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HEALTH & SAFETY IN THE GLASS INDUSTRY

(This is the first in a series of articles on health and safety conditions in the glass industry.)

The glass manufacturing industry is one of the most villainous in its constant mutilation and killings of the rank and file. Villainous? Yes, because workers are unaware that they are being 'killed' daily by the inhuman health and safety conditions at their work place. Each summer many workers at Brockway Glass Company of Oakland, Calif. experience stroke from exposure to extreme heat and noise in the 'hot end', where the bottles are produced. Of the usual eleven operators in the 'hot end', at least one per day finds it necessary to leave the obnoxious heat and noise or risk passing out and falling head first into the machinery below. They are constantly within a few feet to a few inches of molten glass whose temperature is approximately 2200 degrees F. Severe burns are common and the average air temperature (during the summer) in that department reaches 120 degrees F. Chronic exposure to this heat leads to dilation of the surface blood vessels, thus lowering the blood pressure. To compensate, the heart works harder and the kidneys along with other internal organs suffer from lack of oxygen. This leads to fatigue as the body must compensate for these conditions.

As mentioned earlier, noise is another outrageous factor throughout the plant, specifically in the 'hot end' where adequate hearing protection is hard to get. This is because we rotate shifts and a nurse is only provided on the day shift, even though accidents occur all the time. Noise, too, has been proven to cause fatigue, due to energy loss.

Many chemicals used in glass production are not only toxic, but used without adequate precautions. Anhydrous stannic chloride (tin tetrachloride) is a vapor sprayed onto hot bottles as they pass through a makeshift ventilator. This vapor can be seen shooting off into the air freely and a slight sniff causes instant coughing and hacking. At one time there were warning labels on the ventilators, causing workers to avoid these areas. With no regard for human life, but only higher profits, the company removed the warning labels! Of the 15,000 toxic chemicals known to be in use in industry, legal standards exist for a mere 500. Poisonous substances such as cardboard and glass dust permeate the air we breathe through the plant.

One duty of the 'hot end' machine operator is the swabbing of bottle molds. An oil compound must be applied to the 2000 degree F. molds every 10 minutes. As this is done, hot masses of oil vapor burst up from the molds where the operator is inches away unavoidably breathing the mist. It has been proven that oil mist accumulating in the lungs causes chemical pneumonia. This inflames and scars the lung tissue and creates a disability similar to asbestosis. No protection is even offered by the company, for this too would cut into profits.

Maintaining the furnaces where the molten glass is kept is a round-the-clock procedure. Because of this, shift work is a condition of employment. But we are barely compensated for working the swing and graveyard shifts. It has been proven that man is

basically a day time animal. The body functions such as hormone levels, body temperature, and chemical reactions are periodic. Rotating shifts interrupt these periods and lead to chronic fatigue, sleep loss and loss of appetite. By keeping rotating shifts, the company is able to maintain unpaid, forced overtime.

Conditions at Brockway are a good example of what work is like for millions of people every day. Some facts on industrial accidents to show that health and safety are a common problem for all workers under capitalism make the point well:

- Over 14,000 workers are actually killed on the job each year and over 2.2 million are either permanently or temporarily disabled as a result of work accidents and occupational diseases.
- A report from the U.S. Department of Labor indicates there are at least 25 million industrial injuries and deaths unaccounted for each year. What about the Occupational Health and Safety Agency (OSHA), the government agency that is supposed to enforce safety standards in industry? OSHA is understaffed and underfunded.
- In 1974, 80% of the safety violations OSHA inspectors found didn't result in fines, and the ones imposed averaged less than \$20 each. These facts show that OSHA does not protect the working class but is a mere token effort used by the capitalist factory owners to protect their interests while pacifying the workers.

Our lives will always be in danger as long as we live under the capitalist system where profits are more important than human lives! Our immediate task at Brockway glass is to turn our union into a militant one which will force the company to provide health and safety precautions. But we must remember that these are only temporary solutions to the problems that all workers face under capitalism. These problems can only be resolved permanently when capitalism is destroyed and socialism is established.

To our readers: If you work in a dangerous situation, we'd like to hear about it. Send an article or contact us at our PO Box 24116, Bayview Station, SF, Calif.

PUERTO RICO:

ISLAND SHOWCASE OF IMPERIALISM

Current living standards in Puerto Rico can be understood in the light of US economic and political domination of this oppressed nation within the US multinational state. Briefly, the current situation is this: Unemployment stands officially at 20%, while more realistic estimates range from 30-40%. This is greater than even the height of the US depression of the 1930's and does not even reflect the fact that nearly one million Puerto Ricans have emigrated to the US in search of work since World War II. Wages in Puerto Rico are 40% lower than on the mainland, and 60% of the people receive food stamps (even more are eligible). In spite of low wages, the cost of living in Puerto Rico is actually higher than in the US. For instance, food costs average 18% higher. Working conditions are also worse in Puerto Rico -- only 14% of workers are unionized and factories are exempt from US wage and occupational health and safety legislation. Finally, industrial pollution is not only an increasing health hazard to residents of Puerto Rico, but is also jeopardizing the fishing and agricultural industries like sugar cane production, which has dropped from 40 tons per acre to 13 tons per acre because of air pollution.

The source of these conditions is the system of US imperialism. Puerto Rico is a source of superprofits and a captive market for US-produced goods. Profits are insured by low wages and tax exemptions for industry. Under Operation Bootstrap, begun in the

1960's, corporations are exempt from all US and Puerto Rican taxes for periods ranging from ten to thirty years. This stimulated US investment to the current level of \$12-14 billion producing an annual tax free profit of \$1.4 billion.

The US tariff structure forces Puerto Ricans to buy relatively expensive US-made goods. At the same time, Puerto Rico can not establish protective tariffs or develop consumer goods industries to compete with the US. As a result, Puerto Rico, with an annual trade deficit of \$1.5 billion, imports \$800 million worth of food from the mainland each year. Puerto Rico also owes \$6.6 billion to US banks.

In the early 1960's, Puerto Rico was hailed by bourgeois economists as an 'economic miracle' due to the influx of capital under Operation Bootstrap. Indeed wage levels and gross national product did rise for a while, although US investment never developed Puerto Rico's heavy industry or large-scale agriculture, which would provide the basis for an independent economy. By the late 1960's, however, the picture began to change. The influx of capital had slowed down to a trickle of pharmaceutical and petrochemical industries which are capital intensive rather than labor intensive, and added little to Puerto Rico's employment picture. This was largely because such places as Taiwan, South Korea, and the Philippines offered even lower wages and more enticement to US capital.

When recession rocked the capitalist world in the 1970's, high level economic advisors from Yale University issued the 'Tobin Report' which recommended a three-fold program to get Puerto Rico's economy into profit-making gear: freeze wages, increase taxes, and decrease government spending. Thus Puerto Rican workers were forced to bear the brunt of the recession.

One reform passed in 1976 attempts to tax profits sent back to the US mainland rather than reinvested in Puerto Rico. This sort of action is extremely limited as a stimulant to the Puerto Rican economy since any significant attempt to tax profits will only drive capital to the greener pastures of neighboring islands, or other imperialist strongholds throughout the world.

Even the United Nations considers Puerto a colony of the US. Economic conditions in Puerto Rico illustrate the colonial nature of the relationship. Severe poverty exists side by side with superprofits for US investors. Industrial development of the economy is distorted by production for profit for US corporations rather than for the Puerto Rican peoples needs, and islanders must buy needed products from other US corporations. Finally the example of Puerto Rico shows how US imperialism continually looks for greater profits and new people to exploit while militarily preventing any attempts at real economic or political independence.

SUPPORT POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE, NOT STATEHOOD, FOR THE PUERTO RICAN PEOPLE!

(In Part two we will discuss the national liberation struggle for independence and statehood)

WIN THE ADVANCED TO COMMUNISM

The struggle to win the vanguard of the proletariat to the side of communism in order to build the proletarian party begins with a communist understanding of how to deepen the fusion between the spontaneous working class movement and the US communist movement. This understanding consists in where communists focus our work, what defines the 'better situated strata' of workers who respond most favorably to socialism, how the advanced are identified, what is the Marxist-Leninist method of winning them to communism, what should be the level of our propaganda and agitation in this period, and how to combat and prevent the errors of economism and sectarianism.

For Lenin, the advanced workers making up the vanguard are the key to fusion between the 'two great social movements' of our time. They are the link between the communist movement and the mass working class movement.

The advanced workers, as always and everywhere, determine the character of the movement and they were followed by the working masses because they showed their readiness and their ability to serve the cause of the working class, because they proved able to win the full confidence of the masses. (Retrograde Trend, Collected Works, Vol 4, p 260)

Winning the vanguard to communism means determining the character of the working class movement, and deepening it from spontaneous resistance to a class conscious struggle for political power under the leadership of the party.

Lenin spoke of a 'better situated strata' of workers who respond more rapidly and easily to the ideas of socialism, from which 'in the main' advanced workers come. Today this 'better situated strata' consists in the most oppressed and exploited workers in large-scale basic industry, who objectively have the least stake in maintaining the capitalist system. This unskilled lower stratum is least influenced by the labor aristocracy. Who are the advanced workers and how are they identified. We agree with Lenin's characteristics: *those who can win the confidence of the laboring masses, who devote themselves entirely to the education and organization of the proletariat, who accept socialism consciously and who even elaborate independent socialist theories... (who) study, study, study and turn themselves into conscious (communists), the working class intelligencia (IBID).* Identification of advanced workers is not a cut and dried process. Lenin summed up the experience of the Russian communists to give us a framework to identify the advanced. We would say they understand the class is oppressed and exploited and see beyond the narrow limits of trade unionism. They grasp the need for socialism and proletarian revolution as the only way to change these conditions. What the advanced do not have is a scientific understanding which tells them what socialism is and how we struggle to achieve it. The advanced respond to communist propaganda and agitation because it accurately reflects their class interests. It gives a comprehensive understanding of the entire society, the relationship between classes and the respective interests of each class.

Marxists-Leninists identify and win the vanguard to communism through persistence in fighting for both the immediate struggles and the long range goals of socialism. To consolidate the vanguard to communist thought and action, we must systematize propaganda and agitation, placing emphasis on the former and learning to skillfully integrate the two. Only through propaganda, the presentation of many Marxist concepts and their interrelation can the vanguard be won over to communism ideologically. Communist propaganda is aimed at the few advanced workers in order to pull them fully behind the science of Marxism. It must strive to impart an integral scientific socialist world outlook, following up all the tactical, political and theoretical problems of the communist movement. In Lenin's words, *we should strive to give every class conscious worker definite views on all important questions.*

To avoid the errors of economism and sectarianism, we must grasp the dialectical relationship between the advanced, intermediate and backward strata of the working class. We must rely on the advanced to raise the political level of the intermediate and backward, and strive to promote them to a position in the vanguard. Lenin is very clear in demanding that communists strive to broaden their scope, connecting local and national phenomena with the ultimate goal of socialism. Only through the method of relying on the advanced can a true party of the US proletariat -- one which is the advanced organized detachment of the working class -- be built. We cannot win the working class to our side without first winning the advanced to the cause of communism.
