUDIES SEMINAR, UNION ORGANIZING: DIFFERENT STRATEGIES FOR UNION STRENGTH**

On Wednesday November 13, 4:30-6 p.m., Directors Lounge, Institute of Industrial Relations, **Paul Varacalli, SEIU 790** and **David Sickler, AFL-CIO** will discuss their organizing campaigns with labor leaders, faculty and students.

**LABOR MANAGEMENT PARTNERSHIPS TASK FORCE**

Labor Management Partnerships Task Force meets monthly at the Institute of Industrial Relations to discuss issues regarding labor management partnerships. In October, the Task Force will discuss successes and pitfalls in the initiation phase of these new bargaining relationships.

**PENSION PRACTITIONERS' CONSORTIUM**

On November 20, Taft-Hartley pension trustees will meet with Richard Trumka, Secretary-Treasurer, AFL-CIO at a consortium meeting hosted by Art Pulaski, Executive Secretary Treasurer, California Federation of Labor and CLRE. The Consortium will discuss strategic investing, use of pensions in corporate campaigns, and plans for CLRE's spring 1997 conference on **High Performance Pensions**.

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