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My Home Town

by Richard Evanoff

*They're closing down the textile mill
'cross the railroad tracks.*

*A woman says, "These jobs are going
boys and they ain't coming back."*

— Bruce Springsteen, "My Home Town"

I was back in the United States over the summer vacation and was glad to see that the steel mill across the railroad tracks in my own home town was still operating. During the '70s and '80s a lot of small cities in the U.S. became virtual ghost towns as capitalism began to "restructure" itself. One method of restructuring is to "merge and purge." Instead of expanding their own operations, companies try to get bigger by buying other companies. They then sell off those parts of the company which are less profitable and keep the parts that are big money-makers. Another goal of restructuring is to become "leaner and meaner" by cutting jobs so the company can save money on wages. The idea is that this will make American companies more competitive with foreign firms, but the real result is that while the companies get meaner, the workers get leaner. Yet another way for corporations to cut costs is to simply move their operations overseas, where labor is considerably cheaper, taxes are minimal, and safety and environmental regulations are not strictly enforced. In the end, restructuring means big profits for the corporations but it reeks havoc on the lives of millions of ordinary workers and has destroyed thousands of home towns like the one Springsteen sang about.

The steel mill in my home town was originally owned by the Republic Steel Corporation, which had factories scattered throughout the Great Lakes states. In 1937 the Republic plant in South Chicago was the scene of the infamous Memorial Day Massacre in which 10 people were killed and seventy others injured by police trying to break up a strike. Republic's owner, Tom Girdler, achieved notoriety for his remark that he'd rather pick apples than sign a union contract. He also laid bare the logic of capitalism when he openly admitted, "We're not in the business of making steel, we're in the busy of making money."

About a decade ago Republic was bought by a major transnational, the LTV Corporation, a company that knows a thing or two about making missiles for the army but virtually nothing about making steel. It wasn't long before LTV decided to close down the plant in Massillon, Ohio, where both my grandfather and father had worked. Massillon was destined to become another Rustbowl ghost town. When a major indus-

try in a small American town dies, the town dies with it. Main Street ends up being nothing more than the "white-washed windows and vacant stores" in Springsteen's song.

But the workers in Ohio weren't willing to see their town go the way of thousands of others across the country. They decided to buy the company from LTV and operate it themselves. By buying stock in their own company through an ESOP (Employee Stock Ownership Plan), the workers became the majority owners and the ultimate managers of their own plant. With 4,900 worker-owners, the former Republic Steel plant in Massillon is now the fourteenth-largest worker-owned company in the United States (Publix Supermarkets is first, Avis Rental Cars is third, incidentally).

Worker-ownership is a growing international phenomenon. At present there are more than 1,000 producer cooperatives, 1,300 alternative schools, and as many as 10,000 food cooperatives in the United States which are wholly owned and managed by their own workers. Mondragon in the Basque region of Spain boasts 120 worker-owned firms which employ more than 20,000 people. In Japan the Seikatsu Consumer Cooperative Club operates about 100 worker-owned enterprises and markets, with about 60 original organic and environmentally safe products. The coop now has over 500,000 members, with a full-time staff of 700. Empowerment for women is also a major concern of the coop and about 80% of the board members are female.

What do worker-coops have to do with the environment? Len Krimerman and Frank Lindenfeld have recently published a book on the worker-ownership phenomenon, *When Workers Decide*,* which makes the persuasive argument that workers who own their own companies are more likely to be concerned about the impact their companies have on the environment. They're the ones who have to live in the area after all. The big multinational corporations with offices in far-away places couldn't care less about what happens to the local environment or local jobs. All they're interested in is making a profit. As the back cover of *When Workers Decide* states, "The costs of corporate capitalism are all too clear: recession, insecure jobs, corruption, pollution, stripped land, abandoned communities."

Worker-cooperatives, on the other hand, emphasize local control, grass roots involvement, and a democratic workplace in which the workers themselves, rather than absentee executives, make the final decisions. It's exactly the kind of local action that Greens have been advocating and a way to give workers direct ownership of the means of production without a Marxist revolution, state control, nationalized industries, central planning, and all the rest. Moreover, since there are no non-working stockholders to drain off

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NUKE INFO TOKYO

Way Opened for the Long-Term Storage of Spent Nuclear Fuel?

On August 20 the Nuclear Safety Commission (NSC) completed a report claiming that safe design is possible for the storage of spent nuclear fuel in dry casks. Japan's policy at present is for quickly subjecting spent nuclear fuel to reprocessing, with storage being limited to the temporary storage before the fuel is sent to a reprocessing plant. This storage is the wet type, in which the spent fuel is kept in the pools inside reactor buildings and the pools at reprocessing plants. But there is no room to add onto these pools, and it would cost too much to build new pools in other places. Since the reprocessing plant at Rokkasho will begin operating later than initially planned there are worries about insufficient pool capacity, and the recent report is thus a way of accommodating the emergence of the dry storage plan.

Moreover, since the plan for plutonium utilization is falling apart, the view is that authorization for dry storage will lead to the long-term storage of spent fuel, i. e., a change in the policy calling for early reprocessing. And some people surmise that the Long-Term Plan for Nuclear Power Development and Utilization that is now under deliberation by the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) will give definite indications of such a policy shift.

The first possibility for dry storage is the planned construction of a spent fuel storage facility holding about 1,000 barrels at Tokyo Electric's Fukushima I nuclear plant (six BWRs, 4,696 MW total output).

Progress in the Plan for the Higashidori N-Plant

The purchase of fishing rights, required for the construction of a new nuclear plant in Aomori Prefecture's Higashidori Village, was approved on August 14 and 17 at general assemblies of the two involved fishing cooperatives. It was in 1970 when Tokyo Electric and Tohoku Electric proposed to the village that they would like to jointly build a nuclear power plant in this location. At that time they were considering a giant facility with a total output of 20,000 megawatts, but the plan now apparently calls for four BWRs with a total output of 4,400 megawatts.

Many fishing cooperative members oppose the plan, and fought against it for a long time,

but in the end the electric companies prevailed by forcing the opposition aside with mega-yen compensation payments of ¥13 billion (an average of ¥14 million for each person), as well as a ¥5 billion donation for a fisheries promotion foundation, amounts that far exceeded the "going price."

Because the construction of new transmission lines to carry the power to Tokyo would cost at least ¥2 trillion, even the electric companies have had little enthusiasm for this project since the 1980s, when growth in the demand for electricity slowed, but it is said that the companies were pushed into a position from which they could not back out because of the government's policy promoting nuclear power and the village's request for the plant. It appears as though a plan is now proceeding for just one of the four originally planned reactors, which would not require the building of the new transmission lines. There are also rumors that a FBR and not a BWR will actually be built on the site, or that it will become home to a reprocessing plant or a repository for radioactive wastes. □

Citizens' Nuclear Information Center Is Target of Harassment

The heightening citizen resistance to plutonium shipment and use, as well as the near impossibility of siting new nuclear facilities have no doubt represented further slashes and gashes in the hide of that wounded and limping dinosaur, Japan's nuclear power industry. Perhaps it is for this reason that the Citizens' Nuclear Information Center, which forms the core of Japan's highly effective anti-nuclear power movement, has during the past few months been the target of particularly nasty mail harassment consisting of fake requests for huge donations, which suggest that without a massive infusion of money the Center might temporarily close, as well as midsummer greeting cards — using Representative Takagi's name and mailed from a post office near his home — implying that the movement is faltering, and that Mr. Takagi himself has undergone a change of heart. These have been mailed to anti-nuclear activists. There have also been other kinds of harassment through the mail.

As citizens' movements become stronger and moneyed interests weaker, will we see an increase in such harassment? Only time will tell, but the Center says that this is the worst yet. □

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profits, worker cooperatives are generally able to offer higher wages to their employees.

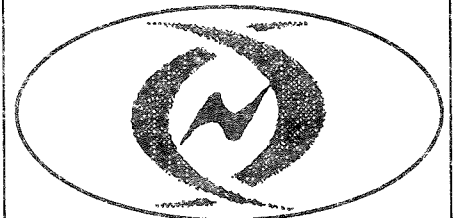
It's true that worker ownership won't necessarily solve every social or environmental ill. Even worker-owned companies must still participate in a market economy where production is geared more towards generating profits than satisfying genuine human needs — the major customer for the steel mill in my home town is the Honda Motors factory in Marion, Ohio. But once worker ownership gives people a taste of empowerment, who knows what will happen? Having real control over one's work, making real decisions about one's life, participating fully in the decision-making process, having a real voice in society — all of this is pretty heady stuff that might lead to some definite changes in the way things are organized.

Maybe I'm just bragging because it's my home town, but I'm kind of proud of what those steelworkers are doing. The revolution isn't some distant event. It's something that's already started. □

* *When Workers Decide* is available for \$16.95 + \$2.00 shipping from GEO Newsletter, P.O. Box 5065, New Haven, CT 06525 U.S.A. A bimonthly newsletter on the workplace democracy movement, *Grassroots Economic Organizing Newsletter*, is available for \$12.00 per year at the same address.

Second Japan Networkers' Conference

This is a call for participation in the Second Japan Networkers' Conference, to be held in



Kawasaki, Osaka, and Nagoya from October 31 to November 8, 1992. Includes technical seminars. The numbers of participants are limited, so contact the organizers as soon as possible. For information and registration call JNC. Telephone, 03-5472-5276, fax 03-5401-0681.