

STEEL STRIKE

Workers may crack non-union South

By David Moherg

NEWPORT NEWS, VA.

SUDDENLY A DEEP-THROATED whistle blew its haunting note in the hazy, chilled morning atmosphere, marking the start of the day shift in the awesome concentration of shops, piers, and dry-docks along James River, home, since 1886, of the Newport News Shipbuilding Co.

It was echoed by a cheer from nearly 200 shipyard workers marching in front of one of the main gates of the nation's largest shipyards, which employed 25,000 people at its peak last spring. Carefully spacing themselves as they walked in front of local police decked out in riot gear and carrying baseball bat-sized truncheons, the picketers had been shouting "scab"—but none of the standard obscene epithets—at the trickle of workers and supervisors who passed through their line, often escorted ostentatiously and unnecessarily by the police.

"That's the whistle," Steelworkers union organizer Roosevelt Robinson exulted, clapping and rubbing his hands as he walked along the opposite side of the street. There, a large group of men had gathered in front of the sandy luncheonette—One Place Restaurant and Kim's—and Sweden bookstore, the few businesses remaining in the shutdown area that survives by catering to shipyard workers on lunch-breaks.

"You don't have to go in," he said excitedly to those whose convictions may have been wavering, as if he were a football coach at the end of a game he'd just narrowly won. "We've got it, brothers. You don't have to go in."

Coach Robinson and fellow organizer Jack Hower, a former miner from Wyoming, had good reason to be pleased when the whistle blew on Jan. 31. Over two years earlier, they had begun with a small band of discontented workers. Now it was the first day of the strike by the new Steelworkers Local 8888 to force Newport News Shipbuilding, a division of the Houston-based Tenneco conglomerate since 1969, to sit down and bargain with the union. It looked like they might win.

Managers of the "Yard" had refused to negotiate. They had challenged as fraudulent the election held precisely one year earlier that ousted the independent Peninsula Shipbuilders Assn. (PSA), a union with intimate ties to management ever since it was founded in the 1920s as a company-sponsored employee representation plan, in favor of the Steelworkers.

NLRB rejected protest.

Last Oct. 27, the National Labor Relations Board rejected the company's protest of the results on the ground of balloting irregularities and illegitimate union propaganda. (In particular, accusations made just before the vote that PSA and company threats had deterred Martin Luther King Sr., from attending a union rally.) But the company appealed NLRB certification of the Steelworkers bargaining agent to the federal courts.

Union leaders saw the move as a delaying tactic, designed to weaken the Steelworkers' support in the Yard and perhaps eventually bring back the PSA, which Newport News Shipbuilding vice-president for corporate relations D.T. Savas openly supported in the 1978 election.

"I've said all along that somewhere they are going to challenge us," Hower said as we drove to a pre-strike lunchtime rally. "They want to test our strength. They want to see how many people here want the Steelworkers."

"The sixty-four dollar question," management spokesman James Griffith told me the day before the strike, "is how many people the Steelworkers can take out and keep out."

Having agreed on that much, the two antagonists share few other opinions, in-



Enthusiastic strikers at Newport News Shipbuilding at Newport News, Va., picket a gate of the Yard under the watchful eyes of police armed with baseball bat-sized truncheons.

cluding estimates on precisely how many workers the union actually pulled out the first day. The union claimed that only about 70 of 1000 workers on the midnight shift and between 2,200 and 2,500 of 9,000 workers overall—including supervision—crossed the picket line. The company said 5,500 came to work during the day. My own observations, and those of most other reporters, suggested that the Steelworkers' figure was closer to the mark.

The numbers are important, for the strike may drag on for some time, and strikers' determination will be tested. The company insisted that it will have its "day in court," and oral arguments will not

who are roughly half black with a growing minority of women. Yet some strikers thought that the scabs were more likely to be very young (interested only in the immediate money), very old (either frightened or loyal), ex-military personnel, the roughly 800-person core of PSA supporters and the individuals who had benefited over the years from supervisors' favoritism.

Across the street from the picketers, one man carrying his lunch preparing to cross the line was Stanley Howard, a 38-year-old black man who remains "PSA all the way." A former steward, Howard argued, "I have to take care of my family."

The old company union was undemocratic and unresponsive. We lost our rights. But we've got it now, Steel organizer tells strikers.

start on its challenge until March 7. In the meantime, there will be considerable pressure on those who waver about returning to the yards.

Money a threat.

Despite the strike fund, which allocates \$30 per member to be redistributed by the local according to need, there will be financial pressures that will undoubtedly be exacerbated by continuing pledges by the company and governor to enforce all Virginians' "right to work" and by the example of strikebreakers who continue to draw pay. Also, the union expects that the company will threaten to fire anyone who is out on strike for five days. If it appears that the strike has a solid, overwhelming majority, then many of those who now say they want to "wait and see" will stick with the union.

Some workers may have stayed away the first day out of fear of the widely predicted violence. A 1967 wildcat, the only previous strike at the yards, erupted in several days of street combat. But this time the Steelworker pickets appeared disciplined, even if the shouts of "scab" grew more virulent as the day progressed. Any violence would have provided a ready excuse for an injunction limiting the number of pickets, but the picketline peace may inspire a few people to cross over.

The strikebreakers appeared to represent a cross-section of the yard workers,

Nearby, two whites in their late 30s debated going in. Billy, a 14-year veteran, said, "That's a lot of time to throw away, but I want to be here another 14 years, and I want conditions to improve. The Steelworkers won the election. The shipyard is not dealing with them. I'd like to see it settled. But I don't believe you can win anything. Fighting Tenneco is like fighting Vepco (the local utility)—you can't win."

Although he thinks Tenneco is lying when it says that it will abide by the upcoming federal court decision and lamented having "nobody to turn to" now that even PSA is out, Billy was inclined to do what he had done so often when things went wrong in the past—"just turn your head and keep on trucking."

"You can't scare me."

But across the street, where there were occasional refrains at various gates of "We are fighting for our future," "We shall not be moved," or "You can't scare me, I'm sticking to the union," the sentiments were different. "Hey, I feel good," a young black picketer said smiling broadly. "We're not going to get anywhere without this."

In their organizing drive, the Steelworkers had faced two different but allied opponents—Newport News Shipbuilding and the PSA—who attacked the union as "outsiders" with a staff of organizers—on plus \$20,000-a-year

expense accounts—who were desperately trying to compensate for the loss of jobs the union had caused in the steel industry and would ultimately exercise arbitrary "power over people" and bring costly strikes.

The organizers, however, benefitted from a double bill of worker grievances. Discontent with PSA had grown in recent years as many workers felt that they were falling behind in wages and benefits, that the union was actually giving away many of their rights, that the union leadership was undemocratic and unresponsive and that it did little about grievances, especially on safety, while collaborating in management's pattern of favoritism.

Union representation—effectively and responsively—is consequently the foremost objective of workers on strike at Newport News. "I think money comes into it some, but just representation in between contracts, that's the problem," 35-year-old local Steelworkers president Wayne Crosby says. "But the company is afraid to talk to someone on their own level, as equals."

Because PSA doesn't fight on many grievances or try to establish work rules, as many workers argue, Newport News management has an extremely free hand in running the yard and desperately wants to keep it. "What they've had here is such a joyride that they don't want to give it up," says Lee Johnson, president of the designers local of the Steelworkers that has been on strike for 22 months against the company's unfair labor practices. "They've had such a free ride with PSA they want to keep it."

Yet if workers hadn't been at least as angry at management as at their old union, the Steelworkers would have made little headway. Wages, which were increased by 7 percent in November, now average \$6.55 an hour, according to management. But the average for the industry was around \$7.10 an hour last September, and over \$9 an hour at unionized yards in the Baltimore area. Although Newport News Shipbuilding recently substantially improved its pension plan, workers were scandalized by reports of veterans of 30 or 40 years retiring with pensions of under \$100 a month.

Fifth worst hazard.

Especially after two workers were killed last summer because a foreman had scaffolding improperly erected (for which the company was fined \$1470 by OSHA).

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LETELIER/MOFFITT MURDER

Witnesses support Townley testimony

A surprise a day

By Max Weisenfeld

WASHINGTON

Assistant U.S. Attorney Eugene Propper has sprung three surprise witnesses in as many days in the trial of the accused murderers of Orlando Letelier and Ronni Moffitt.

The witnesses corroborated the testimony of confessed DINA assassin, Michael Vernon Townley, and they added new details. More supporting testimony has come from the half-dozen FBI agents the government called this week.

Ricardo Canete, a former member of the Cuban Nationalist Movement and a paid FBI informant, revealed damaging testimony. The defendants—Guillermo Novo, head of the Cuban Nationalist Movement's "operational section," his lieutenant, Alvin Ross, and his brother, Ignacio—all mentioned in Canete's testimony, are charged with the car bombing that killed Letelier and Moffitt Sept. 21, 1976, and related crimes.

Canete told the court that Ross boasted of building the Letelier bomb. Ignacio and Novo told Canete that he expected to receive counterfeit \$100 bills, from Chile, as aid from "his friend in DINA." (The Chilean secret police who allegedly ordered the assassination.)

Ignacio Novo, according to Canete, arranged for the purchase of "40 or 50 pounds" of marijuana. Canete further reported that Ignacio Novo tried to obtain false documents from him for "friends" who had "left some bodies behind" and wanted to get out of the country.

Two right-wing Chilean journalists covering the trial for *El Mercurio* and *El Cronista* were asked to leave the country by the FBI. The journalists allegedly arranged to provide defense lawyers Paul Goldberger and Larry Dubin with secret Chilean investigation reports concerning the Letelier case.

The press release from the Council on Hemispheric Affairs that was distributed in the courthouse earlier this week alleging that the Justice Department had given up attempts to extradite the three Chileans indicted in this case, Gen. Manuel Contreras, Col. Pedro Espinosa, and Capt. Armando Fernandez, was vehemently denied by U.S. attorney Propper. Defense lawyer Dubin, upon receiving a copy of the press release, read portions into the record and protested any inactivity of the American government. Propper made an immediate and absolute denial. ■

All in a day's work, Townley testifies

By Saul Landau

WASHINGTON

The details of Chile's Gen. Augusto Pinochet's international murder activities and the organization of his hit squad have begun to leak out, thanks to innuendos in the testimony of Michael Vernon Townley, the U.S. government's star witness in the Letelier-Moffitt murder trial, now in its fourth week here.

On the witness stand, this man whom FBI agents and prosecutors have described as "a nice guy" speaks politely, with control, occasional humor, and always with great specificity. "True, but incomplete," he often answers to cross examination questions. "Correct." "Incorrect."

"No sir, I have no regrets about killing Mr. Letelier. He was a soldier in his army, his party. I was a soldier in mine. I received an order to eliminate Mr. Letelier. I carried it out to the best of my abilities. I do have regrets, sir, deep regrets, about the other person in the car." The other person was Ronni Moffitt, Letelier's col-



Relatives of disappeared persons demonstrate in Santiago, Chile. The sign reads: "My husband and niece were taken alive. No to presumed death."

league, who was riding to work with him in the car that Townley and his Cuban exile chums had rigged with a bomb.

But other "missions" took place. Townley describes how his "Service," meaning DINA, Pinochet's political police, sent him to Mexico to assassinate Carlos Altamirano and Volodia Teitelboim in 1975. Then Townley went to Europe. But here the U.S. government interrupted Townley's testimony. The government had made deals, it turns out, beyond the plea bargain with Townley.

They can ask only about crimes committed in the U.S. or against U.S. citizens. Prosecutor Eugene Propper's boss, Earl Silbert, head of major crimes for the Department of Justice, had signed an agreement with his Chilean equivalent pledging the U.S. not to tell any foreign governments of any DINA crimes in their jurisdictions revealed by the Letelier-Moffitt investigation.

But information on these crimes leaks out. Townley had been assigned to kill Olaf Palme, in 1975, in Europe. The Swedish prime minister was in Madrid at a meeting. In addition, Pinochet had selected for death certain exiled Chilean military officials living in Belgium and Germany.

In Paris, Townley made another abortive attempt to kill Altamirano. In Rome, in the fall of 1975, he worked with Italian fascists to kill Christian Democratic leader Bernardo Leighton. The attempt led to the wounding of Leighton and the paralyzing of his wife.

Townley sent explosives to his Cuban accomplices from Chile in LAN Chile planes, using the pilots to carry materials through customs. He tells how LAN offices at JFK Airport were used for meetings with his surveillance officer, Capt. Fernandez, who gave him a map of Letelier's house and route to work, plus infor-

mation on Letelier's car, license plate, and work routine.

Paul Goldberger and Larry Dubin, who represent the Cuban defendants, try to show the jury how Townley plea-bargained to get a sweet deal for himself and for his wife, Mariana, also a DINA agent who was involved in various assassination missions. In return for testifying, he received a 42-month to ten-year sentence, and immunity for his wife and for all other crimes.

They try to show Townley as a master CIA mole, a corrupt liar, a monster killer. Townley responds: "I did what any normal husband would do to protect his wife." A normal husband who follows orders.

Townley's lawyers, Glanzer and Levine, counsel him on when he should take the Fifth Amendment regarding his various murder "missions." The prosecutor, Eu-

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Chilean press censors self on trial

By Marcelo Montecino

SANTIAGO

When Christian Democratic weekly *HOY* on Jan. 10 asked ousted air force general Gustavo Leigh what kind of control the junta had over the activities of the secret police, he answered: "DINA answered directly to the President of the Republic. Although it's true that it was born through a decree that made it responsible to the Junta, the President never allowed any participation in its operations."

This basic political conclusion has been scrupulously avoided in the exceptionally heavy coverage by the self-censored Chilean press of the Letelier-Moffitt trial in Washington, D.C. Four Santiago dailies and all three weekly news magazines have sent correspondents to cover the "trial of the decade," as one tabloid characterized it.

With the notable exception of *HOY*, the strategy of the Chilean press has been to call the case "a police matter," devoid of any political connotation. As a police matter, the daily press covers the case with a wealth of detail, much of it peripheral, designed to confuse the reader. The occasional reader is hard pressed

to get a complete picture of the conspiracy and its implications.

Chilean correspondents in Washington have focused on the incidental aspects of the trial to demonstrate that the "enemies of Chile are engaged in an international propaganda campaign" to get political mileage out of the event.

La Segunda, an afternoon tabloid belonging to the Edwards conglomerate, has spearheaded a campaign to defame the Institute for Policy Studies, where Letelier and Moffitt worked. Emilio Bakit has extensively reported on activities of the "left-wing institute."

Prosecutor Eugene Propper has also been singled out for special treatment. Stories often point out his political ambitions and his "elegant suits." Propper has been characterized as a man driven by ambition, who is using this trial as a springboard for future office.

Pilar Vergara, who usually covers the theater and the movies for *El Mercurio*, Dean of the Chilean press, described Propper's opening statement as "truly a political speech."

A racist note, perhaps inadvertently, has also been injected into the coverage. Without exception, every publication

has noted that the jury is composed of 12 blacks, a disturbing element to a homogenous Chilean society, unfamiliar not only with jury trials but with the racial composition of Washington, D.C. The stories state that the jury is made up of humble, uneducated people, "who are probably unable to understand the complexities of the case."

The most glaring aspect of the Chilean press' handling of the assassination trial has been the obvious editorial slant. While the moral or ethical considerations of political assassination are condemned, Letelier is constantly portrayed as an "enemy of Chile." The affair is written off as the acts of three secret police agents who exceeded their authority.

The long extradition proceedings of the three Chilean army officers indicted have also been clouded. Defense lawyers for the accused hold regular and lengthy press conferences in which exotic theories are aired. Echoing the strategy for the defense in the trial, the lawyers have stated that Michael Townley was really a CIA agent that infiltrated DINA and murdered Letelier in a U.S.-Cuban conspiracy to destabilize the Pinochet regime. ■