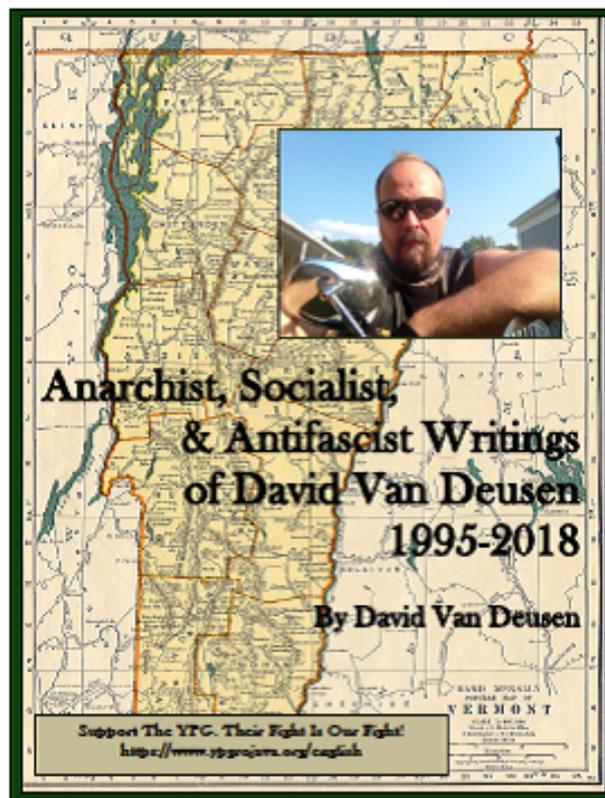


Anarchist, Socialist, & Anti-Fascist Writings of David Van Deusen 1995-2018

David Van Deusen



Contents

Author's Note	7
On These Collected Essays	7
Prelude	8
A Mosaic of Struggle	8
Chapter I: Anarchist Theory	9
Emergence of The Black Bloc & The Movement Towards Anarchism (2001)	9
Chapter II: Street Battles, Armed Defense & Insurrection	29
Early Black Bloc Clashes: North America, 1988-1999 (2005)	29
Two Thousand March Against Democratic National Convention & In Support of Political Prisoners (1996)	34
R2K: Philadelphia and The RNC (2001)	35
Communique From a Wanted Black Bloc Anarchist (2000)	37
N16: Cincinnati and The TABD (2001)	38
Against Columbus Day: AIM and The Black Bloc in Denver (2001)	40
The Battle of York-January 12, 2002 (2005)	42
Antifa In DC & The Baltimore 28 (2005)	44
The War Machine Must Stop! (2005)	47
When The War Started (2005)	48
Valley Forge Battlefield: The Black Bloc vs. Nazis (2005)	50
GW Bush Inauguration Day II: J20 (2005)	52
THE LEFTIST CASE AGAINST GUN CONTROL IN VERMONT (2018)	55
PIPE BOMBS FROM THE RIGHT – ANTIFA MANS THE WALL (2018)	58
Chapter III: Organization Within Anarchist Federations & Labor Unions	62
Towards The Creation Of Regional North American Anarchist Federations & The Adoption Of An Organizational Model From Which a Broad Based Strategy Can Be Carried Out (2001)	62
Building Union Power in AOT Year One: 2015 In Review (2016)	73
Building Union Power in AOT Year Two: 2016 In Review (2017)	98
The Challenge Facing VSEA and A Proactive Response (2016)	116
Chapter IV: Working Class Power	121
Mount Snow Exploits Workers: Threatens Local Economy (1998)	121
One Worker's Perspective on The September 11th 2001 Attacks: Observations & Warnings (2001)	124
Militant UE Strike at Fairbanks Scales Ends in Victory (2002)	127

Union + Town Meeting = Democracy (2003)	130
Montpelier Workers Seek Citywide Labor Union! (2003)	132
WORKER OWNED: The Changing Face of Employment in Vermont (2006)	135
Labor's First Strike Against the War (2008)	139
Healthcare Is A Human Right: Call In Sick May 1 (2009)	141
Green Energy and Good Jobs For Vermonters-October (2011)	143
PAID SICK DAYS FOR ALL WORKERS! (2014)	149
NO RATS, NO RACISTS: WHEN WE STAND TOGETHER WE WIN! (2016)	152
A Gathering Storm In Washington: A Class War We Must Win! (2016)	154
LARGEST DEMONSTRATION IN VERMONT HISTORY: 20,000 March In Montpelier Against Trump (2017)	157
WHY WE FIGHT ON THIS MAY DAY (2017)	159
Justice For Snow Plow Drivers (2018)	162
Chapter V: The Struggle Of The Farmers	166
Dairy Farmers of Vermont Seek Sustainable Milk Price (2003)	166
Dairy Farmers of Vermont United: First Round Of Negotiations With Milk Co-ops Con- clude (2003)	167
FARMERS SEIZE MEANS OF PRODUCTION: Farmer Controlled Processing Plant Opens In The Kingdom (2006)	171
Down on The Farm: Interview With Vermont Farm Organizer Peter Sterling (2006) . .	172
Chapter VI: Direct Democracy & Town Meeting	182
TOWN MEETING DAY: Six Towns Demand Bush Be Impeached! (2006)	182
Vermont Towns Calls For Bush Impeachment & End To Deadly War In Iraq (2007) . .	184
Brattleboro & Marlboro Town Meetings Call For Arrest Of U.S. President Bush & Vice President Cheney (2008)	186
Empower Town Meeting: Abolish The Voting Booth (2014)	188
In Defense Cabot's Town Meeting: Participatory Democracy or Convenience? (2016) .	190
Chapter VII: Counter-Culture	194
Green Mountain Communes: The Making of a Peoples' Vermont (2008)	194
Chapter VIII: The Abenaki/Native Americans	202
People of the Dawn: The Struggle for Abenaki Sovereignty Continues (2003)	202
New Dawn for Abenaki: Original Vermonters Recognized (2006)	210
Vermont Sierra Club Helps Build Abenaki Tribal Forest (2012)	212
Chapter IX: Anti-Fascism	216
The Siege Of Lewiston: An Interview With Lady, Soldier Against Fascism (2005) . . .	216
Wolf Hunt In The Kingdom: Minutemen Draw Rain & Protesters to Derby Line (2006)	220
Chapter X: On Elections	226
Vermont 2006 Elections: Socialist Sanders to U.S. Senate (2006)	226
The Man Who Would Be King: Interview With Vermont Progressive Anthony Pollina (2007)	232

Dave Van Deusen, Candidate for Moretown Select Board (2009)	244
VALLEY REPORTER QUESTIONS FOR SELECT BOARD CANDIDATE DAVE VAN DEUSEN (2010)	246
Concerning The Vote For The Next VT AFL-CIO President (2010)	249
Dave Van Deusen For Vermont AFL-CIO Member-At-Large/Executive Committee (2011)	252
VT 2014 Election Analysis From The Fringe (2014)	254
Farewell From Your Constable (2015)	257
Chapter XI: On The Road	260
AMERICAN DREAMS - WESTERN GREYHOUND (1995)	260
Night Patrol With The Vermont National Guard: In The Shadow of Katrina and Iraq (2005)	262
The Other Campaign: Zapatistas Seek United Left (2006)	267
The French Connection: An Interview With Xavier Massot On The Growing Unrest In France (2006)	270
RESOLUTION IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE STRUGGLE IN ROJAVA – GREEN MOUN- TAIN CENTRAL LABOR COUNCIL-AFL-CIO (2018)	275
TRUMP’S BETRAYAL OF ROJAVA – PARIS COMMUNE FALLS AGAIN? (2018)	278
Chapter XII: Coda/Sports & Politics	283
THE RHYTHM OF BASEBALL - REFLECTIONS FROM A CABIN (1999)	283
B-Hop’s Claim Racist? (2013)	285
Ali: The Peoples’ Champ Is Gone (2016)	288
SPACEMAN: Of Roadkill & Governors (2016)	289

This book is dedicated to the Green Mountain Anarchist Collective (Vermont), the Ramblers Motorcycle Family (Quebec), and the Peoples' Defense Units (YPG) & their armed struggle to establish a Free Territory in Rojava. I encourage all readers to support this struggle however they can and give consideration to becoming a volunteer in their international armed forces.

www.facebook.com

www.ypgrojava.org

About The Author



David Van Deusen, pictured front right (along with union transportation workers & supporters) marched in his first Black Bloc against Bill Clinton & the 1996 Democratic National Con-

vention in Chicago, Illinois. He was an all-section wrestler in his youth, played bass in the U.S. Condemned, and later trained in boxing and karate. Van Deusen co-founded the Green Mountain Anarchist Collective in 2000 and is a former member of Anti-Racist Action. He is a District Vice President and past Member-At-Large of the Vermont AFL-CIO, served on the Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs, and as Conservation Organizer for the Vermont Sierra Club. David is a member of AFSCME Local 2413 and is also a past member of the United Auto Workers Local 1981, Teamsters Local 1L, and United Electrical Workers Local 221. He authored *On Anarchism: Dispatches From The Peoples' Republic of Vermont*, and co-authored *The Black Bloc Papers & Neither Washington Nor Stowe*. In addition, he was elected to two terms on his local Select Board (endorsed by the VT Progressive Party, VT Liberty Union Party & the AFL-CIO), three terms as First Constable, and as Moretown Chair of the [social-democratic] Vermont Progressive Party Caucus. Van Deusen (who has traveled as far west as California, as far east as Budapest Hungary, as far north as Quebec City, and as far south as Chiapas Mexico) has labored as a construction worker, farmhand, bartender, archaeologist, freelance journalist, and as News Editor of Catamount Tavern News. He is presently a Union Rep for AFSCME and a former Senior Union Rep for the Vermont State Employees' Association (representing road crew workers). Van Deusen is a member of the Vermont Workers' Center, and lives with his family (wife Angela, daughter Freya, & son William) in rural Vermont (splitting his time between an off-grid log cabin in the mountains & in a northern village). Van Deusen, who has also resided in New Orleans Louisiana (birthplace of jazz), Jacksonville Florida (birthplace of Lynyrd Skynyrd), West Nyack New York, & Seville Spain, rides a Union made Harley Davidson motorcycle.

Author's Note

On These Collected Essays

This book is a collection of essays I have written over the past two+ decades. A discerning reader will note that some of my more foundational essays such as *Black Bloc Tactics Communique*, and *Neither Washington Nor Stowe* (along with dozens of others) do not appear here. These essays (some of which were co-authored with the Green Mountain Anarchist Collective) were (in my opinion) central to the political themes I have written about (and been engaged in) over the years (especially from 1999-2007). Their absence is due to the fact that they have been brought together in the book *On Anarchism: Dispatches From The Peoples Republic of Vermont* (Algora Publishing, NYC, 2017). What is contained here are those essays that were excluded from that collection (along with some which have been written after its publication). Even so, I trust that some of the words put on page here will be of interest to the reader and to history.

-David Van Deusen, November 5, 2017

Prelude

A Mosaic of Struggle

The collected works which you are holding represent twenty years of my life as a writer, theorist, organizer, and revolutionary. Most of these essays, articles, proposals, reports, communiques, and interviews (but not all) relate to Vermont as that has been my home (and the focus of my work). The tone and form that each essay takes differs depending on the intended audience; some being written for revolutionaries; others for leftists generally; some exclusively for union members; and still more for the public. Most of these essays have previously been printed in underground newspapers, and a few in the establishment press. Taken together this collected works will provide a window into the multilayered struggle for radical social change in rural Vermont and beyond, as it unfolded over time.

A focused view into any specific social conflict would itself carry a certain interest to the student of political change. But when the subject is Vermont (within a context of libertarian socialist struggle beyond its borders), perhaps this is especially so. This sparsely populated mountainous region represents a northern fringe of the American Empire. Being on this fringe it has sustained a leftward and libertarian trajectory which often runs counter to the currents of the United States. Demographically Vermont should be a solid pro-Republican, pro-capitalist state. Instead it is home to the strongest leftist third party in the country (the Vermont Progressive Party), has sent a socialist (Bernie Sanders) to represent it in the United States Senate, and has a vibrant social movement. Hence, the story of struggle in Vermont is not just a provincial tale; rather it is an expansive lesson waiting to be learned by those who would risk change. In putting together this collection it is my intent to allow the reader to draw such lessons as they may find from our common success and failure.

The reader will also discern an interplay in the events and efforts the essays reflect between theory and action; neither acting as the driver alone. This interplay is necessary as the politics of social transformation cannot be dogmatic. If there is an absolute path towards victory, we, as a people, have not found it. Nor has any cult of personality delivered more than the expected. As such, I am loath to paint any single approach to fundamental change as exclusive to another. In all likelihood there is no map with X marking the spot of social revolution. Rather social revolution is more likely something we will stumble upon like a drunk in the night, and then spend the next hundred years trying to dissect and categorize. And even then, we may find that our conclusions lose meaning without a living context.

Therefore, in this meantime we experience as our lives, the best we can do is what we can: subversive art, clandestine operations, militant street actions, building of counter-institutions, union organizing, and even the occasional election should not be understood as mutually exclusive endeavors to an effective movement. Together they are a mosaic that gives depth to our noble if quixotic adventure into a future yet unwritten.

-In Solidarity, David Van Deusen, Cabot Vermont, May 1, 2017

Chapter I: Anarchist Theory

Emergence of The Black Bloc & The Movement Towards Anarchism (2001)



NEFAC members & Black Bloc participants at the first George W Bush inauguration, Washington DC 2000

"Get Busy Living, Or Get Busy Dying!"

—The Kings of Nuthin, Boston, Massachusetts

The Peoples' Republic of Vermont, March 2001- Since the Battle of Seattle, the North American left, and specifically the smaller yet growing revolutionary anarchist movement, has been invigorated at least as much as it has become a common reality in the consciousness of the public.¹

¹ 2017 Note From The Author: This essay was written in 2001, and was first published in *The Black Bloc Papers* (first edition), Insubordinate Editions, Baltimore MD, 2002. The first draft of this essay, and the entire first draft of *The Black Bloc Papers* was edited by Mike Auerbach of Putney Vermont. Mike is now a public school teacher and member of the National Educators Association.

This has not occurred in a vacuum. Nor has this happened due to a simple, quantifiable reason. The reasons are as much diverse and subjective as they are objective and empirical.

One facet of this movement (specifically of the revolutionary anarchist movement) is encapsulated and advanced by the militant actions of a group commonly referred to as the Black Bloc. This informal grouping has acted as a necessary radical action wing of the larger social protest movement. Where liberal inclinations have threatened to stifle large demonstrations under a blanket of acceptability, predictability and boredom, this contingent—numbering anywhere from less than 100 to over 1000 in a typical Bloc—has forced a creative unleashing of popular insurrectionary sentiment.

The following essay is primarily concerned with the Black Bloc. However, in order to more accurately discuss this faction, it will be necessary to paint a picture of the larger contemporary framework within and against which it operates. Towards this end this work will be divided into three sections. The first will deal directly with the Black Bloc; its historical roots, as well as the tactics it commonly employs. The second section will discuss the social, political, psychological and economic macrocosm in which the present movement is situated. The final section will discuss the smaller social context in which the revolutionary anarchist movement as well as the Black Bloc directly exists.

It is the intention of this essay to provide a historical, theoretical and practical base from which a more grounded understanding of the Black Bloc, as well as the revolutionary anarchist movement generally can emerge. Such a grounding can and will only lead to a more mature discussion and development of anarchist praxis and revolutionary progress. It is with this in mind that I here turn towards section one.

Section I

The Emergence of The Black Bloc:

History, Tactics and General Constituency

“I wear the black for the poor and the beaten down,

² During that action, approximately 600 committed communist youth converged upon the city of Chicago in order to protest the trial of the Chicago 8, as well as the continuing war in Vietnam. Their method of confrontation was that of direct physical conflict with the forces of the state (in this case the police). They organized themselves into small affinity groups, and showed up equipped with clubs, helmets, bricks and other means of low tech hand to hand combat. Once assembled they actively attacked the forming police lines and fought the cops with ferocity. Although the first day was the most effective (in terms of enemy injuries and material destruction of capitalist private property), a total of three more days of limited conflict ensued. While this action clearly represents a link between the present Bloc and past militant tactics, it differs in many regards. First of all, the Weather contingent organized themselves by strictly hierarchical means. They employed a chain of command that was not congruent with directly democratic processes. Second, their action occurred without the benefit of being part of a larger, more tactically diverse protest action. In this the police were able to focus their superior resources solely upon them. Third, following the action the Weather leadership did not believe such forms of protest could be maintained without resulting in a negative bloodbath (during the first night of fighting 10 Weather members received wounds from shotguns, and another by pistol).

To paraphrase Weatherman Central Coordinating Committee member Jeff Jones, ‘we felt that we achieved a level of militancy which we could not surpass using aboveground tactics. Furthermore, the lack of public mobilization following the assassination of Black Panther, Fred Hampton, convicted us that our political role would only be sustainable and effective if we operated as a sort of guerrilla force, underground, behind enemy lines.’ [Info gathered by a private interview I conducted with him during the winter of 1997.] Hence the organization soon decided to move its operation underground as an urban guerrilla organization. For these reasons, the Days Of Rage must be understood as no more than a primitive prototype of contemporary Black Bloc actions and no more.

For a decent firsthand account of this action see Albert (ed.), *The Sixties Papers*. Shin’ya ono: *You Don’t Need A Weatherman*, Pages 254-263, Praeger, New York, 1984.

*Livin' in the hopeless, hungry side of town,
I wear it for the prisoner who has long paid for his crime,
But is there because he's a victim of the times."*

—Johnny Cash, Man In Black

The Black Bloc can trace its historical roots all the way back to when and wherever people comprising an oppressed class or group militantly rose up against their oppressors. Elements of the particular tactics of the Bloc were previously utilized by the Weather faction of Students for a Democratic Society (the SDS) in North America during the “Days of Rage” in 1969.² Specifically, the Bloc’s tactical aesthetic and more refined methods of state confrontation first began to concretely emerge in the 1980s Autonomie movement in Germany. There, the seriousness of the anti-nuclear movement as well as the demands of the continuing anarchist/anti-fascist movement required that mass protests be brought to a higher level of militancy and anonymity. Hence, radical collectives—often from within the anarcho-punk scene and typically of working class composition—began to urge their members and social militants generally to assemble at demonstrations donning uniform black clothes (with masks), and to march as a single protest contingent (among many others). With their identities effectively hidden in temporary uniformity, they were able to more successfully push protest actions in more militant directions while protecting themselves from being singled out for direct state oppression or later legal charges or both. This process matured to the point where the emerging Black Bloc began to develop better self-defense and militant tactics. It must be understood that this formation was not the birth of a formal, or rather continuous organization. It simply acted as a temporary cohesive grouping with the immediate goal of creating a temporally contingent street fighting force, which in practice would dissolve with the conclusion of the action at hand. This is not to say that the sole focus of these included persons and/or collectives revolved around such action. On the contrary, those making up the Bloc commonly were rooted in the social and political organizations and projects which the specifics of their local community demanded. They had their roots.³ In addition, the militancy and subsequent actions of the Black Bloc must also be understood as the embodiment of a certain means of struggle amongst many others, a means which are both legitimate and effective.⁴

As a Black Bloc, this grouping was an alliance of independent persons and/or affinity groups. Collectively, the Bloc acted by directly democratic means whenever possible, and by internal affinity group consensus when situations demanded. Other than that, the grouping conscientiously lacked any formal structure or authoritarian hierarchy.

Typically, the Bloc took positions at the front, rear, or perimeters of the protest march in order to provide a strong defensive presence at normally vulnerable points. In this way, the police were prevented from disrupting the movement of the demonstration without first having to subdue a highly militant, dedicated, and prepared section of the protest. In order to strengthen its capacity to achieve these tactical objectives, the Bloc began to carry metal pipes, wooden clubs, and don protective padding and helmets. In addition, other tactical developments included the use of large

³ Such activity at the local level is 100% necessary in the on-going movement towards social revolution. In such, the relative limelight placed on Black Blocs must be subjectively diluted with this fact.

⁴ Here it is necessary to understand that at this stage of the struggle, the tactics employed by the Bloc are most effective when performed in conjunction with others. This includes nonviolent lockdowns, street theater, ‘legal’ marches, etc.. In addition, it also must be clarified that such action, when used in conjunction with more militant tactics, are effective and legitimate. Lastly, it should be noted that many anarchists are involved in these actions as well.

continuous banners, poles, or ropes lining the perimeters of this regiment. The purpose of these tools was to make it more difficult for the police to single out individuals for arrest. The cops would have to pass through a collectively held barrier, while simultaneously contending with blows from clubs in order to carry out arrests.

More than acting as shock troops, or defensive units within the larger protest contingent, the Bloc began to take on an offensive role regarding the conscious destruction of capitalist private property. Here, affinity groups within the Bloc would facilitate the smashing of windows, spray painting of revolutionary messages, and trashing of police and/or military vehicles. Of course, all such activity was clearly directed against capitalist targets. Despite the inaccurate assertions of the corporate media, arbitrary vandalism never was, nor is, the goal or practice of the Black Bloc.

Another function of the Black Bloc is to push the protest at hand towards a more militant and socially comprehensive direction. Largely this was achieved by the Bloc positioning itself at the forefront of the demonstration and subsequently forcing an escalation between the state forces and the protesters. Simply by resisting arrest, refusing to remain on sanctioned parade routes, challenging police barricades, and by actively directing its anger at corporate targets, the Bloc ensured that such an escalation would ensue.

The purpose of such escalation in part lies in the belief that such conflict necessarily results in the unmasking of the brutal nature of the state. The subsequent brutality of the opposing police/military force is revealed. The idea is that by showing the larger population the violent means by which the status quo is maintained, a significant number of people will become further radicalized by this physical and visual demonstration of the nature of the State. Escalation also has a desired effect of forcing an action to transcend its often liberal underpinnings and become an actual example of contextually conditioned revolt. Direct action expands past the confines of simple symbolism and then delves into the very real territory of subjective and objective revolutionary insurrection. The demonstration here begins to assume its own identity free of the social spectacle of the commodified-consumer culture, and begins to move in a more fluid, self-defining manner. The role of the demonstration as a social pressure valve, both impotent and non-revolutionary, begins to be inverted into an actual expression of social unrest. In this regards, spontaneity, via militancy and violence, becomes an actual expression of the mass action. Hence, the action becomes a free means by which natural human identity is demonstrated through its basic rejection of subjugation, authority, capitalism, and status quo.

This element of social clash is necessary by way that it allows the oppressed and alienated person a real experience by which one's pent up and sheep-like identity and boredom is shattered in a situation of revolt. Here the person begins to feel the future reality that the streets and the city, as a basic creation of the worker, truly do belong to them. Here, possibilities of full revolt and victory are crystallized through the adrenalin of conflict. In short, this conflict is good in that it allows one's mind to understand real physical struggle, while also allowing one to feel, if only slightly, the possibility of collective self-management without the confused abstraction of police and government. The city, in the vicinity of conflict, truly becomes the people's to be won, lost, held or discarded.

To paraphrase Jean Paul Sartre, 'The reason the worker does not revolt... is because he does not imagine what a liberated society would actually be like.'

And further from the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, "Let us remember, no great step forward in history has ever come to fruition without first being baptized in blood."

Therefore, regardless of the particular success of the action at hand, the activity of those within the Black Bloc must be encouraged and understood as both necessary and positive in relation to the subjective requirements necessary in the continual advancement of the revolutionary anarchist struggle.⁵

The practice of such Blocs are as socially/psychologically healthy as they are real. In this capacity, persons claiming to be of the left, or even anarchists, which argue against the need for a Black Bloc, or that the Bloc is socially and/or tactically ineffectual, must be understood as persons who either do not understand the subjective dynamic of revolt, or ones who are so weighed down in indecision and tacit acceptance of the status quo that they must be considered ignorant at best, or the enemy at worst. These folk would substitute another generation of ideological debate, meetings and boredom for real action.⁶ Despite their professed goals, they become the harbingers of defeat and alienation through their inability to understand risk, action, movement, and experiential freedom. The revolutionary would do well to discredit their words through action and, as we are not bloodthirsty Neanderthals, the continuing development of legitimate anarchist theory.

Following the example of the German people, the formation of Black Blocs soon spread across Europe, where they are still practiced with relative ferocity and effectiveness today.⁷ By the early 1990s, these tactics began to take root in North America. Black Blocs were organized during the 1991 Gulf War, during the Democratic National Convention of 1996, and at a multitude of other demonstrations throughout the decade.

However, the effectiveness of the Black Bloc in North America seems to be just reaching certain levels of maturity in this new decade; a maturity which is paralleled with that of the broader social protest movement as a whole.

⁵ This is not to say that we should not be concerned with achieving certain objective goals regarding the action at hand. We should seek optimal effectiveness by refining our tactical abilities and subjective dedication. However, even when certain objectives are not met, we can often claim 'victory' in that this form of direct action translates into subjective advances. A good example of this is the A16 action: we failed to shut down the capitalist meetings, but made psychological advances by virtue of our demonstrated abilities in struggle against the forces of the state. In short, each action involving the revolutionary anarchist movement carries with it a plethora of potential victories and defeats beyond the single major stated objective at hand. As revolutionaries against boredom and alienation, our means and ends become intermingled in one continuous organic demonstration of direct democratic process and struggle.

This section is not to imply that every Black Bloc must be violent or destructive by definition. In fact, there are times when the Bloc consciously decides not to conduct itself in this manner unless circumstances demand. At these times, the Bloc is present simply to show movement solidarity within a certain social situation. However, even without the actual practice of such violence, the Bloc still acts as the representation of a certain threat, possibility, and idea. The Bloc, through its person to person composition, is freedom and the unfettered human spirit embodied in a situational social form.

⁶ This is not to say that debate, organizational meetings and other like activities are not necessary. In the contrary, they are. However, they are not desirable or required when they begin to become an end in themselves. This is a tendency which is often played out in leftist organizations by virtue of its liberal constituencies desiring of a means to feel better about their dominated lives and tacitly oppressive lifestyles without actually putting their position as a well fed consumer (i.e. their relative social stability) in jeopardy by advocating or taking part in direct revolutionary action. It should be remembered that it is always such left hesitation and status quo fetishism that is called on by the state to stabilize revolutionary situation (i.e. the French Communist Party in France 1968, the NAACP during the Black Revolt in urban America of that same year).

⁷ Two recent examples can be found in the Prague actions directed against the WB/IMF meetings starting on September 26, 00', and the actions in Nice against the European Union meetings on December 6-7th, 00'.

During the Battle of Seattle⁸, the Black Bloc (numbering approximately 200) primarily focused its attention upon the destruction of corporate property. At the A16 (April 16, 2000) action⁹ the Bloc (numbering approximately 1000) focused the bulk of its energies on combating police engaged in violent acts against the Bloc and nonviolent protesters alike. Black Blocs were also present at both the Republican and Democratic National Conventions of that year.¹⁰ There they again demonstrated their tactics of physical self-defense and the destruction of capitalist private property and/or state property (i.e. police cars). Blocs were present at a multitude of May Day demonstrations in 2000, the first presidential debate in Boston¹¹, at the inauguration of now-President Bush¹², as well as at a number of other events.

The particularities of each of these actions resulted in a variety of Bloc tactics. These differences deserve to be evaluated in order to ascertain what specific tactics are effective in certain situations. Such an analysis is required in order for us to better prepare ourselves for future conflicts. However, it is not the focus of this essay to go into such details. The primary concern here is simply to discuss the history of the Black Bloc and to place it within a certain larger social context. Therefore, such particularities, though important, will be omitted for now in order to stay focused at the task at hand. Thus, I will here again turn to the social origins of the North American Black Bloc.

Social Composition Of The North American Black Bloc

The Black Bloc in North America, primarily composed of folk from within the contemporary counterculture, and more often than not coming from a working class background, is a political expression of the developing class conscious social revolution.¹³ Persons and collectives making up the Black Bloc can be generally described as semi-alienated youth from a poor, declassed, or working class background. This is not to imply that a number of Bloc participants don't come from the upper classes, for they do. However, before someone yells 'charlatans,' it should be stated that during this present age of neo-liberalism (the contemporary mode of capitalism), the basic strains of alienation run strong even outside of the more oppressed communities. On the other hand, I do not intend to imply that the natural focus of revolutionary potential has been stripped from the more exploited and materially deprived populations. It hasn't. It is only to say that as society moves in more abstracted and culturally undesirable directions that more and more people across class lines, particularly young people, will begin to seek social alternatives to the status quo. And, it is only reasonable to expect a number of them to side with the social vision of the actively revolutionary poor and working class. Besides, history has proven that while class origins can say much about the general potential and demeanor of large groupings, it also tells us that these generalities are not absolute laws when judged against the real activities of specific persons.¹⁴ For example, one of the greatest anarchist revolutionaries/theoreticians in history was Mikhail Bakunin. Bakunin came from an aristocratic Russian family. He himself was briefly an officer in the Imperial Army. Yet he committed nearly his entire adult life to the emancipation of

⁸ Protest against the meeting of the World Trade Organization, Seattle, November, 1999.

⁹ To protest the meeting of the World Bank, Washington DC, April 16th and 17th, 2000.

¹⁰ The Democratic National Convention was held in Los Angeles, California, August 14-17, 2000. The Republican National Convention was held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, August 1-3, 2000.

¹¹ Cambridge, Massachusetts, October 3, 2000.

¹² Washington DC, January 20, 2001.

¹³ Of course it is not here intended that it is the only, or even most important of such political expressions. It is only one, out of a multitude, of such developing trends.

¹⁴ To name but a two: Mikhail Bakunin and Karl Marx.

all people. He stood at the workers' barricades during the Bavarian insurrection, and for this his former class origins became both transcended and meaningless. Give us ten divisions of Bakunins, regardless of their past economic standing, and our work as revolutionaries would be over in a matter of days.¹⁵ So, to all you pretentious class concerned critics, I challenge you to tell me what you've done.

This being clarified, I use the prefix 'semi,' in describing the Blocs participants as 'semi-alienated youth,' to mark the fact that the vast majority of those involved are rooted in counterculture communities wherein degrees of non-alienated social relations are actively cultivated. They may be part of a small democratic worker's co-operative, an artistically oriented consensus based collective, reside in a group run commune, house, or squat, subside off tax-exempt funds from the black market, or simply live as well as their anti-capitalist logic and intuition impels them to. In short, a good deal of their lives are focused around the living example of more natural and life/creativity affirming socialist¹⁶ modes of existence. They try to be good folk with each other and the poor and working folk around them. They help each other out without expecting profit.

However, this is not to say that they, unlike more mainstream workers, are not alienated. For no matter how 'counter' one manages to live within an oppressive authoritarian society, one cannot escape the basic drugging of one's spirit by the hands of the state. If one lives on a collective farm, that collective is still coerced into paying property tax, or the land will be seized. If one spends their hours working to collectively create a liberating art -food, shelter, and art supplies have to be had; and often this is enough coercion to compel one to sell their labor as a wage slave. Worker co-operatives are no exception. Such operations are driven to continue dealing on a cash basis inasmuch as certain basic supplies (take paint for example, that is if the co-op is centered around that trade) are not easily attainable through barter or other means. All being said, the rat of contemporary capitalism can be spotted in the best homes.

Still, the anarchist within a counterculture is less alienated from themselves and others as compared to the person squarely within the predominant culture. At least here radical commodification, consumerism, capitalism, and authoritarianism are viewed as crap yet to be overcome, as opposed to the bedrock of social meaning.

With the above understood, the question still remains as to what the deeper social, political and historical reasons are for the emergence of this revolutionary faction within the western nations. For the particularities of their cultural leanings seem to make them somewhat unique as compared to their proletariat ancestors. They are not friendly to the authoritarian analysis of the various communist parties, they are not often motivated by hunger (one can find lots of food in the trash bins of Uncle Sam) and they do not limit their demands and social vision to material equality. They call for a re-thinking and re-organizing of society along lines which challenge the very fundamental basis of contemporary western civilization. They are anarchists! But how did the broader social context give rise to them? Who is their constituency? What exactly is it that they seek to disrupt, and what do they intend to replace it with?

¹⁵ Also for the record... Bakunin spent many years in prison, including some time chained up in a tower in St. Petersburg where he lost all his teeth due to scurvy.

¹⁶ Here I use the term 'socialist' in its older and more accurate meaning. It is used simply to denote a more cooperative means of organizing society.

In order to answer some of these underlying questions, as well as to place the Block Bloc within a comprehensive sociological framework, I will now turn to a discourse on the particularities of the present capitalist reality.

Section II

The New Capitalism And Its System Of Radical Commodification And Consumerism

As capitalism has moved into the new phase of radical commodification and consumerism, its hold on all aspects of the perceived mass existence has seemingly strengthened. Contemporary capitalism, by way of its inherent imperialism, has expanded its former material boundaries as to make a quantifiable commodity out of the hollows of one's private time, internal thoughts, recreation and personal relations. The older forms of classical capitalism, as found in the pre-WWII Euro-American theater, was primarily concerned with large scale domestic industrial production and the subsequent exploitation of the worker, through relatively straightforward means, for the ends of surplus capital (profit). The new concerns center around the exploitation of leisure, the construction of false needs along with the particular commodities to meet these superfluous and profitable ends, and the advancement of its psychological holds to include the subtle coercion of the worker to actively take part in her/his own oppression. Of course the old industrial modes of exploitation are still present, only now the pallet of oppression and dreariness is more well-rounded.

The immediate cause of this shift can be found with the ruling class's ability to export massive segments of the industries (coal, petroleum, machine/auto production, fabrics, etc.) to poorer, formerly agricultural-based third world nations where the worker is subjected by the iron heel of puppet dictators backed financially and militarily by the primary capitalist states along with their plutocracy.¹⁷ Within these countries labor lacks the historical consolidation of organizational strength and past accomplishments such as the eight hour work day and workers' compensation.¹⁸ This of course is in conjunction with the fact that within these boundaries, safety/environmental standards are hardly allotted a whisper of concern, let alone precautionary legislation. Therefore, the primary capitalist nations, through their respected ruling class, can increase production at a fraction of the former cost while massively increasing profit.¹⁹ In turn, the ruling class can then throw a few more peanuts of benefits and wages to the domestic workers, in order to decrease poverty-based insurrectionary sentiment while not experiencing any decrease in profit.

Simultaneously these so called privileged laborers are constantly pressured to utilize their new spending ability through the purchasing of capitalist controlled gadgets and instruments of supposed enjoyment and/or need, i.e. complicated phone services, large screen t.v.'s, brand name garments/sneakers, new top 40 musical CDs written and composed by assholes lacking even a hint of soul, and larger than necessary cars with remote locking devices.

¹⁷ This is different than colonialism in that these regimes are no longer exploited for their raw materials alone. Now their indigenous labor is utilized as a means of producing refined goods for general consumption.

¹⁸ As I am editing this section of the work, I'm cold (Vermont winter with no propane), annoyed (my roommates won't leave me alone), have a sore throat, and am listening to Frank Zappa's 'Hot Rats.' Good fuckin' album. In all, it reminds me of the Motherfucker saying, "We are as utopian as Detroit."

¹⁹ Here the capitalists must still contend with armed communist guerrilla movements as well as the occasional anti-authoritarian uprisings. These are major aspects of the continuing world social revolution, and in such they deserve a great deal of analysis. However, the scope of this text requires that I omit such commentary and this time.

*"[They'll] give you all the hits to play,
to keep you in your place all day."*

—The Clash

In other words, false or unnecessary needs are created within this market, and are then allotted to the populace at the expense of further capital. In this way, the ruling class is able to again accumulate even further surplus capital.

To bring about this trend in popular spending, the masses are bombarded with commercial messages of indoctrination commonly referred to as "advertisements." This force-fed propaganda meets the eye nearly wherever it may wander, and by subtleties and by sheer immensity, directs the hand of the still alienated, if not still half-starved, first world worker down the road of unbridled consumerism. Here the role of the worker takes on a bizarre character. On the one hand, the worker continues her/his former role as a person/class subjected to an exploitative economic relation. For s/he still does not own or control the means of production, and s/he is still used by the ruling class as no more than a drone capable (not without prodding) of generating profit earmarked, alone, for the already wealthy. S/he still does not control her/his own life. It is controlled by powers from economically above. And further, the general prosperity of the economy is still unattainable in any equitable manner inasmuch as it still rests with a minority of ruling economic elite, protected by both the laws of the land and the guns of the state.

On the other hand, by transforming the worker into a consumer, the economic system manages to make the worker into an active agent in her/his own social oppression. For here consumption is both subtly and aggressively made out to be the means by which the individual can escape the experiential emptiness of their so-called free, yet serf-like, life.²⁰ The unspoken message that every advertisement carries is that it is only by virtue of consuming that the single individual transcends the loneliness of provincial existence and takes part in the communion of the 'one' or at least of something greater and more meaningful. In this case the 'one' is capital and the means is the recognition of the self and other (both animated and unanimated, cognitive and non-cognitive) as facets of the universal representation of all commodities, that is money. And in turn, the individual must her/himself sell one's labor both as a means of material survival and, as this new social relation demands, as a means of becoming a commodity.²¹ Furthermore, the worker must now utilize the wages received as a means of again touching the whole through the accumulation/consumption of other commodities. The promise is that as long as this process remains constant, as long as the individual consistently retains an active relation within this process, one can know the universal wholeness of existence, and therefore the additional promise of an ensuing 'knowledge of a truth' and 'sense of wellbeing' is also granted. This occurs insofar as the 'one' or the 'universal' has always been described in conjunction with these traits since the beginnings of religion and permanent/city dwellings. Thus, the lie is painted as truth via an implied association.

²⁰ The state loves to sing "Land of the Free" while sticking it to the common wo/man from the cradle to the grave. The public schools teach obedience and reverence to the status quo; at one's job one is subjected to constant top down power structure; in the streets, laws written by the ruling class are enforced by armed pigs intent on tossing you in the can if you cross the line. There are as many examples as there are bullshit justifications. As for specifics, I'm sure your personal experiences will here suffice (that is if you're not ruling class scum).

²¹ Where under classical capitalism one was coerced into being a wage slave in order to materially survive, under the new capitalism one often becomes a wage slave for both this reason and because one becomes convinced that it is the metaphysically right thing to do. Here work becomes more than a means of survival. It becomes a cornerstone of identity and connectedness with the larger, so-called more meaningful 'one' of capital.

Here, the worker, drunk on continual advertisements and no longer tethered by hunger and cold, immerses her/himself in a constant state of consumption. S/he becomes convinced that superfluous commodities are necessary elements of a good life, and actively seeks them out for consumption. This, despite the fact that the purchasing of these objects or experiences play an obvious and primary role in maintaining the wealth and therefore power, through continuing profit, of those in the ruling class who control the economic rights to these things. In addition, the consumer-worker is often required to further enslave her/himself to the plutocracy by acquiring these commodities by the means of credit (credit cards, loans, etc.). By doing such, the laborer must perform additional hours at work in order to accrue the necessary capital to pay back the borrowed cash, and subsequently maintain their access to credit and hence adequate levels of material consumption. Of course these hours of labor result in the rich further expanding their profit earnings at the expense of the wage worker.

This dynamic often results in the laborer becoming more docile in her/his capacity in the workplace, in that to be fired translates into being cut off from her/his role as a commodity (wage slave) and full consumer. This is something that the indoctrinated consumer-worker dreads, as such a severing from the perceived 'one' would destroy the identity of the self and society which such a neurotic system of relations demand. Therefore, where the worker of old would more quickly risk her/his job security in order to bring about positive change for their class (i.e. union organizing) the new consumer-worker is generally more conservative in order to carefully maintain her/his means to communion.²²

"The basic tautological character of the spectacle [this system of commodity-consumption] flows from the simple fact that its means are simultaneously its ends. It is the sun which never sets over the empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire surface of the world and bathes endlessly in its own glory."

—Guy Debord²³

Where in the religious age ex-communication from the church meant social and perceived spiritual death, now unemployment serves a similar role. For even with such hard earned worker benefits as unemployment compensation, the jobless are still disconnected from half of the perceived process of meaning. In this system it is not enough to consume. A person also must be an object of consumption oneself (a commodified worker). This stands true unless of course you are among the ruling class, in which case you acquire a sort of living sainthood.

This mode of thought also results in a fractioning of class unity. For class no longer becomes the perceived focal point of social meaning. Here, the individual (or more accurately, the believer), along with the capitalist system of radical commodification, becomes the sole basis of human

²² Let it be noted that this desire for status quo is for the most part skin deep. It is a symptom of mass indoctrination, and in such it cannot be understood as natural or necessarily permanent. If one scratches the surface, one will often find an underlying desire to sever the social ties to the world of the commodity. This is played out in childhood instincts by the activity of random vandalism. In the adult life, this natural inclination is often demonstrated at the bar where at folks are known to become a bit destructive towards objects and relationships after a bad week and after a fist or two full of whisky.

In my hometown, the local working class tavern (The Deer Head Inn - where I did a lot of growing up) had a stockade fence lining its back. A favorite Saturday night pastime was punching holes through it. And I'll tell you what, this aggression was not simply foolish male aggression. If that's all it represented, I wonder why I never saw such holes punched in fences at the expensive upper class bars... Well, at least not by those fat bastards who could afford to drink there.

²³ See Society of the Spectacle, Section 13, Black & Red Press, Detroit, 1983.

understanding. Each consumer and commodity demands its own separateness which only the unity of capital (as universal commodity) can bring together.

"What hides under.. [this separateness] is a unity of misery. Behind the masks of total choice, different forms of the same alienation confront each other, all of them built on real contradictions which are repressed."

—Guy Debord²⁴

With this mass foolery intact, the worker is no longer as likely to take personal risks for the benefit of their natural historical whole (that being class). Furthermore, the relationship of the consumer-commodity necessitates an 'us vs. them' mentality. For all those who buy into this and who maintain a full connection to this process begin to recognize themselves in a similar way that insular religious and/or nationalistic ethnic communities tend to view themselves. For those included there is a passive acceptance. For those outside there are misgivings and even hatred. It is for this reason that the right manages to use those collecting welfare as a scapegoat on which the workers can place misguided anger and resentment. Ironically, the social benefits that such persons collect are the same benefits won by the working class struggle during previous times during classical capitalism. In short, under these new capitalist conditions, the economic system becomes a kind of social fundamentalism and/or capital based fascism.

To further undermine poor and working class unity, the ruling elite through the public schools, their paid-for political lackeys and mass media conglomerates aggressively disseminates inaccurate terminologies regarding class categories.

Towards this end the term 'middle class' has been reinvented so as to drive a dividing line between what is correctly a single working class. Wherein 'middle class' was formally considered to be the lower end of the upper classes (i.e. absentee farmers, owners of multiple chain store outlets) it is now used to describe a certain degree of commodity acquisition amongst laborers. It is not uncommon for a person who labors as a nurse, a construction worker, a low end clerk or even one who cleans gutters at \$16 an hour to be considered 'middle class' as long as that person is in possession of a new car, home, large television, etc. Of course these items are typically made available to the worker through the development of the credit industry, and as such cannot represent any real notion of equitable or bountiful wealth. In themselves, such commodities acquired by credit represent the very real increase in profit of those in the ruling class who own and/or control both ends of this industry. At the end of the day, if you work for a wage at a profession which is controlled from above, count on each paycheck to make ends meet, and if that job represents your sole livelihood, and finally if you often or sometimes (during moments of clarity) wish you did not have to be there at all, then you are most likely of a working class origin. In short, terms such as 'middle class' are as meaningless as they are divisive. They do no more than reinforce the relative stability of the plutocratic powers that be.

The stabilizing power of the new capitalism, that of a functioning process of commodification and consumption, derives from mass belief, and when a belief is misgiven, there is always the likelihood that it can and will be reversed. This is especially the case where error is contrasted with objectively material and intuitive experiential truth. And, it is just such a contrast that the contemporary masses are confronted with whenever breaks of continuity occur in the present oppressive system. These breaks are often fraught with existential fear, anxiety, anger, misgiv-

²⁴ See Society of the Spectacle, Section 63, Black & Red Press, Detroit, 1983.

ings, and regret. Shit, psychoactive prescription drugs aside²⁵, it's hard to imagine a person not reflecting on the absurdity, emptiness, and lack of social worth of this system when they lay their head on the pillow to sleep at night. Well, before this begins to sound too pessimistic, let's take comfort in the fact that the world is no longer believed to be flat.

During previous times, when industrial production was primarily based in what is still considered to be the industrial countries, the 'bottom line' of the ruling class limited this relation in that the general working population was not allowed the means to adequately consume in order to take part in this process. In short, the greed of the domestic upper class limited the stabilization of the system. They sucked the working class for all that it was worth and threw them pennies so as they might not starve in order to work and create capitalist profit again another day. Here the proletariat's meager purchasing power vastly limited their ability to consume, and hence the worker could not be as easily fooled into believing in the bullshit communion discussed above.

From the earliest times of serious industrialization, Europe and the United States were fraught with a nearly constant state of relative working class unrest for these very reasons. Capitalism lacked an experiential excuse to dull the knife of mass agitation against the obviously degrading circumstances under which the great majority of people were forced to live. It was not until after World War II that the social situation began to apparently stabilize.²⁶ This happened, in conjunction with other subjective reasons, as the above discussed economic strategy began to take hold.

However, this period of relative stability was not accrued without certain costs still to be felt today. By curtailing domestic rebellion by fostering an internationalization of capitalist oppression, the ruling class must continually pay the price of a greatly intensified mass alienation. This proves to be an expense in that it results in certain profound chinks forming in the armor of the plutocracy at the home front.²⁷ For by domestically decreasing material deprivation (poverty) amongst its domestic laborers, and by setting them upon a course for the nonexistent promised land of happiness within the 'universal commodity,' the social framework of society as a whole becomes bogged down in a world of shit, lies and experiential disappointments. In this way alienation becomes a factor which drives society in two directions; one sociopathic²⁸ the other revolutionary; neither of which bode well for future stability and a continuation of the status quo. This occurs due to the underlying experiential lie of the promise of the universal ability to achieve wholeness with something both greater and more meaningful. There is a reason why

²⁵ Psychoactive prescription drugs are a huge factor and should not be overlooked as a tool of social control. The fact is, there is NO normative model for human brain chemistry and any medical attempt to standardize such will inevitably result in a model which is most conducive to the modes of social interaction which are most prominent in the society in which they are formed. In this case, such approaches most often result in the drugging of a person in order to make them 'happier' or at least non-combative in their role as a means of production and consumer of capitalist controlled commodities.

²⁶ For a well-documented historical account of this period within the United States, see, Howard Zinn's *A People's History of The United States*, Harper Perennial, New York, 1999.

²⁷ Inherent weaknesses are not limited to the domestic scene. For this internationalization has also carried the scope of anti-capitalist struggle to every corner of the globe. However, the form of struggle taken in these less developed regions can be expected to develop differently from that of the domestic regions. There poverty is a more direct driving force than alienation. Hence, differences should be expected.

²⁸ This sociopathic tendency is a rudimentary reaction against this alienation in the void of no greater hope for a progressive mass paradigm shift and/or a lack of a sufficient social/political vocabulary and underlying understanding. Ostensibly this behavior is often demonstrated by the shooting of ones co-workers, teachers, fellow students, etc.. It is also demonstrated by the fairly common act of mass public shooting sprees.

people fear death in this society, and it's not because of fire and brimstone; it is the fear that their whole lives as consumers may have been a waste of time as much as their apparent (forced) happiness was no more than a plastic carrot on a string. That is not a pleasant final thought. In short, 'The Jones' died miserable.

*“..do you see
now that you see that everything they told us was wrong?
The elephant caught like that
and caged
like that?
The way they kicked us and caged us too?
How sweetly sad it seems how sad and sweet passing lonely people on the street
the skulls beneath the skin
the arteries bravely pumping liquid as they rush to do
all the foolish things that they must do...”*
—Charles Bukowski²⁹

With all this being said, it is important to point out that this new Capitalism is still forced to compete with its more backwards internal sentiments. For the ruling class, still being motivated by greed, often finds itself incapable of maintaining the necessary levels of commodity availability for the domestic workers.³⁰ Wherein it is rational (from the point of view of the capitalist) to allow the domestic population a certain degree of purchasing/acquisition power in order to guarantee a basic level of material based social stability, and a continuing profit margin based on commodity sales, the underlying greed of this class often acts as a self-defeating force. Today, certain economic trends seem to indicate that the ruling class has become increasingly concerned with drawing a quick fix of mass profit at the price of steady long term increases. Towards this end, it seems that a substantial number of the plutocracy, as expressed through their political lackeys, has forgotten the weaknesses of classical capitalism, and therefore has embarked upon a course of streamlining domestic workforces (downsizing/layoffs), cutting back of social benefits (dental, medical, etc.), and facilitated a stagnation of real wages. Therefore, the present social realm is marked not by two competing social visions (one status-quo, one revolutionary), but three; the third being a regressive vision of capitalism. These more recent trends have motivated certain sectors of the consumer-working class rank and file to take certain basic stands against a perceived cutback in their social positions. While these rumblings in and of themselves are often no more than shortsighted complaints directed against those who would challenge their status quo as consumers, they also are indicative of a developing social uneasiness. For the consumer-worker is increasingly being educated to the authoritarian, abstract, and antisocial ways and means of the commodified society. They are more and more aware that the basic foundations of society are not geared for them, but rather directed at them only inasmuch as they are considered objects of manipulation from powers above. It is made more and more obvious that the basic mechanisms of society are not controlled by them; they are directed against them. As such, these realizations become increasingly tangible as this regressive capitalist trend is responsible for numerous lapses in commodity-consumer process. And here, some workers will inevitably reach

²⁹ From *Open All Night*, 'Running On Empty', Black Sparrow Press, Santa Rosa, 2000.

³⁰ In the United States this regressive tendency is most often politically expressed by the Republican Party. In turn, the political expression of the new capitalism is more often voiced by the Democratic Party. Both suck.

the logical and emotive conclusion that such an economic process is ultimately not congruent with a more naturally meaningful, beneficial, and democratic society. These backslides inevitably act as a kind of social shock therapy, whose outcome will be the delivering of larger sections of the working population to the side of revolution. That's not to say that these anti-worker trends should be encouraged or justified by way of some long term revolutionary program. They hurt laboring people in the here and now, and therefore, working class revolutionaries must lend their hand in resisting these attacks. To do otherwise would result in the revolutionary movement becoming discredited in the eyes of the masses. As such, this is a danger which should be avoided. But still, this trend must be recognized for what it is; ultimately as a condition aiding in the radicalization of the masses.

However, while this is a very meaningful trend, it should not be utilized as a practical means from which to reinvigorate classical theories of revolution which are primarily based on a mass material deprivation. For the fact that these lapses become noticeable, the fact that they become part of a revolutionary equation, point to the reality that they represent breaks with the predominant social process as opposed to its norm. For the modus operandi of contemporary capitalism is commodification and consumerism. And with such being the case, a greatly intensified alienation, and not poverty (although poverty is still a strong motivating force), becomes the primary motivation towards social revolution. And again, it is this mass alienation which must give rise to certain conditions which inevitably must account for its eventual social transcendence. Alienation creates its own form of revolutionary breaches.

Section III

Counterculture as Social Revolution

The increase in mass alienation has opened a new (or rather more mature) social front within the continuing revolutionary struggle. For the rise of radical commodification and consumerism has occurred alongside the rise of counterculture. This is no coincidence. Counterculture (cc) is a natural reaction against this system and is also the living embodiment of the class conscious social revolution.³¹ It develops as a natural answer to the intensified alienation brought on by this system. Counterculture becomes the living rebel base peopled by those (most often from the poor, working class, and declassed population) who become or are made consciously aware of the basic fallacies and oppressive nature of the larger social/economic system.

Mass expressions in counterculture first emerged in North America with the Beats of the late 1940s to early 1960s. Then again counterculture emerged with the hippy/radical movement of the 1960s and 70s. The mid/late-70s brought punk. Today we have a counterculture that is a kind of synthesis of previously disjointed branches. There is no snappy name for our community, but it clearly carries within it certain elements of punk, hippy, and other counter-modes of being. This is not surprising as the demarcation of this time as being the end of one century/millennium,

³¹ For all those who would like to ramble off arguments that counterculture is primarily an expression of upper class hedonism, or that it is somehow foreign to poor and working class communities, I would like to pointedly remind you that great numbers of cc social facilitators were historically of a working class origin. Take for example: Neil Cassidy (author of *The First Third*), Jack Kerouac (author of many books including *On The Road*), Jimi Hendrix (who's live Woodstock rendition of "The Star Spangled Banner" is perhaps the musical embodiment of the 60's movement), Keith Richards (of the Stones), Janis Joplin (of *Big Brother and the Holding Company*), writer Charles Bukowski (although if he were still alive, and if he had the right amount of booze and was in a shitty mood, he might just hit me in the head with a bottle for putting him in such a grouping), Ozzy Osbourne (writer/ singer for band Black Sabbath, masterpieces include 'War Pigs', a song still barred in the UK during war time), Iggy Pop (of the Stooges), Johnny Rotten (of the band The Sex Pistols), and Shane MacGowan (of the Pogues).

and the beginning of a new one, subjectively seems to spark a kind of social re-evaluation of past eras. Here, this age is also marked by a synthesis of styles, thoughts and dreams. In this we truly are a people in between times; in between the death of an old system and a birth of a new.

Counterculture, as the above indicates, assumes different variations at different times. It dies and then is reborn as a former incarnation is either co-opted or simply no longer aesthetically expresses the particularities of the present age. However, as long as the greater society which it is pitted against still exists, the conditions which demanded its initial emergence will still be present. Hence, the particular death of any one form of counterculture is ultimately inconsequential insofar as the emergence of a new particular incarnation necessarily will follow.³²

Sociologically, counterculture manifests itself in a conscious and organic unity of all those activities that constitute the natural, life affirming, human identity. Social relations, housing arrangements, economy, recreation, art and finally politics are all incorporated into one united, although diverse, alternative community. As this community matures, specific mores, style, and traditions develop. The binding factor lies simply in the conscious recognition of the common rejection of radical commodification, consumerism, and authoritarianism. In this a sister/brotherhood is formed which is inherently anarchistic and is that of the counterculture.³³

This culture is only counter in relation to the predominant culture of the commodity-consumer which its existence assumes and within whose borders of dominance it functions. Without such another, it simply is natural, liberated, culture. But, in the context in which we here discuss counterculture, we must understand it as more than simply an opposition with the aim of dominance. For the predominant culture of the post-industrial age is that of an abstract and hierarchical social system. The common form of this system is found in the most contemporary modes of capitalism (although it is not limited to it) and with it the complete commodification of society. In short, the predominant culture is that of exploitation, oppression, and intense alienation. It is a forced totality specifically defined by the commodity and the process of consumption.

³² Not that we should give one particular counterculture up to our enemies without a fight. We must constantly struggle for the integrity of our cultural communities in order to allow them the time in which our modes of struggle and creation can become more mature. We will concede nothing.

³³ Here I grant that past incarnations of counterculture, such as the Beats, often failed to adequately develop political modes of expression. In addition, other countercultures, such as during the 60s and early 70s, at least in part, seem to have developed politically along more authoritarian communist lines. These seeming contradictions have more to do with the greater levels of cc immaturity than they did with natural internal inclinations. Hence, the Beats, being the first major example of a mass North American counterculture, were locked in a constant search for self-affirming identity. Here their politics were little more than exercises in possibilities. Likewise, the 60-70s developed as the second functioning example of such. And to their credit, they realized the need to develop political modes. But, being relative pioneers in this capacity, they often failed to develop between anything more than rudimentary lines. More than not they identified an already established means of anti-capitalist expressions and tried to force themselves into the cracks. Hence the general friendliness towards Maoism. This mistake was not without exception (i.e. Black Mask/Up Against The Wall Motherfucker, Free Vermont), and it was not without a certain logic. In this case, Maoism was seen as the primary ideology of a global grassroots opposition to the predominate paradigm. And correctly understanding the struggle against capitalism to be both in their interest and necessarily international in character, they attempted to barrow from this analysis in order to mesh with a perceived revolutionary whole.

All and all, the short-comings and mistakes of these earlier incarnations of cc must be viewed as almost necessary given the dialectical nature of the progress of struggle. Each particular cc tried and failed or succeeded where the next cc would pick up.

Therefore, if one was to define counterculture in a very strict manner, it would be conceivable that one would term the Beats and the 60s-early 70s folk as a 'proto-counterculture', rather than that of the full kind. However, that borderlines on semantics, and seems to me to be a waste of time.

In this context counterculture can only live up to its bill if it rejects this totality. It is this totality which necessitates the levels of social alienation which in turn give rise to counterculture. Thus, by virtue of its very existence, counterculture is constituted as an oppositional force posited against its socially dominant other. In this it is a destructive force. However, for it to do so it must creatively construct (or unearth) as well. The basis upon which this creative process must be built is the unity of human dignity and solidarity as implied by the act of rebellion.

“It is for the sake of everyone in the world that the slave asserts himself when he comes to the conclusion that a command has infringed on something in him which does not belong to him alone, but which is common ground where all men—even the man who insults and oppresses him—have a natural community.”

—Albert Camus³⁴

Without committing to such a construction counterculture would fail to challenge the void upon which the all oppressive systems rest. In such, any apparent victory would be false as the death of the particular temporal form of an oppressive system would amount to little more than its reemergence in a new particular form. In short it must posit a constructive claim or fail to address the premises that the system rests upon. Counterculture must be, and in fact is, both destructive and creative at the same time.

“The urge to destroy is also a creative urge.”

—Mikhail Bakunin

Counterculture, in our present context, must be understood not only contra the present form of Capitalism, but also for a liberated society free of the arbitrariness of masters and slaves. The counterculture is anti-hierarchical while being for the consecration of a new society of fully actualized human beings.³⁵ Furthermore, as a creative force, it must actually create. If it does no more than postulate, then it is no more than a criticism, and a criticism alone does not qualify as a culture (be it a counterculture or otherwise). In the act of creating, it attempts to realize those new social relations that the fall of the present system will make fully realizable. In this respect counterculture is a liberating social experiment. It is “the formation of a new society from within the shell of the old.”³⁶ It is the formation of the social revolution before that of the political revolution.

However, at this point it is marked with a contradiction, for as long as it is a counterculture, it is limited by the repressive forces of radical commodification, consumerism and the State. In this it is impelled to commit certain internal contradictions for the sake of survival. It must abide by certain oppressive laws or at the very least function semi-underground to escape certain restraints. But even underground it is compromised. The long arm of the commodity extends to all corners (some less than others). In such a society, there is no complete separateness from these restrictive traits. But these limitations do not relegate the counterculture’s existence to an absurdity. Rather, it is these limitations which light the fire of creativity. For to find dignity and affirmation through the creation of an alternative community despite the dominate opposition is truly dynamic. Such limitations impel the human mind to expand its cognitive ability, and in this consciousness is sharpened. Furthermore, the limitations to its full actualization is the impetus to its destructive aspect. It must necessarily seek the eradication of that opposing force

³⁴ See *The Rebel*, Page 16, Vintage Books, New York, 1956.

³⁵ Old cc had some hierarchy, especially in politics, however, that was forced and represented a general immaturity, not the developing line of internal progression.

³⁶ An old Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) saying.

as the condition of its coming into full being. In this it is more than a decision to organize in a particular manner; It is a revolutionary force. Thus counterculture cannot be judged purely by its contradictions. It must be judged in regards to what it knowingly points to, and to the extent that it stretches the limitations of the predominant culture.

The counterculture is not a subculture, as a sub-culture is nothing more than a variant of the dominant culture insofar as it fails to reject the basic tenants of such. It merely rearranges the detail in order to create the desired illusion. A subculture stops at establishing its identity as quantitatively different from the present system, but in doing it fails to become qualitatively different from it. At certain times a subculture can be mistaken for counterculture in that it may exhibit similar behavior and language to that of the counterculture in relation to the dominant system. But, it is merely exhorting a claim to the throne without calling the institution of the throne into question. It may compete with the dominant culture, but its victory translates into itself becoming its former enemy. Such changing of the guard does no more than reinvigorate that which is already entrenched.

Subcultures which do not seek to transplant themselves to the seats of power, are no more than glorified fan clubs. They are incomplete or escapist at best, and social organs of enemy collaboration at worst. They are not counter.

Likewise, a counterculture which begins to demonstrate these above traits becomes degenerative, and hence must cease to be considered a revolutionary organ. Here, in its diminished state, it becomes just another subculture.

On the other hand, a healthy and functioning counterculture represents a legitimate threat to the predominant culture in that the legitimate counterculture's expansion necessitates a weakening of its enemy's hold over the social and subjective realm. The enemy system survives first by the common belief in its false unity and second by its repressive institution (i.e. police and army). And history has shown the second of the two to be inadequate in ultimately maintaining dominance with the lack of the other. The present oppressive system recognizes the danger posed by counterculture and is thus compelled to take moves to neutralize it. Its first line of attack is indoctrination through education, media, and advertisement. This measure may prolong the day of reckoning but ultimately it is not enough in the face of continuing experiential oppression and alienation. The essential lie of the system and the intensified alienation of the great majority continually results in more persons from the dominated classes becoming disillusioned with the current paradigm. As discussed above, lapses in continuity do occur for numerous reasons, and it is during such lapses that the process of consumerism is unmasked as a process devoid of natural social worth. In short, the regular uneasiness of the subservient and alienated individual/class necessitates a certain anxiety which often impels the affected person to question the ultimate utility of the dominant process/system. At such a point it is only reasonable to expect that person to consider alternative modes of social interaction which appear to offer a more healthy social reality. In that capacity, the actual counterculture is viewed as an option which the affected person can consider. Its appeal will of course lie in its alternative social principals, strengthened by the fact that it stands as a functioning, ostensible, and invaluable example. Here counterculture can be expected to grow in proportion to this ongoing trend. The rate of counter-cultural growth must increase as more persons are included in its composition, or at least sympathetic with its revolutionary vision, necessarily results in the dissemination of its basic life affirming message at faster rates and with more prevalence throughout society.

This is not to imply that we are headed for a society where the old crew cut and blue collar shirt is altogether substituted for mohawks, ponytails, and nipple rings. Shit, it's not even to say that the odd attraction of Frank Sinatra will completely give way to Joan Baez, The Who, Bad Brains, or Crass. It's only to say that the emerging culture of life (counterculture) will begin to exert sometimes obvious, sometimes subtle influence over the day to day reality and outlook of the average worker. Ultimately it's not any more important to the dominant culture if the laborer wears a J. Edgar Hoover button to work and sleeps under an American flag than it is to the revolutionary worker to don tattoos, combat boots, and piercings. All that is important is that the mass of workers begin to view themselves as part of a living culture which, though presently situated in a more dominant culture, is inherently contra the basic premises of its would-be master. In other words, it's a matter of leanings regarding identity. For counterculture does not represent a threat insomuch as its counter institutions seek to replace the status quo (although to a lesser degree this is also true). Its real threat is that its very example can challenge the state sanctioned belief system. As already stated, the present system of commodification-consumerism primarily rests upon mass belief. If counterculture can subvert that belief, the present paradigm can be expected to destabilize. Hence, counterculture, by virtue of its existence, contains within it an element or means of mass liberation.³⁷

This process of mass liberation has already begun. How many factory workers already listen to Jimi Hendrix, Black Sabbath, The Stooges, The Clash, or Rage Against The Machine? How many already take part in elements of counterculture, all the while desiring more? In a word, counterculture, aside from its more puritanical definitions, is more diverse and subtle than many would like to give it credit for. Its currents, like that of the dominant culture, move through many levels of society. It seeks to help facilitate the freedom of all people, unlike the dominant culture which seeks to make people as docile as they are drone-like.

Here it must be stated that such an expansion of counterculture will not take place purely by historically deterministic means. Such a building of popular base must be actively coaxed by persons within counterculture. If counterculture simply was to exist as an isolated community secure in the notion that it would persevere with or without campaigns of concerted outreach, it would die on the vine of passive isolationism. All things being equal, maybe this would not be the case. However, all things are not equal. The predominant culture actively seeks to maintain its psychological dominance, and likewise various subcultures rooted in religion, fascism and the like actively seek to divert popular discontent into their bases of support. For these reasons, counterculture cannot rest on its laurels. It must seek ways to build inroads into the common experience of the common wo/man. It must maintain a dialectical relation with those masses still not consciously brought over to the social revolution. Counterculture must position itself squarely within the larger poor and working class communities. It must support them in their day to day struggles even when those struggles do not take aim at the root of oppression and alienation. All the while, it must provide a sufficient and accessible revolutionary critique of these common problems. It must agitate. Even so, it is not enough to be immersed in the political field. In fact, the political field must be understood as secondary to that of the social/cultural field. For it will not be through creating things such as a living wage that the masses will be fully brought over to our side (their natural side). It will be through the common identification of art, literature,

³⁷ For one reason or another, I'm here reminded of my friend Jon Tobias, who once said, "Sure -when the shit goes down I'll be on my porch with my shotgun, drinking beer and taking potshots at helicopters."

music, social happenings, and real friendship. These are things which touch a person directly and communicate a vision of freedom and camaraderie. It is through such a connection that more people will come to identify themselves as persons within a common culture of struggle, creativity, and future liberation.

The political field, while necessary inasmuch as the political holds legitimate importance in one's life, must be understood as primary to a lesser degree in that such activities often translate into notions of 'alliances', 'common fronts,' etc., and these concepts still imply a certain degree of temporariness and separateness and are not generally responsible for ideas of cultural commonality. They are provisional as opposed to communal. On their own they may foster issue by issue victories (which is good), but not an organic concept of unity through cooperative communities. While they are necessary, they are also incomplete.

Counterculture cannot be content to live on the fringes of the more dominant exploitive culture. To do so would be no more than escapism, and hence the perceived counterculture would, in actuality, be no more than a subculture with a veneer of angst. Ultimately there comes a time when this natural enemy of antisocial structures must attempt to surmount the palisades of oppression. It must seek to destroy that which prevents it from developing in its more mature forms.

Within such a counterculture it is only natural that certain people will carry the ball in this direction. And it is here that specific people and collectives will organically key in on revolutionary political action akin to that presently demonstrated by Earth Liberation Front cells on the one hand and the anarchist Black Bloc on the other. Here it cannot bide its time and wait for the perfect moment. It must lash out at its other as a basic means of its political expression. It must transcend its relative passivity through the violent resistance of its own repression as well as the repression directed against the poor and working classes as a whole. And in such, it achieves an honesty which progressive impostors cannot readily provide. This is one form of its direct political expression. It is different from much of its other political activity which often centers around piecemeal issues and community outreach. It is animated by its own revolutionary aspirations. And here it hardens itself by experiencing portions of direct, unabstracted struggle with facets of its enemy. This and prison support for its jailed comrades become its most direct lines of political expression.

Furthermore, by not limiting itself to liberal dogmatic tactics, it further reaches into the hearts of the yet included poor and working class, who rarely could dig the horseshit of respectable protest and pacifism. In essence, it develops its own means, and limits itself to that which proves effective, both in regards to objective goals, and subjective (non-alienated) needs. In short, it becomes an oppositional force by opposing. It is honest in its opposition by striking back according to the necessity of struggle, self-defense, and victory. It is the physical and political expression of the self-conscious poor and working class social revolution; counterculture in political motion.

In conclusion, it is within the above social context that the North American Black Bloc emerges. In it is an important sphere of conflict between a culture of death (commodification and consumerism) which increasingly has nowhere to go but down, and one of life which must struggle in order to realize itself in a society of cooperation and creativity.

Of course there are many more tactical, practical, and theoretical issues which have not been addressed in the above work that we must continue to explore in order to realize the final victory of the revolution. And of course it may be necessary to modify or even disregard or reverse certain claims made throughout the above essay (absolutism is for shitheads). However, it has been my

intention throughout the above document to map out a more thorough context within which we can further develop the necessary understandings of social process and transformation that will be required in order to bring a liberated victory within our collective grasp. So I trust the above met this task at least in part, and I look forward to the ongoing conversation. Well cheers for now, and I'll be seeing you on the front lines.

David Van Deusen

Green Mountain Anarchist Collective

Vermont, March, 2001

Chapter II: Street Battles, Armed Defense & Insurrection

Early Black Bloc Clashes: North America, 1988-1999 (2005)



Black Bloc in West Germany, 1987

Genesis

Black blocs first appeared in West Germany in the early 1980s. This militant tactic was embraced by anti-authoritarian leftist youth (commonly referred to as Autonomen) as a response to four escalating factors: 1. The increasing confrontations between police and protesters at anti-nuclear demonstrations. 2. In defense of squatting communities. 3. Germany was the scene of massive demonstrations in solidarity with the armed actions of the left-communist Red Army Faction.¹ There it was common for major conflicts to break out between protesters and state forces, and a practical means of self-defense became increasingly evident. And 4. the rise of neo-fascist street gangs accompanied by violent demonstrations/counter demonstration made such formations as the bloc appealing as an effective mode of street combat.

Within the decade the tactic proved itself effective in countering state police forces and neo-fascists in the public arena. This demonstrated effectiveness compelled anarchist, Autonomen,

¹ 2017 Note From The Author: This essay was written in 2005 and was published in *The Black Bloc Papers* (second edition), Breaking Glass Press, 2010.

and radical left forces throughout Europe to adapt Black Blocs as a means to engage in street battles with the state, short of an armed uprising. Very quickly the tactic spread to other northern European nations. By the mid-80s the tactic spread to southern Europe. By the late 80s the tactic jumped across the Atlantic, making its first appearances in North America. By the twenty-first century, the Black Bloc reached east into the former Warsaw Pact nations, as far west as the Pacific coast of the U.S., and south into Mexico.

The twenty-five year history of Black Blocs is one of effectiveness and popular resistance. Its tactical success is born out in the fact that it has spread to many cities and towns over several continents. If, as some critiques have argued, Black Blocs failed to meet their immediate objectives, they would have died on the vine of blunted protests decades ago. Their very proliferation and sustainability over the course of a quarter century has proven their basic effectiveness.

North America

The first organized Black Bloc in North America occurred at the Pentagon, in Washington, D.C. on October 17, 1988. Over one thousand demonstrators—a small number comprised of the Black Bloc—called for the end to U.S. support for the right wing death squads in El Salvador. The protest, organized by the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, managed to disrupt early morning rush hour traffic in the capital, and later to block the main entrance to the Pentagon. The Black Bloc, though small did its part during the actions. From 1988 on, Black Blocs appeared sporadically across North America.

In April 1990, a now defunct group called Youth Greens organized a 2000 strong demonstration on Wall Street in New York City. The demo was held on Earth Day in an attempt to unmask the anti-environmental practices of major American corporations; many of which became ‘official Earth Day sponsors’ in mainstream celebrations across the nation. One practical goal of the action was to shutdown business as usual in the heart of the capitalist beast. In support, a Black

Bloc numbering fifty militants made its presence felt. The bloc aided in the efforts by constructing makeshift barricades across Broadway.

During the start of the first in Gulf War in January 1991, large demonstrations broke out across the U.S. 100,000 marched in San Francisco. 30,000 took to the streets of Seattle. Ten thousand demonstrated in Chicago and 40,000 more in D.C. A week later the protests became more intense, with another 100,000 in San Francisco, and 200,000 in D.C. In Washington, the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation helped organize the largest and most militant Black Bloc the continent had yet witnessed. In scenes foreshadowing the events of 2003, a bloc of 300 lead a breakaway march from the main protest contingent. Catching the cops off guard, this grouping smashed in windows of both the Treasury Department and the World Bank. Through this action the bloc drew attention to the link between imperialist wars and the capitalist institutions that underwrite them. Police reacted to these attacks by attempting to arrest a number of Black Bloc’ers. However, the bloc fought back and were able to physically prevent any of their own from being taken into custody.

October of 1992 marked the 500 year anniversary of the landing of Christopher Columbus in the so-called New World. While numerous cities were planning celebrations, many Native Americans and leftists were planning demonstrations seeking to bring attention to the five centuries of genocide of First Nation people. October 10-12 witnessed such demos in cities and towns including San Francisco, Denver, Columbus Ohio, Philadelphia, Syracuse NY, Boston, and Mexico City. In Denver the American Indian Movement (AIM) succeeded in shutting down a planned parade. In Mexico City 20,000 marched for native rights. In San Francisco a Black Bloc was organized.

The bloc, like those before it, scuffled with police, and held their own against the forces of the state.

In 1996 the Democratic National Convention was held in Chicago for the first time since the infamous riots of 1968. While the Democrats were busy nominating the NAFTA supporting incumbent (Bill Clinton), thousands took to the streets in opposition to the capitalist-anti-immigrant policies of the major U.S. political parties. While the demonstrations remained largely peaceful, the atmosphere was tense. Protesters expected trouble, as did police.

Parallel to the DNC, anarchists organized a “counter-convention” where continental strategies for achieving fundamental social change were discussed throughout the week. 700 anarchists took part in this event. As the DNC got underway, so did the demonstrations; most of which entailed Black Blocs, and again Love and Rage played an important organizational role.

It also deserves mention that it was at these demonstrations which the embryo of Indymedia surfaced via an organization called Counter-Media. This media outfit—based in offices donated by the Teamsters—was largely composed of anarchists. In turn, individuals from within mobile media teams equipped with radios and cameras played the dual role of feeding protesters (especially the bloc) intelligence information relating to police movement. It has been rumored that some individuals also found ways to feed law enforcement bogus intelligence regarding protest movement. This helped to give the bloc an edge which it lacked at most prior actions up until that point.

The first major action was an immigrants rights march. There, close to 1000 mostly working class Hispanics demanded more equitable treatment from the powers that be. In support was a Black Bloc 200 strong. The day remained peaceful, despite tense moments when the bloc refused to enter the sanctioned protest pits at the end of the march.

The second major action was the ‘Not On The Guest List’ march which included upwards of 2000 people, and demanded, among other things, freedom for all political prisoners. As before a Black Bloc of several hundred was in support. The day became interesting when marchers varied from the permitted parade route, opting to pass through predominantly Black housing projects located within site of the convention center. There many poor and working class Blacks joined the ranks and soon one of the major entrances into the DNC was occupied by the Black Bloc, with pacifist elements in support. There a standoff ensued between mounted police and the bloc. A seeming stalemate remained in effect for many hours. However, as night set in, the pacifist and liberal elements made a concerted decision to retreat; leaving the people from the housing projects and the bloc to their own devices. The bloc, eventually realizing that the decreased numbers of protesters put those that remained in danger, called for all present to retreat away from the police lines. During this retreat the bloc came across an alternative entrance to the DNC where delegate busses were being escorted through. There, anarchists blockaded the vehicles, stopping all traffic. The cops responded with force. Scuffles erupted. The bloc’s unity was fractured, and its numbers again dissipated. Even so, 50 militants managed to regroup, and began a long march into the heart of downtown where it was known that prominent Democrats were having a fundraiser. The bloc made two stops along the way. The first at the site of where a police statue once stood. The monument was in honor of those cops which were killed during the Haymarket riots of 1886. The statue in question was blown up by the Weather faction of the SDS in October of 1969, launching the violent Days of Rage. It was blown up again by the Weathermen in 1970 to mark the beginning of their decade long bombing campaign against the U.S. government. Before the Black Bloc moved on, words were spoken in homage to past struggles. The second stop was at a

restaurant teaming with DNC delegates. There anarchists harassed these capitalists collaborators until police began to converge on the scene in large numbers. As this occurred, the bloc moved on to their primary target; the fund raiser.

Upon reaching their destination, it became clear that a massive line of riot police separated them from the premises. The bloc attempted to push through. This resulted in more fighting with the cops. Unfortunately their strength proved short, and the militants were forced to disperse.

Even so, the events of this day demonstrated many of those traits that have come to be associated with the bloc in the years since; they fought longer and harder than their liberal counterparts, and refused to allow the pigs to define their movements without a fight. The last of the major demonstrations at the DNC came days later when the anarchists, alone, organized a march against capitalism. The demo, which was essentially a several hundred strong Black Bloc, marched in isolation from other protesters. The police quickly moved to corral their motion, and successfully carried out a number of arrests. All told the action was ineffective. Here an important lesson was learned. When a small number of anarchists go it alone they quickly become vulnerable to the forces of the state. Until anarchists can put thousands in the street on their own volition, it is wise to work with others, even if they are only temporary allies in the context of a few shared goals.

In the final analysis, the 1996 DNC actions can be looked at as a link between the more crudely organized blocs of the 80s and 90s and those that reached high levels of success and relative complexity from 1999 on. While 1996 was still primitive as compared to, say, A16 in 2000, it was a big step towards building a meaningful militant anarchist presence within mass mobilizations.

As the 90s wore down, the Black Bloc made a major appearance at a 1999 march in support of political prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal (aka Millions 4 Mumia). The city was Philadelphia. The cause drew upwards of 10,000 people into the fray. The story here was the sheer size of the Black Bloc. It was huge by any North American standards, before or since. Estimates range from 800 to 1200 participants. While the day came and went without any reported clashes or arrests, it must be recognized that the bloc was out in force, and was prepared for self-defense if attacked. The enthusiasm shown by this grouping should have served as warning of what was to come in the months and years ahead. Before the year was out, the Black Bloc would propel itself and the anarchist movement back into popular consciousness by inflicting an estimated \$10,000,000 worth in damage to capitalist targets during The Battle of Seattle.

Conclusion

While the above illustrations are not meant to be the definitive story of the Black Bloc prior to Seattle, one should not fail to recognize how this protest contingent grew from humble beginnings of 50 or so militants, into a more capable street fighting force of hundreds and even a 1000. From Europe, to the East Coast, to the West Coast, and then to the heartland, the Black Bloc became an established tactic in the playbook of anarchist militants. Since those early years it has again spread, and is now prolific, turning up in dozens and dozens of cities and towns, every year, across this continent and the continent of its birth. With this history firmly established, we will now turn to the historic actions against the WTO in November of 1999.

² 2017 Note From The Author: This article was first published in the Fifth Column Press, Marlboro VT 1996. Fifth Column Press was briefly the leftist publication of a group called The Liberation Movement which I was a member of while attending three semesters at Marlboro College, Vermont (1996-1997). Fellow members/participants of the Liberation Movement included David Croken, Tino Ferraro, Katie Steward, Ariane Burke, and Parisa "Dove" Norouzi, (who went on to co-found Empower DC).



Van Deusen marching against the DNC in his first Black Bloc, Chicago, 1996

Two Thousand March Against Democratic National Convention & In Support of Political Prisoners (1996)

A coalition calling itself “Not On The Guest List” organized a march on the Democratic National Convention [Chicago 1996] in solidarity with domestic political prisoners.² Participants included Vermonter David Dillinger (Chicago 7) and Dennis Banks (American Indian Movement). The march was supported by a several hundred strong Black Bloc [largely organized by the Love & Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation]. The procession of protesters quickly strayed from its approved parade route so as to pass directly through the heart of a Chicago housing project. There it picked up hundreds of local supporters. Upon entering the “security zone” surrounding the United Center (site of the DNC) the protesters were met with hundreds of police (pedestrian and mounted) which blocked their entrance to the convention grounds. Thousands of police in riot gear were warehoused just blocks away.

At that point Dillinger led a sit-in across an intersection [in front of one of the convention entrances] while elements of the anarchist bloc formed a protective and confrontational counter-line to the police line [which faced it]. The police dared not break up the rally; the [anarchist] counter-line was not challenged and the protest continued.

After a nearly two hour stand-off, the ‘official’ leadership of the march decided to call for an end of the protest. David Dillinger proclaimed “We have proven our point. Let us go home and protest again tomorrow.” With that many, including those sitting across the intersection, left. On the other hand, anarchists and local supporters from nearby housing project refused to give up their counter-line or the streets.

Hundreds of people held the streets in the vicinity for several more hours into the evening. At one point a large fire was lit in the road. An American flag and cardboard effigies of prisons were burned. Still the police dared not attack the protesters (the world was watching...).

Eventually the number of protesters grew dangerously small. With this realization the anarchists (who were the bulk of the remaining demonstrators) marched in unity several blocks away. There they came in contact with a multitude of delegates seeking to leave the convention on busses. Without hesitation these activists (now numbering a couple hundred) blocked the streets and prevented the busses from moving. All this occurred while angry chants of “FREE LEONARD PELTIER, FREE MUMIA ABU-JAMAL, FREE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS, END CORPORATE WELFARE, SMASH THE FASCIST STATE, were echoing through the crowd.

As police began to arrive in large numbers, the demonstrators swarmed through the streets in a frenzy in the direction of downtown (which was about a mile away). Following a change of mounted police, the group became divided. Out of the mayhem a group of 50 regrouped and continued marching on the city. Police kept vigil but did not block their passage.

For this bloc of 50 the first stop was the former site of the statue commemorating the police who were killed at the Haymarket incident in 1886. The statue was blown up by the Weathermen to open the Days of Rage in 1969, and blown up again by the Weather Underground in 1970. There the protesters spent several minutes paying respects to their comrades in struggle who came before.

Next, the group came across a restaurant which was playing host to a DNC delegate/congressional party. There they verbally brought their message of discontent to party goers. Following the mass arrival of police, the protesters moved on.

The demonstrators continued to Michigan Avenue (the Art Institute) where JFK Jr. was holding an event for his Democratic cronies. The protesters, now massively outnumbered by police, attempted to storm the party but failed. Their attempts to break police lines resulted in several grappling contests between them and the pigs. The anarchists did however manage to taint the Democrats made-for-tv evening by vocally and visually putting forward a voice of opposition to the capitalist ruling party and showed that The People can and do have the desire & ability to bring their message to the streets.

An hour after arriving on the scene, obviously exhausted by the days and nights events, the anarchists decided to break down into small affinity groups and quickly vacate the area in order to meet at a secure prearranged location to further plan actions for the following day(s). No official arrests were made.

48 hours later law enforcement illegally raided the Counter Convention (in retaliation?). Throughout the day police swept the city and made close to 20 arrests of suspected activists and leftwing sympathizers. Three people had to be hospitalized as a result of this police crackdown on freedom of expression. A law suit is presently being organized against the City of Chicago.

R2K: Philadelphia and The RNC (2001)



Police lines form at 2000 RNC protests

During the Republican National Convention (August 1-3 2000), between 7000 and 10,000 people (mostly left liberals, Greens, socialists, anarchists and communists) gathered to demonstrate against the rightwing policies of the Republican Party of the United States and their presidential nominee: George W. Bush.³ The bulk of protest activity took place on July 29th and August 1st.

The first day was marked by an unpermitted march from downtown to the convention center and beyond. It was sponsored by the Kensington Welfare Rights Union. This march attempted to draw attention to the plight of the urban poor. It was explicitly nonviolent and even went so far

³ 2017 Note From The Author: This essay was written in 2001 and was first printed in *The Black Bloc Papers*, Insubordinate Editions, Baltimore MD, 2002. At this protest, myself and comrade Ali M of Detroit (a past writer for *The Fifth Estate*) was arrested in in downtown Philly, pre-emptively, after leaving a Black Bloc spokes council meeting and spent three days in jail before being released pending a court hearing on various charges. A day previous to this arrest we had the pleasure of meeting Johnny “Rotten” Lydon (of the Sex Pistols/PIL) at one of the early rallies. –As a side note to a footnote, I continue to be impressed with the fact that Johnny Rotten has publically stated that the most important album is Can’s *Tago Mago*. Great fucking album. I have Erynn Sarno to thank for turning me on to Can.

as to coerce protesters (through the use of parade marshals) to march in one lane of traffic and in single file. Although some persons later composing the more formal Black Bloc did take part in this social stroll, many chose to stand aside and save their energy for the following day's events.

This march resulted in no serious conflicts and no mass arrests. It even received 12 or so seconds of distorted CNN media coverage where it was claimed that 2-3000 (as opposed to the more accurate 7-10,000) were involved and that 'it appeared peaceful.' Other than that, the corporate media failed to address any issues the march hoped to bring to the public attention.

Day two was marked by mass acts of civil disobedience. The target of these actions centered around downtown Philadelphia (as opposed to the heavily guarded convention center located on the outskirts of town). There, thousands of protesters effectively shut down the city center, relying primarily upon non-violent tactics such as lockdowns and sit-ins across intersections. A smaller Black Bloc contingent numbering approximately 200 employed more confrontational methods including resisting arrest, throwing rocks at police lines, smashing luxury cars as well as police vehicles and spray painting of revolutionary messages.

The State responded with straight brutality. In addition to pre-emptive infiltrations and arrests (including approximately 70 at a political puppet-making warehouse), as well as the use of tear gas and billy clubs, jailed activists (numbering over 400 and including a small number from the Black Bloc) were subjected to harsh treatment as well as torture. At times, prisoners engaged in a hunger strike were cut off from any source of water. Access to attorneys was consistently denied. Others were threatened, hogtied and beaten. Bails were set excessively high regardless of the relatively minor misdemeanor charges filed against them. Some initially reached as high as a million dollars while the majority were between ten and twenty thousand dollars.

Despite the practice of 'jail solidarity' by approximately 150 prisoners, a significant number of protesters were not released until weeks after being arrested. In the aftermath of this action police commissioner John Timoney called for a federal investigation into the activities of protest organizations themselves. The idea here is to paint the activists as anti-social terrorists, and in that way justify large-scale legal crackdowns on all related above ground organizers that effectively fight against the status quo of global capitalism.

What makes R2K significant is the obvious collaboration of the mainstream political parties, police, corporate media and others in a joint effort to disrupt and misrepresent this growing social movement. Philadelphia is a Democratic city. The convention was being held by the Republicans. The two major local newspapers are owned by the same corporate assholes. The entire two days of protest were whitewashed and then criminalized by the large money interests through their media conglomerates and legal stooges. This, in conjunction with the continuing attempt to maximize the legal penalties inflicted upon arrested activists, represents a very real move by the state to coordinate a "containment" of the movement via, local, state and federal law enforcement agencies.

While they may succeed in punishing some of our comrades, the state should be reminded of the words of the late Black Panther, Fred Hampton, "You can jail a revolutionary, but you can't jail the revolution."

Note: The Black Bloc and other protesters also mobilized against the DNC in Los Angeles. There, over 15,000 demonstrators took to the streets demanding more than the Democratic Party was willing to grant. As usual the Black Bloc fought with police.

Communique From a Wanted Black Bloc Anarchist (2000)



On Monday, August 1 [2000], during the Republican National Convention, in the city of Philadelphia, I was arrested along with one other brother in a preemptive strike ostensibly aimed

⁴ 2017 Note From The Author: This communique was first published in *We Dare Be Free* in 2000. I never did appear for my court date or any time after that. When the communique was written, it was my feeling (and that of other Black Bloc anarchists) that the state was gearing up for a much more oppressive conflict with the domestic left. While that conflict has greatly intensified, it did not reach the levels we expected. As for my political activity post this arrest, since a radical intensification of state oppression did not occur at the levels we were anticipating, since PA does not presently extradite for misdemeanor charges (such as those leveled against me), and since the bulk of

at those, like myself, who intended to protest the U.S. social/political system through means of direct and uncompromising action later that day.⁴

While walking down the sidewalk in downtown, we were surrounded by 10-15 bike cops and soon after put into custody at the Roundhouse jail complex. This all occurred an hour and a half prior to any known acts of civil disobedience, street fighting, corporate/private property destruction or legal demonstrations.

At the Roundhouse, I was charged with (1) Possession of instruments of crime, and (2) Possession of instruments of crime, conspiracy. My bail was eventually set at \$10,000 [only due upon failure to appear in court], and on Wednesday, August 3, I was turned out pending further court hearings, despite the fact that I refused to sign my release forms.

SOLIDARITY

My court date is set for September 16th [2000]. By the time this communique is made public, I will already have refused to appear and a bench warrant will have been issued for my arrest.

I AM A REVOLUTIONARY ANARCHIST

As such, I do not recognize the authority of the State of Pennsylvania judicial system. I refuse to appear before them in order to plea my “innocence”. In addition to being absurd, such an act would confirm a recognition of legitimacy upon them which I refuse to give. Besides, the court system is simply a tool of the State, and as such, it too is my sworn enemy. Therefore, my necessary relations to it will never be and can never be that of “innocence.” To state it plainly, I am GUILTY; GUILTY of working towards the destruction of that very same court system which seeks to place judgement on me and others; GUILTY of working towards the absolute demise of the whole life denying State apparatus; GUILTY of dreaming of a liberated world where women’s consciousness and material relations will at last be free to develop creatively in a society of love, equality, abundance and direct participatory democracy. In a word, all I am willing to confer to Pennsylvania, the Federal Government, as well as any and all authoritarian, bureaucratic and innately oppressive STATES is the absolute hatred and rejection that all exploited people feel and know towards their natural enemies.

However, let it be known that my hatred runs only as deep as my love for humanity and the dream of complete Social Revolution.

Therefore, I have come to the decision to continue my small role in the ongoing social and political revolution by semi-underground means.

From struggle comes victory and dignity. Strength and courage to the Black Bloc.

—*from somewhere in the New American Dawn. David*

FREE MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

N16: Cincinnati and The TABD (2001)

Between November 16 and 18, 2000, more than 1000 people (200-300 Black Bloc) converged on the city of Cincinnati, Ohio to express their opposition to the Capitalist practices of the leading

my organizing work has since been focused largely in Vermont, it never proved necessary to organize activities in the shadows as a result of this issue (as the contents of this book demonstrate). Even so, I have tried to stay clear of PA because of this pending warrant, and when I have been compelled to be in PA I have sought to keep a low profile. It is also worth mentioning that in 2001 I was also arrested in Columbus Ohio at a demonstration against the prison system. There I was charged with a class IV felony, destruction of government property. While those charges were reduced to misdemeanor levels, I ended up vacating the resulting probation requirements and therefore am wanted



The Black Bloc resisting the TABD

multi-national corporations.⁵ Specifically, the ensuing protests were directed against the annual meeting of the Trans-Atlantic Business Dialog (TABD).

The TABD is an organization composed of more the 100 CEOs from the larger corporations such as IBM. It was founded following a meeting between the world's most influential industry heads held in Seville, Spain 1995. This meeting was facilitated by the Clinton administration's Commerce Secretary Ron Brown, in part as a means to allow these large Capitalist movers a means to discuss their concerns regarding international trade amongst themselves and with top ranking government officials. This organization has since crystallized into a powerful Capitalist advocacy group.

The weekend of protest, while small in comparison to the other mass actions we have discussed, maintained a relative militance through the activities of the Black Bloc and resulted in significant corporate property destruction, the overtaking of police barricades and the subsequent hospitalization of at least one protester (for injuries related to massive oral ingestion of chemical irritants), and the arrest of 53 persons.

On the first day of concerted action, November 16th, a teach-in attended by 500 people was held in Fountain Square. That same evening 100 people paid a boisterous visit to the Music Hall where delegates attempted to enjoy a special performance of the local symphony orchestra. Two

in the State of Ohio to this day, where I caught I would owe them three months in prison. Therefore Ohio is another state I seek to avoid, or stay under the radar in if and when I am compelled to step foot in it.

⁵ 2017 Note From The Author: This essay was written in 2001 and was first published in *The Black Bloc Papers* (first edition), Insubordinate Editions, 2002.

protesters managed to infiltrate the event in order to express their popular opposition to these would-be ‘masters.’ Both were arrested. Outside, the police lines were briefly challenged and a few barricades were overturned, but, all in all, the action began and ended with relatively little incident.

The largest demonstration occurred the following day on November 17th and involved over one thousand protesters. Initially, this demo materialized as a permitted march through the downtown. However, as this march neared its official “end,” the Black Bloc (composed of 200-300) diverged from the sanctioned parade route and proceeded to challenge police barricades (in some cases tearing them down and using them to deter advancing law enforcement officials). In addition, the Bloc facilitated the smashing in of a number of bank windows. Interestingly enough, a good percentage of the less militant protesters followed in the wake of the Bloc.

The cops responded by firing tear gas canisters, rubber bullets and bean bags into the crowd. After a prolonged period of street fighting, the police gained the upper hand and managed to surround and contain a large percentage of the protesters. At that point several people were arrested, and the protest contingent was forced to disperse in small groups of four or less.

November 18th, the last major day of action, was marked by more violent confrontations between protesters and police. Two different demonstrations (the second of which was in solidarity with local African-Americans against ongoing police brutality) were both met with police use of tear gas and the batons, as well as 47 arrests from this action alone.

Finally, despite the relatively small numbers, this protest deserves credit as it maintained a line of consistent action directed against every major Capitalist meeting over the course of the last year and a half. Resistance grows as constant and consistent pressure is applied to corporate oppressors wherever they meet to play their games with our lives. Whenever solidarity of action is displayed, the movement grows.

Against Columbus Day: AIM and The Black Bloc in Denver (2001)

Columbus discovered America in 1492. That is how the history books read. But to discover something would seem to imply that others have not previously “found” it.⁶ And like it or not, Native Americans were living in these continents for thousands of years before any European discovered the written language, let alone foreign lands. What Columbus did discover was that the millions of First Nation people living here were devoid of firearms. With that, him and his crew began an ugly and brutal process of enslavement and genocide that would last 500 years, and cost millions of innocent lives.

Today, Native Americans, divested of most their lands, are still struggling against the chains of an imposed poverty, institutional racism, and government oppression. Since the 1970s the American Indian Movement (AIM) has sought to revive and defend Native rights and culture. Their struggle has stretched from coast to coast, and has included such dramatic events as the 1973 armed occupation of Wounded Knee, South Dakota. Throughout the last three decades many AIM

⁶ 2017 Note From The Author: This essay was written in 2005, and was first published in *The Black Bloc Papers* (second edition), Breaking Glass Press, 2010. I did not march in this demonstration, But I did have the honor of demonstrating next to AIM leaders and activists in 1994 in Washington DC, and in Salt Lake City Utah in 1996. Both these demonstrations in part demanded the freedom of political prisoner Leonard Peltier and for Native American rights generally. Leonard Peltier continues to rot in prison for the “crime” of being a Native American willing to stand up for his people. It continues to sadden and enrage me that Peltier is yet to find physical freedom.



member have been killed during militant confrontations with law enforcement. What is more, countless AIM warriors, such as Leonard Peltier, still rot in government jail cells for no other reason than having the audacity to defend themselves and their community. The Eurocentric ruling class refuses to allow any threats to its continental dominance—not from the working class and not from the Indians. As long as they maintain an effective monopoly on force, Natives will not be permitted to determine their own social and political fate any more than other wage slaves. But after 500 long years of attempted genocide, the likes of which make Bosnia look like child's play, the Native American community and AIM are nowhere near defeated. They are a strong people. Like the Irish, who have fought British imperialism for 800 years, it is unlikely that there will ever be true peace as long as justice remains nothing but an empty word.

Given this history, it is no wonder that Columbus Day is considered a day of official insult to Native Americans. In 2001, AIM and other organizations called on Native Americans, other minorities and oppressed people to converge on the western city of Denver for what they coined “Transform Columbus Day.”⁷ Between October 5th through October 8th (Columbus Day) AIM organized actions, teach-ins, and discussions across the city. Coming on the heels of Seattle, A16, and The Battle of Quebec, AIM made a point of inviting the Black Bloc whom they expected to lend physical solidarity in stopping the Denver Columbus Day Parade.

During two primary days of demonstrations (October 6th and 8th) the Bloc marched in formations numbering 75. As events would unfold, the march on October 5th numbered 500 people, slightly over 10% composed by the Bloc. Despite many tense moments, violence was averted, and only six people were arrested; none from within the Bloc. On the 8th, protesters, numbering 300, took their positions in the streets and prepared to confront the parade. The air was thick with anticipation. A feeling of impending violence reflected off the faces of the countless Denver police. But low and behold, word began to spread that they, the people, won this round without taking a single swing. The parade was all but cancelled! The mere presence of these Native militants, along with their anarchist allies, compelled city officials to give in. Upon learning this, the assembled protesters rightly understood this to be a victory; a victory won not through respectable protest or liberal appeals, but through the implied threat of physical force.

In the end, these days of collaboration between the Bloc and AIM avoided clashes with the police. But even so, bonds were formed, respect earned, and besides, sometimes the honest possibility of action is enough to win the results that you seek.

The Battle of York-January 12, 2002 (2005)

In 1969, York Pennsylvania, along with many other U.S. cities, was rocked with serious race riots. One of the victims was the unarmed daughter of a Black preacher.⁸ More the thirty years later nine white men were finally arrested and charged with her murder. One of these was former York mayor, Charlie Robertson. While many residents of this small (pop. 30,000) working

⁷ 2017 Note From The Author: I did not march in this demonstration, But I did have the honor of demonstrating next to AIM leaders and activists in 1994 in Washington DC, and in Salt Lake City Utah in 1996. Both these demonstrations in part demanded the freedom of political prisoner Leonard Peltier and for Native American rights generally. Leonard Peltier continues to rot in prison for the “crime” of being a Native American willing to stand up for his people. It continues to sadden and enrage me that Peltier is yet to find physical freedom.

⁸ 2017 Note From The Author: This essay was written in 2005, and was first published in *The Black Bloc Papers* (second edition), Breaking Glass Press, 2010. At the time I was living in Columbus Ohio and was a member of the local



Black Bloc'er Kicking Fascist Ass in York PA, 2002

class city were encouraged to see justice begin to prevail, a small fringe minority of racists saw it different. Seeking to exploit the old race divisions brought to the fore by these indictments, five national white supremacist organizations (the National Alliance, the World Church of the Creator, the National Socialist Movement, the Hammer Skins, and a faction of the Aryan Nations) collaborated on a plan to build an organized racist presence among the smoke stacks and row houses that is York. Central to their plan in spreading their divisive hate, was the holding of a widely publicized meeting in the York Public Library. The meeting was called for January 12th. Upon learning this information Anti-Racist Action quickly began to organize a counter mobilization aimed at confronting these fascists. And like death and taxes, one could be sure there would be a clash.

By the morning of the 12th the streets of York were tense. The area around the public library was barricaded and surrounded by hundreds of riot cops. Soon fascists began to appear on the scene, with police acting as escorts. Anti-fascists as well poured into the area. A one hundred strong Black Bloc converged on the library. Three hundred more locals (mostly Black and Hispanic) also came out to confront the racists. The combined forces of the neo-Nazis numbered around two hundred. Early on members of the Bloc caught two isolated fascists in a pickup truck attempting to drive through the area. The truck had its windows smashed in, and the men were dragged from the vehicle and beat. This event foreshadowed what was to come.

For several hours the opposing crowds were effectively separated by the riot cops. As most of the racists met inside, a number of Hammer Skins remained outside, behind police lines, giving the Nazi salute to the angry local residents and the Bloc. Eventually the meeting began to let out; and that is when the fighting truly began.

Anti-Racist Action chapter. My comrades mobilized for this action and took place in the street fighting that occurred in York. I did not fight alongside them in this battle as a warrant existed for my arrest in the State of Pennsylvania as a result of the earlier demonstrations against the Republic National Convention (Philadelphia, 2000). My ARA comrades (including Lady) returned to Columbus victories. None suffered arrest and we had no casualties.

As police lead the meeting attendees away from the scene, members of the Bloc (aided by locals) discovered a way to circumvent the police lines. Catching both the cops and racists off guard, the Black Bloc suddenly found itself in an alley along with 40 fascists. Using clubs and fists anarchists beat down Nazis. A number of Hammer Skins were reportedly knocked unconscious. The fascists tried to retreat towards an adjacent parking lot where many of their vehicles were located. The Bloc pursued, beating Nazis as they came upon them, and smashing in windows and slashing the tires of their cars and trucks. As the fight ensued, riot police moved in, using clubs and pepper spray, arresting a number of people. During the fascists' panicky retreat, one bonehead ran over an anti-racist woman (he was later arrested). In another instance, a white supremacist, being pursued by elements of the Bloc, pulled and fired a hand gun; no one was shot. Events moved quickly. As the enemy fled, anarchists teamed up with locals and scoured the area in search of Nazis who got away. On a number of occasions these scum were found and they and their vehicles were attacked. In the end there can little doubt that the racists were literally run out of town. The price? 25 antifas arrested. One woman broke her arm and another required medical attention after being struck by a truck. One Black Blocer was eventually convicted of disorderly conduct and sentenced to three months in jail.

Was York a victory against fascism? Some naive liberals would argue no. Why? Because of an ideological belief that by providing such hate groups with a stage (even if it is a stage which they are flogged on) helps get them media coverage, and hence membership. Such ungrounded assertions aside, let us look at the facts. In the wake of the beatings, fascists attempted to have two follow up rallies in York. One was organized by the neo-Nazi National Movement, on February 20th, 2002. The other was organized by the Aryan Nations, on April 20th of that same year. In the case of the later, the organization's leader, Richard Butler, promised to turn out 350 supporters. Trouble, right? Hardly. The first drew a whopping six supporters, the second only twelve. In both cases these pathetic and isolated hatemongers escaped the large angry crowds only because of massive police protection. At both, ARA people were treated with respect and solidarity by locals. Area youth (not without humor) approvingly referred to the out-of-town antifas as "anarchist ninjas." All told, history and the facts seem to speak clearly for themselves.

Note: The Battle of York set a precedent for organized street fighting against fascists. From Baltimore to Maine to Valley Forge similar tactics would be successfully used against these nazi scum. On September 25, 2004, a Black Bloc of 75 repeatedly ambushed isolated neo-Nazis on their way to a small fascist gathering within the Valley Forge National Park. Antifascists laid in wait in wooded areas separating the parking area from the rally site. During the course of the day many nazis were beat, some severely. The bloc suffered no casualties.

Antifa In DC & The Baltimore 28 (2005)

In The Streets of Washington DC

April 24th, 2002 witnessed the largest fascist demonstration in the recent history of the U.S. Capital. 400 neo-Nazis took to the streets, calling for Americans to embrace an overtly anti-Semitic world view.⁹ The march was organized by the National Alliance. While 400 Nazis may give folks a moment of pause, one should take pride in the fact that the best they can manage

⁹ 2017 Note From The Author: The essay was written in 2005 and was first published in *The Black Bloc Papers* (second edition), Breaking Glass Press, 2010.



to do is well under 1000. Never forget that us on the left have consistently mobilized 100,000s in order to resist globalization, the war in Iraq, and the neo-conservative programs of the current ruling clique. And again, were the Nazis managed 400, we turned out 500 militants in order to remind them whose streets they marched through. Of those 500, one hundred were organized into a Black Bloc.

In the Capital, the Bloc initially focused their attention on a parking garage where the fascists were to assemble. Despite a massive police presence, counterdemonstrators were able to effectively take over one entrance to the garage, and therefore succeeded in turning away a number of Nazis who sought to meet up with their fellow scum. In time, the cops redeployed their forces and regained control of the entrance, allowing the fascists to assemble.

Under heavy police guard, the Nazis eventually left their concrete enclave, and marched towards the Israeli Embassy. Counter demonstrators from numerous organizations including the Arab Anti-Nazi Bloc, the Progressive Labor Party, Left Turn, the International Socialist Organization, Anti-Racist Action, and NEFAC shadowed their every move. Outnumbered, the fascists were no doubt happy to be flanked by hundreds of riot police. On a number of occasions the Bloc attempted to break through police lines in order to decisively deal with their adversaries. At one point police barricades were overturned, and the crowd nearly reached the enemy. Unfortunately the cops were able to reassert their lines, and maintained the forced separation.

The militant presence of the counter demonstrators compelled the Nazis to relinquish their street presence one hour before their official protest permit was up. As the crowd began to disperse, a number of isolated fascists, were roughed up by members of the Bloc. Two Black Blocers were arrested. Our side reported no injuries.

Meanwhile in Baltimore...

Earlier in that morning a more serious confrontation took place at a fascist meeting place in Baltimore. Through certain intelligence channels, it was learned that the enemy would be concentrating at a Baltimore 'park and ride' before converging on DC. There, two dozen black clad militants arrived in time to witness a bus full of boneheads. With no police visibly in the area, the bus was immediately attacked. The windows were smashed out, the tires were slashed, and the passengers were sprayed with pepper spray. The few boneheads who dared exit the vehicle were severely beat. The attack began and ended in a matter of minutes. The bus in question was utterly immobilized, and was unable to continue on to DC. The black clad attackers, suffering no arrests or injuries, quickly disappeared back into wherever they came.

Shortly thereafter, another 28 black clad anti-fascists arrived on the scene. By this time the cops were present in significant numbers. Although many have speculated that these 28 intended on converging simultaneously with the previous attackers, these folk had nothing directly to do with the previous actions. Never the less, they were quickly surrounded, and arrested by the police. The cops and the courts attempted to hold them responsible for the attack, and initially charged them with numerous felony and misdemeanor charges; charges that represented a combined potential for 1177 years in prison. Bails were set excessively high (many between \$10,000 to \$25,000). Even so, after only 24 hours, friends and allies were able to secure the bail, and the prisoners were released.

In the end, the DC and Baltimore actions blackened the eye of the white supremacists. Their best efforts at mobilizing still resulted in them being out numbered and out muscled by the left. And again, Black Bloc anarchists demonstrated that the streets are still the domain of the people-not the stomping grounds for the fringe element of the far right. Tactically the combined actions

of the day demonstrated an advance for the Black Bloc. It showed that the Bloc is capable of ascertaining, distilling, and acting on intelligence information. April 24th witnessed the Bloc effectively dividing its forces between two cities-hitting the enemy at a weak point, while challenging the enemy where it was strongest. And again, the attack in Baltimore directly resulted in the fascists' primary forces being thinned in the Capital. Statistically, the Bloc suffered 28 arrests in the process of demobilizing 70 of the enemy. Given the overall numbers, this must be viewed as a tactical victory.

**As of writing [2005], none of the Baltimore attackers have been apprehended, and those wrongly charged with the action have all had their cases dismissed.*

The War Machine Must Stop! (2005)



Anti-War Protesters, NYC, 2003

By March 15th 2003, it was becoming clear to all that the Bush led U.S. war machine was forging ahead with the invasion of Iraq.¹⁰ Despite massive world opinion against such actions, and despite the largest demonstrations to ever occur in the United States prior to the outbreak of war, the capitalist preparations against the Bath'ist regime were not being quelled. As tens of thousands of troops prepared for conflict, the people once again tried to assert their united power in the streets. Like on February 15th [2003], massive protests materialized across the continent and the world. Some of the larger U.S. demonstrations were in San Francisco, (200,000), Washington, D.C. (100,000), and Los Angeles (100,000). As before, Black Blocs raged like fire in dozens of cities. The two most militant Blocs stormed the streets of San Francisco and D.C.

¹⁰ 2017 Note From The Author: This essay was written in 2005 and was first published in The Black Bloc Papers

In the capital, a small element of the Bloc was able to force their way into the World Bank building where they proceeded to cause thousands of dollars-worth in property destruction. As police reinforcements arrived on the scene, anarchists were forced into a fighting retreat. Six were arrested.

In San Francisco, the Black Bloc lead a huge break away march of 2000 militants. This contingent raged through the streets of this west coast city, eventually suffering dozens of arrests. All told 175 people were taken into police custody. Again, the big story with M15 was not any particular demonstration, or any particular Bloc, but rather the sheer size and scope of the demos throughout the United States and beyond. And in the coming days, the second part of this story would be the fact that the hundreds of thousands of protesters failed to stop the war.

This failure does not condemn the efforts of the masses or the Bloc. Simply put it further illustrates the need for us to go back into our communities where we can build a more comprehensive power in our neighborhoods and in our workplaces. Protests, even when they are millions strong, do not fundamentally challenge the capitalist status quo. For this we must build a powerful working class movement through which we can shut down production through a general strike. The general strike and eventual insurrection are the tools we must acquire in order to eventually bring down the capitalist ruling class and end their imperialist wars once and for all.

When The War Started (2005)

“Jimmy joined the army cause he had no place to go. And there ain’t nobody hiring round here since all the jobs went to Mexico... Now he’s got a rifle in his hand, rolling into Baghdad wondering how he got this far. Just another poor boy off to fight a rich mans war.”

—Rich Man’s War, Steve Earle

On March 19th, 2003, the imperialist invasion of Iraq began.¹¹ The U.S. and a small number of collaborators (chief among them being the U.K., followed by junior partners Italy and Spain) began one of the most devastating aerial bombardments in the history of warfare. More than 100,000 ground troops soon were crossing the border. Iraq fought back, but after a month of combat, its standing army would surrender, forcing the continuing resistance into a guerrilla phase.

As soon as the attack got underway, outraged people took to the streets in over 500 U.S. cities. San Francisco was effectively shut down by hundreds of thousands of demonstrators. Within the next 72 hours police made a total of over 2200 arrests in that city alone. Anarchist Bloc Blocs made their presence felt at countless protests. Hundreds of additional anti-war demonstrations were held across the world, many numbering in the 100,000s. In the coming days and weeks these protests would spread. On March 22nd over 200,000 rallied in New York City. Across the nation financial centers ground to a halt as protesters took part in acts of civil disobedience. On many occasions Black Blocs fought with police and attacked capitalist targets. But despite this massive show of popular discontent, the state was soon able to regain control and the war continued unimpeded.

(second edition), Breaking Glass Press, 2010.

¹¹ 2017 Note From The Author: This essay was written in 2005 and was first published in The Black Bloc Papers (second edition), Breaking Glass Press, 2010.



Mass Anti-War Protests From Around The Globe, 2003

To justify the war Bush claimed that Iraq was harboring biological, chemical, and possibly nuclear weapons. He also insinuated that the Baath'ist regime had ties to Al Qaeda. As I write this brief essay [2005], two years has passed since the outbreak of war, and no such weapons have been found, and no link between the Baath'ist and Al Qaeda have ever been revealed. 150,000 U.S. and allied troops remain in Iraq were they are the constant target of guerrilla attacks. To date more than 11,000 American service man and women have been wounded, and over 1200 have been killed. The numbers continue to rise daily. This cost in human life has compelled a number of governments to pull their forces out of this desert nation. Spain is out, and Italy has announced its plans to withdraw. Increasingly the U.S. finds itself isolated, while our sons and daughters are shot down in the streets of Baghdad, Mosual, and Basra. Again, the majority of Americans oppose the conflict. While it may seem bleak, one should take heart in the fact that the movement against the occupation is mounting. Already millions of workers, through their unions (U.S. Labor Against the War), have come out in opposition. Every day more and more people are joining the ranks of the resisters. Even within the military, recent veterans and enlisted personnel are calling for the troops to be brought home. As the pressure mounts it should be expected that it will become harder and harder for the capitalists to maintain their presence in the Middle East. Even so, one must soberly recognize that the anti-war movement will face many more trials and tribulations before our victory is had. We would do well to squarely recognize

the need to continue to build the anti-capitalist, anti-globalization movement as we continue the fight against the war. For our victory over the ruling class will not come with the simple withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq alone. Such a victory will only be had when we are able stand up, united, and shut down the entire capitalist machine for all its worth. We must organize not just in the streets, but in our neighborhoods and in our workplaces.

Valley Forge Battlefield: The Black Bloc vs. Nazis (2005)

September 25th, 2004, on the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, neo-Nazis had their ass handed to them yet again by the Black Bloc.¹² On that day the fascist National Socialist Movement, dressed in brown uniforms, held a white supremacist rally in the Valley Forge Battlefield National Park in Pennsylvania. The Nazis mobilized 100. Anti-racists mobilized an estimated 200 at a counter rally located about a mile away in the same 700 acre park. Also confronting the fascists were a number of members of the New Black Panther Party.

The fascist activities were slated to take place between 1-4 p.m. Around noon, some of the more militant anti-fascists organized a welcoming ceremony of sorts for the Brown Shirts. At the park entrance 100 people gathered and proceeded to harass any racist trash which sought entrance. This visibly shook the Nazis, turning a number of them away.

The Black Bloc, composed of 75 militants from ARA, Red and Anarchist Skin Heads (RASH), NEFAC, and other allies strategically placed themselves between the parking area and the NSM rally. The geography of the land was hilly. This allowed the Bloc to take up a position between hills, in such a way that they could effectively ambush isolated fascists as they attempted to reach the main event. As the day continued, the Bloc succeeded in engaging and severely beating numerous neo-Nazis; some so bad that they had to be hospitalized. There was even word of a fascist being stabbed. However, as of print, this rumor has not been confirmed.

¹² 2017 Note From The Author: This essay was written in 2005 and was first published in The Black Bloc Papers



Statue Honoring Revolutionary War Heroes At Valley Forge

The police intervened, on occasion, using pepper spray against anti-fascists. All told, one Black Blocer was arrested (three Nazis were arrested), and no antifa's reported any injuries.

As for the NSM rally, it was forced to end an hour early at the request of law enforcement officers concerned about further violence. The fact that this Nazi rally took place at Valley Forge is an insult to all those soldier-farmers of the Revolutionary war era who froze to death during the winter of 1777-1778, or died fighting for democracy and against British imperialism on the battlefield. On a personal note, both of my grandfathers, and four of my great uncles served in the U.S. Army during World War II. My comrade Xavier Massot—co-author of *The Black Bloc Papers*—had a grandfather who was a member of the Resistance in France during the Nazi occupation. Xavier's grandfather was eventually captured and survived much of the war, despite being tortured in a Nazi concentration camp for political prisoners. In the end, the presence of uniformed Nazis on this hallowed ground of freedom should make everyone's blood boil. Did not an entire generation of working people risk and give their lives to rid the world of Hitlerites and their bigoted, anti-democratic ideology? Did our grandfathers die on the beaches of Normandy just to see fascists organize at home? No. For those reasons, and many others we should recognize the brave service that the Black Bloc performed on that day of September 25th, 2004. They took a stand where one had to be taken and they won! While some middle class liberals may frown at direct confrontation and violence, we must all soberly recognize that it took violence to defeat Hitler and Mussolini during WWII, and it will only be through similar means that we will maintain our victories against fascist at home. As a final word, let us not forget—fascists don't always wear brown shirts!

GW Bush Inauguration Day II: J20 (2005)

The 2004 U.S. Presidential elections ended with George W. Bush and his neo-con allies claiming another dubious victory over the Democratic Party.¹³ Despite massive voting irregularities reported throughout the nation, and regardless of a possible recount in Ohio (which was certified as a Republican victory by the Republican Secretary of State), Bush supporters claimed that their man won 50.73% of the ballots. This amounted to 62,040,606 votes. Democrat John Kerry, former head of Vietnam Veterans Against the War turned hawk, is said to have captured 48.27% of the popular vote. Independents and third party candidates combined for the remaining margin. This not so resounding victory was declared by Bush to represent a mandate from the people to stay the course of war; i.e. the imperialist occupation of Iraq and the slashing of social services at home. However, before we get carried away with ourselves it is important to point out that the population of the United States is 290,809,777. Of that population 228,769,171 did not vote for Bush. 107,700,456 did not vote for either of the major candidates from the capitalists parties. The figures represent less of a mandate than a basic indictment of the Tweedle-dee, Tweedle-dum democracy we live under. Even so, these results were certified as official by the Federal Government, and the Republicans made plans for their second victory parade in as many elections. In response, the Left and the Black Bloc made their own arrangements to welcome our not so popular leader. Bush's victory march was countered by well over 10,000 angry demonstrators

(second edition), Breaking Glass Press, 2010.

¹³ 2017 Note From The Author: This essay was written in 2005 and was first published in *The Black Bloc Papers* (second edition), Breaking Glass Press, 2010.



The Black Bloc

primarily organized by the D.C. Anti-War Network (DAWN). Protests were also held in dozens of other U.S. cities, including Atlanta, San Francisco, and Portland, Oregon. Cities across Europe and Asia witnessed anti-Bush demonstrations as well. It is estimated that more than 25,000 Americans participated in such actions, making the counter-inaugural protests some of the largest of their kind in U.S. history. In D.C. the Black Bloc put 700 militants on the street. Bush for his part, mustered a police force of 6000, and called in 7000 combat ready military personnel to face off any challenges to his power. This was the first time since 1973 [under Nixon] that an inauguration utilized military forces to maintain security. And like four years ago, any people wishing to gain access to the parade route were required to pass through police/Secret Service/military checkpoints. However, unlike four years ago (when the Black Bloc smashed through such a barrier) the immediate area around the route was ringed with ten foot fences.

Leading up to this action, many believed that the Bloc would have to be in very good form—larger and better organized than four years ago—in order to avoid a humiliating defeat. After all, there can be no doubt that the police and military have studied the events that took place last time around and modified their game plans accordingly. The pigs would be ready. Would the Black Bloc? Many signs were present that would imply otherwise. The mobilization was marred with indecision and lack of structure from the start. The first call to action was made available to select groups then rescinded. Then another call came from New York City. Then another from ARA which seemed to compete with the first. Some influential anarchists were calling for smaller decentralized actions instead of a Bloc. One contingent absurdly argued that the Bloc should refocus its energies on a pro-choice action later in the week. The unfolding

situation was confused at best. Yet through such tribulations J20 would see one of the largest, and most effective North American Black Bloc in years.

The Bloc got moving shortly before 12:30 p.m. Its goal was to break through the security perimeter and occupy the parade route—therefore stopping the Bush motorcade in its tracks. To help facilitate this process, key affinity groups worked as counter-intelligence units. Police radios were monitored to keep tabs on enemy movement and scouts reported back to operatives with the main body. Armed with this information and the confidence of numbers, the Bloc boldly set out through the city. The first police barricade it faced melted before its approach. For a moment it appeared that its goal was within grasp. But then an internal dispute over which direction to go at a key intersection slowed its pace enough to allow riot police to rationally redeploy its forces. Conflating matters, the Bloc began to move in a direction counter to recommendations emanating from the scouts. As the Bloc approached the larger DAWN protest, riot police launched a lightning attack against the anarchists. However, this did not occur without a fight. Pacifica Radio reported the Bloc, at this time, numbered upwards of 1500 militants. Other eyewitness reports put the Bloc at well over 2000. In view of the fact that no Bloc organizer or participant claimed numbers to be above 700, it must be assumed that their ranks temporarily swelled with sympathizers as the fight intensified. Even so, this strength would prove short lived. The Bloc was forced into a tactical retreat. After regrouping it launched a counter offensive against police lines. This charge was also turned back, and the Bloc was forced to withdraw. By 2:30 p.m. the anarchists assembled what forces it retained and again set out for the security fence. Successive charges resulted in the opening of a hole in the barrier. The pigs answered the challenge by beating the crowd with large metal whips, resembling elongated antennas. The anarchists were not able to exploit the breach. The Bloc, now utterly on the defensive, withdrew from the area. As a result of the day's actions a small number of individuals were arrested. If the story were to stop here, we would be left with no more than a good old fashion story of the Black Bloc fighting cops at a mass demonstration. But surprise, the story doesn't end here.

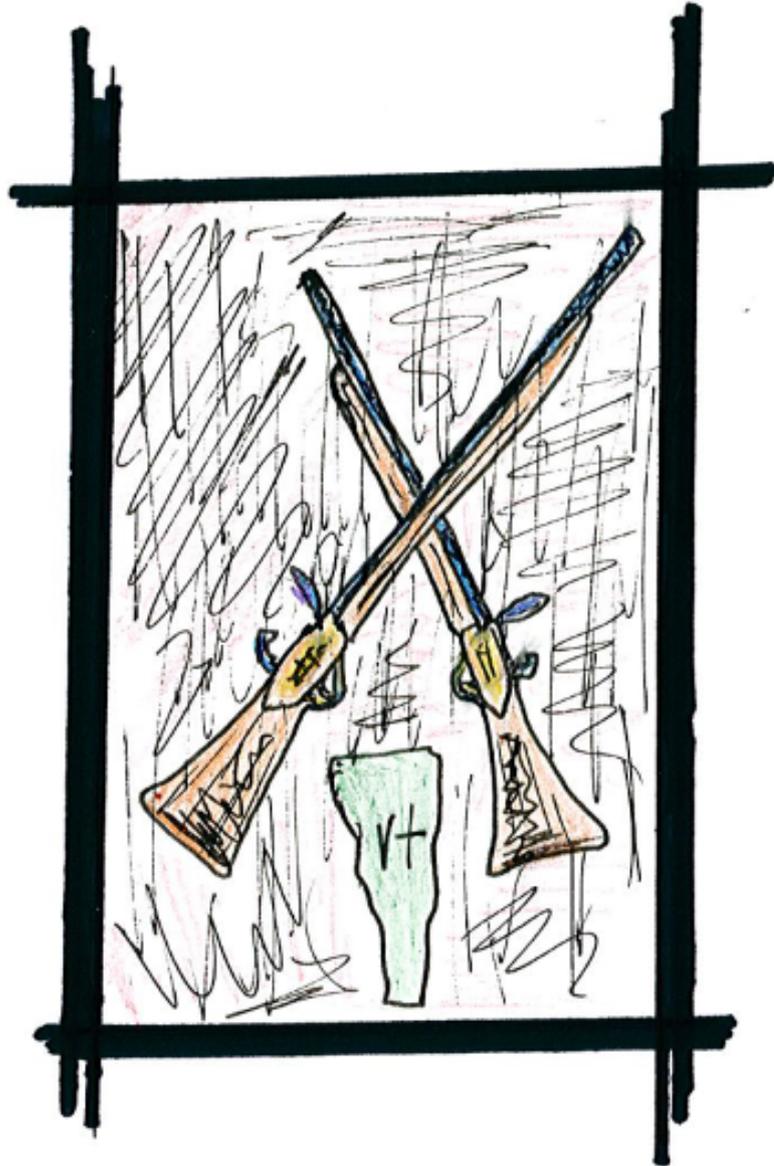
Later that evening a Black Bloc re-converged following a cultural/political event in the Northwest section of the city. Sometime after 10 p.m., 200-300 militants, armed with torches, began to march on the Republican sponsored "Constitutional Ball" at the Hilton on Connecticut Avenue. Under the slogan of "Bring The War Home" this contingent sought to reach the Ball, and teach the rich a lesson about the human will to resist. Along the way something happened. Capitalist tend to call it hooliganism. Many working class and poor people call it revenge. Bank windows were smashed in, a cop curser had a brick tossed through its windshield, a police substation was trashed, many other corporate targets were attacked. For twenty minutes the march continued unimpeded. Riot pigs, as should be expected, responded in force. This time the Bloc was scattered and would not reconstitute itself. 78 people were arrested, and \$15,000 in damage was done to capitalist targets.

What makes the latter part of this action interesting is that the Bloc's immediate objective became the destruction of capitalist private property, not fighting the police. Historically, East Coast Black Blocs have maintained relatively good relations with the larger, more moderate left, because they have prioritized direct struggle with the police. In this capacity, they often come to the physical aid of nonviolent protesters that are being attacked by the pigs. Capitalist property destruction—while always present in lesser degrees—has never been their main purpose. Such destruction, while completely justified from an anarchist or even socialist perspective, rarely sits

well with the more liberally-minded demonstrators. Of course this tactical orientation has been observed as the norm during many West Coast demonstrations (most notable in Seattle).

Could it be that we are witnessing a new phase in regional Black Bloc tactics? This possibility cannot be discounted as many of those who are in the front lines of Blocs today are not the same militants of five years ago during A16 and Quebec City. Many former street militants have refocused their energies on labor struggles, tenants' unions, and other community organizing projects. While most are still supportive of Black Blocs, such formations are no longer their principle mode of resistance. A new generation of anarchists are on the verge of wielding the Black Bloc tactic according to their own inclinations. The future of the Bloc is as malleable as the changing context of those groupings behind it. Many things are possible, both good and bad. The Black Bloc as a tactic, cannot be defined in an absolutist way devoid of the broader social reality. The ever developing anarchist movement should consciously allow itself the diversity of tactics and experimentalism that will make victory possible. We should strive to be the most militant and the most relevant organized force in the broader class struggle. While this may make some of the older guard nervous, one would do well to recall the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson: "Consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." And comrades, in the fields that we play in, consistency is the friend of the enemy and is therefore akin to death.

THE LEFTIST CASE AGAINST GUN CONTROL IN VERMONT (2018)



Artwork By Xavier Massot

“Laws never made men a wit more just.” –Henry David Thoreau

Cabot, VT, February 2018 -Every day I am honored to call rural Vermont my home.¹⁴ Our rugged mountains and vast forests are home to some 600,000 hardy Vermonters. Politically we are the most leftist state in the nation; all of our children have universal healthcare, our minimum wage is \$10.50 an hour (with a serious movement towards achieving a \$15 an hour livable wage), our unemployment rate is 2.8%, we practice a form of direct democracy at the local level (Town Meeting) whereby every citizen is a legislator, democratic socialists (Vermont Progressive Party) are elected to 10 seats in the Statehouse and hold the positions of Lt Governor & State Auditor, socialist Bernie Sanders is one of our two US Senators, and we have no gun control. We also have the lowest rates of violent crime in the nation. On average we have ten murders, total, a year; half of those committed with guns. We are no utopia, this is true. But we are far above most the rest of the United States when it comes to our politics, our social programs, and our standard of living.

We have been able to achieve this, in part, because we have not allowed the right to claim wedge issues (like gun control) to divide working people and compel them to vote against their social and economic self-interest. Thus we are able to make real progress in establishing a livable wage and paid Family Medical Leave while continuing to allow our citizens to retain their Constitutional right to bear arms. And for this, we continue to lead the way nationally on economic and social issues while remaining the safest place to raise a family in the United States.

With the terrible and tragic mass shootings taking place in other parts of the county, there are those who would now introduce gun control into Vermont. However, the root cause of these external acts of mass despair do not happen in a vacuum; these acts, in part, are a result of an American culture of extreme consumerism and capitalism which alienates people and drives a social insanity that can and will only flare up again and again in horrendous ways. Until we seriously address these underlying root causes that affect mass consciousness, and until we adequately fund our mental health system (which deals with the acute symptoms of this mass alienation) we will not be done with the senseless deaths perpetrated by those who have fallen into the darkness. Be it done with a gun, a knife, a bomb, a car, or a blunt object –we will not be done with this death.

In Vermont, because of our strong sense of community, and because of our stronger social safety net, we are somewhat insulated from the consumerism-driven sickness of the American culture. This is borne out through many statistics, including our low murder rate. While we too have a long row to hoe when it comes to abolishing the ills of capitalism, strengthening our mental health programs, and establishing a more vibrant and democratic social system, we must not follow the drum beat of the national Democratic Party; we must see with clear eyes that gun control, if introduced in Vermont, is a solution looking for a problem. No legislation in the world will reduce our already miniscule murder rate. But what it will do is give the Republican Party ammunition to go to working class Vermonters and say: “the left wants to take your guns away. Vote for us and we will protect your rights guaranteed in the Vermont Constitution.” And with that, as has happened in the rest of the nation, working class people, Union members, will begin to vote against their self-interest and will begin to elect pro-gun right wing politicians to serve in Montpelier. In turn, the efforts to win a livable wage and paid Family Medical Leave (efforts

¹⁴ 2018 Note From The Author: This essay was originally published in the Caledonia Record Newspaper in February, 2018.

aimed at solving real problems suffered by tens-or-thousands of Vermonters) will be killed. So on the altar of abstract Democratic Party ideology will be sacrificed the real victories we can see down the road ahead. Let us not allow this to happen on our watch.

Instead, let us recognize that with an average FIVE gun murders a year in the Green Mountains, and with ZERO of these committed with so called “assault rifles”, our time would be better spent focusing on building stronger non-capitalist communities, improving our mental health system, and preventing the more problematic threat of accidental gun deaths. Here we must begin to teach gun safety and respect in our middle schools. Gun ownership is a right under our Constitution just as voting is. We teach civics, why would we also not teach gun safety. This, and not gun control, is a reasonable step we can take to deal with a real concern.

Finally, in the age of Trump, why, under any circumstances, would one advocate for guns to only be in the hands of government forces? Do we feel so secure in our democratic institutions that we would grant a gun monopoly to those that answer to a second-rate fascist? Some may have a bizarre will towards democratic suicide. I am not one of them, and I suspect that most Vermonters would agree. No to gun control, and yes to building a more progressive, socialist, and libertarian Vermont.

PIPE BOMBS FROM THE RIGHT – ANTIFA MANS THE WALL (2018)

WE STOPPED
THE NAZIS



SO
CAN
YOU!

Join your local ANTIFA

Vermont, 10/24/18 -Major news sources are reporting that pipe bombs have been sent to a multitude of political targets including former U.S. Senator Hillary Clinton-Democrat, Democratic-leaning billionaire George Soros, CNN (who has been critical of Donald Trump), former Vice President Joe Biden-Democrat, and former U.S. President Barack Obama-Democrat.¹⁵ This represents an escalation of political violence by growing factions of the U.S. Extreme Right.

While these targets are not reliable allies of the Left (let alone Organized Labor), they are (inaccurately) viewed by the Far Right as being such. Therefore the Left needs to understand this as an escalation of violence against us by the enemies of democracy. For this, we, the Left, need to be prepared to meet such challenges, and we need to be able and ready to respond as may prove effective and appropriate.

Over the last two years, overt Fascists, embolden by the Trump Presidency (who counts on the violent Far Right as an essential aspect of its core support), have engaged in bloody street actions in numerous cities from Charlottesville to Berkley. This rise of street level Fascist activity is being driven, in part, by the extremist rhetoric emanating from the White House. While Trump is a sloppy and buffoonish man (elected to office even though he received three million less votes than his main Capitalist challenger in 2016), he has repeatedly disparaged minorities, immigrants, women, disabled, and the Labor Movement in crude and inflammatory terms. More recently he has begun to openly refer to himself as a Nationalist (all the while verbally attacking more Social-Democratic nations while giving praise to authoritarian regimes); all sentiments shared in common with Fascist world view.

In this political climate, the only thing that prevented street level neo-Nazis (and extremist anti-Labor Trump supporters) from effectively occupying sections of the cities they have marched upon, has been effective counter attacks organized by Antifa/Black Bloc contingents. It has been Antifa, not politicians and not pacifists, who have given neo-Nazis something to fear and a reason to pause. And more often than not, when neo-Nazis and Antifa have met in the streets, it has been Antifa who has come out on top.

History has shown us that when Fascists escalate their violence (even when they represent a relatively small minority of a population), when they are able to openly take to the streets without being physically countered, it is a small step for them to seize more aspects of State power [i.e. Italy in the 1920s, and Germany in the 1930s]. History also shows us the effective means to defeat them is not through education or elections alone, but rather through force [The Battle of Cable Street in England in the 1930s being one example]. And in the end it was not peaceful sit-ins that defeated Nazi Germany; rather it was men like my Grandfather and his brothers who served in the Army and met Nazi force with a more determined Anti-Fascist force.

If we were to allow Fascists to control the streets and to openly operate and dominate in our communities, let us soberly recognize that the consequences would be an inability to conduct effective Labor organizing (as free Labor Unions are antithetical to Fascism), and an inability to openly organize towards Socialist, Anarchist, or Leftist goals (such as towards livable wages, paid family medical leave, civil rights, expanded democratic processes, etc.). In such a reality, instead of workplace organizing we would see an intensification of extra-legal attacks on minorities, Labor leaders, and on the very institutions that (at our best) mark us as a democratic society.

Already, The Administration in Washington has built internment camps on our southern boarder where they have caged children. Already we have seen a desire from political figures

¹⁵ 2018 Note From The Author: This essay was originally published in Enough is Enough & The Anarchist News

on the Right to outlaw or criminalize political protests. Already our Unions have come under existential attack by judges who have been appointed by Trump and other Rightists to carry out this exact mission. Soon we will see the further erosion of a woman's right to control her own body. And yes, we have also seen the President of the United States call on extremist elements from within his base to attack those who would oppose him. And the Fascists have answered this call. And today they have now begun to send bombs to targets which they view as being aligned with the Left.

In response we, the Left, and specifically the Labor Movement, need to build a powerful & militant political force which is steadfast in its resistance to the rise of Fascism, and steadfast in its demand for a strengthening of workers' rights, and steadfast in its demand for democratic powers being vested in the people, and steadfast in its demand for a social contract through which each and every working person and each and every working family is able to realize a dignified standard of living. We must build this political force from below, by engaging the rank & file, by forming solid alliances with fellow Unions and community organizations, and we must develop this power independent of the Democratic Party.

An election is just weeks away. Nationally, the Democrats (who are largely a Capitalist party with a minority of Social-Democrats within their ranks) are poised to take the U.S. House of Representatives. The Democrats are more desirable (or less reprehensible) than Trump's Republican Party, but do not be foolish enough to think for a moment that this Party understands how to fight Fascism (an understanding that apparently died with FDR), or that they have a true intent in taking power from the wealthy elite (who fund their national campaigns) in order to empower the people. They do not. While a victory for the Democrats may weaken Trump (which is good), we have seen what this Party does when it has full control of both Houses of Congress and the White House (as they did at the start of the Obama Administration); minimum wage remained appallingly low, publically funded healthcare never materialized, card check recognition for Unions went nowhere, and we continued to engage in imperialistic foreign military campaigns. So while we may desire a Democratic victory in November, if for no other reason than to blacken the eye of the more reactionary Republican Party, do not expect any wave of change. But do expect street level Fascists to continue to escalate their attacks on the Left. And what will stand between them and a very disturbing future will remain Antifa.

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL ANTIFA BRIGADES

-David Van Deusen, District Vice President of the Vermont AFL-CIO

Chapter III: Organization Within Anarchist Federations & Labor Unions

Towards The Creation Of Regional North American Anarchist Federations & The Adoption Of An Organizational Model From Which a Broad Based Strategy Can Be Carried Out (2001)

Proposal To: The Federation of Revolutionary Anarchist Collectives-Great Lakes Region

Submitted By: The Black Heart Anarchist Collective-Columbus Ohio, December 25 2001

Columbus, Ohio, 2001 –We do not question the need to form tightknit membership based revolutionary anarchist federations.¹ This need is self-evident. We recognize the need to do so on a regional basis, so that organization can be more responsive to the cultural, social, and economic particularities of the region in which it is situated. Regional organizations also carry the added benefit of being autonomous and self-sustaining. Therefore, if one particular federation suffers internal problems, the broader organized movement cannot be dragged down with it.

To date, upon the continent of North America, there is only one such federation (the Northeast Federation of Anarcho Communists-NEFAC) and, to our knowledge, only one other in the process of forming (the Federations of Revolutionary Anarchist Collectives-FRAC). It is our hope that individual anarchists and collectives located within different regions will take it upon themselves to form additional regional bodies in the coming months.² We also urge NEFAC (and FRAC after it is officially launched) to give whatever support they can to persons/collectives which take the initiative in forming such organizations. We must strive to develop such federations all throughout the continent so that a strong and organized revolutionary anarchist movement of the working class can begin to engage in concerted campaigns which bring us closer to the so-

¹ 2017 Note From The Author: This proposal was provided to the still forming Federation of Revolutionary Anarchist Collectives (Great Lakes Region-Midwest) in December, 2001 by the Black Heart Anarchist Collective (Columbus, Ohio). It was not adopted by the federation. It was also sent to the Northeast Federation of Anarcho Communists. I (David Van Deusen) wrote the bulk of this document with assistance from Lady. The proposal was adopted as a position by the Black Heart Anarchist Collective as a whole, whose members also had input into the content. The Black Heart Anarchist Collective was an offshoot of Anti-Racist Action-Columbus. The collective (which included myself, Lady, Dustin, Noah, and others) formed for the primary purpose of engaging in discussions with other regional anarchist collectives about forming the Federation of Revolutionary Anarchist Collectives. The Black Heart Anarchist Collective were participants in a number of meetings leading up to the creation of the federation. However, prior to the official formation of the federation I (along with Lady) moved back to Vermont, the collective disbanded, and was never an official member collective of the federation. I was in Ohio, and a member of Anti-Racist Action, for some time in 2001-2002. The Federation of Revolutionary Anarchist Collectives folded in 2005.

² 2017 Note From The Author: Soon after this proposal, in addition to NEFAC and FRAC, the Northwest Anarchist Federation would form, as would also the Great Plains Anarchist Network. For a time there was much potential for building a strong and united anarchist movement in North America. However, these regional federations, while doing good organizing work, never matured to the point of forming a formal alliance or adopting a common strategy. Today, 2017, none of these organizations are still in existence.



cial revolution, which is both necessary and encompasses that which we desire and our passions demand.

Regional federations should develop out of the experiences of individual anarchists and collectives as found within the given social environment. They should be founded upon anti-statist, anti-authoritarian principles which are compatible with the basic tenants of revolutionary socialism. In a word, they must seek to bring forth a world in which the means of production are owned and controlled by those whose present social position is that of the poor and working class. Such a world must function according to participatory and directly democratic means while guaranteeing a material, political, and social equity for all, as well as deliver a society which is both more interesting and aesthetically pleasing by virtue of the unleashing of the creative aspirations of the masses.

“From each according to their abilities. To each according to their need.”

-Peter Kropotkin

These federations need to be composed of dedicated anarchists who understand the need of struggle, and who through experience also understand the pragmatic means by which struggle can potentially be transformed into victory. They must be rooted in their local communities, or, in some cases, be fully immersed in their life on the road. This, along with a commitment to the revolution, must be the minimum requirement for membership into the collectives which compose the various regional federations.

We welcome the formation of FRAC, of which we hope to be part of. We hope that this potential organization will become operational and manifest during the course of the coming year; even more preferably by May Day, 2002.

In is of our opinion that soon after FRAC becomes politically functional, it should seek to establish formal ties, while still maintaining federation autonomy, with NEFAC in the form of a strategic alliance and a program of mutual assistance. The adoption of such strategies and programs should be facilitated through open proposals, discussions, and debates through the means of an internet listserv set up exclusively for these reasons, as well as by direct correspondences through the mail, telephone, and personal meetings. Mutually agreed upon points should be ratified at an annual continental alliance congress, at which delegates from all federations should be present. The exact process by which ratification should occur should be decided at the first such congress.

In turn, these federations should encourage the establishment of further regional anarchist federations. Their structural goal being the establishment of such groupings throughout all distinct cultural, social, and economic regions of North America.

Prior to the formation of such other regional federations, independent collectives should be encouraged to formally connect themselves to the broader anarchist alliance on a provisional

³ Such a point by point program should be taken very seriously and should entail an in-depth analysis of the economic particularities of that federation's region. It should also seek to project the particular economic and social changes that a working class/anarchist revolution will demand. In addition, all possible intermediary steps should be discussed at length.

The fact of the matter is the capitalist parties, be it the Democrats or Republicans have such economic analysis at their disposal, as well as a platform which describes what they intend to do, how they intend to do it, and how that will effect/change the common experience of the common wo/man. Granted, the rubbish which these parties print, claim, etc. is bullshit. However, the fact that they can point to the particulars of a seemingly realistic and comprehensible platform is a massive psychological lever that they use to separate themselves as relevant from radical anti-capitalists, who often do not produce such point by point programs, as irrelevant.

basis. The status of such independent collectives should remain provisional until such time when they themselves organize a regional federation within their area of operation. At that time, such federations should be encouraged to join the broader anarchist alliance as fully recognized and equal partners. The process by which future regional anarchist federations should be functionally incorporated into the alliance should also be decided at the first continental alliance congress.

Such federations, while developing autonomous point by point programs based on the needs and desires of the broader poor and working class communities living within their select region³, need to create a formal inter-federation anarchist alliance, and move to develop a mutually accepted North American revolutionary strategy. However, in order for any emerging continental anarchist strategy to become effective, the various anarchist federations, from whom such strategic proposals can be expected to emanate, must develop a dynamic relation within the broadest tenants of the contemporary social movement. Here the federations must help facilitate a macro and micro structure through which it can effect a further radicalization of the mass movement.

We must recognize that the regional federations will, at least at this historic juncture, most likely will materialize as small, tightknit membership organizations with a likely constituency of maybe 100-500 members per region (as is the present case with NEFAC). Such small organizations lack the mass base for them to go-it-alone. Therefore, for them to be effective in regards to radicalizing the broader population, they must have a sophisticated method of interacting with the masses at large. Here we contend that the best way for such small highly politicized federations to do so is through working directly with larger radical leftist organizations which already exist, and in turn to encourage a concerted effort on their part to engage the rank and file of the even larger left-leaning/more liberal mass organizations such as within the labor movement and the social justice movement.

We must strive to democratically consolidate the efforts of the already organized masses so that the revolutionary aspirations of the self-conscious poor and working classes can begin to spread like wildfire. And where the masses are not organized and are still slumbering in the delusions of consumerism and institutional oppression, we must *directly* facilitate the basic awakening of class consciousness and help provide the social and political vehicles necessary for a broad based class struggle.

A Structural Proposal

We contend that such regional anarchist federations should act as the facilitator of a more radical world/class analysis. Such leanings can already be found amongst the natural inclinations of the poor and working classes, as well as amongst the more oppressed people generally. Even so, in order for such a highly radical and politicized membership organization to be effective, it must not seek to be the official umbrella of the larger movement. Rather it must, in part, work within the broader mass movement in order to influence its course.⁴ This is in no way meant to imply that the revolutionary politics of the federations should be watered down in order to

2017 Note From The Author: It was this thought that motivated me to have interest in eventually crafting the libertarian socialist manifesto *Neither Washington Nor Stowe* when back with the Green Mountain Anarchist Collective (Catamount Tavern Press, 2004 – reprinted in *On Anarchism: Dispatches From The People's Republic of Vermont*, Algora Publishing, 2017).

⁴ This proposal is not meant to imply that the various collectives making up regional federations should forgo militant direct social and political actions taken locally, through their own initiative. Collectives must initiate such activity! However, these collectives, through their capacity as members of the broader federation, and even the larger alliance, must also work to solidify the more general efforts of the mass struggle against the status quo.

create a quasi-reformist united front. On the contrary, we believe that a well-organized system of inter-organization fluidity can result in the presently liberal influenced elements of the mass movement becoming further radicalized without the anarchist federations compromising their revolutionary positions. We assert that this can best be achieved through select members of the federated collectives joining and participating in other larger organizations which are not specifically anarchistic.

“All workers are socialists, regardless if they know it or not.”

-Mikhail Bakunin

We see this strategy as two prong. First, certain members of the federated collectives should join already existing larger radical left-wing organizations. Second, members of these other organizations, as emanating out of local chapters, should be encouraged to become involved in the even larger left-leaning liberal influenced mass organizations as found within the labor movement and the social justice movement. Here we mean specifically that of Anti-Racist Action (ARA) and, *possibly*, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). We view these organizations as gateway groups with the *potential* to act as a link between the highly politicized and strictly anarchist left, and the mass base of the largely liberal influenced labor movement and social justice movement.

This is not to say that the federations should seek to infiltrate, control, or manipulate such organizations. That is a dirty task best left to dirty authoritarian and self-destructive groups who lack popular support. For us, we must be very open about our presence within other organizations, and not seek to control them, but rather to foster a more thorough radical social and political analysis into their world view.

When the federation alliance adopts a strategic platform which requires the participation of these gateway groups, the platform should be brought to the local chapters of these organizations through the dual members. At that time the proposal will, of course, be discussed and debated. If the proposal is unacceptable to these organizations, it should be brought back to the federation alliance for necessary modification. Likewise, when and if certain strategic initiatives develop from these larger organizations, they can quickly be brought to the federations' attention, again, through the dual members.

This task of inserting federation members into ARA and the IWW will not take an extraneous amount of work, as many of us, especially those of us who are involved with the formation of FRAC, are already members of such organizations and are only now coming to form more specifically anarchist collectives which we already hold dual membership in. However, the formation of federated collectives should not be carried out as an unofficial leadership clique within already existing groups. Nor should such collectives be formed as paper organizations, essentially existing in name only with all local organizing and actions being done solely through the broader group of which members are part of. Nor should groups such as ARA be weakened to critical points through the formation of such collectives (i.e. through a significant amount of members leaving in order to form anarchist collectives). Here we must strike a reasonable balance, and seek to organize in such a way as those already existing larger radical organizations are strengthened rather than weakened.

We suggest that we strive for a balanced ratio whereby at least two ARA and two IWW chapters exist per every one federated collective. In areas where ARA and IWW chapters do not exist, federated collectives should make it a priority to help establish such chapters, and in turn these chapters should be composed of a large majority of individuals who are not also members of

federated collectives. In addition, we recommend that only a small amount of members of each anarchist collective hold an *active*⁵ dual membership within their collective and another broader organization such as ARA or the IWW. This would ideally translate into federated collectives having one or two fully recognized members within each ARA and IWW chapter within the area of the federated collective's zone of operation. Even so, we recognize the necessity of each federated collective making such *exact* decisions on their own, based on the specific dynamics of their local scene. Even so, maintaining a tight limit on the number of dual members per collective would seem advisable so as we do not get ourselves into a position where we create an organization while retaining a super-active role within an existing organization – thereby creating twice as much work for each member. We recognize that ultimately workloads will be decided by the individual and we are not to say who can handle what. However we must create a balance wherein we do not over extend ourselves, and thus do two times as much half-ass work, rather than focus our time and abilities on limited projects which we carry through with the utmost of thought and effort.

The role of such dual members would, in part, be to keep the federated collective in contact with the day to day campaigns and operations of the broader organizations while simultaneously suggesting a more radical politic to the local chapters of these other organizations. These gateway organizations should then come to fulfill certain structural roles within the broader continental-wide working class strategy for social revolution.

For such an organizational plan to be successful, NEFAC, FRAC, and future regional federations would have to prioritize the task of creating new ARA and IWW chapters in areas where the federation is active. At the present time there are roughly 11 ARA and 10 IWW chapters in NEFAC's region of operation; this in comparison NEFAC's 7 federated collectives and few support collectives. In kind, there are roughly 21 ARA and 12 IWW chapters in the broader region of FRAC's area of operation; this in comparison to an undetermined number of potential FRAC collectives. With the possible exception of FRAC in relation to ARA's, the above ratios are still too unbalanced to maximize the effectiveness of anarchist federations in relation to the developing broader radical community. Therefore, these less sectarian groupings must be strengthened and chapters need to multiply so that the developing discontent of youth and workers can be effectively channeled through the organized bodies of radical opposition.

Why Anti-Racist Action?

ARA presently encompasses 50 chapters throughout North America and is a non-sectarian organization which functions upon directly democratic principles.⁶ Its primary focus has historically been to attack fascists at the street level, and in doing so allowing for the space necessary for leftists to organize in a somewhat less combative social sphere. One of its strengths is that it has a certain appeal to young people who, although they may not recognize themselves explicitly as anarchists, come to identify themselves as militant anti-fascists. For many people ARA becomes an impetus, through direct political experience, for individuals to gain pragmatic insight and to develop a more radical world view. In addition, some ARA chapters have been success-

⁵ This is not to say that persons should not hold dual membership in a relatively inactive sense. For example, it would make sense for federated collective members to hold official membership within labor unions such as the IWW. However, this membership should not impede on the work that person performs within their primary collective and within the federation.

⁶ Through a concerted and coordinated effort it is reasonable to think that ARA, with the federations' assistance, could double in size to 100 chapters over the course of the next half decade.

ful in entering coalitions on the local level that, for better or worse, are more representative of the broader social justice movement. In some cities, such as Columbus Ohio, ARA chapters have official representatives in coalitions such as Jobs With Justice⁷, the local anti-war group, a community newspaper, etc.. These are positive characteristics that should be continued and further pursued.

We recommend that ARA chapters continue their direct and militant anti-fascist work, while also making it a priority to connect with the broader social justice movement in the area in which the chapter in question is active. These two facets of ARA activity should, respectively, be the first and second priority of the organization. And in its capacity as a vehicle connecting the more radical element of the broad leftist movement with the more democratic socialist/liberal element it must seek to suggest a more thorough militant energy into these historically less dynamic tendencies –not necessarily by engaging the leadership of such organizations, but by making strong connections with the *rank and file* of such organizations. ARA must build strong grassroots connections between all spectrums of the social justice movement, thereby creating necessary connections between the more militant left and the mass base of organized status quo opposition. It will be through such constructed inter-organizational relationships (between the anarchist federations and the larger radical gateway groups, between gateway groups and the mass organizations) that future continental-wide strategic programs can be brought from the relative isolation of the federation, to the already organized masses.

We recommend that ARA chapters utilize a similar model as that discussed above relating to federation dual members. Furthermore, the ARA-social justice movement dual members should not be composed of persons already serving in a similar capacity in relation to the regional anarchist federation and ARA. To do so would translate into federated members taking on a disproportional amount of work, as well as compromising the political autonomy of the ARA chapter in question. We do not and cannot advocate the development of inter-organizational relations whereby the regional anarchist federations come to *artificially* dominate other larger groupings. When federation/alliance policy/strategy comes to be accepted by larger groupings and/or the mass organizations, it should do so through the conscious adaptation of such principles by the free constituency of the organization.

“The bourgeoisie came to power because it is the class of the developing economy. The proletariat cannot itself come to power except by becoming the class of consciousness.”

-Guy Debord, Society of The Spectacle

It will be through the building of such positive working relationships that the more liberal inclinations of the moderate left can begin to be subverted, with the effect of establishing a more spirited movement with clear rank and file respect and understanding between those who advocate more direct action and those who historically, although sympathetic, display more timid characteristics and reformist platforms. Without the building of such networks the process of bringing more activists to a more radical/revolutionary line can be expected to be obscured by the perceived lack of more militant options.

⁷ 2017 Note From The Author: For a time I served as ARA-Columbus’s representative to the local Jobs With Justice chapter. ARA-Columbus, for a time, also organized weekly food deliveries to striking Mansfield Steel Workers. These workers were on strike for years. I had the idea of providing support after I read about a recent escalation in tension whereby a worker sought to fire a homemade rocket at scabs/management/security thugs. Lady largely secured food donations from area businesses. Then then collective members would drive the food to the USWA Union Hall in Mansfield. There we would drop off food and revolutionary literature.

We also must recognize the changing of the political climate; first following Genoa⁸, and second since the September 11th attacks. Genoa revealed a growing conservatism among the broader leftist organizations in Europe. For it was many of these organizations which not only publically denounced the actions of the Black Bloc, but some of them went so far as to physically restrain them or prevent their free movement during street battles with police. It is rational to expect that this trend, insofar as Europe seems to be on a similar political and social trajectory as the U.S. (only in a more advanced stage), will eventually make itself domestically manifest in the near future. And again, September 11th brought a massive rise in the overt abilities of the police state, again effectively spooking many less radical elements of the North American left. Therefore, groups like ARA should be encouraged to build strong relationships with the rank and file of these groups in order to help foster a feeling of courage and hope as well as to attempt to prevent (or at least minimize) any trend aimed at the further de-radicalization of these larger social justice groups. We must remember many of the consistent 10,000 or so direct action protesters at the more recent demonstrations have emerged out of these groups. To lose them would clearly weaken the effectiveness of large actions at this time. Finally, it is through positive contact with groups like ARA that we can better guarantee the general support for 'diversity of tactics' as has grown out of A20 (The Battle of Quebec City).

ARA, while still retaining its first priority of attacking fascists on the street level, has the potential to act as the bridge between the broader social justice movement and the highly politicized anarchist federations. Through strong working relations and a concerted effort on the part of the regional anarchist federations and ARA chapters, we will have the capacity to create stronger more effective continuum ranging from the anarchist federations all the way through the much larger and presently liberal-dominated social justice movement. And it is through the establishment of such a continuum that a strong sense of solidarity and more radical consciousness can begin to more fluently move throughout the ranks of the masses.

Why The IWW?

The Industrial Workers of the World is a labor union/organization which functions according to directly democratic principles and has the stated goal of the workers seizing the means of production. The IWW contains approximately 55 North American chapters⁹ with a total membership of around 1500 persons, making it one of the largest anarchist influenced organizations in North America. In addition, the IWW officially represents several workplaces and produces a monthly newspaper (The Industrial Worker) which boasts a fairly broad distribution base. This labor union/organization can trace its roots back to the turn of the century, with its political hey-day centering around the time leading up until World War I when its membership was estimated to have been over 100,000.

The IWW's long history is significant in that it was this union which played a pivotal in gaining many of the basic rights which the North American worker nominally has today (i.e. the eight hour work day). Many other skilled trade unions, such as the electrician's union in NY (IBEW), presently require that apprentices take a college level course which teaches about the history of labor movement. And within these courses, a significant amount of time is given to the historical efforts of the IWW. In other words, even though this union is quite radical, it has maintained a

⁸ In July of 2001 massive demonstrations occurred in this city in opposition to a G8 meeting. There a large Black Bloc engaged in violent clashes with state forces; one Black Bloc participant, Carlos Giuliani, was killed by police gun fire.

⁹ Also known as General Membership Branches.

certain degree of psychological acceptability even among the more conservative elements of the unions.

Today the IWW is still active within the labor movement. More recently there have been several IWW organizing campaigns aimed at unionizing select workplaces as well as concerted efforts to gain workers' benefits at non-unionized shops. The IWW has also marched with larger unions at all major anti-globalization demonstrations from Seattle (N30) to Quebec City (A20). It was the IWW, along with elements of the Sheet Metal Workers & United Steel Workers, which acted as the radical contingent within the usually subdued labor marches. In Seattle it was these elements which led the breakaway march to the downtown area (the site of the major protester/police clashes). On local levels, IWW chapters have, at times, made headway in regards to connecting with other more mainstream union locals. At times these connections have been utilized as a de facto common front aimed against anti-worker corporate interests.

Structurally the IWW functions on a democratic delegate system. Major decisions are made collectively at annual conventions. Membership can be achieved by being in a workplace represented by the union, being in a local chapter formally recognized by the organization, or simply by being a dues paying worker. All members are required to pay a monthly dues ranging from \$6 (\$72 a year), depending on income.¹⁰ Members are allowed to retain an additional membership in a different union (i.e. AFL-CIO). There is only one paid member of the union –that being the elected Chairperson.

We contend that this organization is *potentially* capable of being a strong force within the labor movement and within the movement towards social revolution generally. It is non-sectarian, although it's implied politics clearly favor that of anarcho-syndicalism. Its focus upon the obvious struggles of the worker, in the workplace, make it potentially appealing to a wide range of working class persons. Its acceptance of members who hold an additional membership within another union makes it an organization with potential to enter the political arena of the large unions such as the UAW and Teamsters. In many regards the IWW has the ability to act as a powerful gateway organization between the anarchist federations and the 13,000,000 union members throughout the U.S. Also, its primary function of organizing non-unionized workplaces holds the potential to bring more working class persons into the organized ranks of the movement.

We recognize that some anarchists from within the federations may assert that the IWW, as syndicalists of a certain stripe, hold certain ideological differences with certain tendencies within anarcho-communist groups. Here we would counter with the claim that the social revolution, as well as the free society which emerges through this struggle, will take on many forms within the general parameters of direct democracy and socialism. Certain regions, or even certain industries, will come to organize themselves along lines which are consistent with the basic notions of anarchism and which best meet the challenges of their particular circumstances. Therefore, we do not see the slight ideological differences between the various anti-authoritarian-socialist organizations as problematic inasmuch as we view them as healthy differences within a united yet diverse movement.

As a potential gateway organization, the federated anarchist collectives should approach the IWW in the same ways (as recommended above) that we approach ARA. We should help build chapters where there are none, and we should have a select number of dual members who join

¹⁰ The \$6 rate is for those making less than \$1000 a month. There is a sub-minimal dues rate of \$3 a month, but this is only approved for select cases.

locals. In turn, the IWW, while maintaining their first priority of organizing the unorganized, should begin to *place* select IWW members within the larger unions. Ideally each IWW chapter would have *at least* one member also being a rank and file member of a larger union, and another member joining a larger union in the role of a staff organizer. In the same way that we advocate ARA developing stronger inroads to the social justice movement, we see the IWW as a means to develop a continuum between the anarchist federations and the broadest elements of the organized labor movement.

Developing such connections with the mass union rank and file is unquestionably a required task that needs to be carried out. We all recognize the official leadership of the large unions as bureaucrats who, more than often, place their interests as powerful figures within the status quo above the best interests of the working class as a whole. Before and since Seattle, these power brokers have been turning 10,000s out into the streets in order to demand 'fair trade' and 'a seat at the table' (meaning representatives on such capitalist organizations as the World Trade Organization). When and if this moderate request is granted by the plutocracy, it must be expected that the 'leaders' of these unions will make an effort to gain the complacency their members. No longer will they be officially mobilized for mass actions against the economic structures of capitalism. No longer will they be officially agitated on the issues of neo-liberalism. Their leaders will seek normalization of the relations between capital and labor. They will attempt to deliver stability as the price for more power within the framework of ruling class homogeneity. We must plan now for this eventuality and we must find ways to limit the ability of the bureaucrats to turn back the tide of social unrest. When these leaders call on workers not to attend demonstrations, we must have other voices ostensibly from within their ranks who can out shout the conservative hierarchy. We see this as a task well cutout for the IWW.

However, the fact that the IWW is maybe 99,000 members smaller than they were before World War I, and the fact that they only officially represent a tiny number of small workplaces, makes this organization a questionable ally with a seemingly dead end trajectory. This being said, we would argue that with some slight internal modification this organization could quickly experience a full renaissance. First of all, the organization needs to win a big victory. It cannot wait for its bread and butter to walk upon the plate. It needs to identify a *larger* nonunion workplace of maybe 1200 employees with optimal conditions for organizing. Once this target is found, at least 75% of its resources, over the course of a year, should be geared to win this victory. Such a large win, in addition nearly doubling membership, would massively increase the economic abilities of the organization, effectively generating thousands of dollars a week for the union; which in turn could be used on massive educational campaigns and additional union drives.

However, for such a victory to be turned into a sustainable success we recommend that the IWW repeal its current policy of not automatically deducting union dues out of each paycheck. The system they currently operate under, that of voluntarily handing over dues to the local shop steward, suits its present conditions of only representing small workplaces. But once those numbers grow into the thousands, it would seem advisable to do so automatically in order to maintain efficiency and to guarantee a more or less set income every week. The resulting economic stability would seem to better serve a sustained mass organizing drive – *the kind of which our times absolutely demand*.

Another retarding factor regarding the IWW growth is its policy of requiring a set monthly dues from all card carrying members – regardless of whether or not they are presented by the union or active members within a local chapter. These dues are seen by many poor and working

class persons, who are not officially represented by the union, as a means by which to throw away some much needed cash that could better be spent on food and rent. The minimum dues of \$72 annually is a lot of money for a person making \$9000 a year. If the IWW did away with the economic requirement it would not be surprising to see their membership grow by 2000 from this change alone in a single year; all told it is conceivable that it could reach a total of 10,000 within five years. But here of course the question becomes 'if these potential members are not in a represented workplace and if they are not politically active within a local chapter, then why bother considering them members of an organization they do not take an active role within?' Here we have to understand that the social revolution is not simply a political question demanding political activity. It is first and foremost a social question, and with that the question of social identity becomes a major factor. For ultimately the social revolution, as mapped out by Mikhail Bakunin, requires the development of a class consciousness among the great majority of laborers. Without the development of such no political revolution will arise out of the masses that carries with it the broader social aspirations of a classless, stateless, free society. And with the above in mind, we view it as a positive thing if a worker comes to identify him/herself as one who supports the world view of leftwing syndicalism –and namely that of the IWW. The moment of such a self-realization is a moment of which class consciousness, ever so slightly, advances. And with that, this new identity should be supported through the incorporation of that worker into the larger community of the radical left. To give that person an IWW union card would, at the very minimum, help further the physiological grounding of that person as one that sees themselves on the radical left. And here, even if that worker does not take an active role within the broader IWW, it can be expected that s/he will at least talk about her/his views with other workers and friends, and in kind educate them about the organization in which s/he is a member. This activity can be expected to result in more workers becoming interested in the IWW and some may even join, and others may even start an active local chapter. Thus even the way in which a worker comes to identify her/himself bares with it the potential to further the growth of class consciousness –as well as, in the long run, increasing the operational effectiveness of the radical left as a whole.

If the IWW does not make these changes or develop a different means by which it can demonstrate a sustained growth and influence within the broader labor movement, we must be prepared to modify the above recommendations. For if the union fails to emerge as a significant force within labor, then it may become necessary for the federations to limit their interaction with the IWW in favor of helping develop independent anarchist labor unions. In a word, either the wheel we have will work, or, regrettably, we must reinvent the fucking thing.

Conclusion

The above has been presented in order to better frame the question as to how the emerging anarchist community can disseminate a revolutionary disposition among the broadest elements of the working class and social justice movement as a whole. We recognize that some persons/collectives will charge us with putting the cart before the horse (so to speak). This, in that we advocate building semi-formal relations throughout the broadest aspects of the left in order to effectively carry out a North American anarchist strategy which does not sufficiently exist. However, we see such structure as being necessary to construct prior to or simultaneously with the construction of such a plan of action. For any such plan would wither away in its own isolation within the anarchist ghetto if it is not allowed the social motion that this proposal, or a similar such model, would better allow for.

Of course we recognize that the above model must be allowed the space for general modifications within certain regions. In select areas it may make more sense to engage in gateway organizations other than ARA and the IWW. However, for the most part we believe that the above groups fit these roles well.

Finally, we would like to end this proposal by noting that while the language found throughout this document is political, and although we obviously view the formation of political organizations and the development of political strategies to be both necessary and positive, we do not and cannot understand the political struggle to be the be-all-and-end-all of the anarchist movement. On the contrary, we see this struggle as being fundamentally of a social kind, and as such we understand the struggle towards revolution to be largely of a cultural sort. We see capitalism and all authoritarian systems as manifestations of a culture of death and oppression; *an anti-culture*. We see the developing anarchist movement, by enlarge, being the realization of the social revolution through the development of a working class counter-culture. And while the politics are an absolutely necessary facet of this struggle, we see them as representing no more than the skeleton of a complex and horizontal social fabric which can and will surmount the palisades of anti-culture.

“There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one that is hacking at the root.”

-Henry David Thoreau

In Solidarity,

The Black Heart Anarchist Collective,

The Midwest, North America

Building Union Power in AOT Year One: 2015 In Review (2016)

Provided by David Van Deusen,

Senior Union Representative-VSEA/AOT

January 1, 2016

AOT 2015 Highlights:

- All 61 Garages are Organized, with a Union Activist deployed in each (71 overall activists in the Garages including Labor Management Delegates, Stewards, Council Members, & official Garage/Union Contacts);
- 180 Acts of collective Union activism recorded in the Garages, including participation in the Fight Back Rally (AOT composed 20% of the VSEA members in attendance), the ‘Fight Back’ Petition (AOT accounted for 19.6% of the signatures), the ‘Dignity & Respect’ Petition (AOT accounted for 36% of the signatures), the ‘Garage Workers United For A Fair Contract’ Petition (this petition was signed by 50 Union leaders in the Garages on behalf of their co-workers, and marked the only utilized petition in support of NMU Bargaining for 2015), the AOT March on The Boss (which was conducted by Garage workers, using their Annual Leave, when the State failed to show up to negotiate on AOT issues during Bargaining);
- AOT Membership has grown consistently in each quarter, 105 new members overall in VTrans, 64 new members in the Garages. Garages now have 77.48% total Union Membership, surpassing VSEA overall;



Vermont AOT Plow Truck During Winter Storm

- Majority of new AOT hires recruited as Union Members;
- 2016 NMU Contract Gains have been secured via TOK (\$25 increase to Boot Reimbursement, \$1 increase to Tool Pay), or are likely to be achieved (\$100 increase to Snow Pay, Full Pay for those on Workers Comp For Lyme Disease);
- \$250 Winter Retention Bonus (to be paid to Garage workers in May 2016) secured (extra to the Contract -achieved through Labor Management Committee);
- Union Members now to serve on all Hiring Committees within AOT Operations, even for the hiring of AOT Managers (achieved through Labor Management Committee);
- No Terminations in the Garages in over 10 months;
- General Releases (as part of a Grievance or Disciplinary resolution) have, in essence, stopped as a common occurrence;
- All Garages have seen a visit from their Union Rep/Union Staff/Union Leader;

Overview:

On January 1, 2015, upon the request of AOT (Operations) Labor Management Chair, Jason Heath, & (former) Vice Chair, Art Aulis, (and with the support of then VSEA President, Shelley Martin) VSEA implemented a pilot project whereby one Union Representative (myself, David

Van Deusen) would assume responsibility for all of (Non-Management) Agency of Transportation/VTrans.¹¹ AOT was afforded this opportunity, in part, because with 1000+ workers (Non-Management & Supervisory Unit), it represents the largest group in VSEA (15.48% of the Union) and often has its own issues specific to its own distinct working conditions. The decision whether to make this pilot project permanent will, presumably, be made by the VSEA Executive Director and/or VSEA Board of Trustees, based on the achievement of clear benchmarks, goals, and the proven ability of AOT to be a more effective aspect of VSEA. It is the contention of this report that this project is a success, and should be made permanent. It is also the contention of this report that aspects of this project would be well suited for other groupings within VSEA; especially those groupings which share a collective workplace identity (like within AOT), and/or those which are organized as their own Bargaining Unit (like Corrections & State Colleges). It is my intent to allow the case to be made for such reform within the broader VSEA via the objective achievement metrics in relation to the benchmarks set out on January 1, 2015, and, where the data is available, as compared to the overall performance of the VSEA in similar categories over the last year.

The Context:

At the start of this past year, I provided the VSEA Field Services Director a document entitled "AOT Goals and Benchmarks-2015." This document was crafted by myself, in cooperation with AOT Union leaders (Labor Management Delegates & Stewards), and was approved as a guiding document by the Field Services Director. What follows is a fact/numbers based comparison to the 'one year' goals articulated in this document, in relation to what was actually achieved as of January 1, 2016. One will notice that the primary focus of this report is within the AOT subgrouping of Operations. Operations (which includes plow truck drivers, mechanics, etc.) represents the largest subgrouping within AOT (515 workers). Because of this group's size, its visibility, the crucial nature of its focus of labor (keeping the roads open), and because these workers are located (more or less) evenly throughout the State (in 60+ Garage/worksites), it was decided that Operations would receive acute attention by VSEA for the duration of this pilot project. However, where notable activity has been recorded in other aspects of AOT/VTrans (such as within DMV), it is also included in this report.

It needs to also be plainly stated that setting numerical targets concerning such topics as worksite visits, recruitment of Union activists, etc., is in-and-of-itself meaningless; here *meaning only arises through the context of outcomes*. In other words, the number of worksite visits, the number of self-identified 'Union Activists', etc., does not matter if these efforts (and numbers) do not result in (positive) measurable outcomes concerning increases in effective Union activity and other tangible results; bottom line, we must consistently ask ourselves if the efforts we put into a project produce results and in fact contribute to *building a more powerful member lead Union*. The measurables which provide this context, roughly, can be understood as:

- Ability of AOT/VSEA to meet defined activist goals;
- Ability of AOT/VSEA to deliver tangible Contract improvements;
- Improving membership/fee payer numbers;
- Ability of AOT/VSEA to improve Representational outcomes/processes.

¹¹ 2017 Note From The Author: This report was first provided to VSEA Union Officers & senior staff in 2016.

Therefore, what follows will first be a short outline of some general points, followed by an objective assessment of numerical targets ('structure building'). After this will be a summary of activist data and a Bargaining update. These more meaningful measurables will provide the context through which the target numbers can be properly understood (as having a positive impact or not). Where activist outcomes and Bargaining goals are viewed favorably, this should reflect positively upon the efforts that were undertaken to provide the structure to achieve these goals. An unfavorable view of these outcomes must call into question the cost/benefit associated with these meta-tasks. In addition, membership levels also need to play a role in understanding the effectiveness of the total effort, and therefore will be looked at further on in this document. Just as specific Union activity must weigh the likelihood that such actions contribute to a desired victory, such activity must also gage how and if that activity contributes to increasing the number of Union members. If two divergent roads can lead to victory, but one road carries the added benefit of increasing membership, it is down the path that leads to a broader membership that must be traveled. This must be the case insofar as the reader agrees that Union power, in a large part, extends or contracts based on a growing or stagnant membership base. And when a Union has a baseline membership of fewer than 80% (as does VSEA) stagnation is akin to the acceptance of a general weakness at worst or an unfulfilled potential at best. Therefore, understanding the effectiveness of this AOT project, it is crucial to look at the metrics, the outcomes, *and* the membership trends. And finally, Contract gains as supported by activism and membership growth is only as good as a Union's ability to enforce those gains. Hence a section of this work will also address Representational outcomes over the past year. It is towards these topics which I shall now turn.

I. Emerging Culture/Rank and File Leadership:

Immediately preceding this pilot project, VSEA Labor Educator, Tim Lench implemented a new and innovative training model; on a quarterly basis all AOT (Operations) Labor Management Delegates and AOT (Operations) Stewards would come together, as a group, for a joint training. This joint training, which has been implemented throughout the year, has allowed for the development of coordinated strategic discussions between all top AOT Union leaders. This ability for rank and file Union leaders to better define, articulate, and compare perceived workplace issues (as well as hear report backs from the Union Rep who regularly visits multiple Garages in different AOT Districts), has allowed this leadership to cooperatively develop (in consultation with their Union Rep and Labor Educator) coordinated responses to identified issues. By fostering such group discussions, and having the results of these discussions followed up upon through various actions, VSEA has provided for more ownership of Union actions by Union members. This coordinated body further requested that the VSEA-AOT Union Rep provide them with detailed monthly reports concerning Grievance/Investigation/Issue/ activity in the Garages by AOT District, as well as updates concerning the carrying out of Union actions agreed upon at these quarterly trainings (and as may become necessary in-between these meetings). This request has been fulfilled. Providing these reports builds accountability between VSEA staff and member/leaders, puts extra sets of eyes on accumulated data (where additional patterns may be deciphered), and creates an environment of transparency & trust. The reports further aid in the collective task of measuring progress every 30 days.

As an additional tool aiding in the building AOT Operations into a more effective aspect of VSEA, a mapping-tracking document is maintained and regularly updated. This document, in

excel spreadsheet form, lists every workplace, their membership numbers (over time), Union activists by Garage, Grievance/Investigation/result information by Garage, last Garage visit, activism, etc.. Maintaining a centralized depository for this information saves VSEA staff time when seeking to understand trends, rationalizing/prioritizing worksite visits, reaching out to key Union activists, etc.. This document further allows the VSEA the security of knowing that this information can rapidly be imparted to a new Union Rep, Organizer, etc., as needed in the absence of any one incumbent. The use of such mapping documents are common in other Unions (although presently are not utilized in other sections of VSEA). This document was initially developed by myself and former VSEA Organizing Director Kristin Warner (with technical support from VSEA Admin Nick Stein and VSEA Operations Director Ray Stout), and was later modified to meet the developing needs of this specific pilot project. The original intent of creating such mapping documents were for use in every VSEA Rep territory. However, this goal has since dissipated within VSEA.

In summation, the joint quarterly trainings have consistently been carried out, and the agreed upon monthly reports consistently have been provided to AOT (Operations) Union leadership (as well as the VSEA President, Vice President, Executive Director, and Director of Field Services). The comprehensive AOT (Operations) mapping/tracking document is also consistently maintained and updated and is used as a tool for VSEA Reps and Organizers.

II. Concerning AOT Union Structure and Outreach

The following section looks at the efforts and structures that were put in place by VSEA in order to achieve a higher level of participation and effectiveness within AOT. In-and-of-itself, these efforts only have meaning in relation to measurable outcomes and overall membership growth. Such measurable outcomes will be reviewed later in this document.

Building AOT Operations Labor Management Committee:

- 1/1/15 Starting Point: AOT Operations Labor Management had 5 AOT Districts represented on the Committee (plus Central Garage & Bridge Crew), with a total of 7 Labor Team members [note that AOT Operations consists of 8 Districts, Central Garage, and Bridge Crew];
- 1/1/16 Goal: Number Of Districts with Labor Management Delegate: 8 (10 Total/One Per District + Central Garage and Bridge Crew);
- 1/1/16 (One Year Measure): 7 Districts Represented (+ Central Garage), 11 Labor Management Delegates [with 2 alternates serving in the absence of Delegates from District 3 and Bridge Crew and a Chairman who represents the Garages overall] (fell short of annual goal by lacking D1 and Bridge Crew Representation, but surpassed goal for total member participation);
- Growth in this category was achieved through development of the Garage Contact system (see below) whereby Garage Contacts are asked to nominate LM team members, as well as by staff Garage visits, and through demonstrated success of the existing Labor Management Committee. By tracking Union activity VSEA staff was further able to identify reliable activists in the Districts for recruitment (as was the case with the recent recruitment of

a District 1 Delegate). Note: Labor Management Minutes are shared with rank and file directly by VSEA staff via email, and in print via the Garage Contacts-who print them and post them on Union bulletin boards. They are also printed in the Management AOT Operations News Letter, and, upon request of Labor, forwarded directly to Managers.

Building A Robust AOT Steward System:

- 1/1/15 Starting Point: AOT Operations Stewards existed in all but one AOT District;
- 1/1/16 Goal: Number Of Districts With At Least One Steward: 8 (Minimum One Per District);
- **1/1/16 (One Year Measure): 7 Districts have at least 1 Steward, 10 Total AOT Operations Stewards (increased number of Garage Stewards, but D1 remains open);**
- New efforts to recruit new Stewards have been conducted through Garage Contact system, by VSEA staff visits, via a question on an AOT specific Bargaining Survey, and by the VSEA Labor Educator. Tracking activity by Garage, and making positive assumptions regarding relevant Garage Contacts has also allowed VSEA to more rationally recruit potential Stewards (as was the case with the recent targeted recruitment of a new Steward in AOT District 7). AOT Operations now has a healthy ratio of approximately 1 Steward for every 50 workers.

AOT Participation in VSEA Council:

- 1/1/15 Starting Point: 3 AOT Operations Members served on VSEA Council (AOT is allotted 10 Council seats);
- 1/1/16 Goal: Number Of AOT Operations Council Members: 10;
- **1/1/16 (One Year Measure): In AOT Operations all allotted Council Seats have been filled, plus 2 additional Council Seats attained through Chapter elections. 12 AOT Operations workers now serve on Council (surpassed one year goal);**
- Growth in this category was achieved through discussions resulting in volunteers at seasonal meetings of AOT Stewards and Labor Management Delegates, and with reliable Garage Contacts. It needs to also be noted that as AOT workers witness and participate in meaningful ways to build their own power and achieve specific victories, it becomes more likely that workers will consider engaging in their Union on broader levels such as with on Council. In a word, engagement breeds engagement, and success breeds success.

Recruiting New AOT Operations Union Activists/Organizing Garages:

- 1/1/15 Starting Point: 11 Garages had identified Union activists;
- 1/1/16 Goal: Number Of Worksites/Garages In Operations (Out of 60+) With Identified Union Activists (Council, Stewards, Labor Management, Garage Contacts): 22 (Double 1/1/15 Numbers);

- **1/1/16 (One Year Measure):** *All 61 Garages are now organized*; there are now 52 Garage Contacts, 11 Labor Management Delegates, 10 Stewards, 12 Council members, & 1 member of the NMU Bargaining Team; this makes 71 Union activists in the Garages (as some activists hold multiple positions/roles). These 71 Union activists each understand themselves as also serving as Contract Captains while Bargaining is underway between the VSEA and the State. All told this represents 60 new Union activists over the last year recruited and deployed from within AOT (greatly surpassed/more than tripled one year goal);
- Four VTrans-NMU Contract Captains, from outside AOT Operations, have also been identified and recruited by VSEA Organizers (3 from DMV, 1 from AOT Program Development). In total AOT/VTrans has 75 Contract Captains, representing 52.82% of all current VSEA Contract Captains (total of 142);
- Central to growth in this area has been VSEA staff visits to Garages. When a Garage is visited that has no official Union Contact, VSEA staff asks all the assembled workers, together, who should serve in this role. Typically all the workers will nominate one person to serve. This volunteer, before agreeing, is clearly informed that this role will mean they will be responsible for keeping their co-workers informed on issues, will print VSEA-AOT communications and place them on the Union bulletin board, and will be tasked facilitating Union activity in the Garage as needed (i.e. petition signatures, attending a rally, etc.). Potential Garage Contacts are also made known that being nominated or selected to serve their Union and co-workers in this position is an honor. In addition, District AOT Union leaders have greatly aided in identifying and recruiting Garage Contacts. Also note that these Garage Contacts are regularly provided these written updates on unfolding Union issues directly from their Union Rep, which they are expected to print and share with their co-workers (point being—if we recruit new activists it is important to give them something to do or they will inevitable fade way)

Communicating Union Struggles/Imparting Union Values:

- 1/1/15 Starting Point: previous, targeted communications, Union updates, etc., was not provided to AOT workers beyond those that go to all VSEA members and fee payers;
- 1/1/16 Goal: While this was not a specific category in the Goals & Benchmarks document, AOT Union leaders made it clear to their Union Rep that their expectation was that their Rep would keep them intimately informed about unfolding Union issues;
- **1/1/16 (One Year Measure):** Union Rep (and AOT Union leaders) crafted and provided AOT specific communications on emerging Union issues throughout the year. Such communications were provided to the Garage Contacts, who in turn printed them and posted them in the Garages (met one year goal);
- Topics for these communications were an April 11 Fight Back Rally report back, a recap of our victory in keeping the Contract closed (and heading off mass layoffs), the workings of the Retirement Incentive, AOT specific Bargaining updates, the need to build 100% Union membership in the Garages, and a recruitment document for the AOT Rapid Response

Team –to be discussed in Section VII. On two occasions the Union Rep also worked with rank & file AOT Union leaders (activist Ed Olsen, Mendon Garage & AOT Bargaining Team Delegate and Steward Art Aulis, Derby & Westfield Garage) to assist them in laying out communications to AOT members (both on the Governors want to open the Contract and/or threat to cut jobs). [The Olson letter was first printed as op-ed in various newspapers, and was later adopted as a posted AOT Union communication. This op-ed was widely circulated in VT, and ranked as one of all the all-time most ‘liked’ posts on the VSEA Facebook page.] Throughout the year these communications were provided to Garage Contacts who in turn printed them, and posted them in the Garage. All communications were tailored specifically to AOT Garage workers.

Union Worksite Visits:

- 1/1/15 Starting Point: VSEA did not previously track Garage visits (although numerous Garages expressed that they had not seen a Union Rep in “4-6 years”);
- 1/1/16 Goal: Number Of Garage/Worksite Visits (in Operations) Over Coming Year: 52;
- **1/1/16 (One Year Measure): 107 Garage visits to 63 distinct Garages/worksites have been done in AOT Operations since January 1, 2015. Every Garage has been visited by VSEA staff/leadership (more than doubled one year goal);**
- Since the first of the year the VSEA Union Rep has also made 6 visits to other various VTrans/DMV worksites.
- VSEA-AOT Union Rep has set time aside, each month, to focus visits in a select AOT District. Union Rep seeks to coordinate with VSEA Organizers in order to not unnecessarily duplicate visits. Worksite (staff) visits are and remain critical to building a stronger, more responsive VSEA. Through these site visits Union Rep is able to hear concerns from members that go beyond pure Contract enforcement, and in turn those concerns which are heard in multiple Garages are then brought to AOT Union leaders (Labor Management Delegates & Stewards). And here Union leaders are able to weigh in on these issues and, where appropriate, are able to work with their Union Rep in crafting a plan of action to address them. The successful effort to have Union workers serve on Hiring Committees (discussed in more detail in Section III) is a direct example of how site visits can and do lead to concerted Union activity which is relevant to members. In brief, it is the workers themselves who know the issues, and it is the workers themselves who should set the activist agenda.

Section Summary (Building Union Structure)

- **AOT Operations Labor Management Committee: 11 Delegates;**
- **AOT Garage Stewards: 10 (Aprx 1 Steward For Every 50 Workers);**
- **VSEA Council: 12 Council Members (All AOT Seats Filled);**
- **Garage Contacts: 52;**

- Total Garage Activists: 71;
- Organized Garages: All;
- Staff/Union Worksite Visits To AOT Operations Garages: 107
- Total VTrans/AOT Contract Captains (Includes All AOT Operations Labor Management Delegates, Stewards, Council Members, Garage Contacts, + Designated Contract Captains Outside AOT Operations But Within VTrans): 75 (Accounting For 52.82% of All VSEA Contract Captains).

III. Measures of Success Concerning AOT Union Activism

What precedes this section are the efforts and structures that were pursued and put in place by VSEA in order to achieve a higher level of participation and effectiveness within AOT. What follows are the measurable results of these efforts. If the below outcomes are viewed as favorable (in conjunction with membership trends), then the meta-efforts must also be viewed as favorable. On the contrary, if the below is viewed as unfavorable or otherwise not standing up to expectations, than the meta-efforts that went into creating these outcomes must be critically rethought. Immediately below will be a synopsis of activist engagement conducted through and by the AOT Operations Labor Management Committee, followed by a more general outline of activist engagement throughout 2015:

AOT Operations Labor Management/Worksite Organizing Goals:

- District Stewards 15 Minutes Of Time With All New Hires Carried Out (Member Lead);
- **This ability was established through the AOT Operations Labor Management Committee. This system has been implemented in the month of June. Stewards are now informed of new hires (by their Union Rep-Union Rep in turn is notified regularly of new hires by VSEA Secretary Laurie Hassett) in their Districts, and can/are expected to use Steward Time to meet with these workers to inform them about their Union, and have a Union Card presented to them for their signature. In some instances Union Rep will alternatively (or in conjunction with AOT District Steward) also notify the local Garage Contact, and have the Garage Contact seek to sign up new worker as a Union member. Point being, an effort is made to have a rank & file Union member approach every new hire in AOT Operations and seek to sign them up as members. [Note: AOT Steward Seth Perry, Rutland Garage, should be especially recognized for his diligent and successful efforts to sign up new members in AOT District 3.] While VSEA (excluding AOT/VTrans) has only converted 33.78% of new hires in 2015 into Union members (177 members compared to 347 fee payers), AOT Operations has a membership rate for 2015 new hires of 64.44% (29 members & 16 fee payers).¹² While 30.66 percentage points higher than the rest of VSEA, it should be noted that anything under an 80% sign up rate should not be considered sufficient. Hence there is more we can build on concerning this process (one year goal met).**

¹² These figures include two known AOT Garage workers who were hired in 2015, were recruited to the Union, but later resigned from State employment (for personal reasons). These figures additionally include workers who are

- In VTrans overall, 51.55% of new hires have become Union members in 2015 (50 members 47 fee payers); 17.77 percentage points higher than for the rest of VSEA, excluding VTrans. Outside of AOT Operations, where we do not have in place the ability for Stewards to meet with new workers while using their Steward Time, and where we do not have a developed system of workplace contacts (yet), the Union Rep makes a point of sending an email to new hires explaining the basics of the Union, why it's important to join, and a link is provided to the online membership application.
- Labor Liaison To AOT Training Center Communicates With Rank & File, And Brings Thoughts/Concerns To Training Center At Least Twice In The Year Via Official Sit Down Meeting (and Meetings Reported Back to VSEA Union Rep -Member Lead);
- This position was created through the AOT Operations Labor Management Committee. To date, AOT-LM appointed one member of LM to serve in this role, Nick Davis (out of The Fort). He has had one meeting with Training Center Management, and reported back to the AOT-VSEA leadership at the spring training (AOT Stewards & LM Delegates). In December 2015, this Liaison had a training survey emailed to Garage workers, the results of which he will discuss with Management at an upcoming Labor Management Committee meeting (Liaison carried out task once for year, not twice, but program continues forward fruitfully).
- District Management Meetings Regularly Include Local Stewards/Labor Management Delegates (and Stewards/Delegates Report Meetings Back To VSEA-Member Lead);
- This ability was created through the AOT Operations Labor Management Committee. This process was further clarified in June through discussions between Labor and Management, and was implemented in fall, 2015. The goal here is to have AOT Union Stewards/Labor Management Delegates address issues with AOT District Management at the District level, to seek a resolve before it needs to go to the Statewide Labor Management Committee. Union leaders have been made aware of this tool, and thus far it was invoked, once, in AOT District 2, by AOT LM Delegate Brian Labounty, Dummerston Garage (one year goal met).
- Dummerston Garage (District 2) Labor Management (Pilot Project) Takes Root, and Local (Garage) Labor Managements Expanded To Minimum of Three Districts (Member Lead);
- This effort has largely been unsuccessful in the Dummerston Garage and is presently on hold overall. Here the idea was to have rank and file NMU-AOT Union leaders address workplace issues with the Garage Forman (Supervisory Unit) at the local Garage level (once a month), and resolve issues before they grow unnecessarily large and need to be addressed at the AOT District level (via AOT Stewards/Labor Management Delegates). However, in Union strong Garages this process is occurring informally anyway. This goal will be considered, as opportunities arise, in 2016, but will not likely be a priority. It is of interest to highlight that the idea for this potential innovation came directly from

known to the AOT Union Rep to have signed Union Cards or filled out the online membership application but who do not yet appear as members in the VSEA database.

the Union Rep, as opposed to the workers themselves. While the idea was supported by AOT Union leaders, support was mild. Suffice to say that the failure of this idea to take root should not be surprising as it was not an idea that grew out of the organic concerns and ideas of the workers themselves (one year goal not met).

- Secure Rank & File/Union Participation on Local Hiring Committees (Effort Staff Supported, Outcome Will be Member Lead);
- Union Rep (at Garage visits) repeatedly heard that workers perceived the hiring process as unfair and not transparent. Therefore an effort was launched through the Labor Management Committee (with D9's Barton Garage and LM Delegate Alain Pion in the vanguard) to achieve worker (Union) participation in the hiring process. In the fall of 2015 this was achieved. The Standard Operating Procedure of AOT Operations is now to secure the participation of a classified worker, one who has typically taken the 'Interview' class at the AOT Training Center, in every hiring committee up to and including those convened for hiring Managers. Hiring Committees make recommendations concerning new hires. Union Rep has conveyed to members that the VSEA expects them to report the results of these hiring's (did the person who was hired line up with the Committee recommendation?) to their Steward or Rep. Union Rep now, in turn, tracks these results in the AOT Operations mapping/tracking document in order to keep an eye out for patterns specific to Districts. This information may help inform future dialogue concerning hiring/promotion issues within this section of AOT. At any rate, establishing this as the SOP provides a meaningful avenue for member input and a rank and file perspective into a process which carries a direct bearing upon their working lives; namely who will be their boss, and who they will labor alongside of (one year goal, as it emerged throughout the year, met).
- Improve Retention & Recruitment of Garage Workers:
- While not specifically listed in the Goals and Benchmarks document, it has been known that retention of quality workers and recruitment of quality employees has been a difficult challenge in recent years within the Garages. Previous to the scope of this review document, the AOT Operations Labor Management Committee, under the Labor leadership of Chairman Jason Heath, Georgia Garage, repeatedly discussed this issue with Management. Management understands this as an acute challenge, especially with increasingly competitive wages being paid to road crews by the towns.¹³ This issue came to a head this fall when over 35 Garage positions remained unfilled on the eve of Snow Season. Therefore, Labor Management Delegates advocated for a one time retention and sign on bonus above and beyond economic incentives provided for within the Contract. Management agreed. As a result, Management implemented a \$250 Winter Retention Bonus (paid to classified Garage Union workers in May, 2016, and technically considered a merit bonus). Management also implemented a \$1000 Sign-On Bonus for new

¹³ An additional result of this Labor Management discussion was a commitment from Management & Labor to look at factual data regarding the wages and salaries of town road crews with thought to how this may create challenges to AOT retention and recruitment. These figures, and possible action items, will be discussed further at future Labor Management Committee meetings in 2016.

hires (to classified positions) who are in possession of a valid CDL. Indications are that the number of applicants for AOT Garage positions are on the rise as a result (one year goal, as it emerged throughout the year, met).

Recorded Activism With AOT Operations & By Garage:

- With nominal exceptions, all instances of recorded Activism have been facilitated by a Garage Contact, Steward, Labor Management Delegate, etc., after being asked to do so by their Union Rep and/or Organizer (utilizing Garage visits, phone calls, emails, and text messages). What is significant is that *it has not been VSEA staff directly asking workers to sign petitions, etc., but rather fellow rank and file Union leaders who have asked their co-workers to take action;*
- 1/1/16 Specific Acts of Union Activism have been recorded in 54 different Garages;
- 1/1/16 A total of 180 distinctive examples of activism have been recorded (Note: These are recorded by Garage, not by individual; i.e. five workers in one Garage who attend a rally, counts as a single example of activism);
- Of these 180, An All-Garage Conference Call (kicking off the Fight Back Campaign), the Fight Back Petition (circulated and returned to VSEA by Garage leaders), the April 11th Fight Back Rally, the Dignity & Respect Petition (circulated and returned to VSEA by Garage leaders), the Garage Workers United For A Fair Contract Petition (which was delivered by AOT Stewards to Management & the Administration), and the AOT March on The Boss account for 145 of these recorded acts (other acts ranging from participation in the May Day Rally to Fight Back LTEs to Phone banking in support of the April 11 Rally, etc., constitute the remainder);
- 15 Garages were on the AOT Fight Back Conference Call (which typically has all or many of the workers in one Garage listening on speaker phone –Winter, 2015);
- 12 Garages (plus DMV offices and other VTrans workers) had a presence at the April 11th Fight Back Rally [the Mendon Garage, working with VSEA Organizer Cecile Reuge, went the extra mile in taking part in a phone bank, out of their Garage, asking other area AOT workers to attend the rally. In addition, Mendon Garage worker, Ed Olson, severed as the primary rally speaker for VSEA.];
- 32 Garages circulated the Fight Back Petition (hard copy-paper format -Winter, 2015);
- 36 Garages circulated the Dignity & Respect Petition (hard copy-paper format -Summer, 2015);
- 42 Garages (50 AOT Union leaders) signed on to the Garage Workers United For A Fair Contract Petition (Fall, 2015);
- 14 Garages had members use Annual Leave to attend NMU Bargaining (on a day dedicated to AOT issues) or to previously March on The Boss (as related to Bargaining). This constitutes the only dedicated use of Annual Leave by VSEA members in order to further their

Bargaining priorities with the possible exception of a single Liquor Control Investigator and a single Game Warden [Note that a number of DMV Commercial Motor Vehicle Inspectors, acting upon the request of NMU Bargaining Team member and fellow DMV Inspector, Paul Beebe, also attended a relevant section of NMU Bargaining, which took place on the same day, but these VTrans workers were able to do so on-the-clock as their vehicles were being serviced at Central Garage. These DMV Commercial Motor Vehicle Inspectors came to show their support for a Bargaining proposal to create a condensed Step plan for those in Group C retirement plan in order to make it increasingly probable that an employee in Group C can reach their top Pay Grade before the forced Retirement at age 55].

Fight Back Petition:

- Of the names entered into the VSEA database (gathered from the petition), 19.6% of them were listed as from AOT/VTrans (not broken down by division or subgrouping) [Note: AOT/VTrans represents 15.48% of the total workers covered by VSEA CBAs]. AOT's disproportional effort on this aspect of the Fight Back campaign contributed to the overall Fight Back victory whereby no Contracts were opened, and whereby hundreds of threatened job cuts were avoided.

April 11th Fight Back Rally:

- Of the identified VSEA participants in the rally, 20% were from AOT/VTrans, including a significant contingent from the Randolph Garage (including Foreman Jerold Kinney & Garage Contact David Lambert). AOT's disproportional effort on this aspect of the Fight Back campaign contributed to the overall Fight Back victory whereby no Contracts were opened, and whereby hundreds of threatened job cuts were avoided.

Dignity & Respect Petition:

- Of the names entered into the VSEA database (gathered from the petition), 36% of them were listed as from AOT/VTrans (not broken down by division or subgrouping) [Note: although this petition was launched in the summer of 2015, VSEA has yet to utilize it in support of its Bargaining efforts or otherwise. The Executive Director has indicated that it may be used in support of the passage of the Pay Act].

Garage Workers United For A Fair Contract -Petition:

- In the months leading up to NMU Bargaining AOT Union leaders endorsed the tactic of crafting an All-Garage petition in support of their Bargaining priorities (these included increases to Snow Pay, Tool Pay, Boot Reimbursement, and full pay for workers who go out on Workers Comp for Lyme Disease). The launch of this petition was delayed as the Dignity & Respect Petition remained open (and still does) and it was agreed that having two petitions circulating in the Garages at once was a bad idea. However, it became necessary to launch the AOT petition in late August in order to present the petition prior to the advanced stages of negotiations. But given the tight timeline, it was decided that only the Garage leaders would sign, on behalf of their co-workers, after they gained consensus

for the content of the petition from their Garage. All told, 50 Garage leaders representing 42 Garages signed, and the petition was delivered (in early September) to Transportation Secretary Sue Minter and AOT Operations Director Scott Rogers by AOT Stewards Jerry Comstock, Central Garage, & Nick Davis, The Fort.

September 19 AOT March on The Boss:

- Prior to September 19th it was previously agreed to by the State and the NMU Bargaining Team that both parties would sit down in order to seek to negotiate on AOT specific Bargaining proposals. It was also understood that a number of AOT workers (who are not on the NMU Bargaining Team) would use Annual Leave in order to attend these negotiations. Through Labor Management and through the NMU Bargaining Team, it was also made clear that VSEA would welcome the participation of AOT Operations Management at this meeting (which did in fact occur, but not until the following week). It was further agreed to at AOT Operations Labor Management that Upper-Management would communicate down the chain that pending no conflict with operational needs that Union workers seeking to attend these negotiations would not be denied Annual Leave. However, 24 hours before this meeting, the State unilaterally cancelled the meeting. VSEA responded to the State making it clear they were not agreeable to this cancellation and would be in the VSEA conference room at 10am, ready to Bargain. AOT workers were informed of the great likelihood that the State would be a no show, but were also informed that in that event an appropriate action would be carried out. The afternoon previous, VSEA staff (Union Rep and Organizing Department) crafted a contingency action plan which would be presented to AOT workers as needed. On the day in question, 10 AOT workers (from divergent Garages) came to Bargain; the State was a no show. These workers, with the full support of the AOT/NMU Bargaining Team Delegate, Art Aulis, adopted the plan to march on the boss in order to deliver the 'Garage Workers United For A Fair Contract' Petition (which was previously delivered by AOT Stewards to the Secretary of the Agency of Transportation) to the Governor's office as and to the Department of Human Resources, as well as to articulately express their dissatisfaction with the State for disrespecting them by not showing up. These workers elected to empower AOT worker Leavitt Sayer, Williamstown Garage, as their spokesperson. Phase two was to break into two groups (after the march on the boss); one group would flyer downtown State workers in Montpelier concerning the action (flyers were previously crafted by the VSEA Organizing Department), and the other group would head back to the Union Hall to call all the Garage Contacts asking them to inform their co-workers that the VSEA is requesting that workers call the Administration to express their displeasure with the State's failure to Bargain and to demand a fair Contract (this call request was supported by a VSEA-wide email, crafted by VSEA Communications Department, asking all Union members to do the same). All these tasks were carried out by AOT workers, and resulted in three media stories in VT newspapers (two being generally favorable to the Union, one unfavorable). It is also worth further noting that moments prior to the March On The Boss, the VSEA Executive Director (who was not present at the Union Hall) called in order to suggest that the workers consider standing down, in order to allow him an additional opportunity to call the Administration in order to seek to get the State to negotiate that day. This option was presented to the workers; it was unanimously

voted down and they (along with VSEA First Vice President Aimee Towne) marched. One week later VSEA and the State did in fact meet to Bargain AOT issues. AOT workers again used Annual Leave to be part of this. The result was a \$25 increase in Boot Reimbursement, a \$1 increase in Tool Pay, and no extension of Snow Season (as was being proposed by the State). The actions and results were reported back to Garage Contacts by VSEA Union Rep. Garage Contacts then informed workers. Feedback from AOT workers/leaders to the Union Rep on this action was overwhelmingly positive. Note that the Non-Management Unit was under no ground rule restrictions when this act was carried out.¹⁴

Section Summary (AOT Union Activism)

- AOT Operations Labor Management Committee Projects/Campaigns
- AOT Stewards Meet With New Hires: Implemented;
- AOT Labor Liaison Seeks Training Feedback From Workers/Meets with Training Center Management: Implemented;
- AOT LM Delegates/Stewards Meet With District Management On District Issues As Needed: Implemented;
- Local Labor Management Meetings Occur At Garage Level: Not Implemented;
- Union Secures Rank & File Seat On AOT Operations Hiring Committees: Achieved;
- Garage Retention Challenge Addressed: \$250 Retention Bonus Achieved.
- General AOT Operations Activist Stats
- Activism In Garages: 54 Garages Have Engaged In Union Building Activity;
- Total Collective Acts of Union Activism In Garages: 180.

IV. Bargaining Victories/Goals:

A central element of Union building activity is Bargaining Contract improvements, and defending those Contractual rights as may be challenged by Management at the table. In order to maximize success at the Bargaining table, and in order to build Union membership and power in the process, it is also advisable that members play a strong role in setting Bargaining priorities, and remain engaged in the Bargaining process as it unfolds. Having a skilled and experienced Lead Negotiator is also key. Here VSEA is fortunate to have Gary Hoadley serve in this role for

¹⁴ One aspect of the March On The Boss that proved to be controversial was the fact that the media did not simply find out about the action, but were directly informed about the action by VSEA staff, although without the apparent knowledge of the Executive Director. A media interview with the AOT spokesman gave an appearance that AOT members in NMU had knowledge of demands being pushed by the State upon the Supervisory Unit. The Supervisory Unit, unlike NMU, was operating under ground rules that prohibited public communication about Bargaining proposals without first providing 24 hours' notice. VSEA did not anticipate the media asking questions that, depending on the answer, could contribute to the AOT worker/spokesperson giving the appearance of this knowledge, and hence he was not prepped for such questions. Regardless, the State *did not* take any ULP actions.

both the Non-Management Unit (and for Corrections Unit). This section looks at our achievements thus far, this year, concerning AOT Bargaining priorities within the Non-Management Unit. Please refer to Section III, above, to better understand the rank & file activism which has been implemented in order to support these Bargaining priorities.

AOT-NMU Specific Bargaining Survey:

- This survey was included in the annual goals document. The Survey was created at the request (and with the participation) of the AOT Labor Management Delegates and AOT Stewards;
- **This Survey was completed by 34.2% of all AOT/VTrans workers within the Non-Management Unit, and was central to the creation of AOT Specific Bargaining Proposals, such as the proposed added protections against Lyme Disease (further referenced below) which ranked as the top safety concern (ahead of traffic) for Agency workers [Note: The Lyme Disease/Tick question made it on to the survey because of the strong concerns voiced by Garage Contact (and former Labor Management Delegate) Jon Leonard, Lyndon Garage];**
- Survey was initially made available in print form to all AOT workers in Operations. Stacks were sent directly to Garage Contacts (with SAE). Later, an online version was created and repeatedly made available to all AOT/VTrans workers through direct emails from VSEA Staff and via a link provided in WIA. By comparison, the general NMU Bargaining Survey had 12% of its total Unit complete their survey.

AOT/NMU Bargaining So Far:

- Based on the results of the AOT specific Bargaining Survey, the NMU Bargaining Team (through AOT Bargaining Delegate Art Aulis) proposed the following when Contract Negotiations opened in early fall:
- **Snow Pay up 4% a year every year henceforth;**
- **Tool Pay up 4% a year every year henceforth;**
- **Boot Reimbursed up 4% a year every year henceforth;**
- **Secure Contract language guaranteeing Snow Pay to job classes that do not plow (but support road clearing activity);**
- **Full (not half) Snow Pay for workers who ‘volunteer’ to be on Snow Season Status, but who do not otherwise automatically qualify for Snow Pay;**
- **Full Pay for workers out on Workers Comp due to Lyme Disease;**
- As negotiations progressed the following has thus far been achieved via TOK:
- **Boot Reimbursement up \$25 (to \$175 a year);**
- **Tool Pay up \$1 (to \$18 a paycheck).**

- As negotiations are heading out of Mediation and into Fact Finding, it appears likely that AOT will also achieve:
- \$100 increase to Snow Pay (\$2100 a winter);
- Key Job Classes who do not plow (but have related responsibilities) will be secure in receiving Snow Pay;
- Full Pay for AOT workers out on Workers Comp for Lyme disease.
- However, it is now reasonable to also project that we will *not* achieve:
- An automatic ‘escalator’ effect on Snow Pay, Tool Pay, Boot Reimbursement;
- Full Snow Pay (not half) for those that volunteer for Snow Season Status.
- Furthermore, the State continues to bring forward proposals (to Fact Finding) that would do harm to AOT (and NMU) workers. And of course the outcome to the overall negotiations are still in question. The harmful State proposals include:
- 0% Cola in year 1;
- Dismantling of the OT Article;
- Elimination of most Union Leave Time.
- AOT Bargaining efforts, as described above, have been supported by the Garage Workers United For A Fair Contract Petition, the March on The Boss, by member phone calls being placed to the Administration (in relation to the March on the Boss), by a number of AOT/VTrans workers attending Bargaining on the day dedicated to AOT proposals, by one All-Garage Conference Call, and by the receiving and posting of regular AOT specific Bargaining updates from their Union Rep above and beyond what is typically provided to non-AOT Contract Captains by the NMU Bargaining Team¹⁵; all of this has been sustained and circulated by Garage Contacts/AOT Contract Captains.

Broad AOT Bargaining Priorities for NMU:

- AOT workers (who of course are part of the Non-Management Unit) also have emphasized broader Bargaining priorities that would apply to and affect the entire Unit. These are:
- **Fair COLA;**
- **Maintain regular pay Steps;**
- **Maintain current Benefits;**
- **Establish binding third party Arbitration as Step IV of the Grievance Procedure (presently Step IV goes to the Vermont Labor Relations Board).**

¹⁵ Note that AOT Bargaining Team Delegate, Art Aulis, has given his support and encouragement for these updates.

- As negotiations now move out of Mediation and into Fact Finding, it is reasonable to project that the regular pay Steps will be maintained. However, uncertainty, especially given the political climate, still exists concerning what will be achieved (for good or bad) beyond that.
- The top Bargaining priority for DMV Commercial Motor Vehicle Inspectors (who are part of VTrans), and all Group C, is achieving a Condensed Step system in order to increase the likelihood that they can reach their top Pay Grade before the mandatory Retirement at age 55. While this Bargaining goal remains a high priority for the NMU Bargaining Team, the outcome on this point remains uncertain.
- Undoubtedly, as the NMU and AOT Specific Bargaining Survey demonstrated, the above more general issues remain as the top priorities for AOT/VTrans workers outside of Operations.

Section Summary (Contract Negotiations)

- **AOT-NMU Bargaining Survey: 34.2% Participation Rate (VTrans Overall, Not Just Operations);**
 - **Achieved Thus Far Via TOK In NMU**
 - **\$25 Increase In Boot Reimbursement (\$175 Total);**
 - **\$1 Increase In Tool Pay (\$18 Total);**
 - **Likely To Be Achieved**
 - **\$100 Increase To Snow Pay (\$2100 Total);**
- Full Pay For Those Out On Workers Comp For Lyme Disease.**

V. AOT Union Membership Trajectory:

Growing Union membership is paramount in relation to growing Union power over time. The specific issues that the Union fights for needs to emanate from the real and perceived needs of the workers, and tactics employed to achieve victory on these (or some of these) issues also needs to be of the type which heighten member engagement and spark interest within the ranks. When all of these factors are aligned, and when a sufficient number of victories are attained, it is reasonable to project that the membership rate will steadily grow. When the priorities and tactics are not in line with the workers it is likewise reasonable to project that the membership rate will stagnate or (worse) decline. Other contributing factors to membership growth is fostering a good system of communication between Union Reps, Organizers, Union Leaders, etc., as well as making concerted efforts to reach out to non-members and new hires to personally ask them to join their Union. This section looks at the membership trends in AOT over the past year.

VTrans/AOT Overall Union Membership

- 1/1/15 Starting Point: Total AOT/VTrans Membership was approximately (a dismal) 62+%;

- 1/1/16 Goal: Increase AOT/VTrans Union Membership to 70%;
- **1/1/16 (One Year Measure): Overall AOT/VTrans membership stands at 69.82%, a significant increase over 2015. VSEA, overall by comparison, has seen its membership grow by 0.5 percentage points, from 73.2% to 73.7%¹⁶ during this same timeframe (fell just short of one year goal);**
- Central to growing membership is the clear awareness that the Union is engaged, active, and fighting for the interests of its members as defined by the members (and with participation of the members). As we maintained higher levels of engagement around the Fight Back Campaign, and later around Bargaining, it should not be surprising that our numbers went up. In addition, membership increases have been pursued by ALWAYS including a pitch (with link to membership form) to join the Union with every email sent by the VSEA Union Rep that may reach fee payers. This is especially effective when we are reporting out victories or strong Union efforts to uphold the interests of the workers. A direct fee payer mailing was also done by VSEA with a specific appeal to AOT/VTrans workers. However, reports indicate that *less* than a nominal number of Union Cards (one) were returned to VSEA as a consequence. Also, as a result of a Labor Management victory, Stewards have begun (June) to meet with new hires in order to educate them on their Union (see both above & below) and to present them with Union Cards. Half way through the year, Garage Contacts were also mailed lists of Fee Payers in their Garages with a corresponding amount of Union Cards. This precipitated in a significant number of fee payers joining the Union [Note: Many Garage Contacts & AOT Union leaders including Justin Irish, Chimney Corners Garage, Peter Boyd, Marlboro Garage, sent back multiple signed Union Cards for area AOT workers.]

Union Membership In AOT Operations:

- 1/1/15 Starting Point -Total AOT Operations Membership approximately 66%;
- 1/1/16 Goal: Increase AOT Operations Union Membership to 75%;
- **1/1/16 (One Year Measure): AOT Operations membership stands at 77.48%, a significant increase over 2015. VSEA, overall by comparison, has seen its membership grow by 0.5 percentage points, from 73.2% to 73.7% during this same timeframe (surpassed one year goal);**
- See immediately above.

Specific Number of New Union Members in AOT/VTrans Overall:

- 1/1/15 Starting Point –N/A
- 1/1/16 Goal: Increase AOT/VTrans Union Membership
- **1/1/16 (One Year Measure): AOT/VTrans has seen 105 new Union members;**

¹⁶ These overall year to year VSEA membership numbers were provided by VSEA Operations Director Ray Stout

- See above.

Specific Number of New Union Members in AOT Operations (the Garages):

- 1/1/15 Starting Point –N/A
- 1/1/16 Goal: Increase AOT Operations Union Membership
- **1/1/16 (One Year Measure): AOT Operations has seen 64 new Union members;**
- See above.

Overall AOT/VTrans New Hire Recruitment to Union:

- 1/1/15 Starting Point –These numbers were not previously tracked;
- 1/1/16 Goal: Implement outreach to new Hires;
- **1/1/16 (One Year Measure): 51.55% of new hires in AOT/ VTrans in 2015 were signed up as Union members (surpassed rate in rest of VSEA, which is at 33.78% for 2015, by 17.77 percentage points);**
- This was achieved by having a VSEA Admin inform Union Rep of new hires, and Union Rep, in turn, making the simple point of sending an email to these new hires, using a personal tone, extolling the virtues of Union solidarity, explaining recent victories and struggles, and asking them to join via a provided link to the VSEA online membership application.

AOT Operations (Garage) New Hire Recruitment to Union:

- 1/1/15 Starting Point –These numbers were not previously tracked;
- 1/1/16 Goal: Implement outreach to new Hires especially through member to new worker outreach;
- **1/1/16 (One Year Measure): 64.44% of new hires in AOT Garages/Operations were signed up as Union members (surpassed rate in rest of VSEA, which is at 33.78% for 2015, by 30.66 percentage points);**
- This was achieved by having a VSEA Admin inform Union Rep of new hires, and Union Rep, in turn, passing these names along to in District AOT Stewards. Stewards (using Steward Time as achieved through Labor Management) are then expected to meet with the new worker to explain the Union, and to present them with a Union Card. At times Union Rep also has informed local Garage Contacts if a new hire has not immediately joined the Union, and thereby asking the Garage Contact to talk with them about joining.

Section Summary (Union Membership)

- **VTrans/AOT Overall Membership Rate: 69.82% (Significant Increase);**
-

- Total VTrans/AOT New Members: 105;
- VTrans/AOT New Hire Member Recruitment Rate: 51.55%;
- AOT Operations (Garages) Membership Rate: 77.48% (Significant Increase);
- Total AOT Operations (Garages) New Members: 64;
- AOT Operations (Garages) New Hire Recruitment Rate: 64.44%.

VI. Contract Enforcement/Representation:

A Contract is only as good as the Union's ability to enforce it. The following section looks at some basic metrics concerning Grievance and Disciplinary activity.

Representation by the Numbers:

- From January 1, 2015, through the present, AOT Operations has seen:
- 6 Grievances;
- 30 Investigations;
- 9 Investigations resolved with No Discipline;
- 9 Investigations resolved via Imposed Discipline
- 8 Investigations resolved via a Limited Release;
- 3 Investigations resolved via a General Release;
- 6 Loudermills;
- 2 Terminations/Forced Resignations [Employees off Original Probation];
- 60 Other issues (tracked in the AOT Operations mapping/tracking document –numerous issues dealt with via the above organizing methods as outlines in Section III);

The Stewards:

- AOT Stewards are expected to represent workers in their District and areas in Investigations and for Step I Grievances. AOT Stewards have generally done a good job in this essential Union work. These include, but are not limited to, Allen Brown, White River Junction Garage, Scott Lane, Dummerston Garage. As discussed in Section II, we now have 10 AOT Stewards in Operations, accounting for approximately 1 Steward for every 50 workers.

Discipline/General Release:

- 1/1/15 Starting Point –Majority of Disciplinary cases resolved through the use of a General Release (Note: a General Release negates any and all legal and Contractual rights of the

worker to take action against the State for any past issue, know or unknown, since “the beginning of time” through to the moment the General Release is signed;

- 1/1/16 Goal: Minor Discipline Imposed (With Right To Grieve And To Take Legal Action Against The State Retained) Becomes Norm (Stipulated Agreements The Exception); Where Stipulations Are Found Appropriate, Limited Release (and Not General Release) Becomes the Norm;
- Since January 1, 2015, the majority of Disciplinary cases within AOT Operations have been settled without a General Release. Imposed Discipline has occurred 8 times, a Limited Release was used 4 times, and a General Release was used 3 times. No General Release has been used since February, 2015. Additionally, no AOT worker in Operations has been terminated/forced to resign since February, 2015. The increase in instances where discipline has been imposed has been achieved as part of a broader VSEA effort on this issue, especially through the continuing engagement of VSEA General Council Tim Belcher with DHR attorneys. It is also true that another contributing factor towards this achievement can be understand as the lengthy discussions between VSEA (AOT) Union Rep and AOT Operations Upper-Management over the course of the early part of 2015. Through these conversations or otherwise, Management has come to see value in creating a more timely process (which impacts morale and productivity). Having one Union Rep interface with one DHR Manager further creates opportunities to come to such understandings as a basis upon which to implement a better functioning process. Also note that Loudermill Letters in AOT Operation have increasingly used the language “we are considering disciplinary action up to and including suspension” as opposed to “termination”. This allows VSEA Union Rep and members more ability to seek a resolution guided by fairness as opposed to one propelled by a workers’ fear of being terminated. This improvement was achieved through the same means (outlined above) that lead to the decrease of use in General Releases (met one year goal).

Section Summary (Contract Enforcement)

- AOT Stewards In The Garages: 10 –1 Steward For Every 50 Workers;
- AOT Operations Terminations/Forced Resignations: None Since February, 2015;
- Use of General Release As Part of Resolution Process: None Since February.
- Loudermill Letters: Increasing use of term “Suspension” as opposed to “Termination.”

VII. Looking Towards 2016 in AOT

New annual goals and benchmarks will be set by the AOT Union leaders (Labor Management Delegates & Stewards, with participation of their Union Rep) over the course of the winter. Prior to setting these goals, Union Rep will encourage these AOT Union leaders to talk with the Garage Contacts and other AOT Union members in regards to their priorities and concerns. Once these goals are definitively set, they will be shared with the Garage Contacts, AOT Council Members,

etc.. The Union Rep will then work with AOT members to create tactics on how these goals will be achieved, etc.. That said, it is already known that the following issues will be part of these priorities (as they have already become issues/projects that have been adopted by the AOT Union leadership in late 2015):

- **Reaching 80% Union Membership In The Garages;**
- **Successfully concluding Contract negotiations;**
- **Growing working class/Union solidarity in the Garages (and stamping out any vestiges of Discrimination);**
- **Building an AOT Rapid Response Team.**

I will conclude this brief section by elaborating on the planned AOT Rapid Response Team. While the meaning of other above priorities may self-evident to the reader, this point may not be. That said, many Unions have built 'Flying Squads' as part of the tools at their disposal. Such groups are made up of rank & file members, and will be called upon from time to time to take direct action in support of their Union. The intent to build an AOT Rapid Response Team came out of a discussion on Bargaining during the All Garage Conference Call (held in November). Here the idea was supported of building an AOT Rapid Response Team that would be committed to converging on Montpelier, upon 24 hours' notice, come hell or high water (and using Annual Leave) when asked to do so by the AOT Union leadership. The intent is to build this team from Garage Contacts and other Garage activists (not including Labor Management Delegates, Stewards, etc., as the idea is to build out Union power, not place more and more responsibilities on those already engaged in high level Union activity). The goal is to recruit a team of 12. Those recruited will be vetted by the AOT Union leadership before being definitively placed in this position. Once established, and where appropriate, the team, in principle, could be called to action in response to an acute workplace issue, to support Bargaining efforts, to support aspects of a Union legislative priority, etc.. The actions which they may be called on to carry out could, in principle, be to stage an informational picket, to deliver a petition or message from the workers to a key decision maker, to take part in a press conference, meet with lawmakers, or to generally be a protest presence.

By starting the process of building Rapid Response Teams within VSEA, we will be creating a new tool in our collective tool belt. The more reliably we can turn out members, on any given day, to the State's Capital, the more we will be growing our overall all ability to demonstrate worker power. Of course building this first team will be a challenge, but one that AOT is well suited for and which the AOT Union leadership supportive of. [For bragging rights: The first volunteer to serve on the AOT Rapid Response Team was Pierre Lamarche, Barton Garage. Pi, as he is known, is an AOT member of the VSEA Council, and was a Union Steward in his previous job with the Department of Corrections where he worked as a CO. Pi was also one of the AOT workers who used a day of Annual Leave in order to take part in the March On The Boss.]

VIII. Conclusions/Exporting AOT Success To Broader VSEA

on 12/16/15.

Undoubtedly there is much positive work being done within the broader VSEA. The Judiciary Unit having close to a 90% membership rate is testament to that fact. It is also true that we were not compelled to open the Contracts in 2015, and we did not suffer the threatened 450 layoffs. The hard and effective work of our Organizing Department and activists members (building the Fight Back Campaign) demonstrated their talent, dedication, and effectiveness leading up to that victory (i.e. total 2500 signatures on the Fight Back Petition, and 500 workers at the April 11 Fight Back Rally). And of course our Union Reps do a great job defending workers Contractual rights. However, it is also clear that there is still much work to be done (both within AOT and VSEA generally).

AOT, over the course of the last year, has done many things well and has consistently hit above its weight. Factoring in that VTrans/AOT represents approximately 15% of VSEA, and recognizing that AOT has time and again achieved a higher participation rate than the rest of VSEA, the question becomes: what would VSEA look like if it were to achieve what AOT (proportionately) has thus far achieved?

If VSEA achieved what AOT Operations has proportionately achieved:

- Overall Union membership would be up significantly more than the 0.5% increase from 2015-2016;
- A majority of new hires would be members of their Union (not the 33.78% we saw in 2015 for VSEA excluding AOT);
- There would be a Contract Captain/designated Key Union Contact in every workplace;
- 100 NMU workers would have thus far used Annual Leave to attend a Bargaining meeting or to take part in an action to support their Bargaining Team;
- All of the Non-Management Unit's Steward positions would be filled;
- Every VSEA Council Seat would be filled;
- The Dignity & Respect Petition would have 2500+ signatures as of September 1, 2015 (not the 1100+ as of 12/23/15);
- The April 11 Fight Back Rally would have had 650+ workers in attendance (not the estimated 500).

If we were to achieve all of the above, across VSEA, we would still not be as powerful as we need to be; after all, we should (eventually) be able to put 1000+ workers (VSEA & Labor allies) on the Statehouse lawn, not 650 (if our brothers & sisters from the Vermont Workers Center can do it, we should be able to as well). But even so, if we could expand our reach to include the above we would be further down the road of building a more vibrant base of the Union and the Vermont working class by extension. But to get down this road, and to realize a truly member lead and member run Union which is capable of decisive action, staff will need to play a strong role in building the structure, or the bones, that will allow for higher levels of member engagement.

Therefore, based on the experiences of AOT over the course of the last year, it is recommended that VSEA take the following steps to replicate those successes as are evident above:

- A centralized worksite mapping/tracking document be kept and updated by VSEA staff (and made accessible to Union activists);
- VSEA Union Reps and Organizers continue to conduct regular worksite visits and that issues which arise in multiple worksites (in the same Department) continue to be the basis for moving a Labor Management agenda forward (such visits should also have a strong focus in identifying and recruiting Key Union Contacts);
- Single Union Rep be assigned, statewide, to key worker groupings or to distinct Bargaining Units such as the AHS social workers, Corrections Unit, State Colleges Unit, Vermont State Housing Authority Unit, Office of Defender General Unit, etc. (as is already done for the Judiciary Unit, the Supervisory Unit, and AOT) ;
- That assigned Union Reps for these groupings act as Lead Negotiators for these Bargaining Units (as is presently the case with Senior Union Rep Brian Morse for the Judiciary Unit but counter-intuitively not for the Supervisory Unit), or that the Rep assist in the Bargaining process under the Lead Negotiator (as is presently the case with myself and AOT/NMU under the direction of the VSEA Labor Relations Director & NMU Lead Negotiator Gary Hoadley);
- VSEA Union Reps and Organizers be assigned territories that reflect one and other, and (continue) to rationalize Union building activities in these areas;
- That assigned Organizers for these identical Rep territories assist in facilitating the organizing efforts of these Units during negotiations;
- Union Reps and Organizers prioritize the *systematic* recruitment of Key Union Contacts in *every* VSEA worksite;
- Key Union Contacts be regularly asked to do Union building tasks which are in line with the culture of their workplace and/or are supported or framed by the Union leaders in their Department or Unit;
- That seasonal Steward trainings increasingly become organized by Department (as has already been implemented in a number of areas by VSEA Labor Educator Tim Lench), and that they be combined, where possible, with the relevant Labor Management preparatory meeting in order that Union leaders in work groups can collectively articulate an evolving organizing agenda for their sections of VSEA;
- Union Reps and Organizers *systematically* track collective acts of Union activism by workplace, and Key Union Contacts in active workplaces be recruited to serve on Council, as Stewards, and on their Labor Management Committee;
- That relevant Stewards and Key Union Contacts be regularly provided lists of new hires in their workplace with instructions (and trainings) to seek to recruit these new State workers into their Union [Note: It is my understanding that this practice may already be starting within the broader VSEA];

- All electronic communications sent out by the Union that may reach or be viewed by fee payers include a brief pitch on why one should join the Union (along with a ‘click here’ link to the online membership application);
- Union Reps and Organizers regularly provide more personalized and specific (to the job type/Department) Union communications to workers in their territories [Note: while it is 100% true that the VSEA Communications Department, under Communications Director Doug Gibson, does something more than a *phenomenal* job, it is also true that more personalized communications from Union Reps to the workers they represent has a positive effect. This insofar as ‘asks’ emanating for the Rep, as the person who the worker knows they may one day have to go to in order to push back against an unjust Disciplinary action, carries a certain weight that should not be under-utilized.];
- That Union actions, where appropriate and when called for, seek to further engage the membership in ways *beyond* basic lobbying efforts. Point being, for many members and potential members (although not all) exclusively engaging politicians in the Statehouse, especially when there are expectations that said members need to interact with lawmakers who may be ‘fucking’ them in a ‘respectful manner’ (which understandably is a tried and try hallmark of traditional lobbying) is not something they get excited over, grow their expectations around, or that sparks their imagination and a sense of ownership and engagement. Therefore, it is important that our overall Union activity include the outside game *along with* the inside game just as it is also important to, at times, utilize the stick and at other times the carrot;
- That VSEA continuously evaluate the interconnection between Union activism on specific issues/campaigns, the tactics used, the outcome (won/lost), and membership levels. Where our win/lost column becomes undesirable, or when membership growth is not increased, that the identified issues and/or tactics employed to seek redress on those issues be appropriately modified;

I will conclude this report by offering my opinion that VSEA would be well served to make this AOT pilot project a permanent fixture of the Union. It has been, and will continue to be, my honor and pleasure to serve in my role as Union Rep for workers in the Agency of Transportation.

Respectfully Submitted (and in the Spirit of Solidarity),

David Van Deusen, Senior Union Representative

Vermont State Employees’ Association

END OF REPORT

Building Union Power in AOT Year Two: 2016 In Review (2017)

Provided by David Van Deusen,

Senior Union Representative-AOT/VSEA

January 1, 2017



AOT Union Workers From The Randolph Garage

With the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, we need to expect that organized labor, including VSEA, will come under attack.¹⁷ It should be expected that Trump will appoint a Justice to the US Supreme Court who will rule against agency fee and will generally seek to weaken the rights of unions. It should also be expected that Trump will appoint persons to the National Labor Relations Board who will also be hostile to labor. Any attack on labor must be resisted by unions (individually and in aggregate). But to effectively resist, each union, including VSEA must be internally organized and prepared to meet such a struggle. While there is still a long road to go, the Vermont State Employees' Association (VSEA) has made significant strides in building an effective internal union structure within the Vermont Agency of Transportation (AOT). Therefore, this document should not only be read as a memorialization of what we have done in AOT, but also with an eye to what can or should occur in other sections of VSEA. Of course there are numerous examples of effective work being done in other sections of VSEA, but these examples are outside the scope of responsibility of this writer and therefore are not included in this report. Even so, the reader is encouraged to seek out those examples and give thought to how they too may relate to the broader challenges facing VSEA.

I. AOT Overview:

The Vermont Agency of Transportation, with 1191 workers and 80+ worksites (covered by both the Non-Management Unit & Supervisory Unit Collective Bargaining Agreements), remains a significant bloc within VSEA composing 15.81% of the Union. These 1191 workers can be subdivided into the following major groupings:

¹⁷ 2017 Note From The Author: This report was first provided to VSEA Union Officers & senior staff in 2017.

- **Garages/Maintenance (Operations):** 9 Geographic Districts/534 Workers;
- **Program Development:** Largely Montpelier Based/284 Workers
- **Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV):** 11 Branch Locations + LE/217 workers;
- **Finance & Administration Division:** Montpelier/94 workers
- The remainder being made of smaller divisions such as Aviation, Rail, etc..

AOT, specifically the Garage workers and those who support them, are a foundational element of Vermont functioning as a society. During the winter months, State Government and the private sector would shut down during a snow event if these workers did not labor to keep the roads open. In a State where snow can be expected 7 months of the year (October-April), the strategic need for these workers to be organized into a strong union cannot be overstated.

Up until January 1 2015, VSEA did not assign a single Union Rep to represent AOT. Rather Union Reps were assigned geographic regions. One Rep may have had 5 garages/AOT worksites in their territory, but no VSEA staff person covered AOT as a whole. Therefore, no single staff person was in a position to gage the overall issues facing AOT workers or to evaluate if the contract(s) were being exercised in a uniform and consistent manner. And of course VSEA staff was also hampered in potential efforts to mobilize AOT workers towards collective goals due to this fragmenting of territory. And likewise, previous to 2015, AOT did not have an internal rank & file union structure in place that would efficiently allow communication and organizing activities by the workers themselves. Prior to 2015, membership rate in the agency was approximately 62%, and approximately 66% in the garages [today, as will be discussed later in this document, this membership rate is significantly higher]. As of two years ago, many Garages reported not having a visit by a Union Rep in 4-6 years [for the last two years there have been in excess of 200 worksite visits by VSEA staff to garages and other AOT worksites-see below].

At the urging of AOT garage Stewards & AOT Labor Management delegates (such as Labor Management Chair Jason Heath-Georgia Garage), VSEA created a pilot project at the start of 2015 whereby a single Union Rep (myself-David Van Deusen) would be assigned to cover all of AOT stateside. This pilot project proved a success in that membership increased, gains were made at the bargaining table, worker activism grew, and a rank & file structure was built into the workplaces (all this was outlined in January 1 2016 “AOT-VSEA 1 Year of Building Union Power” report). As a result this pilot project was made a regular fixture within VSEA in 2016. In addition (as was recommended in the 2016 “AOT-VSEA 1 Year of Building Union Power” report) VSEA exported this model to the rest of the union; all Union Reps (and Organizers) are now assigned territory based on bargaining unit/agency/department (and are no longer geographically based).

This report documents the outcomes of year two of this effort as they unfolded with AOT. It is the intention of this writer to chart these experiences in order to not only continue to build Union Power within AOT for 2017, but also to extrapolate lessons that could prove useful to VSEA as a whole. It is towards these tasks that I now turn.

II. Rank & File Union Structure

Sustained membership growth (or maintenance), effective internal mobilizing, long term bargaining success, and the building of an increased political power are all largely predicated upon

an effective internal rank & file structure based primarily in workplaces and networked within an department/agency/bargaining unit. Internal structure is what allows members to efficiently engage in union activities. Internal structure is also the vehicle through which the membership can make itself heard. Without a workplace based internal structure, a union may win on a given issue, but those wins will often rely disproportionately on staff and will often be reactive (stopping a bad thing from happening) as opposed to proactive (making a good thing happen). And wins without a backing structure often fail to result in the union emerging from a specific struggle stronger than it went in. With a rank & file structure in place and utilized, success often increases the confidence and enthusiasm of involved members. This growth in confidence and enthusiasm can be contagious, and can help inspire more workers to take on specific union roles (thus increasing the potential power of the union). Victories under these conditions also can elevate the aspirations of the union membership, thus pushing the union (organically) into more proactive power building struggles.

However, internal union structure does not build itself. If a goal of VSEA is to create a member lead or member run Union, the path towards this goal must rely heavily upon paid fulltime staff to get there. And without internal structure a union cannot be effectively member run. Hence much of my time in 2015 was spent building such a structure in the AOT garages. In 2016, I worked to maintain this system (which is increasingly maintained by the members themselves) and began to expand this system to other areas of AOT and beyond.¹⁸

Garage Contacts/Local Union Contacts

In the AOT garages it has proven elemental to have a garage contact in every worksite, or at least in every worksite that does not include a steward or other union officer. However, garage contacts are not just names on paper. Nor are they just potential activists identified by VSEA staff. Rather, garage contacts have come to be understood as foundational union officers with the specific responsibilities of printing communications (sent by Union Rep) for posting on their union bulletin boards, circulating petitions or facilitating other union actions as is called for by union leadership, recruiting new hires and fee payers in their worksites into the union, acting as a conduit between their co-workers and the AOT union leadership/VSEA staff concerning any and all issues, and serving as contract captains as negotiations become active.¹⁹

Unlike previous incarnations of a 'key union contact' system in VSEA (whereby multiple persons in a given worksite simultaneously serve in this role), garage contacts are not unlimited. Typically only one worker serves as a garage contact per worksite. Once the garage contact is recruited, it is understood that this position is filled. In this way workers come to understand the garage contact as being an important union position, and garage contacts can take additional pride in their specialized service to the their union. In rare circumstances a second garage contact exists in a garage. The creation of a 'second' may come about as a result of a garage contact in good standing transferring to a new garage where there is already a garage contact. Where a second exists, their role is to back up or fill in for the garage contact as needed.

The initial recruitment of garage contacts was largely done (in 2015) by the Union Rep visiting a worksite and asking the assembled workers to nominate someone for this role. Often

¹⁸ As a Union Rep I am also responsible for the Office of the Defender General Unit. Here there are 8 worksites. As of January 1 2017, all 8 of these worksites have deployed local union contacts and/or other union officers. In addition to the Defender General I am also responsible for the Vermont State Housing Authority Unit. Likewise I am working with that Unit Chair to establish the same system in that Unit.

¹⁹ All union officers in AOT, with the exception of those directly serving on the bargaining team or who are in the

all the workers would indicate that a certain respected person would be good at this. If that worker accepts the nomination, it is considered official. As this system has matured (in 2016) it is increasingly common that area stewards (and AOT Labor Management delegates) will recruit garage contacts in their region as is required. At other times, if a garage contact is retiring, or otherwise leaving their worksite, that garage contact will seek to recruit his or her replacement. As workers take an increasing responsibility for maintaining this system, the Union Rep/Organizer has more time freed up to build this system in other areas and or to focus their attention on different union building projects.

Garage contacts have also played an important role in recruiting area stewards (such as in District 1-Bennington Garage where Garage Contact Tim Bortell recruited Brett Crawford as area steward). Garage contacts also constitute a “bench” whereby union members can gain experience and be brought up to higher levels of the union leadership (as is the case in District 8-Enosburg Garage whereby Ellen St. Marie, after proving herself an outstanding garage contact was recruited to serve as steward-steward paperwork currently pending).

It is in the garages that this system was first built in 2015. The effort to export this model to other areas of AOT was begun in late 2016 (DMV), but is still very much a work in progress. It was the intent to have DMV complete this year, however the departure of the VSEA Organizer assigned to AOT, and the fact that this position is yet to be filled has hampered these efforts. With or without an assigned Organizer, this effort should be complete in 2017. In addition, an effort will be made in 2017 to also begin to export this model to the remaining aspects of the agency.

I am pleased to note that the VSEA Board of Trustees & Chapter Presidents have expressed support for exporting a version of this model to the rest of VSEA (as was recommended in the 2016 “AOT-VSEA 1 Year of Building Union Power” report). The goal of building a similar system throughout VSEA is articulated in the proposal “The Challenges Facing VSEA and a Proactive Response” (penned by Brattleboro Chapter President Robin Rieske).

AOT Stewards

Garage contacts/local union contacts, in brief, are the foundation upon which union structure in AOT is built. Another essential element of this structure is our steward system. NMU is afforded 95 stewards. Presently there are only 52 appointed stewards. This makes the steward to worker ratio in the Non-Management Unit 1:145. If all 95 steward positions were filled, that would improve the ratio to 1:79. The two things we should aim for if we are to rationally deploy quality stewards while achieving a manageable ratio, is having a proportional number of stewards appointed in every major agency/department while making sure we deploy these stewards geographically so as to provide a steward presence across the state.

In the garages, there is 9 geographic AOT Districts (although District 6 is essentially akin to a central office without a plow fleet and is not factored into this section). Each District contains between 5-9 garages. Presently we have at least one steward in each AOT District [this was achieved in 2016 and marks the first time in memory that this has been accomplished], and no

Supervisory Unit, serve as NMU contract captains when negotiations are active. Therefore, AOT garages/DMV in effect has 86 NMU contract captains. Not including AOT, NMU has a total of 63 additional contract captains. Therefore, AOT, although composing approximately 20% of NMU, accounts for 54% of the total number of NMU contract captains.

²⁰ Having AOT stewards primarily cover only fellow AOT workers in their geographic area increases their effectiveness as they provide representation on issues which they understand in the context of working for AOT, and by providing representation in their geographic area they are able to develop a more consistent relationship with their local management.

more than two stewards in any one District. With few exceptions (such as District 3 Steward Seth Perry-Rutland Garage), these AOT stewards only represent fellow AOT workers, and typically only in their geographic AOT District.²⁰ In total AOT garages have 11 stewards. This is 1 steward for every 49 workers (well within the minimum worker-to-steward target ratio of 1:79). Over the course of 2016 a total of 3 new stewards have been recruited from within the garages. One was recruited by a garage contact, one by the Union Rep, and one came forward on his own. In addition to providing their co-workers representation, stewards also play a crucial role in membership recruitment [membership recruitment will be discussed in more detail later in this report]. AOT garage stewards also work closely with AOT Labor Management delegates [there being much overlap between the stewards and the Labor Management Committee] and AOT delegates to the bargaining teams. All told, the stewarding program in AOT garages is strong and effective. Given the need for VSEA to expand its steward system, and given the low steward-to-worker ratio already achieved in the garages, it is advisable that the number of stewards in the garages be capped at 12 for 2017.

While our steward program is strong in the garages, the same cannot be said for those other sections of AOT which we are just now beginning to be systematically organized. In DMV we have one steward (Ed Martin-at the South Burlington Branch). This means we have only 1 Steward for every 216 workers. At minimum our goal should be to recruit an additional DMV steward in Montpelier (where our membership is concentrated). This would improve our worker-to-steward ratio to 1:108. A secondary priority could be to recruit a third steward in more southern Vermont. Having a third steward in DMV would make the ratio a solid 1:72.

AOT Labor Management Committee (Garages)

The AOT Labor Management Committee (for garage workers) meets seasonally (4 times a year) on a perpetual basis. The committee strives to have one worker representing each AOT District, plus someone from Central Garage (the mechanics) & the Bridge Crew. All persons on this committee are from the Non-Management Unit.²¹ The committee, with the concurrence of the Non-Management Unit Executive Committee, also elects a Chair (presently Jason Heath-Georgia Garage) and a Vice Chair (Shawn Ainsworth-North Montpelier Garage). Many stewards serve on this committee, although it is not exclusive to stewards. Presently 9 AOT workers serve on this committee. It is the responsibility of Labor Management delegates to gather issues and concerns from workers in their geographic area (AOT District) or work group (Central Garage or Bridge Crew). These issues are then brought to a labor only training/meeting (that includes both the AOT stewards & Labor Management delegates) which occurs one week before the official Labor Management meeting. Here the issues are discussed and the combined stewards/Labor Management delegates craft a draft agenda for the meeting with management. Here not only are agenda items agreed to, but unified labor positions are also hammered out.²² As a rule, these common positions are supported by all Labor Management delegates when in front of management (even if an individual delegate may have argued for a competing position at the prior labor only

²¹ The practice of meeting 4 times a year (in perpetuity) and having up to 11 union delegates on it, surpasses the baseline labor rights guaranteed by the contract. This expansion of the rights of this committee were agreed to by both labor and management at their first meeting after the group was reformed in 2013.

²² At the request of labor, management provides labor with its proposed agenda items prior to this meeting. This allows the AOT stewards/Labor Management delegates to also form a unified position on these agenda items.

meeting). Failure to uphold such common positions while in front of management is understood as grounds for being removed from the committee.²³

The draft agenda that emerges from this seasonal meeting of Labor Management delegates & stewards is then sent to management prior to the official meeting. This prior notice helps to foster a more productive meeting whereby labor and management are prepared to address the issues, and other agency personal (who do not regularly attend these meetings but who may have a special relevance to an agenda item) can be invited to attend.²⁴

The meetings with management are facilitated by the Labor Chair. All labor delegates (and Union Rep) sit together on one side of the table, and management on the other. For labor generated agenda items, the Labor Chair assigns a labor delegate to start off the discussion on the issue. The Union Rep keeps minutes. After the meeting, the Union Rep crafts draft minutes that include agreed upon action steps were they exist. These draft minutes are then provided to the Labor Chair and management for review and joint approval. Once approved, the minutes are sent to the garage contacts (for printing and posting) by the Union Rep, and to lower ranking managers by upper management. The minutes are also printed in the management generated AOT newsletter.

In 2016 the major topics of discussion/achievements have been as follows:

- **\$250 Retention Bonus;** In order to address staffing deficits in the fall of 2015, the Labor Management Committee supported paying Snow Season eligible workers who remained employed with the agency over the winter, a \$250 bonus. New hires were also allotted a \$1000 sign on bonus. Although these bonuses were agreed to in 2015, the retention bonus was not paid out until May 2016. These bonuses were extra to the contract(s) and were one-time in nature.
- **Overcoming any vestiges of discrimination that may still exist in the garages;** Labor advocated for the establishment of mandatory (labor only) anti-discriminations trainings, given by the VSEA Labor Educator to all garage workers. This training, among other things, would articulate how it is in labor's collective self-interest to foster a common solidarity in order to grow the power of the union. A determination on this proposal is still pending.
- **Seeking to establish a uniform and fair system of garage to garage (lateral) transfers;** Recognizing that this is a bargainable issue, labor expressed support for a seniority based system like is presently provided for in the Correction Unit Contract. Management stated its openness to developing a system [as presently there is no official system], but expressed that they would rather see it based on job performance. Both sides will continue to discuss this issue with an eye to coming to an agreement in principle prior to the start of bargaining in 2017.
- **A comparative pay analysis looking at state AOT workers vs town highway crew workers;** This study was conducted by a join subcommittee of labor & management using data provided by the VT League of Cities and Towns. The findings demonstrated that workers

²³ AOT Labor Management delegates have not broken this rule, and to date no delegate has been removed for this infraction.

²⁴ It should also be noted that labor's internal rules also prevent delegates from bringing personal issues into the meetings with management. Labor Management agenda items cannot be personal in nature, nor should they

get paid higher when hired by a Town, but make significantly more with the state as their seniority grows.

- **Reforming the AOT Equipment Committee;** These committees, which are a creation of management, were previously organized differently by Region (An AOT Region is composed of two AOT Districts under the same regional management). These committees play a key role in recommending equipment upgrades and purchases for the agency. Labor successfully advocated for a uniform appointment process and meeting schedule whereby Equipment Specialists (who are NMU positions) would be appointed to these committees, and that they would meet twice a year (fall & spring).
- **Making sure good wood cut by AOT is put to a positive social use;** Although this issue was visited in previous years, it came to labor's attention that good (cut) wood was still being discarded in some Districts. Labor (again) advocated for good wood to be provided to garages which heat with wood (as many do) first, and any excess being given to state fuel assistance programs that help low income and elderly Vermonters stay warm in the winter. Management agreed with labor's opinions, and this matter was favorably resolved.

Prior to 2016 (since 2013) this AOT Labor Management Committee has also successfully achieved the following improvements for AOT workers:

- **Union stewards afforded paid union leave to meet with new hires in their AOT Districts;**
- **Classified worker participation in all Hiring Committees (even for those convened to hire management positions);**
- **Appointment of a Union Liaison to the AOT Training Center.**

All told, the AOT Labor Management Committee for the garages continues to be productive in addressing issues of concern for union workers. There is no reason not to expect this committee to continue its positive trajectory in 2017.

At this time there are no other statewide Labor Management Committees in AOT. DMV has one local Labor Management Committee (South Burlington) which meets irregularly and where local branch issues are discussed. Some discussion has occurred with union officers about forming a statewide DMV Labor Management Committee that would meet twice a year. At the present time, the DMV Commissioner is not enthusiastic about forming such a meeting, and interest from DMV workers has been mild. This idea may be revisited in 2017. Other sections of AOT would prove challenging in forming a productive Labor Management Committee (for various reasons including a multitude of differing work responsibilities). Union members in these groups have not expressed strong interest in forming such committees at this time. Therefore there are no plans to build Labor Management Committees in these other groupings in AOT.

AOT Union Leadership in the Garages

Together the stewards, Labor Management delegates, and bargaining team leaders, by default, constitute the top union leadership in AOT. The stewards & Labor Management delegates meet

involve one specific garage. Labor Management is viewed as a forum for issues that are broad in nature and involve multiple AOT Districts. Where issues are specific to one garage or one District, there are other venues for them to be

in person seasonally [discussed above] as part of the “training” program established by VSEA Educator Tim Lenocho (bargaining team members are also invited). At these meetings AOT union priorities are discussed and adopted for the coming quarter. Often these priorities involve the Labor Management Committee, but not exclusively and not always.

Issues (not directly related to the Labor Management Committee) that have been discussed at these AOT leadership meetings have included building union membership in the garages, and exploring the possibility of the Agency of Transportation seeking to become its own bargaining unit within VSEA. And of course the underlying garage contact system allows the AOT leaders a means to take meaningful action on priority issues. Prior to 2016, AOT union leaders also directed their Union Rep (myself) to provide them with monthly activity reports which track any and all progress on issues prioritized at these seasonal meetings [these monthly reports have been provided every month for two years, and are also forwarded to the VSEA Director of Field Services & Executive Director]. Providing these reports helps to create more accountability within AOT (for staff and leaders), and allows VSEA to track progress on issues over time.

These quarterly AOT (garage) leadership meetings have been a success not only in defining priorities & coordinating projects, but also have become a venue to better allow for union members/leaders to set the direction of their union; thus furthering the goal of realizing a member lead union. In 2017, these quarterly leadership meetings will continue.

Staff Worksite Visits

One advantage staff has over worker-union members is that staff is free to make time to visit all the worksites, and thereby get feedback from members on a multitude of issues. In turn staff are able to widen the conversation in the leadership meetings based on this feedback. This helps to better inform the union leadership when they are prioritizing issues and deciding on a course of action. Towards this end VSEA staff have done 98 worksite visits in the garages this year (in 2015 staff did 107). Of these 98, the Union Rep did 90 and a Union Organizer did 8 (in 2015 the Union Rep did 77 and Union Organizers/other staff-leaders did 30). All AOT garages were visited (in 2016 and 21015). In 2017 it should be expected that the Union Rep will again visit all the garages, and will complete between 70-100 garage visits.

In DMV there have been 9 worksite visits by VSEA staff (3 from the Union Rep and 6 from VSEA Organizers). It was expected that more visits would be done at DMV branches, and this work was to have been largely done by the assigned VSEA Organizer in the fall/early winter. However, the assigned Organizer left employment with VSEA, and is yet to be replaced. Therefore we have fallen behind in this area. In 2017, as we further build the local union contact structure in DMV, and as VSEA hires an Organizer to replace the one that left, it should be expected that all DMV branches will be visited by staff.

Also note that the Union Rep and Organizers have visited AOT workers stationed at the National Life complex in Montpelier on 5 occasions. National Life is the workplace for all or most workers in AOT Program Development and Finance & Administration, but also includes workers from Operations (who support the garages). Therefore these visits are logged as garage/worksite visits.

AOT Communications

In the garages, through the garage contacts, a system is in place which efficiently allows for the printing and posting of union information. Using this system, the Union Rep provided 9 union

appropriately addressed.

updates for posting over 2016. These updates ranged from bargaining updates to information on filing incident reports on tick bites to the need for membership recruitment in light of looming struggles. All postings sought to be specific to AOT garage workers and included photos of union members.

When priority issues arise, the Union Rep also regularly sent brief a text to the garage contacts/AOT union officers. These texts would ask the leaders to share the information with their co-workers, and/or to facilitate an action in support of one of their issues.

At times, the Union Rep also sent out general emails to AOT workers in general also highlighting recent union activity or challenges that union members need to be prepared for. Where appropriate, fee payers were also emailed on an issue. Where emails went to fee payers, the message always circled back to why their membership in the union is important and relevant to the issue at hand.

Rank & File Structure/Worksite Visits By The Numbers

What follows are the basic statistics for what has been achieved/maintained within AOT concerning this internal structure [note that no stats are included for AOT Project Development or Finance & Administration because these aspects of AOT are yet to be properly organized].

In the 64 garages/worksites for AOT Operations:

- 61 Are organized (“organized” meaning there is a union officer in the worksite responsible for specific union building tasks);
- 80 Total union officers/core activists (1 union officer/core activist for every 7 workers);
- 54 Garage contacts;
- 14 VSEA Council members (all allotted AOT Council seats are filled);
- 11 Stewards (1 steward for every 49 workers, 1+ steward in every AOT District);
- 9 Labor Management delegates (representing differing geographic areas/AOT Districts);
- 4 AOT Rapid Response Team members;
- 3 NMU bargaining team delegates;
- 1 Supervisory Unit bargaining team delegate;
- 1 Union Liaison to the AOT Training Center;
- 1 Member of the NMU Executive Committee (Vice Chair);
- 98 Total garage/worksite visits conducted by VSEA staff;
- 90 Garage/worksite visits conducted by Union Rep;
- 8 Garage/worksite visits conducted by Union Organizer;

²⁵ There are 11 branch locations across Vermont. In addition, DMV Law Enforcement constitutes a specific grouping within DMV. These police officers are home based, and for mapping tracking purposes are listed as their own ‘worksite’ within DMV.

In the 12 DMV branch sites/job groups:²⁵

- 4 Are organized;
- 11 Total union officers/core activists (1 union officer/core activist for every 19 workers);
- 4 Local union contacts
- 4 Members of a local Labor Management Committee (South Burlington);
- 2 VSEA Council members;
- 1 Steward (1 steward for every 216 workers);
- 1 Member of the NMU Executive Committee;
- 9 Worksite visits conducted by VSEA staff;
- 3 Worksite visits conducted by Union Rep;
- 6 Worksite visits conducted by Union Organizer.

III. Union Activism/Political Elections

Union activism is a necessary element of flexing union power. If a union never flexes its power, its power will decline.²⁶ Activism, which is another word for taking common action, is also in part a learned skill. Therefore it is important to find reason to practice such an activism in order for the membership to gain experience. Doing this will increase the union's effectiveness at times of crisis when action is demanded by events. Cultivating a healthy activism with a union also keeps the membership engaged and its energies aimed at achieving common goals. In this way activism, in and of itself, helps to build membership numbers.

AOT Collective Activism By Workplace/Issue

2015 saw the Fight Back campaign and the first half of contract negotiations. Therefore union activism was way up in AOT garages for that year (182 collective instances of activism, and 56 active garages). In 2016 contract negotiations were essentially concluded by spring. And while VSEA engaged in a number of legislative efforts and played a role in the Vermont General Election, there was not an overarching issue which drove activism on the scale that was witnessed during Fight Back.

In 2016 the garages had:²⁷

- 90 Collective instances of union activism;
- 48 Active garages;

DMV (who is now getting organized & is very much a work in progress) had:

²⁶ In the same way, I find if I let my chainsaw sit too long, it's a bitch to start up when I finally need it to.

²⁷ In this section I do not count 5 people in one garage who signed a petition as 5 instances of activism. Rather if people in one garage, be it 2 or 10, signed a petition I count that as one instance. What is recorded here is collective activism attributed to a specific garage, not individual acts as such.

- 1 Collective instance of union activism (union photos supporting bargaining team priorities);
- 1 Active branch (Montpelier-although the South Burlington Branch has an active Labor Management Committee);

In the garages the bulk of the activism can be attributed to:²⁸

- 42 Garages, upon request from Union Rep, provided photos of themselves holding signs in support of the NMU bargaining team (i.e. “Hands Off OT-Fair COLA Now”). The scale of this action in regards to the number of garages taking part, is close to the high water mark thus far achieved in AOT;
- 16 Garages, at specific times requested by Union Rep, recruited new union members from among their targeted co-workers;
- 14 Garages made calls and or emails to key politicians in support of union issues, when asked to do so by their Union Rep (i.e. in relation to contract negotiations & expressing non-support for workers comp being privatized);
- 7 Garages had workers present to the AOT Union Motorcycle Run (which was intended as a celebration of recent contract victories, and as a mobile union rally);
- Remaining acts ranged of providing quotes in support of VSEA endorsed candidate for Governor, attending a press conference in support of union issues, attending VSEA political events, etc..

The union photo action, which was called for in January 2016 by the former NMU Chair Michelle Salvador, was the last larger rank & file action called for in support of the contract negotiations. This action resulted in a total of 107 photos being submitted to VSEA. 42 of those photos came from AOT garages (where our garage contact system was already in place), 2 came

²⁸ It should also be mentioned that as of December, 17 AOT **union women** (not teased out by department or division) wrote to their Union Rep (and the BOT point person on the action) expressing strong interest in being part of a union delegation to the January 21 2017 **Million Women March** (a total of 37 VSEA woman expressed such interest). A number of these women have never been directly involved union activities prior to expressing a desire to attend this historic event. While the VSEA Board of Trustees allocated \$5000 to send such a delegation, and while the VSEA Council backed this decision from the Board, no VSEA staff was assigned to coordinate logistics with the BOT member serving as point on this project. Therefore it appears increasingly unlikely that the planning for this delegation will be achieved, and it is unlikely that these women will be able to attend this event on behalf of VSEA or otherwise. This is unfortunate on a number of levels; not only is this an opportunity for VSEA to be part of a historic march, it is also an opportunity for VSEA to begin to develop alliances (through collective action) with potential allies external to VSEA (which will be needed in the looming Trump era), but it was also a porthole through which new activists could begin to engage with their union. The failure for this effort to come off may decrease the credibility of VSEA with these 17 AOT members. Support from VSEA staff, after the BOT voted to support this action, could have and should have prevented this from playing out as it has. A similar failure to follow through also occurred over 2015-16 with the Dignity & Respect petition (36% of the signatures being from AOT) which was never delivered to the state/politicians or utilized in anyway, and the political press conference which two AOT stewards agreed to seek to attend in support of the candidate we endorsed for Governor. Point being: If you say you are going to do something, do it. Failure to do so decreases our credibility with the members and over time decreases our ability to get members to take action next time there is a need.

from DMV (Montpelier), and 1 came from AOT construction. Therefore, although AOT makes up (apx) 20% of NMU, 42% of the photos were AOT. This, like in other instances, is a testament to the effectiveness of the garage contact system.

With the AOT photos, a brief video was produced in support of AOT bargaining priorities. The video was publically posted on YouTube, drew over 700 views, and gained supportive comments from VT State Senator Anthony Pollina and VT State Rep Susan Hatch Davis (both members of the VT Progressive Party).

This AOT video can be viewed at the below web address:

www.youtube.com

AOT Activism & Electoral Politics

After contract negotiations concluded and the contract was funded by the Legislature (in the spring), 2016 was a year when VSEA asked less of its members with the exception of requests revolving around membership recruitment and electoral activity. Concerning electoral activity the asks tended to be related to phone banking for union endorsed candidates, providing quotes in support of candidates, etc. And like all of VSEA, participation from AOT members was minimal.²⁹ AOT workers, unlike other sections of VSEA, did provide four quotes in support of the candidate we backed for Governor (although only one of those quotes was used in an internal VSEA mailing). Two AOT stewards also committed to taking a day of annual leave to attend a press conference also in support of the VSEA endorsed candidate for Governor (although this event was cancelled when other VSEA union leaders failed to make a similar commitment). AOT members did not volunteer to work phone banks, did not knock on doors, and remained apprehensive about our overwhelming support for many incumbent Democratic Party candidates.³⁰

In fact, of the 1191 AOT workers covered by Collective Bargaining Agreements, not a single one belongs to the VSEA PAC. That number is striking. However, despite it being a stated goal of VSEA since at least since 2012, less than 100 union members (out of 5688) in total belong to the PAC. Given the zero AOT contributions to the PAC, and given the apprehension shown by AOT members towards many incumbent candidates, AOT members' minimal engagement in the election effort is not surprising. Perhaps what is surprising is that select stewards/leaders did provide quotes in support of our candidate for Governor and that two of these stewards were willing to take a day to support that candidate at a press conference.

To the credit of VSEA's Executive Director, in 2016 the union attempted to address the perceived disjunction between political endorsements and the political leanings of its members. For the first time in VSEA history, a poll was conducted prior to the Primary and the General Election. There the membership was asked to vote for the candidate in the statewide races that they wanted the union to back. For the poll prior to the General Election, following requests from a number of AOT garages, a "None-Of-The-Above" option was added to the ballots. In all cases, VSEA endorsed the candidate that won the vote (Matt Dunne for Governor & David Zuckerman for Lt Governor in the Democratic Primary, and Sue Minter-Democrat for Governor & David Zuckerman-Progressive for Lt Gov in the General Election). This new effort to further expand union democracy is to be applauded. However, AOT members still feel alienated from the en-

²⁹ In the 2016 VT General Election, in seriously contested statewide races, our endorsed candidate for Governor, Sue Minter-Democrat, lost to Phil Scott-Republican. In the LT Governor race, union endorsed candidate David Zuckerman-Progressive, won.

³⁰ As I have travelled to AOT garages, I have often been asked by AOT members why we tend to endorse the same incumbent politicians we appear to fight against during the legislative session.

dorsement process in general. After all, down ticket races are not voted on by the general membership, and while they are subject to ratification or reversal by the VSEA Council (on which AOT has allotted seats), it is still difficult for AOT members to understand how we can spend two years fighting against a lawmaker, appear to drag them kicking and screaming to the right side of an issue (in cases where we win), and then turn around and endorse them when their re-election comes up. And given the overall low number of union members who give to the PAC (again, zero in AOT) it is reasonable to question if this sentiment is not also felt in the wider VSEA. Regardless, the fact remains that if we are to honestly gage the level of electoral activism in AOT (and the rest of VSEA), we must understand it as low.

Given VSEA's inability to build the PAC and recruit a significant number of union members to volunteer on electoral work, perhaps a re-thinking of how we approach down ticket endorsements is in order. The AFL-CIO, for example, allows it's local (typically county or city based) Central Labor Councils (similar to VSEA Chapters) to make local endorsements and to organize electoral activity on the local level. In this way union members are directly vested and may personally know (or come to know) the candidates for State Senate, State Rep, Mayor, and City Council, etc..

If localizing the down ticket endorsement process is not advisable, another option would be to greatly reduce the number of endorsements we issue per election. Perhaps we continue to poll the members on the statewide races and continue to make these endorsements as we did in 2016. But for all down ticket legislative races we make clear that any legislator who does not vote in favor of any one of our legislative priorities will not receive our endorsement in the next election. In 2015, for example, there were about a dozen State Reps (out of 150) that voted in favor of a \$2 hotel occupancy tax that we were supporting (as a means to close the budget gap without layoffs or pay cuts). What if we only endorsed those incumbents in 2016?

All told, for AOT members to become more engaged in the electoral process and for them to begin to contribute to the PAC, they must come to believe that the politicians their union endorses are on their side on their issues. Endorsing the worst of two candidates (just to oppose an incumbent who is not a champion of labor) is not a rational option. But given our level of member support for the PAC and our minimal level of member engagement in the electoral process, doing things as they have been done in the past is also not a rational option. If the two suggestions above are not workable/desirable (for whatever reason) a new approach must be articulated and tried. Unless and until this happens, I see the likelihood of AOT's increased participation in the PAC and/or the electoral process to be minimal at best.

AOT Rapid Response Team

Another area where AOT fell short was in the creation of an AOT Rapid Response Team. This effort began as an outcome of an all-garage conference call held in late 2015 in support of the bargaining efforts. The idea was to put together an elite team of 10-12 AOT activists who did not hold union office above the level of garage contact. This team would be committed to using annual leave to attend 2-4 union actions a year. They would be committed to being anywhere they needed to be in Vermont upon 24 hours' notice (and as requested by the union leadership). This team would engage in informational picket lines, marches on the boss, key press conferences, etc.. However, despite efforts to build this team, to date only 4 persons have been recruited. In 2017 this project will be reevaluated. It is possible that this project will draw to a close, and energy will instead go into the continuing effort to build the garage contact/local union contact system in new areas of AOT.

IV. Bargaining

2016 saw the conclusion of Bargaining for the current contract. VSEA did well. Going into negotiations AOT members had the following priorities (although initial proposals were higher):

- Retain quality Healthcare;
- Retain Pay Steps (worth 3% every two years for most workers);
- Fair COLA;
- Establishment of Binding Third Party Arbitration (as opposed settling disputes through the Vermont Labor Relations Board);
- Snow Pay up 2% a year every year henceforth;
- Tool Pay up 2% a year every year henceforth;
- Boot Reimbursed up 2% a year every year henceforth;
- Full (not half) Snow Pay for workers who 'volunteer' to be on Snow Season Status, but who do not otherwise automatically qualify for Snow Pay;
- Full Pay for AOT employees out on workers comp due to Lyme Disease;
- For DMV Commercial Motor Vehicle Inspectors (and others outside AOT in the Group C Retirement Plan): a condensed step system.

Through the new Non-Management Unit & Supervisory Unit Contracts the following was achieved:

- No change to Healthcare Plan;
- Average 7.25% wage increases over 2 years (Steps & COLA), 10.25% wage increases for workers in their first 5 years of State service (Steps & COLA);
- The State and VSEA would continue to seek to negotiate Third Party Binding Arbitration and insert it into the contracts before they expire.
- \$100 increase to Snow Pay (that equals a 5% increase to Snow Pay);
- \$1 increase to Tool Pay (that equals a 5.8% increase to Tool Pay);
- \$25 increase to Boot Reimbursement (that equals a 16.66% increase to Boot Reimbursement);
- Full Pay for AOT employees out on workers comp due to Lyme Disease;
- Time-And-A-Half OT for Pay Grades 23-24 (this amounts to a HUGE raise for garage Foremen).

At the end of the day AOT union members did not get everything they were after. An automatic 'escalator' on Snow/Tool/Boot Pay was not achieved. Binding Arbitration was not locked down. Full Snow Pay for "volunteers" was not delivered. And, for DMV Commercial Motor Vehicle Inspectors, a condensed step system for Group C workers did not come to fruition. Even so, without making any meaningful concessions, it is true that most of AOT's priorities were addressed. And while much of the basic wins were achieved through the victory of a favorable Fact Finder's Report and a positive ruling by the Labor Board at Last-Best-Offer³¹, it is meaningful to note that the increases to Snow Pay, Tool Pay, Boot Reimbursement, and the full pay for AOT employees out on workers comp for Lyme Disease were all won at the bargaining table prior to going to Fact Finding or Last-Best-Offer. All told, AOT exceeded their own expectations concerning the contract that is now in place.

AOT workers (represented by Art Aulis-Westfield Garage on the NMU bargaining team) and their 86 contract captains in NMU did much to work towards these victories. The above discussed union photo action serves as one example. However, since much of the negotiating and major actions in support of the NMU bargaining team occurred in 2015, and since those actions were discussed in detail in the January 1 2016 "AOT-VSEA 1 Year of Building Union Power" report, they are beyond the scope of this document. Suffice to say that AOT, again, did well in contract negotiations.

V. Union Membership Recruitment

VSEA put a strong emphasis on membership recruitment in 2016. AOT members worked hard on this priority. The results of this effort are an unmitigated success. All told we saw 164 AOT workers join the union. Union membership in the garages (where we have a fully functioning garage contact system in place) is now at 81.65%. Union membership in DMV (where we have just begun to recruit local union contacts) stands at 80.56%. Overall AOT membership has climbed 2.81 percentage points to 72.71%. This improvement to AOT's membership rate is in line with the broader trend within VSEA. Likewise, VSEA overall added 821 members, increasing the membership rate by 1.82 percentage points to 75.52%.

In AOT we achieved this not by having staff individually sign up new members, but rather providing names of fee payers and talking points to garage contacts and other union officers and having them take the lead on this effort.³² As a secondary means of member recruitment, the Union Rep also sent occasional mass emails to non-members in AOT asking them to join highlighting pending challenges and union victories. These emails included an appeal to join the union and provided a link to the online membership application. After the successful conclusion of contract negotiations, the Union Rep also sent personalized letters to non-members who were tagged in the VSEA database as having taken an action in support of their union over the last two years. This letter included an appeal for them to become full union members.

Another important element of membership recruitment efforts within the AOT garages is the now standard practice of having stewards and garage contacts reach out to each new hire with

³¹ Here VSEA Director of Labor Relations, Gary Hoadley deserves much credit.

³² Early in 2016, Garage Contacts/Union Officers were mailed a hard copy list of names of non-members in their Garage. The mailing included reasons why we need to sign up new members, talking points, and Union Cards. Late in the year these Garage Contacts/Union Officers were emailed a broad list of fee payers broken down by Garage. Throughout the year, the Union Rep would encourage said officers to sign up new members in order to build the

the goal of having them become a union member. The ability for stewards to use a brief amount of VSEA leave time to meet with new hires in their AOT Districts was achieved through the AOT Labor Management Committee in 2015. In brief, a practice was set up whereby VSEA Administrator, Laurie Hassett, would regularly provide the AOT Union Rep a list of new hires in AOT.³³ The Union Rep would then do two things: first, all new hires would get an email from the Rep explaining why union membership is important, a personal request to join, and a link to the online applications. Second, if the new hire was from within the garages, the Union Rep would email the name to the District steward with a reminder to make time to meet with them. In the same email, the local garage contact would be cc'ed, and a reminder would go to them to also make a point of talking to them about joining the union. This effort resulted in 68.75% of new hires in the garages becoming union members. While this rate is well below the desired 80% mark, it is a significant improvement to the rate achieved in the rest of VSEA.

The effective recruitment of new members within AOT was done, by enlarge, through our garage contact system, our steward's ability to meet with new hires, and through effective use of email by the Union Rep. Having reached an 80%+ membership rate in the Garages and in DMV, it should not be expected to see additional growth in these sections of AOT. I would project that the membership rate in these areas will fluctuate between 78-82%. However, we can and will seek to fine tune the new hire procedure, and the goal will be to bring that rate up. We also should aim to increase the membership rate in Program Development and Finance & Administration. As we begin to build structure into these sections of AOT we should find success in recruiting new members. For 2017 the overall goal will be to increase AOT's overall membership rate to 75%.

AOT Union Membership Recruitment By The Numbers

Historic Perspective/AOT New Union Members by Year

2006: 37

2007: 29

2008: 36

2009: 41 (Year Governor Douglas-R pushed for pay decreases)

2010: 25 (Year after VSEA suffered pay decreases and step freezes)

2011: 31

2012: 50 (Organizers begin concerted effort to visit garages-VSEA Organizing Dept. formed)

2013: 45 (Organizers continue effort to visit garages/AOT Labor Management re-formed)

2014: 40 (New contract brings significant increases to Snow/Tool Pay/Boot Reimbursement)

2015: 87 (Single Union Rep to AOT/Governor threatens mass layoffs/seeks to reopen contract)

2016: 164³⁴ (VSEA begins membership recruitment campaign/new contract sees increases to Snow Pay/Tool Pay/Boot Reimbursement/Time-And-A-Half OT for PG 23-24 i.e. garage foremen/full pay for AOT employees on workers comp for Lyme Disease/average wage increases of 7.25% over two years/wage increases 10.25% for workers in their first 5 years of state service over two years.)

power of the Union.

³³ Laurie Hassett did a great job keeping this Union Rep informed about new hires, new members, and helped immensely in this on-going effort.

³⁴ In the 2015-2016 AOT 1 Year Review document, 105 new members we reported as being recruited. This was accurate. However, this number included those that recently filled out a union card and whose membership (in the database) was not yet processed. Therefore, some new members identified here (by searching the "started paying dues" option in the database) for 2016 were actually recruited in 2015.

Membership Rate on Jan 1 2016 (or earliest recorded figure) & on Jan 1 2017

AOT in Total: 2016 69.82% 2017 72.63%

+2.81 percentage points increase

AOT Garages: 2016 77.48% 2017 81.65%

+4.17 percentage point increase

DMV: 2016 78.9% 2017 80.56%

+1.66 percentage points increase

VSEA-Wide: 2016 73.7% 2017 75.52%

+1.82 percentage point increase

New Hire/Union Membership Recruitment Rates By Department for 2016³⁵

AOT Total New Hire Recruitment Rate: 2015 51.55% 2016 61.98%

+10.43 percentage point increase

AOT Garage New Hire Recruitment Rate: 2015 64.44% 2016 68.75%

+4.31 percentage point increase

DMV New Hire Recruitment Rate: Not Tracked

VSEA-Wide New Hire Recruitment Rate: 2015 35% (apx) 2016 48.16%

+13.16 percentage point increase

VI. Contract Representation

Internal structure, activism, contract gains, and membership recruitment are not meaningful unless the Collective Bargaining Agreements are also defended. In this regards the Union Rep and AOT stewards continue to provide quality representation to AOT workers. First and foremost I am happy to report that the AOT garages have not seen a classified non-probationary employee terminated since February, 2015; *nearly two years ago*. I am also pleased to report that the use of General Releases, as part of the conflict resolution process, remains a rare occurrence. We have only had one General Release³⁶ in 2016 (and only four over the last two years). And finally, AOT management/DHR has increasingly come to identify the basic level of discipline they are considering in Loudermill Letters. In multiple cases in 2016, the Loudermill Letter states that Management is considering disciplinary action up to and including “suspension” (where previously they would all say “up to termination”). This represents an improvement in the disciplinary process, as the worker and Union Rep now have a clearer understanding of what is at stake at a hearing and can adjust their defense strategy accordingly.

What follows are the two year totals (2015 & 2016), in the Garages, concerning representational work:

³⁵ These new hire recruitment rates do not calculate in new hires that join the union (or did not join the union) but for whatever reason are not still employed with the State as of January 1 2017. In the 2016 AOT annual report, I calculated those into the equation. Thus last year’s numbers reflect that.

³⁶ From a union point of view, a General Release is a bad thing as it compels the worker to sign away all his/her rights to take legal action against the state for all known and unknown issues that may have occurred with few exceptions (a workers comp related claim being one of said exceptions). A Limited Release, on the other hand, only compels the worker to sign away their legal recourse on things stemming from the specific issue at hand.

- Grievances filed: **10**
- [Management/DHR] Investigations into [alleged employee] misconduct: **47**
- Loudermills [termination/suspension hearings]: **10**
- No discipline issued (worker cleared) [following Investigation]: **10**
- Discipline imposed [following Investigation]: **16**
- Limited Release [which prevents future legal action the issue which is being resolved]: **6**
- General Release [which prevents future legal action on all past issues, known and unknown, with few exceptions such as relating to Workers Comp]: **4**
- Terminations/forced resignations [employees off original probation]: **2**
- Other issues (not contract violations) looked at and dealt with: **100**

What follows are the 2016 totals, in DMV, concerning representational work:

- Grievances filed: **1**
- [Management/DHR] Investigations into [alleged employee] misconduct: **10³⁷**
- Terminations/forced resignations [employees off original probation]: **2³⁸**
- Other issues (not contract violations) looked at and dealt with: **3**

In 2017 VSEA will continue to provide quality representation to AOT employees through the grievance procedure and disciplinary process. AOT stewards will also continue to receive training. Overall I expect the number of stewards in AOT to increase from 12 to 15 (two of the three new stewards being from outside the garages).

END OF REPORT

The Challenge Facing VSEA and A Proactive Response (2016)

Problem Statement: In light of the outcome of the 2016 US Presidential Election, VSEA is facing a crisis; all indications are that President-elect Trump will appoint a Justice to the Supreme Court which will eagerly rule against the constitutionality of Agency Fee.³⁹ VSEA and its members

³⁷ These 10 cases are still open.

³⁸ In both these cases the workers resigned just prior to the holding of a Loudermill Hearing. In one case the allegation was in regards to using state equipment to embezzle public funds. In the other it was a clear cut violation of a Last Chance Agreement.

³⁹ 2017 Note From The Author: I wrote the first draft of this proposal for the Vermont State Employees' Association when it became clear that the union's director was unwilling or conceptually unable to craft an organizational response to the looming reality of the incoming Trump administration. However, internal politics being what they were, I asked the VSEA Brattleboro Chapter President, Robin Rieske, if she would make the work her own and present it to the Chapter Presidents Committee and then the VSEA Board of Trustees. Robin edited my draft and made it stronger, giving her own imprint to it (that is the version that appears here). Despite resistance from the Executive Director,



VSEA Union Members

need to expect that Agency Fee will be ruled unconstitutional within a year. Assuming that this ruling will also mandate that effected unions are still required to provide services to non-paying workers, will potentially result in a disastrous decrease to our unions membership.

Our Efforts: While VSEA has done an admirable job of increasing its union membership over the past few years, this membership effort has not necessarily created the organizational change in structure that is needed. If our membership is weak, then we are weak in our ability to bargain. For example, we were recently unable to negotiate a true “win” in the contractual fight with our Governor. Also, without engaged VSEA members or identified active leaders in each worksite, efforts such as our petition drives fall short. In summary, our membership is up, but our ability to resist attacks by management, our next Governor and our next President is not. We need to understand that getting new members cannot be our only goal. Instead we need members who are activated and involved. This level of engagement is currently exemplified in some of our Departments, but these examples are exceptions. It is critical in this new political climate that we help members learn to help themselves.

The Solution: Change will only happen if VSEA members are made to feel engaged, informed and listened to. Once dues are no longer required for services, we will only retain a powerful membership when each union worker is felt to be intimately and essentially part of the union. And this cannot come about if the union is experienced as something external (i.e. staff). In brief, it is necessary that we build a structure whereby the union is visibly embodied by rank and file union leaders actively engaged on a weekly if not daily basis in every worksite, on every shift, in every place where the VSEA represents employees. This is not about whether we have a service model or an organizing model; instead it is simply the implementation of a model which proves itself effective in sustaining and building our collective power. But to achieve this, even though the end game is worker to worker engagement, VSEA must in essence, increase staff focus on achieving this goal in measurable ways over a defined period of time. The analogy here is that of a house. We, as member-leaders, are drawing the blue prints. In turn VSEA staff must act as the full-time experts in the implementing the blue prints (they are the builders). Once the house

the Chapter Presidents endorsed it, and the Executive Committee and VSEA Council took a favorable view of it. In the end the Executive Director was pressured in to making the goal of recruiting Local Union Contacts in each work-place a strategic aim of the union. This document was first presented to the VSEA on November 15, 2016.

is built, the structure will be maintained and even expanded not primarily by staff, but by the workers themselves.

Therefore, VSEA must refocus all union resources, for at least the next 12-18 months, on the identifying and recruiting of union leaders in each and every workplace. These leaders should be true rank and file leaders who have the respect of their co-workers and who are willing and able to perform defined tasks as required and requested by the union leadership. These leaders again will be understood as Local Union Contacts who are not arbitrarily chosen, but rather are a valued co-worker who all or most workers in the jobsite have respect for. The Local Union Contact may be an officer in the local Chapter, however, the idea is to create a contact in each worksite and not just have one or two people be the Contact for an entire region.

Tasks and Responsibilities of the Local Union Contacts:

- Receive regular communications from union leaders and staff which they must circulate with the workers in their location;
- Regularly update union bulletin boards;
- Share information about local Chapter meetings and events;
- Specifically meet every new hire to discuss why it is crucial to join the union in order to maintain union power, increase pay, and better working conditions; Chapter Presidents can share this information with Contacts monthly;
- Make a concerted statewide effort to communicate with long-standing fee payers (or non-members) to have them join the union;
- When requested, circulate and return petitions that gain the majority of signatures in their workplace;
- Help facilitate phone calls or emails that may be helpful to various union efforts; and organize other worksite/public actions as may be necessary and as may be called for by the union leadership;
- Act as a basic conduit between the people in their workplace and union staff/leadership;
- Regularly make known the views of their coworkers to the union leadership/ staff on union related issues;
- Act as Contract Captains when bargaining is underway in order to provide direct support to their bargaining teams.

Of course having a Local Union Contact at every job site and on every shift willing and able to do these tasks will help us, overall, maintain and increase our membership numbers and power even in the face of adversity. Their tasks are foundational to the kind of union VSEA needs to become in order to remain viable. However, whereas the core of a Steward's work is contractual in nature, the core of a Local Union Contact's work is organizational in nature; and both are surely important.

Likewise, VSEA must also make the building of its Steward system a priority as well. It is necessary that workers understand, in a personal way, the necessity of the union through the

regular enforcement of the contract that they have won. And here the primary place where they will experience this is through regular interactions with their area Steward. VSEA must also continue to prioritize the building of our Steward system until we reach the maximum Stewards allowed by the contracts. Stewards, for their part, must not only provide workers contractual advice and representation, but like Local Union Contacts they must also actively be trained and willing to recruit new members, including all new hires in their area of coverage.

If all or most of VSEA's resources are aimed at 1) recruiting a Local Union Contact in each workplace and on each shift, and 2) fulfilling the number of Steward appointments allowed under the contracts, and 3) training these Local Union Contacts and Stewards to effectively carry out the above defined tasks, we will have gone a long way in building an effective firewall between us and the disaster that is the looming Supreme Court decision. In the process we will have also delivered our bargaining teams new tools which they will wield in our inevitable contract fights. And all told, success tends to breed success: Therefore the more rank and file capacity we build, the more powerful we will become, and the more workers will naturally see the need to join their union (required or not).

Department Goals & Measures:

Organizing: Organizers will spend 4 days a week in the field visiting worksites. The primary object in unorganized worksites will be the recruitment of a key Local Union Contact in each worksite and on each shift. With the help of Union Reps, within the next 12 months, a key Local Union Contact will be identified and recruited in each worksite.

Union Reps: Reps will spend 2 days a week (minimum) visiting worksites. Recognizing their expertise in contract enforcement, their primary goal will be to recruit Stewards in every department, and in every geographic area. Their secondary goal will be to assist Organizers in the recruitment of key Local Union Contacts in each workplace and on each shift.

Political Department: All Department staff will spend 1 day a week during the legislative session (minimum) in the worksites (4 days a week after the legislative session if not in an election year) identifying and recruiting union members to partake in political/electoral activity. The secondary goal of this Department (during such worksite visits) will be to assist the above discuss work of the Organizers and Reps.

Labor Educator: Educator will seek to tailor their trainings to best suit the priorities defined above. Educator will also organize trainings during non-work hours in order to provide relevant trainings to Local Union Contacts who otherwise may not be eligible for VSEA leave time.

Communications Department: Staff will work daily to publicize the emerging struggle, the existential danger being faced by public sector unions, and the work being done (outlined above) by VSEA to meet these challenges.

Timeline/Basic Tasks for VSEA Staff:

Identify exactly how many worksites and shifts per worksite exist within our combined bargaining units. Divide that number by 12, weighting the first 6 months more than the second 6 months, and assign expectations to departments that result in Local Union Contacts being identified and recruited in all these locations (and on all shifts) by the end of one year. Further identify where we have Departmental /geographic needs for stewards, and work through those areas in order to identify/recruit/train stewards. Milestone achievements should to fill all of our contractual openings inside one year. As structure emerges, Union Reps will be notified of all new hires in their areas of coverage, and in turn those Reps will notify the proper Steward and Local Union Contact of said new hire and will provide directive to for them to speak with new hire with aim

towards recruitment. Likewise, bargaining teams, will develop direct communications with these Stewards and Local Union Contacts within their jurisdiction in order to coordinate information (back and forth) between themselves and members, and in order to coordinate mutually supportive efforts as is necessary. VSEA communications department, on the website, will make known who the Local Union Contact is for each worksite/shift and will provide contact info. BOT and Council will consider how this structure could be most effectively used to further the additional goals of VSEA.

Chapter IV: Working Class Power

Mount Snow Exploits Workers: Threatens Local Economy (1998)



Mount Snow Ski Resort, West Dover, VT

Wilmington, Vermont, 1998 –Saturday morning - up at 5am, still dark. Shower, shave, catch bus at 6am. Start work at 6:30am.¹ Thirty minute paid break at 11am. “Remember to smile for the tourists!” Catch 6pm bus home. It’s dark out. Eat dinner, sleep, wake at 5am. Repeat process 6 days a week (minus two hours Monday-Friday). Don’t plan on celebrating Christmas.

The Christmas weekend is the busiest time of the year. Out-of-state tourists flock to ski areas to spend quality time with their families during the holidays.

¹ 2017 Note From The Author: This article was provided to a number of Mt. Snow workers. I myself worked there for a period of time during the winter of 1998. The article was also sent to a number of Vermont newspapers as well as some socialist newspapers. Frankly, in the age before the internet was common in Vermont, I do not know where or if it was published. At the time I wrote this article (and while working at Mt. Snow) I was crashing at my friend Christine Linn’s apartment in Wilmington Vermont.

Fill BMW up with gas (super unleaded), set climate and cruise control, leave city, drive to Vermont. Rent condo, buy some wood, light fire. "Isn't this quaint dear? Vermont is so quaint." Sleep. Wake up at 10am, go to ski resort, and spend Christmas skiing with family. Notice the smile on workers' faces, or don't. "Isn't Christmas wonderful dear?"

This is the duality of the Mount Snow worker and the Mount Snow tourist. According to Snow management the average tourist spends \$60 per day at the slopes. Up to 2/3rds of Mt. Snow employees are paid between \$51 and \$63 a day (before taxes). The tourist can afford to not work. The Snow employee, with no or little paid sick leave, can't afford to miss work. Of course such discrepancies in situations, between worker and tourist, between Vermonter and out-of-stater, are unfortunately hard to avoid given Vermont's increasing reliance on tourism as a staple of the Green Mountain economy. Presently there are 27 ski areas in the state. The majority of these are owned by out-of-state interests. These 27 areas directly employ 11,000 workers. According to the Vermont Ski Areas Association another 11,000 jobs are contingent on these establishments. With a total workforce of 332,000 [Vermont Department of Labor], slightly more than 6% of in-state jobs are reliant on the ski industry. In turn, this industry is estimated to generate \$750,000,000 of revenue a year (much of it ultimately going out-of-state). While it is clearly good that 22,000 workers can find employment, it is not so clear if these workers are treated fairly.

Take for instance the real life situation of the average Mt. Snow laborer. Snow (as a subsidiary of the American Ski Corporation) employees 1200 workers. According to a source in Mt. Snow management, 600 to 800 are paid \$6 an hour. An additional 100-300 are paid up to but not more than \$7.50 an hour. Many of these employees also suffer stagnant wages. One current lift operator (who wishes to remain unnamed) still only receives \$6.25 per hour despite 7 seasons of service. Compare that with the \$6 per hour paid to any starting employee at the same position. These wages must be viewed in comparison with the Burlington based Peace & Justice Center's findings that a livable wage for a single rural Vermont resident is no less than \$7.98 per hour. For a two parent single wage earning family with two children, the livable wage is recognized as \$14.94 per hour [Vermont Job Gap Study, January 1997]. These findings are based on a 40 hour work week and assume 80% of one's health insurance is paid by the employer; coverage Mt. Snow typically does not provide.

In addition to poverty wages, the overwhelming majority of Snow employees must fend for themselves in regards to health and dental insurance. Snow refuses to provide such basic benefits unless a worker is a year-round employee. And of course, given the seasonal nature of the business 90% of its employees are laid off in April. Likewise, Snow's 401K retirement benefit is also refused to all non-year-round workers no matter how many hours and seasons they have been with the company. Thus middle aged workers such as Willy Frommelt, who have been with the company for several consecutive seasons, have little economically to look forward to in their later years other than the uncertainties of social security.

Snow, for their part, have been billing their employment opportunities less as a means to make a living, and more as a way to spend the winter skiing for free. While Snow does issue its workers free lift passes, it is a meaningless token to the many employees who only receive one day a week off and the others working from sun up to after sun down. The reality of the majority of laborers is that they do not seek out Snow as a place to ski for free, but rather as one of the few places of employment given the area's tight job market. For these workers Mt. Snow could very well be a local factory or machine shop (if NAFTA did not already drive those out).

So why is it that Snow neglects their laborers in this way? Could it possibly be that Snow simply does not generate the necessary revenue required to uplift the working and living conditions of their employees? That would seem a weak defense for such exploitation given the fact that management admits that each of the half-a-million seasonal customers generate \$5 of pure profit per visit to the slopes. Such an economic rebuttal would also seem hollow insofar as Snow is currently sinking \$18 million into the construction of a new Grand Summit Hotel. In addition, this season alone Snow has invested \$400,000 into employee training and orientation. The stated goal of the trainings is to keep workers happy. To quote Snow's PR Director Melissa Gilotty, "If the staff is not trained properly they will not be happy and may quit." I find it fascinating that presumably the shareholders & management 1.) view training as a means to pacify labor rather than a way to increase job expertise, and 2.) that management is concerned with worker loyalty, yet refuses to provide any concrete basis from which that loyalty could evolve (i.e. medical/dental insurance, better wages, pension plans for all full time employees).

It is clear that Snow does have the required revenue necessary to do right by its laborers, but Snow would rather invest that money in further profit making ventures and 'pacification programs' rather than in the material wellbeing of its employees.

One could argue that a 'temporary' stagnation of wages and benefits is a justifiable sacrifice in that such moves would free revenue in order to expand Snow, and that this growth could have a positive impact on the local economy (here I am specifically speaking about the construction of the Grand Summit Hotel). The logic basically being that the expansion of Snow will create new jobs, and attract more out-of-state money. Theoretically this money would find its way both directly into Snow and independently owned businesses in the area. This new money would result in growing profit margins for Snow, and sometime in the future, these increased profit margins would result in the ability to pay higher wages and increase access to benefits to its employees. But unfortunately neo-Reaganism trickle-down-economics, due to the human/capitalist tendency towards greed and gross accumulation of wealth, has time and again shown itself to be without merit on the micro level, and formula for increased unemployment and economic recession on the macro level. In reality, the trickle-down practice has not resulted in workers being uplifted, but instead in upper-management and shareholders siphoning profit into their own pockets at a rate faster than they can spend it. Thus the old capitalist truth that "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer." In brief, history does not tell us we should expect wages to keep pace let-alone catch up to any increased profits.

I grant that the present expansion of Snow will result in the formation of approximately 200 new jobs. But how many of these jobs will be at \$6 per hour with no benefits? All? 90%?

It should also not be assumed that this expansion will have a positive impact on the broader local economy. In fact, the opposite may be true. For example, what will adding more on-site rooms at Snow do to the independent inns? If local inns capture less business will better paying jobs actually be lost?

The expansion of Snow also brings a likelihood that it will increase its on-site retail operations. Snow already admits that the new hotel will include an increase in its ski-idem-specific retail offerings (with its current retail shop moving from the Base Lodge to the new hotel). When asked during a phone interview if there are plans to expand retail [more generally] PR Director Gilotty affirmed, "Yes! Definitely." During hotel ground breaking ceremonies this fall American Ski Corporation majority shareholder Les Otten (a Maine resident) said, "This is just the beginning of a village."

If or when Snow does expand its retail in more general ways, the result could be far from desirable from the point of view of local merchants. For instance, imagine the catastrophic impact that the opening of an on-site bookstore could have on the Bartleby's Bookstore located in downtown Wilmington? Imagine what could happen to any independent retailer that had to compete with an expanded on-site, Snow owned and operated shop.

In the final analysis, the material expansion of Snow comes at a cost to the Snow worker, and (if left unchecked) eventually may result in the subjugation of the surrounding area to the sole standing major capitalist employer – Mt. Snow.

In closure, the poor economic standards subjected upon Snow's labor force is very real and very serious. Such poor wages and lack of benefits are a direct result of the shareholder's & management's failures to recognize its employees' value as workers and as human beings. The shareholders & management would rather pay these folks a base minimum necessary to keep them functioning and minimally content rather than allow them to reap the benefits generated by the corporation's profit margin. The existence of any profit margin in any corporation ultimately owes its entirety to those who maintain and facilitate a safe workable environment. I will therefore end this commentary with an invitation to the workers of Mt. Snow to organize a union which can act as an advocate for your' demands and as a community voice. The mobilization of Snow's workforce into a strong union & the exertion of community control over its future direction are the goals which should be supported by all those Vermonters who value the liberating traditions upon which this state was founded.

One Worker's Perspective on The September 11th 2001 Attacks: Observations & Warnings (2001)

From Somewhere in the United States of America, September, 2001 –One the morning of September 11th 2001, four commercial airliners were hijacked and used to destroy popularly perceived centers of U.S. military and economic power.² The outcome of these attacks were, in part, the partial destruction of the Pentagon, the complete eradication of the World Trade Center, the death of all persons onboard the four planes, the death of an untold number of workers from within the fallen buildings, and an the death of an unconfirmed number of NYC firefighters and ambulance personnel. At this point reports have been circulated that those operatives responsible for the attacks held an extreme Muslim Fundamentalist ideology.

I, as an anti-imperialist revolutionary of a poor and working class perspective, mourn the loss of those thousands of working class people who were specifically aboard the aircrafts, as well as those custodians, secretaries, maintenance personnel, bike couriers, firefighters, etc., who perished with the collapse of the Twin Towers. These are losses whose true magnitude can only be fathomed by those friends and loved ones who knew them personally. To them I extend my sincere condolences.

Of course the great number of us in this country did not know any of those lost. Even so, this tragedy has taken its psychological toll on most of us. I recognize the fact that many working class persons throughout the United States are now experiencing deep emotions of anger and fear. However, we must understand that these are emotions that much of the "third world" have been

² 2017 Note From The Author: This article was first published anonymously in Barricada magazine, 2001.



View from the NYC harbor on 9/11/01

feeling for generations. Or more immediately, since the western capitalist world has targeted foreign people and lands for exploitation. These emotions here alluded to are just now striking the consciousness of the people within the United States as the horrors of blood and bombs are returning home to the very doorstep of imperialism. And here the emotions seem intense and clear inasmuch as a “first” for everything always bears an intensity not yet dulled by a dark regularity.

In a word, the intensity of this anger and fear is a symptom of our common isolation as Americans; isolation from the daily horrors experienced by the great multitude of laboring and unemployed persons in the Middle East, or otherwise, who’s daily pallet of existence includes a continuing image of the blood and rubbish we see spread across the streets of New York City today. We, the working class and poor of the U.S. may suffer the humiliation of a daily life of bosses, pay-cuts, bills and any number of other slights, but one thing our generation has thus far been removed from has been the deadly attacks of “suicide bombers”, the leveling of cities, and the mass starvation of our children.

Here we must understand that while the acute motivations of those responsible for these attacks may or may not stem from Islamic dogma, the broader motivations clearly can be traced to the federal government’s continuing campaigns of global imperialism. The guns that kill Palestinian children are produced in American factories. The bombs which kill Iraqi civilians are dropped from American planes. The massive poverty within the poor and working class communities in the Middle East and the World over stem directly from the capitalist policies of the North American ruling class and their allies as facilitated by the World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and Group of Eight.

As this document is being written, the corporate media is repeatedly portraying the above mentioned anti-democratic, fascist organizations as defenders of “democracy.” The neo-capitalist powers that be are no more the defenders of democracy than Islamic Fundamentalism is the defender of personal freedom. In reality these two ideologies, capitalism and religious fundamentalism of any stripe, represent different sides of the same coin; God and State. Both necessitate the dichotomy of ruled and rulers; rich and poor; master and slave. They both force organic reality to be experienced through the perceptual grid of hierarchical abstractions.

The way to prevent such future horrific attacks is not through arbitrary bombings of other countries or the assignation of individuals who may or may not have been involved. Such actions will only guarantee an escalation of carnage through retaliation and counter-retaliation. Nor will the expansion of the domestic police state prove effective in providing individual security. Israel, for example, is the personification of a quasi-western police state –yet is bombed more frequently than nearly any [other industrialized] nation on Earth. Rather, the way to avoid such future attacks is to eliminate the role of the U.S. and its allies as economic and military imperialists. It is the western nations which consume the vast majority of the World’s resources. It is the capitalist ruling class who reap the great wealth of the Earth through the exploitation of *all* poor and working people. It is these contradictions, in conjunction with the daily poverty and military oppression of the Middle Eastern people which creates the fertile fields in which these acts of terror are rooted.

Therefore, North American working class revolutionaries like myself must and will continue to struggle for a materially equitable society based on direct participatory democracy; a society which does not seek the homogenization of the World through imperialism, but rather the blooming of creativity, plenty and liberation through international cooperation and autonomy.

It is only through the emergence of such a truly free society that the proliferation of anti-social violence (be it U.S. bombs or religious terror) can be expected to subside.

Here I expect the struggle to become more difficult as the police, military, and intelligence agencies are given the green light by the government to begin operating at unprecedented levels of authority. Already Congress has agreed to provide these “security” agencies an additional 20 billion dollars to carry out undefined actions. Already right-wing Republicans and liberal Democrats are calling on working people to passively give up their nominal freedoms so that the state can more easily manage those who would and do dissent. The illusion of national security is gained at the expense of the illusion of our civil liberties. What lies ahead is the police state of random checkpoints, wiretaps, surveillance, political arrests, raids, assassinations, etc.. Of course this already happens, and always has (where one finds a state on finds abuse). Only here it will emerge as a daily reality common enough not to be mistaken as an anomaly. There is also talk of detaining mass amounts of U.S. citizens of Middle Eastern origin and/or requiring them to retain special identity cards. Fascism –no more no less.

We all must be very clear about the fact that the degrading effects which the rise of the fascist state will necessitate will not be limited to any one isolated group. Nor will it pertain exclusively to any one ethnic minority. It will directly affect us all. The strengthening of the police state will not occur without the open attack of the state against those who would oppose it. It is no mistake that with the U.S. entrance into World War I the government rounded up and arrested thousands of working class community and labor union organizers who correctly understood that it would be the working class who would die for the benefit of the rich –and who therefore opposed the war. And as history tends to tragically repeat itself, I fully expect that it will be us who resist the rich man’s paradigm of “democratic” exploitation that they will come for again. I accept this challenge as inevitable, but still I will not fight in their proposed war, and I will not tolerate the rise of fascism in the land that I live. I will continue to organize and I will resist. As to the exact form that my resistance will take –well every moment demands its own events which in turn imply a relevant response. I will do what I have to, and I hope you do the same.

No War

But

Class War.

Militant UE Strike at Fairbanks Scales Ends in Victory (2002)

St Johnsbury, Vermont, November 2002 –United Electrical Workers Local 234 at the St. Johnsbury Fairbanks Scale factory went back to work with a new three year contract on November 19th following a three week strike.³ The strike was a defensive maneuver in response to management’s attempt to enact an indefinite pension freeze, and to significantly decrease wages by way of requiring higher worker payment for healthcare. While the workers did not get all they hoped for in the final contract settlement, they did force the bosses to unfreeze their pensions in the final year of the contract, and gained a 26 cent an hour pay raise in the second and third year, and reduced the amount of healthcare payments management originally sought. The gains made by the union’s rank & file were, in part, due to strong community support and a militant 15 day picket line which operated 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

³ 2017 Note From The Author: This article was first published in Barricada magazine, January 2003.



During the course of the strike it was not unusual for local restaurants to bring food to the picketers. Also many local citizens and representatives of other labor and social justice organizations came down to the line to show their support during the crucial hours of 5:30am to 7:30am and 3:00pm to 5:00pm; a time when management and scabs entered and left the factory. The picket line maintained itself in front of the only entrance/exit into/out of the factory's parking lot.

Things came to a boiling point on November 12th when, following a public support rally [attended by U.S. Congressman Bernie Sanders & Progressive Party candidate for Lieutenant Governor Anthony Pollina], more than 75 workers (supported by other trade unionists, people from the Vermont Workers Center, members of the Vermont Progressive Party and a myself as a member of the Green Mountain Anarchist Collective) attempted to block all traffic moving in and out of the factory.

The confrontation heated up when a UPS truck, driven by a manager, attempted to cross the picket line. As the truck tried to cross the union's leadership [including Local President Bob South⁴] called for workers and supporters to link arms and block the path of the vehicle. This action was met with brutality on the part of the Sheriff's Department who began to physically push the workers out of the way. However, picketers refused to give in and began to push back. Soon, police were throwing punches (one woman was punched in the face) and this writer exchanged head-butts with one Deputy Sheriff. Soon police deployed pepper spray against the workers [I personally took a good part of a canister in the face], and still the line stood and the truck could not pass. [Not until after the union leadership gave the order to stand down] did the line break and the truck was able to go through.

Following this confrontation one worker was arrested for disorderly conduct. However, [when police moved to arrest myself –likely for the head-butt] a number of UE members [including President Bob South] put themselves between [myself] and the police. [I was therefore not arrested.] Vermont Public Radio is presently reporting that police are still considering making further arrests.

Soon after [the confrontation] reinforcements from the State Police were called to the scene and the union's blockading abilities were [therefore] weakened. Even so, as scabs and management left the factory they had to contend with a constant barrage of union signs, profanity, and spit.

In reaction to this day of militancy police responded with a massive presence. For the remainder of the strike, numerous State Troopers, some in bullet proof vests, patrolled the area with the local Sheriff's Department in support. Police were also positioned in front of the factory, further down the road to both the left and right, and even in the wooded hills located to the north. Approximately a dozen police vehicles were assigned to defend Fairbanks management, scabs, and property. One State Trooper informed a UE member that they were "expecting a riot." Several UE members stated in jest "now would be the time to rob a bank... and donate the money to the strike fund!" Despite police escalation and intimidation the UE members stood firm, as did other local allies who continued to publically support the strike.

By the Thursday leading up to November 19th, management threatened to permanently fire the strikers. Still only one union worker crossed the picket line. By the 19th, UE negotiators and

⁴ 2017 Note From The Author: Bob South would go on to serve multiple terms as a State Representative in the Vermont General Assembly as a member of the Labor Caucus and as a Democrat. Bob would also go on to become a Union Rep for the Vermont State Employees' Association.

management came to a compromised contract settlement which the rank & file felt was in their interest to accept. Of course the issues which caused the strike are not over, and one can be certain that they will again come to the fore in three years, when the current contract expires.⁵

Union + Town Meeting = Democracy (2003)



Workers of Montpelier Step Forward, History Calls!

Position Statement of the Green Mountain Anarchist Collective

Montpelier, VT, October 2003 –There are perhaps one or two moments in an individual's life where they find themselves immersed in what rightly can be considered an historical moment; a moment where their very own decision to act or not to act may determine the future outcome of not only their immediate surroundings, but that of an entire people, and history itself.⁶ It is just such a position that the workers of the Vermont city of Montpelier find themselves in today.

For more than three months a union drive has been underway in Vermont's capitol. However, this union drive is not the kind that we have come to expect. Instead of targeting a single factory,

⁵ UE Local 234 has a long history of militancy. During the most recent strike prior to this one, union workers turned over a bus filled with scabs which was attempting to enter the factory grounds.

⁶ 2017 Note From The Author: This essay was originally printed as a handbill by the Green Mountain Anarchist Collective and distributed to workers in Montpelier, Vermont. It was also published in Catamount Tavern News, 2003. The essay was written by David Van Deusen but was reviewed, modified, and adopted by the Green Mountain Anarchist Collective. The campaign lasted into 2005, but ultimately the effort was not sustained. To understand some of the factors that contributed to the decline of this effort see, *Precarious & Pissed Off*, by Sean West, 2006, theanar-

or business, the goal, from the onset, has been to organize the entire city into a general union of workers. This has not been remotely attempted in North America in many generations. This project was initiated by area employees, the Vermont Workers' Center, and the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America (of whom the Hunger Mountain employees are members), and has been carried forth by a volunteer organizing committee of rank & file workers from dozens of distinct city shops. To date [10/25/03] management at Charlie O's tavern has said that they will voluntarily recognize the union.⁷ Also, recognition at the Savory Theater is looming. Workers at La Pizzeria, Karma Imports, and State Street Market are organizing and have requested recognition. At J. Morgan's (a restaurant that employs more than 40 people) *a majority of workers have come forth in support of the union*. Thus far J. Morgan's management has refused to recognize the union and has created an atmosphere of fear and intimidation on the shop floor. *Management beware! Union busting will not be tolerated in our community!*

What does the unionization of Montpelier mean for the city's workers?

With a union, workers will receive a contract through which they can attain job security (bosses will no longer be empowered to fire people without just cause, and bosses will be forced to follow an agreed procedure if they seek such action), increased wages and/or a guarantee that wages will not be cut (the union seeks to gain fair wage increases for all, and has the goal of winning an eventual livable wage), and with the organization of the union workers will have a legitimate chance of winning decent benefits (i.e. medical coverage). However, more importantly than these concrete gains, the unionization of Montpelier will result in the expansion of democracy in that workers will now have a citywide organization through which they will be able to meet and discuss *all* pressing issues that affect them on a local, national, or even international level. They will be in direct possession of a democratic organization that has the capacity to take a position, and to take action, in the interests of the Montpelier and Vermont working class, and other laborers (wherever they may be) whenever such acts of solidarity and mutual aid are shown to be both desirable and necessary. For example, if the city or state government was to enact laws or regulations that are counter to the interests of working families, or conversely, if resolutions from Town Meeting Day are not enacted by the related authorities, the workers will now be able to call for a meeting of representatives from each city shop. At such a meeting they, through a democratic decision making process, will be able to organize the united response of all city employees. Such united and organized action, regardless of the particularities that such will ultimately entail, will result in the applying of a strong and united pressure on those who seek to block or manipulate the will of the people. After all, it is the workers who make Montpelier and Vermont as a whole function; it is they who, among many other things, clean the offices, work the cash registers, count inventory, serve and cook the food, provide childcare, maintain the roads, construct buildings, give medical care, and mill the lumber. If the workers build such a strong and democratic organization through which their common interests, visions, and goals can be articulated by a united voice, backed by a commitment to action, then they will be in a position whereby they can put the agenda of the common Vermonter first. The laboring classes make Montpelier function and if united they, at will, can decide otherwise! There is power in labor!

chistlibrary.org.

⁷ 2017 Note From The Author: They did not, and recognition was never achieved there.

Let us be clear about something: Montpelier could be just a beginning. After this campaign has won citywide recognition, other Vermont towns may follow its example. And if the workers of such towns (both large and small) come together into strong organizations, and as these organizations build strong ties between each other, the Vermont working class as a whole would no longer be at the heels of politicians who have to answer to the bosses (be them the IBM CEOs or *out-of-state* logging interests). If this time comes, these strong and democratic organizations of various city and town workers, in collaboration with farmer's organizations such as the Dairy Farmers of Vermont, and taking into account the general will as organized through the more than 200 Town Meetings, would now be in a position to put forth a united and legitimate voice of all these working persons who make Vermont what it is! *We will win!*

And again, as goes Vermont, other regions in North America could follow. For if we, as working Vermonters, can show people that it is possible to band together to receive a wage that one can live a dignified life by, and as it is demonstrated that democracy does not start and stop in a voting booth, but that it is a real everyday practice of workers which must be won and protected by our own collective efforts, then we can rightly say to our natural allies across the continent and beyond that "we stand in solidarity with your particular struggles, and we offer you a proved model that you too can utilize for your own empowerment."

The question that every worker in Montpelier must be prepared to answer is 'which side was I on when we, together, stood at the historical crossroads of class struggle? Did I stand with my fellow workers, and therefore strive towards the further democratization of my community, or did I fall back in line, into the stagnate waters of the status quo? Did I take part in the historic emergence of an empowered working class, or did I support the poverty wages and dictatorial control of the bosses, the wealthy, the big money politicians, and all those who would seek the stifling of real everyday democracy?' Just as our ancestors who rebelled against the tyranny of British imperialism had to decide which side they were on, so too must we. To support the union is to support further democracy. To support the bosses who are against the union is to support the status quo which feeds us on poverty wages and keeps us tethered to a political machine which is fed by little more than capital. In the spirit of the Green Mountain Boys, and with the goal of democracy and social justice, the Green Mountain Anarchist Collective calls on all fellow workers to step forth into the light of history and seize the opportunity that the moment holds! Union Yes!

**if you are a Montpelier worker and wish to join the cause, form a union committee at your workplace and get in touch with the Vermont Workers Center at 802.229.0009 or stop by their office located at 7 Court Street, on the 4th floor, Montpelier. If you are a worker from outside Montpelier, but also wish to form a union, you too are encouraged to call the Vermont Workers Center.*

Workers of Montpelier Unit!

The Green Mountain Anarchist Collective

Montpelier Workers Seek Citywide Labor Union! (2003)

Montpelier VT, October 2003- The Vermont Workers' Center, in collaboration with the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE –who recently organized Montpelier's Hunger Mountain Food Co-op), has gone public with a now several month old campaign to organize

⁸ 2017 Note From The Author: This article was first published in Catamount Tavern News in 2003.



Downtown Montpelier

a general union of Montpelier workers.⁸ This campaign seeks to gain union representation and recognition in every single shop, the majority of whom are from the service and retail sector, in this capital city (population 7800). For the last few months the drive has been furthered by the formation of an organizing committee made of rank & file workers from dozens of distinct shops. The union seeks to gain fair wage increases (with the goal of achieving livable wages), job security, and more democracy for all area workers. As of print, management has come out in support of voluntary recognition at Charlie O's Tavern.⁹ Additional shops, such as the Savoy Theater are seriously considering recognition as well.¹⁰ Workers from La Pizzeria, Karma Imports, and the State Street Market have requested recognition of the union as well.

However, it is clear that the unionization of the entire city will not be won without a fight. At J. Morgan's, a downtown restaurant of more than 40 workers owned by the Bashara family, management, in addition to attempting to intimidate, bribe, and harass the staff, has brought in a union busting firm to aggressively seek to disrupt the efforts of the majority of employees who have come out in favor of the organizing drive. This being said, the general support of the union is clearly growing as workers are coming to understand the benefits and need to have a democratic organization which advocates for their interests; *an organization which is owned and controlled by the workers themselves.*

In an interview with CT News, James Haslam, Director of the Workers' Center said, "The bosses and the employers are well organized. They have the Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Business Association. *The workers need their own organization...* When workers form a union they are able to have the space to get together to figure out how to address issues which affect them. In Montpelier they are starting to not only discuss specific workplace issues of fairness and equitable treatment, but also things that transcend these specifics, like healthcare [coverage], parking for workers, and affordable housing."

This union drive must be understood in the correct context. The fact is the relatively well paid manufacturing jobs, many of which were unionized, have been leaving Vermont in great numbers as a result of NAFTA and so called free trade. In this last year alone hundreds of jobs have left the Green Mountains. In turn the new jobs that are being created are largely in the service and retail sector, and generally pay well below a livable wage (which is presently defined as \$11.60 an hour) and very few carry any benefits such as healthcare or dental coverage. It is such service and retail jobs that employ hundreds of Montpelier workers. Therefore, it should be no surprise that employees from Vermont's fastest growing sectors are coming together in order to win a dignified and sustainable life based on the labor that they perform. As such, the efforts of the pro-union working class in Montpelier must be viewed as a step forward both in terms of expanding the functioning bodies of democracy, and in terms of achieving directly democratic socialism within the rugged geography of the Green Mountains.

⁹ 2017 Note From The Author: Charlie O's was and continues to be a working class, biker oriented tavern on Main Street. Recognition would never be achieved there as the owner (unlike his local manager) soon came out firmly against the union. In fact, as time passed, I [David Van Deusen] became a bartender at this tavern. I was eventually fired without cause within 24 hours of being quoted in the local newspaper as being a spokesman for the union (in opposition to a proposed regressive option tax – which was ultimately voted down). While a union efforts failed to get me reinstated, 75 local patrons organized a one night tip-strike against the manager (who also bartended). On this same night, with nearly all patrons wearing 'Bring Back Dave' stickers, a fellow bartender names Mo (who recently resigned) also threw a glass at the manager's head (which missed, smashing behind the bar), and patrons (including KW) poured beer on the pool tables. "Bring Back Dave" was also carved into the wall of the women's room with a knife.

¹⁰ 2017 Note From The Author: A union contract was soon signed at the Savoy theater and Downstairs Video.

WORKER OWNED: The Changing Face of Employment in Vermont (2006)



Langdon Street Café, Owned By The Workers, Montpelier, VT.

On March 3 2006 the 98-year-old Capital City Press in Berlin, Vermont shut its doors for the last time and 200 skilled workers, members of the Teamster-affiliated Lithographers Local 1, found themselves without jobs.¹¹ The decision to close down the facility was made as a cost cutting measure by the print shop's parent company—the Maryland-based Sheridan Group. Production formerly done in the Green Mountains has been transferred to a nonunion plant in Hanover,

¹¹ 2017 Note From The Author: This article was first printed in Z Magazine and Catamount Tavern News, 2006.

Pennsylvania. Immediately after the announced closing, many Capital City Press employees came together to see if they could establish a new print shop that would be better rooted in the community and ultimately owned by the employees.

Dan Brush, a former Capital City Press worker and current business manager of Local 1, explained that his union was “60 percent” down the road to getting the new company off the ground. He and other members of the committee have been meeting with third parties trying to raise capital and pursue block grants. They had also been reaching out to former Capital City Press customers and had already secured over \$1,500,000 in projected sales. If all goes according to plan, they expect to open, providing employment for 35 people, in June or July 2006.

If successful, these print workers will join other Vermont companies such as Carris Reels, Croma Technologies, the Trust Company of Vermont, and King Arthur Flour as the latest addition to the growing list of employee-owned Vermont businesses. In total there are 45 worker-owned companies in Vermont employing an estimated 2,200 people.

According to Don Jamison, director of the Burlington-based Vermont Employee Ownership Center, worker-owned businesses are on the rise. He explained that the reasons why people pursue worker ownership are diverse. Some do it to cash in on tax benefits offered by the state. In other cases businesses choose to transition towards worker ownership as an exit strategy for a private owner. Still others do so because of a sense of moral obligation. Whatever the reason, supporters contend that employee-owned companies have achieved higher levels of productivity, are less apt to relocate out of state, and tend to offer better pay and benefits than comparable jobs in traditional corporations.

Worker Cooperatives

The vast majority of employee owned businesses are organized according to one of two dominant models: worker cooperatives or Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs). Worker co-ops represent just over 20 percent of employee owned companies in Vermont. However, these tend to employ far fewer workers than ESOPs. While practiced on an industrial scale in a number of nations, including Spain, Italy, and Argentina, in Vermont it is rare that co-ops involve more than 20 people. For example, the Red House construction co-op in Burlington and the Langdon Street Café co-op in Montpelier both employ 15 people. The Brattleboro Tech Collective employs three.

Some worker co-ops, like Red House, were started for practical reasons, such as the desire to attract and retain highly qualified workers. Others, such as the Langdon Street Café, were started for more philosophical reasons, such as the desire to extend town meeting-type democracy into the workplace. All worker co-ops have democracy built into their structural model. This was done by either allowing every worker a voting seat on the board of directors or through workers electing representatives to the board from within their own ranks. In a co-op the worker-owners always constitute the majority of any decision making body.

While the ten or so worker cooperatives in Vermont differ depending on industry and the people involved, what co-op members hold in common is the belief that this model helps alleviate workplace alienation, increases output, and more equitably extends financial rewards throughout its membership.

David Evans, a member of the Brattleboro Tech Collective, contends, “We spend the bulk of our days and lives...laboring in a workplace. So I think the bulk of peoples’ experience is not having any control or real feelings of independence.... On the other hand, you don’t get apathetic when you’re a worker-owner. Once you take the reins of your workplace, it empowers you in other areas of your life.”

Wes Hamilton, a worker-owner at the Langdon Street Café (established in 2003), emphatically agrees. “You’d have a hard time finding anyone who would argue against freedom, equality, and democracy, but the funny thing is we are completely willing to accept what amounts to a dictatorship when it comes to work and your job. We decided on collective ownership because we want to live in a world where there is no dictatorship...and where there really is democracy and where everybody affected by a decision has a voice in creating that decision.”

For Hamilton, who describes himself as an anarchist, worker cooperatives represent an alternative model of how Vermont’s economy could be restructured along more equitable and democratic lines. In a certain sense he understands his co-op as a kind of propaganda of the deed.

“We are a small band of idealistic, politically-minded 20 somethings, but to the extent that we can make this work and get our philosophy and ideas out...I think it opens up the notion that worker owned cooperatives can be successful. It opens up the concept to people who may otherwise never consider it,” Hamilton explained.

Stock Ownership Plans

The majority of worker-owners belong to Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs) and claim workforces well into the hundreds. While some are committed to workplace democracy, the only guaranteed commonality is that employees own some portion of the business. That portion can vary from 1 percent (Green Mountain Coffee Roasters) to a slight majority (Carris Reels) to 100 percent (King Arthur Flour). The way this ownership works is that after a set amount of time, qualified workers accrue stock that pays dividends as the value of the company increases. Collective ownership requires that departing employees sell back the stock. In this way ESOPs have built in financial rewards for the workers whose labor helps generate profits.

In general Vermont ESOPs put a heavy emphasis on “the culture of employee ownership” where employees are made to feel that their voice matters. They are typically encouraged to maintain an open dialogue with management, to take a more active role in the overall running of the company, and are often allotted representation on the board of directors. The extent of this representation varies. Gardener’s Supply Company in Burlington, for example, allows non-management one seat on a seven-member board. The former Capital City Press workers, on the other hand, plan to give the rank and file ultimate control over the board, presumably by giving non-management employees a majority of the seats.

Many within the ESOP movement report that their work environment translates into increased productivity, a decrease in absenteeism, and an avoidance of many of the management-labor frictions common in traditional corporations. However, not all are convinced of the workplace altruism that many ESOP boosters speak of.

While Vermont’s labor leaders speak highly of the worker cooperative model, when it comes to ESOPs they express varying degrees of apprehension. Vermont Workers’ Center Director James Haslam points out that the formation of an ESOP, despite the near universal talk of a culture of ownership, does not necessarily mean employees will be any more legally empowered than in traditional companies. Haslam contends, “Unless [companies] are worker run, and in a democratic way, then it makes sense for workers to have a voice in their own working conditions. The only way to have that truly is if you have a union.”

Traven Leyshon, president of the Washington County Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO, shares Haslam’s misgivings. “Who has the majority [and therefore control] on the board of directors and who is the management? Of course management is a technical skill. It usually does require hiring-

in someone who has business expertise that the workers are not likely to have themselves, but who controls that person?”

Leyshon explains that his misgivings date back to his experiences in the 1980s while organizing in the labor movement outside Vermont. He says that during this period ESOPs were used as a tool to win concessions from union truckers across the U.S. He states that following the deregulation of the industry under Ronald Reagan many faltering freight companies went to their employees and convinced them to agree to ESOPs in exchange for large cuts in benefits and wages. He points out that all of these firms went belly up within the first few years of their existence.

ESOP enthusiast Cindy Turcat, chief operating officer of Gardener’s Supply Company and president of the Vermont Employee Ownership Center, admits that it is not accurate to paint all ESOPs with the same enlightened brush. “Not all people do ESOPS for the right reasons,” she warns.

Jamison recognizes the past exploitive nature of some ESOPs. “As with any complex financial arrangement...there is room for abuse.... In the 80s, when there were a lot of businesses going belly up, unions were sometimes suckered into bad deals for their members where ESOPs were used as a kind of a last way of ringing out concessions from employees as the business was going down,” Jamison explained. However, for him these abuses are primarily a thing of the past and asserts that the recent track record for ESOPs in Vermont demonstrates that the potential gains far outweigh perceived risks. Many people currently employed in ESOPs tend to agree.

Pat Bates, an employee-owner of the Gardener’s Supply Company, is a firm ESOP supporter. She sees employee ownership as a means for workers to feel more connected with the business, as well as a way for them to share in the rewards. “It’s [in part] about sharing the profits. We’re not working our eight hours a day, putting in our 100 percent so that the few elites can reap the benefits and profits and put them in their pockets. We all get to share in it. In the good times we can celebrate and in the difficult times we come together to find those creative resolutions,” says Bates.

At Green Mountain Coffee Roasters I talked with a ten-year veteran of the company. He affirmed that the benefit package and pay provided by the company is very good (i.e., full health-care, time off, and occasional yoga classes) and he is particularly happy with the additional pay accrued by his stake in the ESOP. However, he also confides that in his opinion the company employs too many temps.

As at many ESOPs, temps and part-time workers are not eligible for ownership or benefits and commonly receive no more than \$9 an hour. The human resources department reports that there are currently 60 part-time workers and 7 temps employed by the company.

One former temp told me his experience at the company was not qualitatively different than at other non-ESOP factories. He says, “I didn’t see any signs of anything [at Green Mountain Coffee Roasters] being any utopian pleasure palace. I saw people just trying to get through the day with equipment that was malfunctioning and deadlines that were to be met and demands by management to make more portions for sale.”

As for the coffee company’s claims of establishing a culture of ownership, he charged, “They said there was an open door policy, but saying that there was and actually accepting any feedback are two different things.... The only feedback that they [management] wanted to hear was, ‘Yes, I will work harder.’”

While this worker’s experience may or may not be common within ESOPs, many Vermont workers are still drawn to the model. Dan Brush and the former Capital City Press employees

have chosen to organize their new business venture as an ESOP. Even so, they intend on borrowing certain elements of the cooperative model in order to provide meaningful worker oversight of management.

Brush asserts, “When we get up and running, we will be making all the decisions. We’ll all be shareholders. We’ll own a majority of the business. We will sit down and make the decisions. We’re not going to make the day-to-day decisions [for that they expect to hire a plant manager], but the big decisions.” Brush continues, “Since people are all union members and are used to having those types of meetings and making those type of decisions, this is something we are very comfortable with doing.”

The print workers also intend on keeping their status as a union shop. “There are a lot of good shops that are union shops where there aren’t a lot of problems between the union and management. I think we would be evolving into one of those shops and I think we may be growing into a vision as to what the future might be for parts of the labor movement as our manufacturing base leaves the country,” concludes Brush.

Whatever the future may hold, it is likely that worker-owned companies will continue to play a dynamic and increasing role in Vermont’s economy. What remains to be seen is whether or not this trend is capable of delivering actual workplace democracy or if it will be limited to providing financial rewards and a perception of employee participation. Regardless, in this era of outsourcing and stagnant wages, employee ownership will likely be embraced as a marked improvement to the status quo by many a Vermonter. The print workers are just the start.

Labor’s First Strike Against the War (2008)

Montpelier VT, April 2008- The Executive Board of the Vermont AFL-CIO, representing thousands of workers in countless sectors across Vermont, have unanimously passed an historic resolution expressing their “unequivocal” support for the first US labor strike against the war in Iraq.¹² The strike, being organized by the Longshore Caucus of the International Longshore & Warehouse Union (ILWU), will seek to shut down all west coast ports for a period of 8 hours on the day of May 1st 2008. The Vermont AFL-CIO is the first state labor federation to publicly back the Longshoremen; other state federations are expected to follow.¹³

The resolution, among other things, calls the war in Iraq “immoral, unwanted, and unnecessary”, states that the vast majority of working Vermonters oppose the war, and contends that the war will only be brought to an end by “the direct actions of working people.” Many other Vermont labor unions and organizations, including the Vermont Workers’ Center, have also made official statements condemning the war.

The resolution also calls on working Vermonters to “discuss the actions of the Longshoremen, to wear anti-war buttons, and to take various actions of their own design and choosing in their workplace on May 1st, 2008.”

“Workers in Vermont and all across this nation are against this war. We have already demanded that the government end it, but they have consistently failed to heed our words. Therefore work-

¹² 2017 Note From The Author: I wrote this piece as a press release for the Vermont AFL-CIO in April, 2008. However, I was not the primary author of the attached resolution, although I did vocally support the resolution did help craft aspects of it.

¹³ 2017 Note From The Author: The South Carolina AFL-CIO soon after also passed a resolution in support of the Longshoremen’s strike against the war.



ing people are beginning to take concrete steps to make our resistance known. If the war does not immediately end we, the unions and working people of Vermont, will also be compelled to take appropriate action,” said David Van Deusen, a District Vice President of the Vermont AFL-CIO.

Traven Leyshon, President of the Washington, Lamoille & Orange County Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO, said, “Vermont labor has long called for an end to this war. The untold billions being spent on the war could instead be used to address our domestic needs. It is working people who pay the cost of the war - in some cases with our lives, but always with our sacrifices.

Vermont AFL-CIO Resolution In Solidarity With Longshoremen’s West Coast Strike Against War April, 2008

Whereas the war in Iraq is immoral, unwanted, and unnecessary,

Whereas this unjust war is opposed by the great majority of Americans & Vermonters, the bulk of organized labor, and by thousands of enlisted military personal,

Whereas this unjust war has already resulted in over 4000 American dead (including a disproportionate number of brave Vermonters), and tens of thousands of service men & woman being wounded,

Whereas this unjust war has further resulted in untold number of Iraqi deaths,

Whereas the Federal Government has not made any constructive moves towards the ending of this war and the full removal of US troops, and instead has taken the course of escalation and indefinite occupation,

Whereas the government of Vermont, and especially Governor Jim Douglas, have failed to find ways to bring Vermont National Guard troops home from Iraq,

Whereas this war will only be brought to an end by the direct actions of working people,

Therefore, Let It Be Resolved that the Vermont AFL-CIO continues to stand in firm opposition to this war, and unequivocally supports the decision of the Longshore Caucus of the International Longshore & Warehouse Union (ILWU) to shut down the west coast ports for a period of 8 hours on May 1st, 2008, as a means of resistance.

Let It Be Resolved that the Vermont AFL-CIO stands in full solidarity with the New York Metro Local of the American Postal Workers who have resolved to conduct two minute periods of silence on May 1st, 2008, at 1PM, 5PM & 9PM in protest of the war and in support of the Longshoremen.

Let It Be Resolved that the Vermont AFL-CIO encourages *all* Vermont workers to stand in solidarity with the historic actions being taken by the Longshoremen & other labor unions to end this war.

Let It Be Further Resolved that the Vermont AFL-CIO calls for *all* Vermont workers to discuss the actions of the Longshoremen, to wear anti-war buttons, and to take various actions of their own design and choosing in their workplace on May 1st, 2008 as a means of resistance against this unjust war.

Healthcare Is A Human Right: Call In Sick May 1 (2009)

Montpelier VT, April 2009- We know how things stand. The recession is teetering on a New Great Depression; many say we are already there.¹⁴ Tens of thousands of Vermonters are out of

¹⁴ 2017 Note From The Author: This article was first printed in the Rutland Herald in April 2009. The Healthcare



May Day demonstration for healthcare for all, Montpelier Vermont

work. Thousands more are slipping into severe poverty. Nonunion workers are losing their jobs and having their benefits gutted, while union workers are facing layoffs, pay cuts and increases in their health care costs. Republican Governor Douglas has reacted by calling for mass layoffs, a decrease in unemployment benefits and cuts in social services; all at a time when we need jobs and services more than ever!

Up until now, working Vermonters have been on the defensive. But, as a District Vice President in the Vermont AFL-CIO, I am here to say this is about to change. No longer are working people willing to pay for the greed and failures of the capitalist class. No longer will we stand by as Wall Street tycoons squeeze more profit from a broken system at the expense of our jobs, our health care, and our lives. In a word, working people are preparing to go on the offensive in the fight for a dignified way of life, and the Vermont AFL-CIO is ready and willing to stand by these folks wherever they may be.

On May 1, thousands will march upon the Capitol in Montpelier not only to insist that our jobs and services be made safe, but also to demand that all Vermonters be provided with health care now! The Vermont Workers' Center, with a constituency of over 25,000, has been organizing towards this rally for months as part of their "Health Care is a Human Right" campaign, and is boldly calling on people to "call in sick" and for small businesses to "voluntarily close down" in order to support the mass action on the 1st. The Vermont AFL-CIO, with our 10,000 members, has

Is A Human Right campaign resulted in legislation being passed in the Vermont General Assembly in 2011 which set a mandated road map for achieving this by 2017. However, Democratic Governor Peter Shumlin, who publically supported single payer and made it a major leg of his electoral campaigns, killed the legislation shortly *after* winning his third term in 2014. Shumlin did not seek reelection in 2016.

endorsed this day of action and is calling on our rank and file to take a "personal day" to attend the demonstration. We project that the May 1st demonstration will be of historic proportions. It will be the first shot fired in a battle to reclaim Vermont for the working man and woman.

So on Friday, May 1, stop whatever it is you are doing, and at 12 noon converge at the State House in Montpelier. It is time for working people to stand together and say "enough is enough!" "Health care is a Human Right" and we oppose the profit driven private insurance companies that make billions off of our sickness. We need a Vermont based single-payer health care system now, and we intend on winning it!

For more information of the May 1 Rally, and the "Health Care is a Human Right Campaign" go to: www.workerscenter.org

Solidarity,

David Van Deusen

Vermont AFL-CIO Liaison to

Green Energy and Good Jobs For Vermonters-October (2011)



Lowell Mountain Wind Farm, Vermont

An open letter to The People of Vermont, Gov. Peter Shumlin, and other interested parties:

Vermont's leading voices for working families and the environment are united and speak with one voice when it comes to renewable in-state energy production. We agree that renewable energy production is necessary if we are to become energy independent, environmentally respon-

sible and carbon neutral.¹⁵ We also comprehend the building of these new energy facilities as a source of construction jobs for working people. However, the question becomes, will these jobs go to out-of-state corporations, will they go to irresponsible in-state companies or will they provide livable wages, good benefits and family-sustainable employment for a generation of Vermonters?

It is our common assertion that the environmental and economic issues related to new energy development cannot be separated. Creating green energy without also supporting a strong local economy, or aggressively seeking job creation without addressing basic environmental issues, undermines the future upon which our Green Mountain State is predicated. As Vermonters, as the leaders of organized labor, as environmentalists, we do not and cannot accept a disjunction between these two foundational beliefs. In brief, we need green energy, and we need good green jobs!

As the state of Vermont moves forward with its comprehensive energy plan, we have an opportunity to not only guarantee Vermont's place of honor as a leader in the global struggle against climate change but also as a leader in local green-job creation. It will be by virtue of this multiplier effect, by virtue of breaking down the false dichotomy between environmental concerns and economic concerns, that we will firmly establish the cultural shift necessary to achieve sustainability, self-reliance and to further the common good in Vermont and beyond. Once again, history calls for Vermont to lead the way. Will we heed this historic call as we so often have in our proud past? That is the question before us today.

Therefore, we, the undersigned leaders of Vermont's labor and environmental movements, with a combined membership in the tens-of-thousands, call on the [Vermont] Public Service Board to make local job creation, livable wages and good benefits a basic, binding and non-negotiable prerequisite prior to issuing a Certificate of Public Good for renewable energy projects. We further call on our governor, Peter Shumlin, to continue to be a strong voice in support of hiring local, ideally union, for these green energy projects.

We look forward to working in partnership with socially responsible renewable energy developers, the Public Service Board, our governor and the State of Vermont towards a green energy and green economic future. However, let it be known that we will publicly resist any and all new energy projects that do not address the needs of the people of Vermont, articulated as good jobs and a green environment.

Freedom & Unity,
David Van Deusen,
Conservation Organizer,
Vermont Sierra Club

This statement is endorsed by the following Vermont labor and environmental leaders:

Ben Johnson, President of the Vermont AFL-CIO
Jeff Potvin, President of the Vermont Building and Construction Trades Council
Michael Morelli, Business Agent for the Vermont Iron Workers Local 7
James Haslam, Director of the Vermont Workers' Center

¹⁵ 2017 Note From The Author: This letter was first published in VT Digger, October, 2011. While working for the Vermont Sierra Club it was a pleasure to help forge a better sense of solidarity between environmentalists and labor. As the Sierra Club we worked with the Iron Workers Local 7 to secure union Iron Worker jobs on major wind farm projects that were then in the works. In return the Iron Workers (and labor in general) supported us in our efforts to build support for new conservation projects such as the Nulhegan Abenaki Tribal Forest.

Zak Griefen, Chairman of the Vermont Sierra Club
 Steve Crowley, Energy Committee Chair of the Vermont Sierra Club
 David Stember, Organizer for 350Vermont



Van Deusen at age 20 in Ireland, 1992



Van Deusen marching in first Black Bloc, Chicago, 1995



Van Deusen in Colorado, 2001



Van Deusen (fourth from left) with comrades (including DH far left, Xavier August, second from left, TK third from left, PW fourth from left, and Liam Kill of the Kings of Jubber crouching with rifle and bear) in Woodbury, VT, 2002

¹⁶ 2017 Note From The Author: This article was first printed in the Times Argus, February, 2014. Legislation mandating that all Vermont workers have the right to accrue up to 40 hours of paid sick leave passed the VT General Assembly and was signed into law by Democratic Governor Peter Shumlin in 2016.



Left: Green Mountain Anarchist Collective (Van Deussen holding banner far left, Lady holding banner with fist in air, Jason W holding banner right) leading Black Bloc against fascism, Lewiston Maine, 2002; Right: Xavier ~~██████████~~ left, "Hefty" center, Van Deussen right, Brattleboro, Vermont, 2002



Van Deussen (center) with comrades, including Catamount Tavern News Photo & Image Editor Jeremy ~~██████████~~ (front right), and JK, (standing left), ~~██████████~~, Vermont, 2006



Members of the Vermont Workers Center in Statehouse for paid sick days press conference, 2014

PAID SICK DAYS FOR ALL WORKERS! (2014)

Moretown VT February 2014 -We, in each of our towns and throughout the Mad River Valley, are together a community.¹⁶ As town meeting approaches, I trust that all of us, regardless of our particular political persuasions, agree. And, as a community, we do right to concur that one does well when one's neighbor does well.

This commitment to our friends, family and fellow residents is an old one. When the Green Mountain Boys evicted New York land surveyors, tax collectors and sheriffs, I do not doubt that they too were motivated by this notion of self-preservation as inalienably linked to community; *Freedom and Unity*.

More recently, we saw this belief manifest during the crisis following Hurricane Irene. Two and one half years ago I was honored to see many of you from Waitsfield, Warren, Duxbury, Fayston and beyond coming to lend a hand in Moretown during our hour of need. Such acts of human camaraderie will never be forgotten. In essence, Vermont has a long and proud history of people reaching out in solidarity when their neighbors could use a hand. We are, in a word, a people who embrace and honor the core value associated with the very notion of community as the foundation upon which rests the prosperity of the individual.

Today, we can and do express our sense of community, not only in time of crisis, but also through a maturing social compact which gives form to the worth and well-being of our fellow citizens. Maintaining and improving an equitable education system that gives support to children and families is one such expression. Creating a Vermont controlled health care system that provides insurance and quality medical care regardless of job or lot in life is also such an expression. Guaranteeing that all working Vermonters are afforded the right to accrue paid sick days is yet another.

It is for these reasons that I support H.208, a bill currently in the Vermont House of Representatives that would guarantee all Vermonters the right to earn up to seven sick days in a given year. As your neighbor, I encourage you to support this noble effort too.

The fact is, all people get sick some time or another, most of us a few times a year. When this happens, when one has a fever, one should be able to stay home for a day and get better. And if your kid is home sick, and if both parents have to work, one parent should be afforded the economic ability to care for the child during that time of need. How could one begin to construct a moral argument against this statement? Either we are a community, and therefore embody the core truth inherent in the principle which is Vermont, or we are not. I assert that we are Vermonters.

However, the reality is that thousands of low-income people in these green hills do not have any paid sick days. When they get sick, they often must make a hard decision: work while their body and mind are turned against them, or stay home and miss one fifth of their weekly pay. For the many, this one few-and-far-between unpaid sick day means the phone will be shut off; the rent will be late; the kids will miss a meal. For those that do work when they are ill, not only does their productivity go down, but they typically infect their co-workers which, in turn, makes productivity sink measurably lower. Therefore, as a community and as Vermonters, it is absurd to maintain a status quo which serves no human, neighborly or long-term interest. For these and other reasons, H.208 (paid sick days) is supported by both Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility and organized labor.

As a resident of Moretown, as part of the broader Valley community, I encourage all of you to take a moment to reflect on this human issue. I encourage you to express your support for H.208. I also encourage our two state representatives, Maxine Grad and Adam Greshin, to actively support this bill with no exemptions. I also call upon our governor and Washington County Senate delegation to likewise support this legislation. By doing so, they will all be casting a vote in favor of the Valley's working families and in line with Vermont's long tradition of valuing our community over short term and private interests. After all, one does well, when one's neighbor does well.

**David Van Deusen is the elected First Constable of Moretown and the Chair of the Moretown Progressive Party Caucus. He is a former Moretown Selectman.*

When We Fight We Win! (2016)



Vermont Agency of Transportation snow plow drivers affiliated with VSEA confronting Governor's staff, Montpelier VT, September 2015

Bargaining Update, Montpelier VT, 4/20/16- Vermont Agency of Transportation workers, word has come in: WE WON.¹⁷ On April 19th, the Vermont Labor Board chose the Vermont State Employees' Association's Last-Best-Offer. Therefore, the package proposal we submitted will be imposed as our next two year Contract. Therefore, this Contract will include the following:

¹⁷ 2017 Note From The Author: This communication was provided to AOT Union Officers and posted in the 60

- Pay Steps maintained (a Step = approx. 3% Wage Increase);
- 2% COLA in 2016, 2.25% COLA in 2017;
- Workers who get a Step every 2 years (or one Step during life of the Contract): 7.25% total Wage Increase (Steps & COLA) over life of the Contract;
- Workers in first 5 years of employment: 10.25% total Wage Increase (Steps & COLA) over life of the Contract;
- Basic Benefits maintained;
- No negative change to OT;
- AOT Foremen (and all persons in Pay Grade 23 & 24) will get Time-And-A-Half OT;
- No change to Mileage Reimbursement;
- No change to the start and finish date of Snow Season;
- \$100 Increase to Snow Pay (\$2100 total);
- \$25 Increase to Boot Reimbursement (\$175 total);
- \$1 Increase to Tool Pay (\$18 total);
- Full Pay to those AOT workers out on Workers Comp for Lyme Disease;
- Binding Arbitration (as final step in the Grievance Procedure-as opposed to going to the Labor Board) will be negotiated with goal of inserting it into Contract in 2017.

This is a damn good Contract. We won because *you* fought. And when we fought we were strong because we were organized, informed, stood united, did what had to be done, and never gave in. This is *your* victory!

Where We Started From: We have come a long way throughout these negotiations. When we started, the [Vermont] Governor [Democrat Peter Shumlin] was demanding -4% Wage Decreases, massive cuts to our OT rights, a one month extension of Snow Season, cuts to Mileage Reimbursement, and the unilateral right to degrade our Healthcare. We beat them back on *every* score. But let this be a firm reminder... Without a Union the Governor would have been empowered to implement the entirety of his anti-worker agenda. But we do have a Union, the VSEA, and it is a fighting Union! Instead of suffering such devastation, we emerged victorious. *That is why Unions matter!*

For our part, within AOT/VTrans, we had the priorities of winning a fair COLA, maintaining our Benefits, no unfair extension of Snow Season, increases to Snow Pay, Tool Pay, and Boot Reimbursement, 100% pay for those out on Workers Comp for Lyme Disease, and achieving Binding Arbitration as part of the Grievance Procedure. We have made significant progress on *all* accounts! *That is also why Unions matter!*

state highway garages in 2016.

How We Won: We achieved overwhelming success for AOT/VTrans because of all the work you, the rank & file, put into this collective effort. We started by circulating the Dignity & Respect Petition (AOT/VTrans workers made up 36% of the 1100+ signatures); Doing the Garage Workers United For A Fair Contract Petition (which was signed by Union leaders in the great majority of the Garages); We had our Stewards deliver our petition to the Secretary of Transportation; When the State disrespected us by not showing up to Bargain on AOT/VTrans issues we marched on the Administration; When we did sit down to Bargain AOT/VTrans issues many AOT/VTrans workers came to support their Bargaining Team (this was a show of strength); We took photos of ourselves and our co-workers holding signs stating our Bargaining priorities (and produced a public video with them thereby building more public support for our fight); We called our State Reps and Senators to build political pressure in support of our priorities; Our NMU Chair **Michelle Salvador** helped organize a press event whereby all the major Unions in Vermont & the Vermont Progressive Party came out firmly in support of our goals; We also increased our Union membership consistently throughout the negotiations (thereby showing the Administration that we were getting stronger every day); And all the while your Bargaining Team (including **Art Aulis of the Westfield Garage**) stood firm and never gave in. It is because of that engagement, because of that action, that we won.

However, let it be said that we did not win on every single issue... We did not achieve Condensed Pay Steps for our DMV Commercial Motor Vehicle Inspectors (who are forced to retire at age 55). At times this goal seemed close to being attained, but in the end, we could not get it done for this Contract. But even so, our DMV Commercial Motor Vehicle Inspectors will, as a result of these victories enjoy the same fair pay raises outlined above. And come next Contract, the fight will begin anew.

All told the victories you achieved in this new Contract (which will go into effect on July 1, 2016) were significant. This goes to show that we win when we fight. And now, even as we celebrate these wins, our attention must turn towards the General Assembly. We now need the Legislature to fully fund this Contract. That is where the struggle now centers. And already today, AOT Garage Leaders from North Montpelier and Randolph will be taking part in a VSEA press conference in the Statehouse which will demand that the Contract be funded. On this new front I will provide you with updates, and actions requests, as events unfold and as action (again) becomes necessary. *Together we will win!* -Solidarity, *Dave Van Deusen-Union Rep-AOT*

NO RATS, NO RACISTS: WHEN WE STAND TOGETHER WE WIN! (2016)

Montpelier VT, 9/6/16 –Unionized Vermont Agency of Transportation Workers, we have come a long way over the last 3 years.¹⁸ Average pay is up 10% (COLA & Steps), Snow Pay has gone from \$1700 to \$2100; Tool Pay from \$11 to \$18; Boots from \$125 to \$175; We have pay protection for Lyme Disease; Everyone has seen a reclassification; We have Union Members on Hiring Committees; We have a Labor Liaison to the Training Center; Foremen now get Time-And-A-Half OT; And when the Governor wanted to open the Contracts and/or cut hundreds of jobs [2015], we stood firm and won. We have done well because we have been united [Union Membership in the

¹⁸ 2017 Note From The Author: This communication was provided to AOT Union Officers and posted in the 60 state highway garages in 2016.



Vermont Agency of Transportation mechanics, affiliated with VSEA, Berlin VT, 2015

Garages now stands at over 80%]. If we are to continue on this progressive trajectory, we cannot let that unity be threatened from within. Instead, we must further strengthen our Solidarity in order to further build our collective power.

Unity & Solidarity means Union Members in the Garages are actively working their issues out themselves (at the lowest possible level) in order to best maintain a healthy comradeship and good morale. Unity & Solidarity means all of us treating all our co-workers with the respect that our Labor and Union Membership demands (regardless of any differences we may have by birth or by principle). To *not* seek to work out problems with co-workers, directly, at the lowest level, or to discriminate against a Union Brother or Sister is a rat move and is inherently anti-Union.

But no amount of collective will can make the Garages (or any workplace) utopia. We will have our conflicts. But how we deal with those conflicts is what will set us apart.

- **WORKING PROBLEMS OUT OURSELVES**

When you have a problem with a co-worker, deal with it at the lowest possible level. Respectfully talk to that co-worker and explain your concerns. Seek to work it out directly. If, in good faith, you cannot work it out, talk with the local AOT Steward and seek to have them help mediate the situation. If need be, call your Union Rep. And don't just complain. Keep an open mind and maintain a willingness to have a healthy give-and-take with the co-worker(s) in question [good conflict resolution is a two way street]. In brief, let's seek to deal with our own issues ourselves, as a Union, *before* they become unnecessarily large and drawn out. And let's deal with them right away and not let them fester.

- **ANTI-DISCRIMINATION**

We also need to keep our eye on what is truly important. That is getting the job done (keeping the roads open), and improving our collective Working Conditions, Union Rights & Pay. We do this by standing together. It makes NO difference what race, religion, gender, age, or orientation your co-worker is. They may be different from you, but you are co-workers and Union Members first. If we fail to recognize that and fail treat each other with the respect that that demands, we create artificial disunity and weaken ourselves collectively in the face of those who would seek to exploit that division. That is unacceptable.

As your Union Rep *I am loyal to you*. As a Union Member *loyalty to your Union is expected*. And part of that loyalty means your commitment to building and maintaining a basic unity in your Garage, within your Union, and among working class people in general. LOYALTY, UNITY, & SOLIDARITY; it is by adhering to those three principles, above all others, that we will continue to build the power that is the Union.

Solidarity,

Dave Van Deusen-Union Rep-AOT

A Gathering Storm In Washington: A Class War We Must Win! (2016)

Montpelier VT, December 2016- Vermont Agency of Transportation Workers, your Union (the Vermont State Employees' Association) historically does not endorse candidates for President of

¹⁹ 2017 Note From The Author: This communication was provided to AOT Union Officers and posted in 60 state



Vermont State Employees' Association union members march against opening the contracts and against job cuts, Montpelier VT, 2015

the United States.¹⁹ Just as most Vermonters were partial to our own Bernie Sanders, we did not support Clinton and we did not support Trump. Although Trump only received 29% in Vermont (and lost the popular vote nationwide), he won the Electoral College. On January 20th he is slated to become the President of the United States of America.

I do not know or care what political beliefs you hold in your home as long as you put your Union first. I myself am Union to the end. I am not a Democrat and I am not a Republican. I have seen both these Parties look to screw us. I put blind faith in no mortal man or Party and I hold that respect needs to be earned (not assumed). I support livable wages, affordable healthcare, our Town Meeting democracy, and dignified standards of living for all workers and their families. I support all Unions and the right of workers to belong to a Union. But, like many Vermonters, I also oppose gun control, helmet laws, so called free-trade, and believe the statewide property tax should be abolished (and replaced with a progressive income tax whereby the we pay less and the rich pay more). I suspect that many of you are like me in these regards. But agree or disagree, the one thing that truly matters is that we all put our Union first. When we are attacked by the Democrats (like in 2015) we fight back. When we are attacked by the Republicans we fight back just the same. In this regards we are bipartisan.

Republican Donald Trump is now threatening to make all States like Wisconsin by decimating public sector Unions such as VSEA. Let's make no mistake, he is coming after us as a Union and he will look to break us. If successful, he will roll back our ability to Bargain for fair pay and benefits. He will seek to cut federal funding for State programs which would lead to job cuts. He will appoint corporate stooges to the National Labor Relations Board, roll back OT rights, and diminish the ability of workers to form Bargaining Units & hold fair elections for Union recognition. Like so many Republicans and Democrats before him, he will not be our friend. But unlike those that came before, he wants *more*.

To be clear, together as AOT-VSEA members we have faced down many challenges over the last three years, largely against Democrats, and we have prevailed. Our hourly pay, on average, is 10%+ higher than it was in 2013. Snow Pay is \$400 higher. Tool pay is nearly \$7 higher. Boot Reimbursement is \$50 higher. We never opened our Contracts, and we have not suffered layoffs. We achieved this by sticking together, taking collective action, and putting our Union first. But the challenges we face now are dire. The attacks will be National in scope, and no matter our strength as VSEA, we will need to fight this war on many fronts and with all the allies we can gather.

We cannot allow the politicians to divide the American people and pick us off one by one. We cannot shrug off potential attacks against women or minorities or fellow Unions. We must all stand together as ***one united working class*** in order to defend all those rights and social benefits which we have earned through our common blood, sweat, and tears.

For these reasons, the VSEA Board of Trustees has voted to allocate limited funds to sponsor a delegation of Union Members to attend the Million Woman March in Washington DC on January 21, 2017 (the day after Trump is scheduled to be sworn in). Already a dozen women Union Members within the Agency of Transportation have expressed interest in going. This is a good first step. But we will need to do much more in anticipation of the fight to come.

What We Need To Do:

highway garages in 2016.

- Conversations need to happen in every Garage about what is coming down the line, how we need to be READY to take action when called for or when necessary;
- We need to build alliances across Vermont and across the Nation. Locally, have conversations with your family, friends, and neighbors in order to express our collective concerns and ask that they stand with us when the battle is engaged;
- Support your VSEA Board of Trustees and other Union Officers when they seek to reach out to other Unions, community organizations, and different constituencies in order to build a popular front in defense of our common interests;
- **Everyone needs to be a Union Member.** Talk with any non-members in your Garage and have them sign up today by going to the below web address on the computer: www.vsea.org.

There are those within the Unions who are scared. *We are not.* We know what it means to fight and we look forward to the opportunity to show any who would doubt us what it means to be AOT Union Strong! We cannot be broken. We will win.

Solidarity, *Dave Van Deusen-Union Rep-AOT*

LARGEST DEMONSTRATION IN VERMONT HISTORY: 20,000 March In Montpelier Against Trump (2017)

Labor Unions Need Not Stand Alone!

Montpelier VT, January 21, 2017 – Unionized Workers of the Vermont Agency of Transportation, Today thousands of Vermonters, largely women, converged on the State Capitol [population: 7,755] to protest against the stated policy objectives of US President Donald Trump and in support of women’s rights.²⁰ The Montpelier Police Department estimated the protest at 20,000, making this the largest demonstration in the history of Vermont. The rally was the local expression of the Million Woman March. As Montpelier filled with protesters, half-a-million converged on Washington DC (including 3000 Vermonters), with hundreds-of-thousands more taking to the streets in cities across the US and across the globe. Worldwide more than 2.5 million took part. In Montpelier demonstration participants included many union members. Among these were VSEA’s AOT Labor Management Delegate Peter Boyd (Marlboro Garage) and AOT/DMV union member Darlene Nunn (Montpelier Branch) along with their families. The demonstration was endorsed by dozens of organizations. From labor, official backers included the Vermont AFL-CIO, the Green Mountain Central Labor Council, and the United Electrical Workers Local 255. US Senator Bernie Sanders [Independent Democratic Socialist], Lieutenant Governor David Zuckerman [VT Progressive Party], and human rights lawyer & Native American rights advocate Mary Gerisch were among the speakers.

To the crown Sanders boomed, *“Mr. Trump, we are not going backwards we are going forwards... Yesterday at his inauguration Mr. Trump said he was for working people and against the establishment. But right behind him in the VIP section were billionaire after billionaire after billionaire who*

²⁰ 2017 Note From The Author: This communication was provided to AOT Union Officers and posted in the 60 state highway garages in 2017.



Record crowds for Woman's March, Montpelier VT, 2017

are the establishment. Donald Trump is a fraud and the American people will understand this. If there is a silver lining... I see workers and women and environmentalists and senior citizens; I see our people coming together... They are not gonna divide us up... We are gonna create the kind of nation we can we can be –a nation based on love and compassion, not based on hate and bigotry.”

Yesterday [1/20/17] tens-of-thousands also protested in the streets of DC against the inauguration of Trump. At times, these demonstrations turned violent, with banks and limousines being attacked and in some instances set on fire. On the West Coast the Longshoremen’s Union conducted an unofficial wildcat strike in protest of Trumps anti-union and anti-worker policy objectives. As a result, the Port of Oakland was effectively shut down, and other ports experienced disruptions. Point being, we do not stand alone.

President Trump [who lost the nationwide popular vote by millions and only received 29% in Vermont], in addition to being hostile to woman’s rights, has shown every indication that he will appoint a reactionary to the US Supreme Court that will seek to degrade labor rights for all workers. It is expected that through the Supreme Court Trump will seek to make all of the US, including Vermont, into one big “Wisconsin” whereby every possible obstacle will be set before us in our tasks of building and maintaining a strong labor union while seeking to negotiate fair contracts.

No matter what challenges are set before us (be they emanating from Republicans or Democrats), as long as we stand together, are organized, are ready to do what is needed to be done without fear or hesitation, and as long as we stand in solidarity with all our natural allies (from within other unions and community organizations) –we will prevail. We are AOT and we are UNION STRONG!

Today’s historic protest shows the potential of our power if we (the VSEA) and the labor movement as a whole work in cooperation with the millions of other Americans who also stand to lose from billionaires (be they Republican or Democrat) running the institutions of Washington. Together we are in fact The People, and together we will win!

-An Attack On One Is An Attack On All! Solidarity, Dave Van Deusen, Union Rep-AOT

WHY WE FIGHT ON THIS MAY DAY (2017)

Vermont AOT/DMV/VTrans Union Workers,

Your NMU Bargaining Team will be bringing forth a number of major AOT proposals to the next round of Bargaining (which will get underway in the fall of 2017).²¹ These will include:

- Fair Wage Increases/Maintaining Pay Steps;
- No Negative Changes To Your Healthcare;
- Right To Use Only Sick Leave (Not Annual Leave) When On FMLA;
- Modest Increase To Snow Pay;
- Significant Increase To Tool Pay (For Mechanics);

²¹ 2017 Note From The Author: This communication was provided to AOT Union Officers and posted in the 60 state highway garages in 2017.



Vermont Agency of Transportation Union Worker & Labor Leader Art Aulis-VSEA

- Annual Cash Stipend For Boots/Shirts/Sweatshirts

(All workers currently eligible for boots and shirts would receive this, plus the AOT Survey Crew. This cash would be put in your paycheck in the fall – Here we will aim to achieve more value than you receive now through the boot reimbursement and five t-shirts/one sweat shirt so that you may purchase other gear you may need such as high visibility jackets and raincoats);

- A Fair And Predictable System of Lateral Workplace To Workplace Transfers, Largely Based On Seniority, For *All* VTrans Workers;
- Increase To The AOT Comp Time Cap;
- Guaranteed (Limited) Weekends Off From Snow Season Status;
- A Mandated Four Day A Week Work Week (10 Hour Days) In The Summer, Starting In 2019 For All Garage Workers;
- Condensed Pay Steps For DMV Commercial Motor Vehicle Inspectors (and all others in Group C who are required to retire at age 55).

Make No Mistake: We have the power to win on many of these issues if we all do our part as Union Members. But Contractual gains alone are not the only reason we fight.

Working class people, one by one, alone, do not have sufficient power in society (such power is disproportionately held by the wealthy and elite). But we are the great majority of the people. When we come together as a Union we become a formidable power as an organized class, and we, together, have the means to affect the world around us. Yes, the first mission of a Union is to fight for fair pay, good working conditions, and rights on the job for its members; but a Union can and should also choose to turn its attention to other issues that impact working people outside of their place of employment. This may include political involvement, advocating for livable wages for all workers, paid family leave for all people, or healthcare as a basic right (all issues that VSEA has taken a public stance on). It may mean advocating for more local democratic control through Town Meeting, or better guaranteeing all citizens the right to dignified affordable housing, or access to higher education for all our children. The point being it is up to us as Union Members to decide what issues our collective power should be felt on. And in our Union we hold an Annual Meeting every year in September whereat all Union Members are invited to attend, all Union Members have a vote, and wherein all Union Members have a say in defining the strategic direction of our Union.

On this May Day, recognized as a holiday for workers throughout much of the world, I implore you to continue to build our Union, to be ready to fight to achieve the Bargaining objectives we have, together, set forth, and to give reflection to those other social issues which you would see our Union working to address. Our vision cannot be small. As we grow our power we should do so understanding that, when acting in solidarity with other Unions & working class people, there are few limitations concerning that which we choose to achieve throughout society. In a word, just because the world we inherit manifests itself as it does, does not mean that it cannot be transformed. When our common farmer-ancestors rode forth with the Green Mountain Boys, they could have instead chose to stay home and resign themselves to the reality of New York and Great Brittan dominating our hills: but they did not. Instead they chose to harness their

collective strength towards the creation of a free and independent Vermont. And as we reflect upon the Vermont of today, I ask you to not only see what is, but also what should be. Being a working person gives you the *reason* to consider this question. Being a Vermonter gives you the *right* to consider this question. Being a Union Member gives you the *means* to make your vision a reality.

Justice For Snow Plow Drivers (2018)



Rutland VT, October, 2018 –As we all get ready to brace for another Vermont winter, imagine for a moment that you were the person your neighbors relied on to be ready at a moment's notice to clear the roads of and ice.²² Imagine that while they were going about their lives, they would expect you to be at home waiting by the phone, ready to forgo any personal business or problems and head out the door in sub-zero temperatures to answer the call for help. It wouldn't matter if it was 3:00 AM on Christmas morning. It wouldn't matter if you had to work 16 hours straight to get the job done. Your neighbors would be counting on you, and it would be your responsibility to get the job done. And when all that snow and ice melted, they would be relying on you again to repair the roads that were chewed up over the long winter and handle a number of other critical jobs.

Of course, you would expect to be compensated for your work, and hopefully receive some reasonable pay increases over time to help you and your family keep pace with the cost of living. But now imagine that your neighbors came to you and said they wanted to make deep cuts in your net pay going forward and even refund them some of the money they have paid you over the past two years. The dedicated, hard-working members of the Castleton Department of Public Works don't need to imagine this scenario. They are living it - right now - thanks to James Leamy and his colleagues on the Castleton Board of Selectmen.

Driven by Leamy, the board is refusing to execute a new contract with these workers, opting instead to stonewall them for more than two years in contract negotiations in an effort to force wage and benefit concessions that would result in a severe cut in their real take home pay. That's right. Despite the fact that many of these workers only earn \$15.00 dollars and change per hour (some as low as \$11 and change), Leamy wants to them to accept drastic, deep cuts in the net money they use to support themselves and their families!

It's important to note that the union (AFSCME Local 1201) has offered to accept significant concessions that would in fact, result in a reduction in take home pay. We agreed to nearly triple our health insurance contribution rate in exchange for a modest two-percent pay increase in 2016 and again in 2017. But that wasn't nearly enough for Leamy, who ironically enjoyed steady pay increases and affordable quality healthcare coverage as a member of his teachers' union for many years. Leamy is demanding we pay four times as much for our healthcare and at one point, actually wanted the workers to pay that increase back to the town retroactively for the two years.

Despite the fact that these workers haven't received any pay increase for two years, Leamy's last offer was a five-percent increase spread out over the next few years (with no increases accounting for 2016 and 2017), coupled with a three-hundred percent increase in out-of-pocket healthcare costs for the workers. Leamy also wants us to dismantle the system that provides workers with time-and-a-half overtime pay for working those middle of the night snow-plowing shifts, and make cuts to vacation time going forward.

Adding insult to injury, Leamy and the board have also gone back on their word. At the onset of negotiations, the town and the union were agreeable to a set of ground rules that included a provision to use a neutral arbitrator (if necessary) to help settle our differences. They also agreed to refrain from what is known as regressive bargaining, which prohibits either party from moving backwards from formal proposals made during negotiations. They broke their word on regressive bargaining a long time ago. And recently, Leamy and the board broke their promise on another

²² 2018 Note From The Author: This op-ed was first published in iBrattleboro in October, 2018.

ground rule by refusing to use an independent arbitrator, presumably because it was not their best interests to have their shameful tactics reviewed by a neutral party.

For these reasons, AFSCME Local 1201 has filed two Unfair Labor Practice charges with the state. The first charge calls for Leamy and the board to honor prior proposals built around modest wage increases and more reasonable increases to employee healthcare costs. The second, calls on the state to force the board to abide by their pledge to use a neutral arbitrator.

We look forward to hearings on these charges and ultimately, to making our case in arbitration. In the interim, we look forward to hearing how the taxpayers of Castleton, and Vermonters generally, feel about how lousy Leamy and his cronies on the board treat their hard-working public employees.

We ask readers to share their thoughts with Leamy by phone at 802-468-5319 or by email administration@castletonvt.org

David Van Deusen Union Representative AFSCME Council 93 – Vermont AFL-CIO

Chapter V: The Struggle Of The Farmers

Dairy Farmers of Vermont Seek Sustainable Milk Price (2003)



Northeast Kingdom, Barton VT, Spring 2003- Less than thirty years ago there were 4,000 dairy farms throughout the Green Mountain of Vermont.¹ Today there are just 1200 remaining. Out of these, farmers and agricultural experts state that 200 or more are facing the very real possibility of being forced out of business in the coming year. These farmers are currently receiving between \$10-\$11 per hundred weight for raw milk. This is down approximately 40% from a year ago when the going market value was regularly \$17 per hundred weight. At the present wholesale price many family farmers are unable to cover the basic costs of living. In contrast, the retail price of processed milk has risen and so called co-ops (who are middlemen) & processors are seeing record profits.

For many of these farmers hope is being kindled through the formation of a new organization called the Dairy Farmers of Vermont (DFV). The intension of this organization is to band together

¹ 2017 Note From The Author: This article was first published in Catamount Tavern News in 2003.

as much raw milk produced in the state as they can, and then proceed to collectively bargain with dairy co-ops and processors in order to bring up the prices. Peter Sterling, an organizer for the group, states “we intend to push the processors to pay the farmers a fair and stable price and put that into a long term contract.”

The organizational drive of DFV was launched in earnest over the course of this past winter. Their immediate goal was to represent one third of all raw milk produced in the state, and then in the spring move towards negotiations with the co-ops and processors. Since then they have met their initial goal by signing up over 300 dairy farms, representing a staggering 850,000,000 lbs. of raw milk. DFV organizers now project that negotiations will begin in a matter of weeks.

On Saturday, April 26, forty dairy farmers gathered in the Barton Grange Hall for a chicken dinner and some live country/bluegrass music in celebration of meeting their spring goals. In-between music, food, and drinks, Anthony Pollina (a DFV organizer and leader in the social democratic Vermont Progressive Party) facilitated a conversation during which the farmers expressed deep concern over dropping prices and the lack of communication & accountability of the co-ops/processors. Farmers also articulated the negative effects so called free trade has had on the industry. One farmer brought up the fact that large amounts of raw foreign milk, subsidized by the Canadian government, is now being shipped to processing plants in New England at the expense of Vermont farmers. This farmer went on to explain how this corporate practice is a result of NAFTA & the policies of the World Trade Organization, and how this not only hurts Vermont farmers, but are also undermining the rights and hard earned gains of Quebec farmers and their organizations. While many present expressed deep frustration with the situation, the night as a whole was marked with optimism that DFV *can* and *will* make concrete gains for the Vermont family farmer.

DFV also hopes to facilitate the purchasing of a farmer owned processing plant, possibly in Springfield Vermont. The estimated purchasing costs are presently estimated at three to four million dollars. When asked by this writer, Peter Sterling asserted “we are currently working on this and it is moving very quickly.” If DFV can do this, it is expected that the rate of return for participating farmers would drastically increase as the cost of the middleman would be completely taken out of the picture.

When negotiations get underway, DFV will have farmers, allied labor leaders, and attorneys on their side of the table. DFV intends on making the process open to the public and democratic. Any final agreement between themselves and the co-ops/processors will have to be ratified by a majority of the member-farmers before it is final.

Dairy Farmers of Vermont United: First Round Of Negotiations With Milk Co-ops Conclude (2003)

Northeast Kingdom, Vermont, Fall 2003- As of this coming December it will have been one year ago that the first meeting of the Dairy Farmers of Vermont (DFV) took place.² In an old barn in Derby Line, a couple of farmers and two organizers (Peter Sterling and Anthony Pollina) shot the bull about the need for a farmer organization here in the Green Mountains. With that, they began what many thought would be impossible. At first folks said “farmers will never join an or-

² 2017 Note From The Author: This article was first published in Catamount Tavern News in 2003.



ganization.” Then, hundreds of them did. Even then, naysayers scoffed that the co-ops/processors would never agree to bargaining meetings. They did.

The Dairy Farmers of Vermont, a democratic organization representing 314 Vermont farms accounting for one third of all raw milk produced in the state, have recently completed the first round of negotiations with the so-called co-ops/processors. The meetings were held in Vermont’s Capital City of Montpelier. The stated goal of DFV is to bring up the price they receive for their product to levels which will guarantee the survival of the family farm. To date the price of raw milk continues to be close to \$11 a hundred weight. This is down from the \$17 that they were receiving a year and a half ago. In spite of these falling wholesale prices the retail price for a gallon has risen during the same period. At the current level, numerous farms have gone under and those that are still in operation find it hard to cover the basic costs of electricity, fuel, and supplemental food for their family.

This first round of talks occurred within a fog of mutual mistrust and hostility. Many farmers harbor negative feelings towards the co-ops. The co-ops ostensibly set the rate the farmers receive for raw milk, and they are therefore the obvious target of farmers who are upset about the plummeting prices. This mutual hostility is furthered by the fact that the co-ops, theoretically owned by member-farmers, have evolved into capitalist corporations which seek to further their own agenda as opposed to acting in the collective interests of its participants. They clearly do not answer to the individual farmers, and they rarely show any interest in the thoughts, concerns, problems, and wellbeing of the farms from which they collect their raw products (*just ask any Vermont farmer!*). Irasburg dairy farmer and DFV member Maureen Lehouillier says “the co-ops are bleeding the life out of dairy farms.” Even so, the first round of talks is being heralded by farmers as a good first step in the right direction.

The DFV negotiating committee, made up of farmers & allies from organized labor, held three separate meetings with representatives from Agrimark, the St. Albans Co-op, and the Dairy Farmers of America cooperation (the latter two are both members of the umbrella group Dairy Marketing Services). Each of these meetings counted ten to twenty farmers in attendance. DFV organizers are calling these meetings significant in that it was the first time that the co-ops and the farmers were able to sit down and have serious conversations about prices and the industry in general.

At the meetings DFV laid out various options. One was that the co-ops raise the price they pay for raw milk, or at least eliminate certain deductions that they take out of the farmers’ check such as the ‘hauling fee’ (a fee for the use of milk trucks), ‘truck stop charge’ (a charge for the milk truck actually stopping at the farm), and the ‘promotion charge’ (a charge supposedly for the marketing of the collective product). It was pointed out that the hauling fee and the truck stop fee are redundant and unnecessary and that all these various charges culminate in a substantial price reduction as far as the farmer is concerned. The second option put forth by DFV was that it is increasingly possible that they will purchase their own plant in Springfield Vermont, and market a new line of “Vermont Made” milk. If this becomes a reality it is understood that such a farmer owned operation would effectively eliminate many of the middlemen, and therefore raise the amount of revenue that actually makes it back into the farmers’ pocket. DFV argued that if and when this occurs, the co-ops must begin to work with them in good faith or risk being cut out of the equation. Here it should be mentioned that the St. Albans Co-op currently owns the “Family Farms of Vermont” line of milk, but has thus far put no significant resources into its promotion. DFV asked this co-op to give, sell, or redirect the bottling of this product to DFV

through the future Springfield plant (this “Vermont” milk is currently bottled in New Hampshire). While St. Albans has not yet agreed to these possibilities, they have not ruled them out.

As a whole, DFV members and organizers contend that this first round of negotiations, while reaching no reaching no definitive conclusions, have gone well. The meetings with the Dairy Farmers of America and the St. Albans Co-op were more or less cordial given the starting point.

The meeting with Agrimark (who initially refused to meet with DFV) was more confrontational, but not without some promise. Dairy Farmers of America, for their part, appeared interested in working with DFV in the production of a well marketed Vermont brand of milk (one that would presumably be of high quality and carry a slightly higher retail price that would directly benefit farmers). It appears possible that they could work with DFV in regards to their proposed Springfield operation.

In regards to DFV charges that the co-ops can afford to pay farmers more than they currently do, Dairy Farmers of America representatives alleged that it was not the co-ops which are responsible for the low wholesale prices. They claimed that much of the blame should be laid on large retail operations such as Wal-Mart, other large chain stores, and cheese processors; all of whom compel the co-ops to sell them milk at reduced rates. The DFV negotiating committee countered that *if* this is true, then the co-ops should be willing to stand together with the farmers and their organizations in order to confront these corporations in a united manner. When asked about this possibility by CT News, DFV organizer Anthony Pollina said “what we are looking for is farmers and organized labor to take on not only the [so called] co-ops, but the Wal-Mart’s of the world, so farmers and consumers can get their fair share.”

Another round of negotiations as well as special Town Meetings are planned for the coming months. DFV spokespeople say they are optimistic that this second round will lead to more concrete results. Now that the general parameters of the negotiations have taken form, the co-ops are encouraging the organization to come forth with more detailed concrete proposals. Any eventual agreement and contract reached between the negotiating committee and the co-ops will have to be ratified by DFV member-farmers; one farmer, one vote.

In related news, rumors have been circulating that political officials in New England have been considering reviving a version of the now dead “Northeast Dairy Compact” (previously killed by the Republican controlled U.S. House and Senate). The revived program would take form in a manner aimed at circumventing the need for Congressional approval. The rumored multi-state agreement would link the retail price of milk (which has been on the rise) with the price received by farmers (which has been on the decline), setting a ratio whereby the wholesale price would become more stable and fair. In other words the agreement would stipulate that if the retail price was to rise by a certain amount, then the farmer would have to be paid an equivalent amount more for their raw product. CT News will be following both these stories and will be bringing you news as events unfold.

³ 2017 Note From The Author: This article was first published in Catamount Tavern News in 2006.



FARMERS SEIZE MEANS OF PRODUCTION: Farmer Controlled Processing Plant Opens In The Kingdom (2006)

Montpelier, Vermont, July 29 2006- With the price of raw milk remaining at unsustainable lows, Vermont's dairy industry faces what many farmers and experts are calling 'a crisis of historical proportions.'³ Non-organic dairy farmers are currently receiving \$12 a hundred weight; that is \$5 less than two years ago, and the same price, *unadjusted for inflation*, that they received as far back as 1994. This latest downturn is forcing farmers to tighten a belt that, according to the Dairy Farmers of Vermont (DFV) organization, is already cutting off the life blood of the state's dairy industry. Since 1975 an estimated 2900 farms were forced to close. Of the approximate 1100 that remain, many are on the verge of a similar fate.

In response the Douglas Administration has been seeking to make low interest rate loans available to farmers as a means to stem the tide of closings (already 100 over the last year). However, DFV, which represents over 300 farms, insists that such measures will do little or nothing to reverse the tide of collapse.

"[Governor Douglas] offers programs of low interest loans which [farmers] don't need. They won't take them because they can't afford any more loans. They are already maxed out," asserts DFV organizer Peter Sterling.

Instead, DFV is rapidly moving forward with its plan to open a farmer owned processing plant and to bottle a Vermont brand of milk. DFV intends this brand to be both affordable and

widely available throughout New England. And by cutting out the current co-ops/processors, DFV expects farmers to be paid between \$17-\$19 a hundred weight over a two year contract.

Currently famers are compelled to work under the thumb of the so called co-ops, which are supposed to negotiate the price received from processors further down the line. Such processing plants are often located out-of-state and do not separate Vermont's milk from that of the rest during pasteurization and bottling.

The idea of a farmer owned milk plant was first floated by the organization in 2003. In 2004 DFV came to the Vermont General Assembly asking for \$500,000 towards the purchasing of such a plant in Springfield, VT. Under pressure from the Governor the bill died in the VT House. This time DFV claims to have backing from sufficient private investors and expects to be in operation, somewhere in the Northeast Kingdom, by winter.

"The leading candidate for the location of the processing plant is in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont... because that is where most Vermont dairy farmers still exist. We want to be close to the dairy farmers for many reasons, not least of which is that it lowers the shipping costs," says Sterling.

As for the startup capital, "it will cost anywhere from two to three million dollars to get the processing plant going with the packaging, the add marketing, and all that. We are raising it from private investors who believe that this is a good investment for Vermont's economy and rural communities," continues Sterling.

DFV projects that the plant will initially include slightly less than twenty farmers but will seek to expand as fast as possible. DFV spokesmen contend that opening such a farmer owned processing plant will also have the ripple effect of driving up wholesale prices across the region.

"We want to draw as much Vermont milk as we can through this plant. For every farmer we get to bring their milk through this plant we will make the farm economy that much stronger... the goal is to change the system by giving farmers not only control over their milk but giving an independent, truly farmer owned outlet for Vermont milk," states Sterling.

Down on The Farm: Interview With Vermont Farm Organizer Peter Sterling (2006)

Montpelier Vermont, August 1, 2006 – In 2002 a group of Vermont dairy farmers approached organizers Anthony Pollina and Peter Sterling and asked them to help form a democratic organization that could effectively fight for farmers' rights.⁴ What grew out of this is the Dairy Farmers of Vermont (DFV). Today this grassroots organization consists of over 300 farms representing a staggering eight hundred and fifty million pounds of annual raw milk, or one third of the total produced in the state. They expect to open a farmer owned milk processing plant sometime shortly after the year's first significant snow fall. What follows is an interview with DFV organizer Peter Sterling about the organization, their future plans, as well as the general state of agriculture in Vermont and beyond.

David Van Deusen: Peter, what is the situation with Vermont's dairy farms?

⁴ 2017 Note From The Author: This interview was first printed in Catamount Tavern News and the Valley Reporter in 2006. Today [2017] Peter Sterling serves as Chief of Staff to the Vermont Senate Pro Tem, Tim Ashe-Vermont Progressive Party.



Peter Sterling: Under Clinton and the Bush administration there has been enormous consolidation in the processing industry. Where [Vermont] farmers, twenty years ago had 15-20 places they could sell their milk, now they basically have two...Agrimark and Dairy Farmers of America, [the latter of which] gobbled up the St. Albans Coop.

Because farmers don't have enough places to sell their milk these two big corporations, which control 85% of the fluid milk in New England, can dictate the price. And they often dictate horrible measures. Farmers have to pay the transportation cost. When gas prices go up, they tag farmers with a surcharge for hauling milk. They charge farmers a fee for those 'Got Milk?' ads. Dairy farmers pay for those with a surcharge that is taken out of their milk check. It has basically created a slave system for farmers.

For example, farmers, when they get their milk check every week, have no idea for how much it's going to be for. Imagine anybody else being asked to go to work and run a business and not having any idea how much their product is going to sell for. You would never ask a teacher or a politician to do that. They know what their pay stub is. But farmers are slaves to this system, when the milk prices plummet there is nothing they can do. These big milk guys, if they had their way...they would have just one big farm with 10,000 cows. Because for them it is inefficient to make all these stops.

So what you'll notice is the big politicians like [former Vermont Governor, Democrat] Howard Dean or [current governor, Republican] Jim Douglas or their AG secretaries pay lip service to farms going out of business, but they always say 'don't worry, the amount of milk Vermont is producing is not falling.' Like that's the measure of how good things are going.

Van Deusen: Could you name the different milk co-ops in the state?

Peter Sterling: For conventional [non-organic] milk there is Agrimark which makes Cabot cheese which we all know, which does not use all Vermont milk, so that is an issue. Then there is St. Albans Co-op. Then there is Dairy Farmers of America, which is the [largest] corporation in the country for milk. St. Albans Co-op, because they are gutless dogs, signed [in 2004] what they call a marketing agreement basically making them one and the same as Dairy Farmers of America...Because they knew their farmer-members would never support such a thing, they called it a 'marketing agreement.' They didn't technically let themselves be taken over, but the staff is all the same now. St. Albans Co-op is controlled by Dairy Farmers of America...which is part of Dean Foods and [other] big corporations. So you can say that Agrimark, St. Albans and Dairy Farmers of America are the three biggest co-ops, but really there is just two. It's really bad.

What the St. Alban's Co-op did was disgraceful. Their members found out on the WCAX news. That's crazy. They turn on the TV and find out that their co-op signed this agreement with this corporation that is driving farmers out of business across America. Dairy Farmers of America, for example, one of their classic moves is to buy up processing plants and then close them down. And they will close it down, not because it isn't profitable, but because it will be more profitable for them if there was less competition from processors and the farmers would then have to ship [milk] to their plants that already exist elsewhere. Bad news!

Van Deusen: How would you describe the co-ops in relation to the farmers and the processors?

Peter Sterling: They are the middlemen. They pick up the farmers' milk, they are supposed to negotiate the prices for the farmers, and they don't really do any of that. The co-ops are supposed to take all these actions to benefit farmers, and they really just take it to benefit their board of directors and their corporate bottom line. St. Albans, even though they call themselves a co-op, as well as Agrimark, technically are not.

I can give you a lot of examples of the bad things they do...[For instance] we got fourteen St. Albans farmers to write to the director [of the co-op] saying 'let us see the details, the paperwork, let's talk about it.' No. They wouldn't even tell their own farmers about it. Yeah, it's really bad. Really disgusting...

One of the things that keeps farmers from really speaking out is the reality of dairy farming which is the milk truck has to come every day to pick up their milk. And if the co-ops were to black list a farmer or take some kind of revenge action...then the farmer would lose thousands of dollars in addition to their cows getting sick because the milk has to be picked up every day. For example, we had a farmer, his father came up to Montpelier [the capital] to testify [in front of the state legislator] about something the co-ops were doing which was bad. The co-ops, in addition to picking up the milk, also test it to make sure it is pure and clean. A couple weeks later they sent a guy down to test his father's milk, who had never ever had a problem with bacteria count or anything. The co-op guy looked at him and said 'no, your milk is not good this week. We're not picking it up - there is too much bacteria. Good-bye.' That was basically a giant 'fuck you...' The tester even said something like 'you should have been here working on your milk instead of going to Montpelier..'

Van Deusen: Can you say which co-op it was, and who the farmer was?

Peter Sterling: No...But it's true, and that is how they got back at the farmer for speaking out.

Van Deusen: Was the farmer a DFV member?

Peter Sterling: It was a member's father...That is the kind of thing that [the co-ops] will do if they feel they are threatened.

Van Deusen: Let's back track for a moment and get back to the question of consolidation versus retail prices. To play devil's advocate for a moment, if milk is a commodity that we value and want in society, and if it's cheaper for consumers to have it consolidated in one massive farm, or a few massive farms, then what is the argument against such consolidation?

Peter Sterling: There is a few. First of all, the price to the consumer, when these consolidations happen, doesn't necessarily go down...Really what happens is that there is more profit for the processors. Number two, farming has an enormous impact on our landscape. If done well it can have not such a big impact, and it actually can be quite beneficial. If done poorly, meaning very concentrated with 1000 cows on the land, that is very bad for the environment, and really it's also horrible for rural communities in Vermont. When a farm goes out of business, it's not just the farm that goes out of business, it's the guy who hauls his milk, it's the guy who sold him feed, it's the guy who sold him tractor parts. The whole community suffers. So what you're talking about is the [potential] savings of a couple of cents on a gallon of milk for the consumer [verses] the collapse of a rural economy-you know, Barton, Enosburg Falls, Newport, Troy. I'd like Vermonters to ask themselves, would they be willing to pay another quarter for a gallon of milk knowing that not only would the environment be protected through more sustainable practices, but on another level these rural economies would be sustained. I think any Vermonter would part with a quarter per gallon of milk [to sustain family farms].

[In addition] the kind of farming that these guys are demanding is changing the landscape of Vermont, and not for the better. When you have a farm that has 900 cows on it, that's absurd for the Vermont landscape. It's not something the Vermont landscape can sustain. Wells will go dry...You cannot put big farms on little pieces of land in Vermont.

Van Deusen: How much is milk going for right now per hundred weight?

Peter Sterling: Every farmer has a different [agreement], but generally its \$11 - \$12...If you adjusted that for inflation, that's what they were making in 1970. You can't [sustainably] farm for something like that.

Van Deusen: How many farms have we lost in the last generation, and more specifically in the last couple years?

Peter Sterling: Well the [State] Ag Department really clamps down on that kind of info... [Even so] in 1980 there were [close to 4000] dairy farms, easy. But now there is less than 1200. It's going fast. What happens is there is a minimum number of farms you need in an area to make it viable. The guy who hauls the milk, a trucker, he's not going to drive up to Newport to pick up from one farm. It's not worth his time. So if there is only two farms in Newport he ain't going up there and [therefore] that farm is done. So you need a minimum number of farms and we're getting awfully close in some areas.

But what is really happening, what you can say is the general theme, is that older guys, [say] a guy who's fifty and on the verge of getting out of farming, [is] not going to take out a loan to stay in business, [he's] going to cash out now. Why take on another \$60,000 of debt if you know the milk prices aren't going up?

Van Deusen: Are there any areas of Vermont that you can specifically name that are getting close to being unable to sustain dairy farming?

Peter Sterling: Off the top of my head, it's getting awfully tight down in Bennington County. There are not a lot of farms left down there...That is exactly what has happened down in Rhode Island. [In Rhode Island] there [are] only four dairy farms left. They can't make money because nobody wants to drive their trucks down to pick up their milk. I'm saying you could see that in the near future in Vermont, and that is something a lot of people worry about.

Van Deusen: Of the 1100 dairy farms currently operating in Vermont, how many cows does the average farm have?

Peter Sterling: The state doesn't release this stuff. They are very cagey. Even though the law requires them to do so, they don't. [Even so, we know] there are only 25 large farm operations, which...is someone with more than 500 milking cows. For Vermont that is very large. [On the other end of the spectrum]you don't have that many conventional farms that are able to make it with under 100 cows anymore...The average size is getting bigger. In 1950 you were considered a very big farm if you had 50 milking cows, now you can't make it with under 100 because farmers are being pushed to produce more, to put Bovine Growth Hormone (BGH) in their cows, to make more milk to make more money, which doesn't work. The more [milk] they make, the more the price falls...Organic is completely different...

Van Deusen: Are you seeing Dairy Farmers of Vermont farms also closing down because of the low milk prices?

Peter Sterling: We have seen a couple. What a bunch of farmers have done, because they saw this coming...[is] they went organic. The key with organic and why it's so attractive to these guys, is because they get a guaranteed contract. Organic milk is so in demand that the organic companies will give you a two year contract at \$24 a hundred weight...They will [also] help with \$30,000 for the transition. If you're a conventional farmer your milk prices fluctuate every week or two, but these guys will lock in for two years. That is the way to run a business. For two years you know how much you are getting...

Because there are [many] farmers in Vermont who don't use BGH it's not too hard [for them] to make the transition. They had to wait awhile and do some paper work and bullshit like that,

but it wasn't like a radical change in their operation. So [many] who want to stay are trying to make it as organic farms... There is a huge demand for Vermont organic milk, way more than is currently available from Vermont farmers, that's for sure.

Van Deusen: Do you have organic farms that are part of DFV?

Peter Sterling: Yes and no. Yes in that they joined us to do collective bargaining, but the processing plant that we are opening will not be organic. We are going to do BGH free. But we have farmers who started with Dairy Farmers of Vermont then left to go organic.

Van Deusen: In 2004 the price of raw milk peaked at \$18 a hundred weight. What effect did the farmers see from that?

Peter Sterling: It wasn't long enough to get these guys out of debt. That's the problem. They all go into such massive debt when the milk prices drop that they can't get [even]. That is why the state's program to give these guys loans is such fucking bullshit. These guys can't use any more loans. They're loaned out their fucking asshole. [Really] it's about getting more money for their milk. [And] if you're a corporate guy, like Douglas, the only thing you don't want to do is give [farmers] more money for their product. That would mean you're lowering your buddy's profit.

Van Deusen: Can you talk some about the history of the Dairy Farmers of Vermont organization?

Peter Sterling: We started in the winter of 2002, when the milk prices dropped to one of the most historic lows of all time...It went down to \$12 a hundred weight, which was the actual price they got back in 1984 (which is what they are getting again now)...In response to that, farmers called Anthony [Pollina]. [*Note: Pollina is a long time Vermont organizer and supporter of farmer & worker rights. He received 25% of the vote in Vermont's 2002 Lieutenant Governor's race as the Progressive Party candidate.]

Van Deusen: When DFV first started, from what I understand, the goal was to sign up one third of all the raw milk produced in the state, which you did, and then to try to negotiate prices with the co-ops and processors on behalf of the 300 plus represented farms. This was, of course, an attempt at collective bargaining. What was the idea behind that, and why did it fail?

Peter Sterling: The thought behind that was that even though co-ops, in theory, are made up of farmer-members and farmer-members sit on the board, in reality the boards really don't represent farmer interests. Co-ops stopped doing the farmer advocacy for farmers that they should be. So instead of pushing the processors to give the farmers more money for their milk, [the co-ops] got into bed with [the processors]. So farmers kind of felt like the co-ops weren't their voice anymore, and they wanted a voice to help them get more money for their milk. That is why we thought collective bargaining, a model which works for unions, would be very effective. We thought if we had enough milk behind us the co-ops would have to say 'ok, we have to talk to you otherwise we're going to have a serious problem.' [This is the case] because no matter what [the co-ops] say, they really do want these guys' milk.

The problem we ran into [that the co-ops] at the end of the day did not really believe farmers were going to walk away from their co-ops. [The farmers] did not have enough places to send their milk. That really hit us hard...Even in face to face talks [the co-ops] had no intention of helping farmers in even something as minor as removing the one dollar a hundred weight surcharge for farmers to have their own milk shipped away to these guys to make all the money. When we realized that there was no legitimate alternative for farmers to pursue for their product, we realized we had to create that. And we thought that creating some sort of Vermont brand for their

product would give the farmers the alternative they needed...an alternative place to send their milk. That has taken a lot of our effort of late.

Van Deusen: I understand DFV got very close to opening a farmer owned processing plant in Springfield, Vermont, a few years ago. Didn't the legislature shit the bed on that one?

Peter Sterling: No, the Governor did. We needed half a million dollars to help the farmers' purchase the plant and the equipment. The Governor did not think that was a good investment. The [Democrat controlled] Senate passed it, and [Douglas] used his man in the House [which back then was controlled by a Republican plurality] to block it, and the Governor refused to support it, and that is what killed it...Jim Douglas was saying from the beginning that he would never sign a bill that would give farmers that money. So it was hard to get momentum for it.

Van Deusen: So the Governor killed it. What was his, along with Agriculture Secretary Steve Kerr's reasoning?

Peter Sterling: Well, Steve Kerr is just a lackey for the corporate guys. Douglas's reasoning was that the state should not be giving money to individual businesses because it might harm other businesses that compete with it. [It's all] such fucking bullshit. That is the biggest lie I ever heard in my whole life. I mean the State of Vermont gives money to businesses every single day. So he just needed a pretext to protect the profits of his corporate buddies. The real reason is St. Albans Co-op and Agrimark Co-op didn't want to see another [more equitable] place go get [farmers'] milk because it would make them have to raise their prices.

Van Deusen: Recently Governor Douglas sponsored a 'Farmer Summit' aimed at solving, what some have termed, the current crisis in Vermont Agriculture. Did DFV have a presence at the event?

Peter Sterling: Anthony [Pollina] went to it... [But] the Farmer Summit, again, is just Jim Douglas trying to grab a newspaper headline saying he cares about farmers. When it really comes down to it he doesn't do anything to help farmers. He offers programs of low interest loans which they don't need. They won't take them because they can't afford any more loans. They are already maxed out. It was really just a way for him to look good in public. He won't do anything to really help farmers like make sure the state buys Vermont milk and basic stuff like that. [The summit] was just a lot of politicians flagellating themselves.

Van Deusen: I know DFV has also been working on getting Vermont milk into schools and other public institutions. What is the status of that campaign?

Peter Sterling: Well the legislation did not make it out of the [Democratic controlled] House. It is unfortunate... But Dexter Randle, a dairy farmer from Troy, a Progressive [Party] legislator who was also one of the founding members of the Dairy Farmers of Vermont, introduced that bill. One of the cool things about Dairy Farmers of Vermont is that we encourage farmers to become politically active [and] two of our farmers actually ran for office and won. Dexter Randle from Troy, and the other is [Democrat] Harold Gerhard who lives down in Addison County. He ran for State Senate and won. So for me, having two more farmers elected is really great.

Van Deusen: You now have two DFV members elected to Vermont's General Assembly. In addition, David Zuckerman, a member of the Progressive Party from Burlington, himself a produce farmer, has been appointed to chair the House Ag Committee. Unlike in 2003, the Democrats now represent the largest elected parties in both legislative chambers. Left of the Democrats, the Progressives [which are essentially democratic-socialists] now have six seats in the House and expect to add to that in November. In the electoral field you seem to be in a better position than two years ago. How does DFV assess the electoral situation for the next legislative session?

Peter Sterling: Anthony [Pollina] actually did most of the lobbying, but I would say we [are] seeking a solution outside the legislative arena for this. We [are] going right to funders to help us fund the processing plant because after our experience in the last legislative session in 03-04' we [don't] want to waste our time. We [want] to go right to where we knew we [will] be most effective, and that is starting a processing plant. [Even so] Anthony is particularly active in lobbying the state institutions like... UVM to buy Vermont milk. [Still] we are also realistic in that we have to keep the focus on what we really want which is a farmer owned processing plant that will supply a Vermont brand of milk to folks.

Van Deusen: In the face of opposition from the co-ops, the processors, and the Douglas administration, the Dairy Farmers of Vermont have been trying to rebuild, and trying to establish their own processing plant without the benefit of state money. What can you say about the status of this project?

Peter Sterling: The trick with a processing plant is to find a place that has a guaranteed market... So it's really finding a market for our milk which is the challenge. So Dairy Farmers of Vermont feels it has got a good location in mind [and] we are working on the details. We feel like we really got some market secured for some Vermont brand of products that don't currently exist. Right now, the way we are going to make it in the market is by being able to say that all of our products are made with 100% Vermont milk, and none of the co-ops can say that because they blend all their milk. Like Agrimark blends their milk with New Hampshire milk, Massachusetts milk... They all blend them in big tanks, and they don't separate it which is crazy because you think that they would want to say '[made] with 100% Vermont milk' but they can't say that. So what we are going to be doing as Dairy Farmers of Vermont is be the only company that sells its milk regionally using the Vermont name. Of course, there are smaller outfits like Monument Farms, Stafford Organic...[and]Thomas's Dairy... Those are three Vermont brands, but they are tiny and they stay tiny because they just want to be family operations. Dairy Farmers of Vermont's plan is to become statewide, region wide, using the Vermont name as our selling point. That is something nobody else is doing. And we think that is going to work really soon.

Van Deusen: What do you think that is going to mean for participating Vermont farmers in regards to the price that they will receive for raw milk?

Peter Sterling: What we would do is give them a guaranteed price, a contracted price for two years that would be in the \$17-19 a hundred weight range... That would mean that farmers would no longer have to suffer the fluctuations of a market that currently gives them anywhere from \$11-\$18 a hundred weight – more towards \$11 than \$18, believe me.

That is huge for farmers because, again, there will be a contract and they will know what they will be making for two years. One of the most important things that farmers want is this security. Even if it's just \$17 they will know that they will be able to make their loans, and do all these things based on how much money they know they will get. That is a big deal to farmers. [And] just as important as helping...[the]farmers that supply the plant, it will create another place where farmers can go... with their milk... and the other co-ops [will thereby] be forced to raise their prices [paid] to Vermont farmers. So we believe that this will actually have a ripple effect on all of Vermont dairy farmers. That is really the goal,; to change the system by giving farmers not only control over their milk, but giving an independent, truly farmer owned outlet for Vermont milk.

Van Deusen: Do you have an estimate as to how much startup capital DFV will need to open such a processing plant, and where will that money come from?

Peter Sterling: I think it will cost anywhere from two to three million dollars to get a processing plant going with the packaging, the ad marketing and all that. We are raising it from private investors who believe that this is a good investment for Vermont's economy and rural communities.

Van Deusen: Where is DFV looking to open the plant?

Peter Sterling: Right now the leading candidate for the location of the processing plant is in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. Mostly because that is where most of Vermont dairy farmers still exist. So we want to be close to the dairy farmers for many reasons, not least of which is that that lowers the shipping cost.

Van Deusen: How will DFV take care of the shipping?

Peter Sterling: We will do what other companies do and that is hire a couple truckers. We may end up buying our own trucks or leasing them... We will do all the quality testing ourselves...and then work with some distributors who go to stores already and have them make the delivery of the Vermont milk company products part of their routes.

Van Deusen: Initially how many Vermont farms will participate?

Peter Sterling: I would say that there will be less than twenty farms initially. But still, that is a good chunk for right off the bat. Some farms may choose to send only part of their milk to us for whatever reason; some farms may choose to send all of their milk, so we won't exactly know till we're running.

Van Deusen: Is the idea to increase the number of participating farms over time?

Peter Sterling: Oh, yeah. As fast as possible. We want to draw as much Vermont milk as we can through this plant. For every farmer we get to bring their milk through this plant we will make the farm economy that much stronger. And they [the farmers] won't have to deal with [current] the slave co-op system.

Van Deusen: What is the timeline for this plant opening?

Peter Sterling: If all our ducks were to fall in a row, before the end of the year.

Van Deusen: Are you going to have the ability right off the bat to get this Vermont brand of milk onto shelves all throughout the state? Where will this milk be sold?

Peter Sterling: That is the plan. Our hope is to have it available all throughout Vermont. We don't see this as specialty co-op item. We see this as affordably priced milk... There [are also] other products we want to make that are going to be good... Even if we process milk, we could then sell that milk to a cheese maker who wants to be able to say that their cheese is made with all Vermont milk. It might have another label on it, but the farmers would still be reaping the economic benefit of selling them their milk. So fluid milk is just one of the possible products. There are many possible products. There is cheese, there is yogurt, all the possible value added products in addition to fluid milk.

Van Deusen: How are these decisions, where to open a plant, what to produce, etc., reached? How does DFV internally operate?

Peter Sterling: [DFV's] board is made up of all full time dairy farmers. Not gentlemen farmers or out of state farmers. [The board is] all fulltime dairy farmers who vote on every decision, unlike current [dairy] co-ops... [They are all] elected by the membership.

Van Deusen: Are the elected board members from different regions of Vermont?

Peter Sterling: We did strive to not only have geographic diversity, but [also] size diversity, meaning smaller farms, medium size, large, etc.

Van Deusen: I understand that back when DFV was trying to conduct collective bargaining with the co-ops, you had allies from within organized labor helping you with this. Will such good relations continue when the processing plant gets off the ground? Do you foresee the workers in that plant being unionized?

Peter Sterling: They better be. I certainly think we would encourage them to be. I don't think we should even consider opening up a processing plant that wouldn't be a union shop. I think that that is a requirement for us. To me [unions] are good for workers... why wouldn't you have one?

Van Deusen: Family farmers across New England, in different parts of the country and beyond, are facing similar problems to those in Vermont. How do you see the struggle of dairy farmers in Vermont affecting the national debate? Do you see Dairy Farmers of Vermont growing beyond our borders?

Peter Sterling: Our sincerest hope is that other farmers will see Dairy Farmers of Vermont as starting this model plant as a way to start their own plant. And that means, of course, taking back their own means of production.

Van Deusen: Is there any thought that down the road DFV could evolve into a larger farmer organization that would include other farmers outside of the dairy industry?

Peter Sterling: Well that would be amazing. But right now it takes so much energy to organize dairy farmers, you know guys that are working 70 hours a week for low pay. Once we get this processing plant going I think you could see different [projects] sprout up that would support local Agriculture, like a farmer owned (or state owned) slaughter house for people who want to slaughter their animals locally and things like that. You could see this thing blossoming into something beyond dairy farming.

Van Deusen: Do you have any final thoughts to add?

Peter Sterling: Farmers will never be able to succeed with the current system... Guys like Douglas are not doing anything. Farmers need to take action. By taking action and starting a processing plant they are insuring that there will be a place for them to sell their milk that will pay them a fair share. If you look at every newspaper article there is, all Jim Douglas's solutions, he never once mentions that farmers need to be paid more for their milk, and that [in part] is what we are about.

Chapter VI: Direct Democracy & Town Meeting

TOWN MEETING DAY: Six Towns Demand Bush Be Impeached! (2006)



Marlboro Town Meeting House

Newfane, Vermont, March 2006 –Town Meeting Day on March 7th resulted in five towns voting on a resolution demanding that Vermont’s delegation to Washington begin impeachment proceedings against President George W. Bush.¹ All these resolutions asserted that Bush was guilty of misleading the American people in the buildup for the invasion of Iraq, in lying to the American people in regards to the use of torture on prisoners, and of illegally spying on citizens. In all five towns, Newfane, Marlboro, Dummerston, Putney, and Brookfield, the vote was squarely

¹ 2017 Note From The Author: This article was first published in Catamount Tavern News, 2006.

in favor of impeachment. In Newfane, where Selectman Dan Dewalt introduced the resolution, the vote was 121 for impeachment, 29 against. In Marlboro the vote was a staggering 60 to 10. The other towns passed the resolution by a voice vote.

In Brattleboro, which holds its Town Meeting some weeks after the traditional first Tuesday in March, the resolution was also passed. Brattleboro is one of Vermont's largest communities with a population over 13,000.

That makes six out of six towns that understand Bush's action to be a criminal abuse of power. Since these votes were passed, Bush's popularity in Vermont has sunk to new lows.

Vermont's sole Congressman, self-described socialist Bernie Sanders issued a statement saying he agrees with the assertions of the resolutions, but since the Republican Party is in the majority in both the US House and Senate, any attempt on his part at impeachment would, unfortunately, go nowhere.

"Bush has been a disaster for our country, and a number of actions that he has taken may very well not have been legal... [But with Republicans in control of Washington] it would be impractical to talk about impeachment," said Sanders in a statement to the press.

In other Town Meeting news, a number of resolutions demanding the General Assembly adopt laws requiring minors to notify their parents before receiving an abortion were, by enlarge, defeated across the State. However, in one community (Moretown) opponents of the resolution won through a parliamentary maneuver rather than a straight vote. In 2005 Moretown overwhelmingly voted to oppose the war in Iraq. This year residents had the parental notification resolution indefinitely tabled. The stated reason was because the resolution did not relate to town business. For some residents, including those who say they would have voted against the resolution, the move struck them as hypocritical and an infringement upon the honest democratic process.

A resolution demanding that the State government refrain from raiding the Education Fund in order to boost the Transportation Fund was taken up in 122 towns. The resolution passed in every one of them. As a result of this demonstration of public unity, Republican Governor Jim Douglas, who initially endorsed the plan, relented. Any additional money for the Transportation Fund will now come from elsewhere.

As another Town Meeting Day has come and gone it is increasingly apparent to many that what is needed is not more non-binding resolutions, but rather a single *grand resolution* which would self-empower Town Meeting to become the prime arbiter of the law of the land. While the Administration relented on the Education Fund issue, it was not legally bound to do so. Lest we forget the multitude of towns that voted for universal single payer healthcare in 2005?² Or what of the 100 plus towns (by far the majority that have taken up the issue) that have voted for a moratorium on GMOs?³ Montpelier is yet to express the will of the people on any of these issues. Instead we get a weak seed labeling law and a makeshift healthcare reform bill that is far from universal in scope. Therefore, many rightly question whether we should spend even more time debating issues when our voice is often ignored. Instead, some advocate that starting in 2007 Town Meetings pass a resolution that would read something to the effect of:

² 2017 Note From The Author: The Vermont General Assembly passed single payer healthcare legislation in 2011, however the transition to a state-based universal healthcare system was later derailed by Vermont Governor Peter Shumlin-Democrat.

³ 2017 Note From The Author: The Vermont General Assembly passed a mandatory food GMO labeling law in 2014. The Federal Government has since trumped this legislation with its own law which provides cover for cooperate interests.

“When and if a majority of the towns pass any given resolution, and when said towns represent a majority of Vermonters, we will withhold cooperation with the government in Montpelier until said resolution becomes the recognized practice of the land.”

It will only be when Vermonters reclaim those democratic powers that are currently monopolized by the party politicians in the Statehouse that Town Meeting will again take on the significance that it enjoyed during the days of the Green Mountain Boys. And this will not happen unless regular folk, like you and me, make it so.

Vermont Towns Calls For Bush Impeachment & End To Deadly War In Iraq (2007)

Brattleboro Vermont, March 2007 –Riding record low approval ratings and more than 3000 dead U.S. soldiers in Iraq, 37 Vermont towns voted ‘yes’ on a Town Meeting Day resolution demanding that Congress begin impeachment proceedings against U.S. President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney.⁴ These towns were Bristol, Burke, Calais, Craftsbury, Dummerston, East Montpelier, Greensboro, Guilford, Grafton, Heartland, Jamaica, Jericho, Johnson, Marlboro, Middlebury, Montgomery, Morristown, Moretown, Newbury, Newfane, Peru, Plainfield, Putney, Richmond, Rochester, Roxbury, St. Johnsbury, Springfield, Stanard, Sunderland, Townshend, Tunbridge, Vershire, Warren, Westminster, Wilmington, and Woodbury. In 2006 Brattleboro, Brookfield, Dummerston, Marlboro, Newfane, and Putney voted for Bush’s impeachment. However, that resolution did not include Dick Cheney. Therefore a number of these towns took the issue up again this year and voted in favor of the expanded resolution. In Putney the resolution passed unanimously.

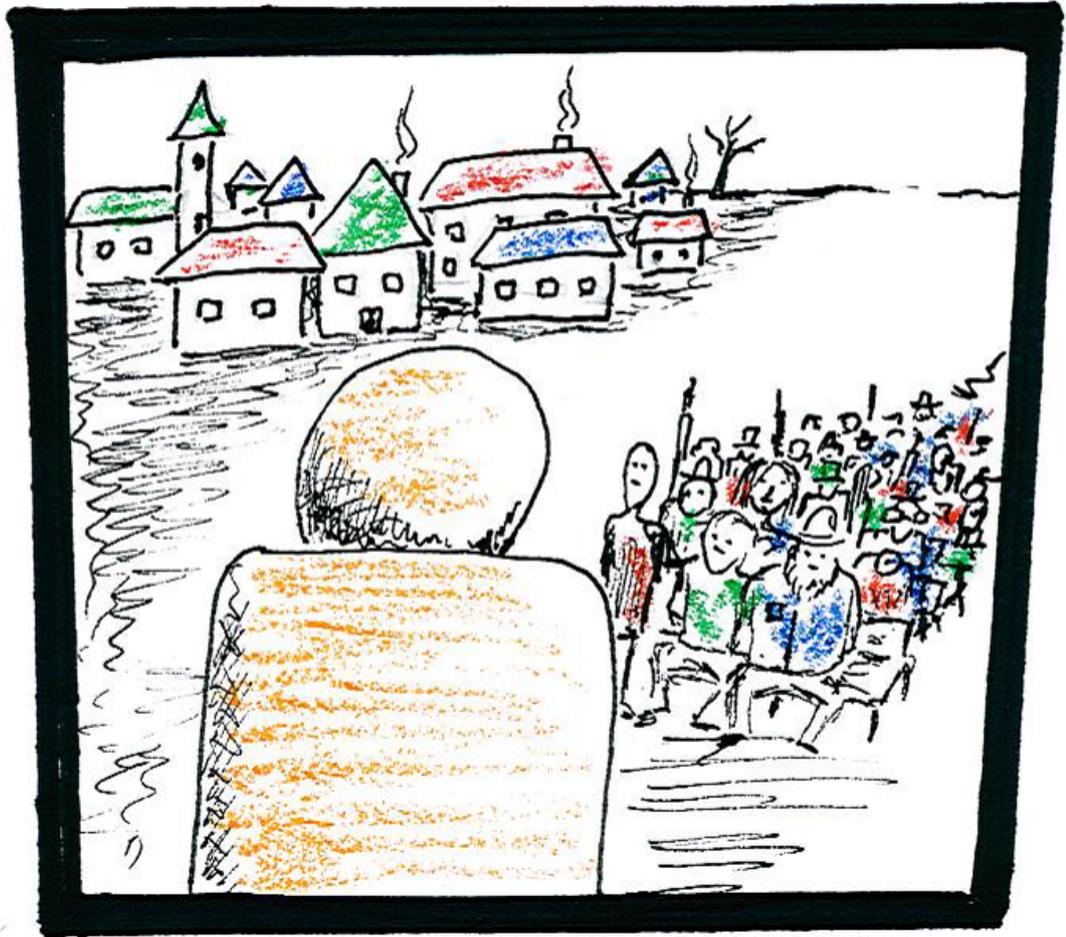
Two towns, Dover and Clarendon, voted the resolution down. Five others ‘passed over’ the resolution or indefinitely tabled it.

Twenty towns additionally voted in favor of a resolution calling for an end to the war in Iraq. These were Bristol, Calais, Cornwall, Greensboro, Guilford, Hardwick, Jamaica, Jericho, Johnson, Marshfield, Middlebury (home of Republican Governor Jim Douglas – Douglas also serves as that community’s Town Moderator), Newfane, Peru, Plymouth, Rockingham, Roxbury, St. Johnsbury, Townshend, Walden, and Woodbury. Two years ago 49 towns also voted to recall the Vermont National Guard from Iraq.

The movement for impeachment was begun more than two years ago by Newfane Selectman Dan Dewalt. Dewalt’s campaign is not limited to Town Meeting. He has also been pressuring the Democrat controlled Vermont General Assembly to pass an impeachment resolution. If this were to happen, impeachment proceedings would automatically be triggered in Washington in accordance with the rules of Jefferson’s Manual.

A bill calling for impeachment has been introduced in the Vermont House of Representatives and has the backing of 20 sponsors. Even so, House Speaker Gay Symington-D and other Party leaders oppose allowing a floor vote claiming this would distract from more pressing business. However, in a stunning move, the Vermont Senate passed the impeachment resolution 16-9 (with all Republicans and two Democrats voting no) on a floor vote on April 20th.

⁴ 2017 Note From The Author: This article was first published in Catamount Tavern News in 2007.



Artwork By Xavier Massot

As we go to print, VT Representative David Zuckerman-Progressive has been working frantically to get the resolution on the floor of the Vermont House. Whether or not he will be successful is difficult to determine.

The General Assembly did pass a formal resolution against the war in Iraq earlier this year. Vermont's Legislature is the first in the nation to condemn the war. But unlike a vote on impeachment, this resolution lacks any teeth or enforcement clauses. The Vermont National Guard is still in Iraq, and they are still being killed at six times the national average per capita per state.

This Town Meeting Day has once again demonstrated the lack of connection between the democratic voice of Vermonters and the politicians in the Statehouse. And once again it is apparent that Vermonters should take a new path down the road to true democracy. Instead of passing 'non-binding' resolutions, towns should vote when and if a majority of the towns representing a majority of Vermonters pass a resolution, that resolution will be understood as binding. If the state refuses to recognize such a practice, towns should be prepared to withhold all cooperation with Montpelier until the popular will is fulfilled.

It will only be when we stop relying on the State Legislature and instead rely on ourselves, our Town Meetings, our unions, and our farmers' organizations that true democracy will flourish in the Green Mountains. Anything less is not enough.

Brattleboro & Marlboro Town Meetings Call For Arrest Of U.S. President Bush & Vice President Cheney (2008)

Brattleboro VT, March 4th, 2008- On Town Meeting Day the people of Brattleboro & Marlboro voted to issue an arrest order for U.S. President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney for crimes against the Constitution.⁵ Brattleboro, a town of 13,000 populated by blue collar workers, hippies, and hard drinkers (*imagine Montpelier & Barre smashed together in a particle accelerator*), voted to 2017 in favor and 1795 against the resolution. In Marlboro, itself a small wooded left-leaning town in the hills of southern Vermont, the resolution was carried by an overwhelming vote on the floor of the Town Hall.

This historic resolution calls for the immediate arrest of these persons if and when they step foot on town soil, as well as requests other states and municipalities to honor this order and apprehend & extradite these persons to Vermont to face justice. According to state and government officials, there is no legal precedent for towns to issue arrest warrants without a judge's approval. Therefore, these same officials contend that the carrying out of the resolutions is unlikely. Even so, many Brattleboro residents point out that there also no precedent for the Republic of Vermont declaring independence from the Royal New York Colony, nor the actions taken by Americans during the Revolution. The only justification for these extra-legal upheavals were the democratic will of the people, yet both these historical events have come to be recognized as necessary political facts. And again, on what accepted legal code did Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys act upon when, in 1770, they tarred and feathered the appointed Yorker sheriff in Bennington? What official precedent did they follow when they proceeded to run this sheriff up a flag pole outside the Catamount Tavern?

⁵ 2017 Note From The Author: This article was first published in Catamount Tavern News, 2008. President George W. Bush never stepped foot in Vermont during the eight years of his Presidency.



George W. Bush

One possible means for the resolution to be carried out, however unlikely, would be for Bush or Cheney to enter Vermont territory, and for them to be apprehended by of the elected Town Constables. Vermont Constables, unlike State Troopers, Deputy Sheriffs, or organized town police departments, are answerable directly to the people, and according to Vermont law retain the authority to arrest persons for “treason.” But before Vermonters break out the old tar and feathers, it must be recognized that it is very unlikely either Bush or Cheney will come to Vermont, a state which is overwhelmingly opposed to the war in Iraq & where the current rightist administration in Washington is extremely unpopular. Vermont is the only state in the union which has not been visited by Bush during his two terms as President.

The passage of the resolutions have been met with popular support across the Green Mountains, with only a minority of Vermonters arguing that resolutions of this nature are not directly related to town business, and therefore have no place on a Town Meeting agenda. Many others have asserted that our town residents and therefore our towns *are* directly impacted by the failed right-wing policies of the Federal Government. As long as the Bush administration spearheads the attempts to rollback our liberties as defined in the Bill of Rights, the U.S. Constitution, and the Vermont Constitution, and elsewhere; as long as Vermonters are dying in an unjust war we oppose at 6 times the national average; as long as the Federal Government acts as an obstruction to the further expansion of our democratic-social system, then it is not only the right of our Town Meetings to express our opposition, but it is also our *moral obligation* to see that they do so. Any less would imply that Vermonters would rather live on their knees than to stand for what we believe, and we are not those kind of people.

Empower Town Meeting: Abolish The Voting Booth (2014)

Moretown VT, 2014- Today, on the first Tuesday of March, at the Moretown Town Meeting, we, as a community, passed a nonbinding advisory resolution requesting that the select board in 2015 place an article on the warned agenda, proposing that we do away with the Australian ballot and return to a traditional, participatory Town Meeting system.⁶

So, I am just getting back up my mountain on this first Tuesday in March and before I contemplate cleaning out my sap buckets, I would like say we had a good Town Meeting this year. Truth is I was sceptical. When I saw the agenda, not much looked like it was heading for a floor vote. Seemed like most of the decisions were to give a couple-three hundred dollars to this or that non-profit organization. Now don't get me wrong, the little bit we vote to give here or there is important, especially to those folks who need the social services that many of these organizations provide. But at the end of the day real democracy, Vermont democracy, should be more than making a dozen small donations and then going home. And more truth be told, a little into Town Meeting, when it looked like we would be through with the entire agenda by 10 a.m. (which as fate would have it was not the case), I was not thinking this would be one of our more historic Town Meetings in our community's collective memory. But when we got to the last agenda item, "Other Business," I'll be damned if we didn't have some real productive discussion and debate; in fact, among other things, we debated the very nature of our local democratic process.

One thing folks recognized was that of the 1,500 or so residents of Moretown, only 70 of us (give or take) were there on the floor today. Most agreed that a healthy local democracy should be

⁶ 2017 Note From The Author: This article was first printed in the Valley Reporter in March 2014.



Moretown Town Hall

expected to draw the participation of more of our neighbours. But again, if the big vote is giving \$1,000 to the Senior Center and \$150 to the Boys and Girls Club ... well, let's just say it isn't shocking that not more folks came out and spent their day (or half day in this case) practicing democracy. Many folks at our Town Meeting recognized this problem and some (myself included) questioned if we should do away with the Australian ballot [i.e. voting in secret in a voting booth] and instead return to Vermont's traditional Town Meeting structure. The traditional Town Meeting structure provides for the right to discuss, debate, amend and vote on the town and school budget from the floor. It allows for us the kind of true participatory democracy which the Green Mountain Boys fought and died for (and which people throughout the world continue to struggle for today).

A Traditional Town Meeting allows for people to share ideas, to merge or reject ideas based on the best intention and belief of the many, as gathered together as a true community of peers. This is unlike our present lot (in Moretown) whereby the big decisions, those which cost more than \$5,000, are simply put before us as a yes or no question, not open to change and not necessarily decided upon after a meaningful public discourse. Whereas, Vermont traditionally made creative decisions together in Town Meeting, we [and a minority of Towns in Vermont] now sanction or decline the more narrow options put before us, unchangeable and on paper. For me, eliminating the participatory and amendable aspects of local democracy in the name of expedience is no gain at all.

So, after a good discussion, we, as a community, adapted a nonbinding resolution to request that our select board consider placing a binding article on the agenda for next year which would do away with the Australian ballot and instead make all our meaningful decisions on the floor. We have a good select board. Tom Martin has done a great job. Therefore, at the conclusion of this 2014 Town Meeting, I am already looking forward to the 2015 Town Meeting. If we do have this important question before us in a binding manner, we will have much to discuss. For the people of Moretown, people from all political stripes and parties, to come together to revisit the method by which we practice our local democracy is a courageous step forward (and back to our traditional roots).

Now with all proposals and debates, perhaps the majority of you disagree with my enthusiasm for such a change. Perhaps, we will instead heed the arguments and assertions of others that live in these immediate hills and valleys. Perhaps the majority will decide the way we are doing it now is for the best. But, in the true spirit of Town Meeting, I would welcome a conclusion that differs from my views as long as I (and you) have the opportunity to stand up in our Town Hall, make the honourable argument and wield the free opportunity to try (through reason and heart) to win a majority on a principled point of view. That, my friends, win, lose, or draw, is the very essence of the participatory democratic system which I believe in and which I support.

In Defense Cabot's Town Meeting: Participatory Democracy or Convenience? (2016)

Cabot VT, October 2016- As is plain to all who care to see, beyond our Green Mountains, the United States of America is a troubled place.⁷ National elections are contested by shills for cor-

⁷ 2017 Note From The Author: This article was posted on community bulletin boards in the Town of Cabot, VT, in October 2016.



Cabot Town Meeting

porate interests, buffoons, liars, and caricatures of what polls suggest the people of Ohio and Florida and Virginia want them to be. When an honest man or woman does step forward, the party machines mobilize to cut them down. In Congress the two parties lock their jaws around each other's throats over petty disagreements amounting to who can stick it to working class families faster than the other. The public, in turn, is fed the facsimile of conflict framed as a moderately interesting sporting event over the nightly news. As a result, public disinterest grows, working people withdraw from substantive debate, and otherwise good people are drawn into the corporate media's advertised notion of what one should want or be (which not surprisingly coincides with the interests of the wealthy & powerful). The polls reflect these manufactured opinions, and the politicians compete to reflect these distortions. The death grip tightens.

I was once passing through some dying farm country in up-state New York. I took refuge in a hole-in-the-wall tavern. Over a \$1 shot of whiskey and with a basketball game unfolding on a battered old TV (sound turned off), I asked the farmer next to me what the local issues were. He said he did not know and otherwise had no opinion; he told me he had given it no thought because no one ever asked him what he thinks and no one would care if he did say something. In New York, democratic expression, from the birth of the State, amounts to pulling a lever in a private voting booth once every four years for one of two candidates or for are against a local budget that they had no hand in crafting. And no matter how many levers are pulled, rarely does anything of genuine public interest see fruition.

Ethan Allen, a man who fought with musket and saber to forge our right to govern our communities through a true Town Meeting system, once said: "*The Gods of The Valleys Are Not The Gods of The Hills.*" Vermont is cut from a different cloth, agreed. Have a drink with any farmer within a rifle shot of your home; there will be no shortage of opinions on issues, I assure you. You may hear about the need to retain our school, the need to abolish property tax (in favor of a progressive income tax), what our community would be best served to do with our grant money, or how we should buy a new plow truck (but perhaps not spend too much extra on all the bells and whistles). You may hear that we need to reduce spending by cutting private contracts, but maybe we should increase the line item for languages (like French) in the school. Point being, Vermonters have opinions; we are informed because WE THE PEOPLE have a very real and very meaningful voice (the final voice!) in what is done within aspects of our communities. And here I would be lying if I said that relegating our local democracy to a voting booth would carry the same effect. When one no longer has the right and ability to propose changes, from the floor, to the budgets, and when one is now only expected to vote something secretly up or down (and leave all the details to a small Select Board or small School Board) we have lost a core element of who we are and who we will be.

The first Republic of Vermont was founded upon the rock of local participatory democracy. From times too long ago for even our great-great grandparents to remember, Town Meeting has served as the meaningful basis upon which our citizenry organizes itself. Town Meeting does not mean many of us being in one place at one time. Town Meeting does not mean hosting a debate with no binding resolution. Town Meeting, in its true sense, means the citizens of a community will come together, as needed, to both debate the issues of the day and then to act on those issues in an honest way while looking each other in the eye. For generations we have acted upon the belief that the many, when gathered together and committed to the common good, will make the best decision more times than not. Democracy, for us, is no abstraction.

But as I write these words, I understand that there are now those in our community of Cabot who advocate for the sacrificing of our proud and true traditions of participatory democracy on the altar of the voting booth (for the reward of convenience). Such a proposal is blasphemy against the principles upon which Vermont was founded; principles which men and women died for (and today continue to die for in other parts of the World). A true Town Meeting demands we face our neighbors and courageously declare where we stand (and not hide our decisions behind a curtain). A true Town Meeting demands we, as citizen-legislators, retain our rights to change or modify proposals based on reason and collective need (not simply provide a blanket sanction or rejection of a proposal from the few). A true Town Meeting demands that the citizenry retain the authority which it won through struggle (to do less is to dishonor our common ancestors).

Even so, I have listened to the arguments of some of our neighbors, and here I have heard some legitimate concerns. Having to miss a day at the job without pay (for a working class person) can be hard. Finding childcare can be hard. I agree. But working people should not be forced to diminish their collective rights because aspects of our society have thus far failed to take their needs into account. Instead we must learn from the many Unionized workers who have won a paid holiday for Town meeting Day in their Contracts. And here we all must demand that Montpelier mandate Town Meeting Day a paid State holiday for all. We must require that our State Representatives and Senators support this proposal or we must vote them out of office. We also must organize as a community, ourselves, and find the means to provide organized childcare during the duration of all Town Meetings. We would also do well to find ways to expand the role of the floor vote at Town Meeting to include articles that may presently be voted on in the booth. By protecting the pay of working people, by providing parents the ability to spend some hours focusing on town issues, and by expanding the scope of decisions made on the floor we will increase democratic participation and not lesson it.

In conclusion, the great pragmatist and Vermonter, John Dewey once proclaimed: "*the solution to the ills of democracy is more democracy.*" Are we now to turn our back on this premise and join the other States in their march towards the disempowerment of The People? I for one say no. And at Town Meeting, 7pm on Thursday 10/20/16, I invite you and your family to do the same.

Chapter VII: Counter-Culture

Green Mountain Communes: The Making of a Peoples' Vermont (2008)



Free Vermont supporter at rally in support of the Free Farm, 1970

*"Gonna leave the city, got to get away,
Gonna leave the city, got to get away.
All that hustling and fighting man,
you know I sure can't stay."*

-Goin' Up To The Country, Canned Heat

"Something is happening here but you don't know what it is."

¹ 2017 Note From The Author: The article was first published in Catamount Tavern News & the Northeastern Anarchist in 2008.

Do you, Mr. Jones?"

-Ballot of a Thin Man, Bob Dylan

Northeast Kingdom, Vermont, 2008- From 1965 through 1975 it is estimated that 100,000 young people migrated north to the Green Mountains; most simply passed through.¹ Still, many thousands remained. These newcomers, mostly white, of mixed class background and primarily from the eastern cities, shared the commonality of being part of a loosely defined 60s counter-culture. This youth migration culminated in the founding of 50-100 communes by 1970. Their forms varied; some were organized around radical left politics, others around agriculture, many more lacked any defining focus beyond the vague parameters of the hippy counter-culture. What they all had in common, whether this was individually articulated or not, was a desire to transcend mainstream America. With this, social experimentation as opposed to adherence to traditional political-social-family structures became the counter-culture norm.

The first wave of communards hit the Green Mountains in the mid-60s. By 1967 a number of communes were established, especially in the southeast part of the state. Of these, a good deal of their members cut their teeth in the Civil Rights Movement, and the continuing resistance to the war in Vietnam.

Robert Houriet, an early communard and a current resident of the Northeast Kingdom, recalls, "The commune movement began with the Civil Rights Movement. The Freedom Houses in the south became the incubators of the communes... People continued to live communally because they wanted to restore the broader community of the Civil Rights Movement."

However, Houriet [who authored *Getting Back Together*, a book on communes in 1969] contends that this first wave was not necessarily intending to organize Vermont - at least not at first. In fact he understands these first commune pioneers essentially as political refugees suffering from both urban police repression and political burnout.

"The first phase was an escape, but it was an escape which had a utopian element... The big bang came after the Chicago [Democratic National] Convention. The Chicago convention [and the ensuing riots] was the epigamic event where people realized the political movement was over -fractured beyond repair. You can go to the Weathermen or you can go to Vermont," says Houriet.

Many of these early migrants, a good number of whom were formally members of or allied to the radical Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), sought to take refuge in these northern hills. It was a time for reflection, experimentation with psychedelic drugs, and an evaluation of their personal and social lives. But it was not long before two things occurred. First, after 68' the trickle of counter-culture migrants turned into a flood. This mass second wave quickly led to the formation of dozens of new communes, especially in the north. Second, the older SDS/ political elements realized that any attempt to circumvent personal and economic alienation was intimately tied to the external community. And with that, new efforts at political organizing were rekindled.

One commune, Red Clover, was at the forefront of these new efforts. Members, including John Douglas, Jane Kramer, Robert Kramer, and Roz Payne, began as a radical media collective in New York City called Newsreel. By 1969 this group, now transplanted to Putney, formed an organization called Free Vermont. The goal of Free Vermont was, simply put, to bring forth a popular revolution in the Green Mountains. To do so they worked to consolidate the newly arrived counter-cultural elements into the radical left. To a smaller extent, and with mixed results, they also sought to radicalize the native population. Free Vermont's political analysis also hinged on

the belief that the urban centers of the United States were teetering on revolt, especially in the Black community. In the event of widespread urban insurrection, it was their contention that Vermont, and other rural areas, should be prepared to act in a supporting role. Towards this end they acquired firearms as a means of self-defense. But the acquiring of weapons was by no account considered a strategic end by Free Vermont. They realized that to foster a meaningful and socialist revolution and/or to provide the anticipated broader revolution support, it was first necessary to build up their own effective institutions which in turn would give the counter-culture left a non-capitalist (or at least a more participatory) means of subsistence and production. By enlarge these new institutions took the form of producer, consumer, and service orientated co-ops and collectives. By bringing people together within co-ops it was hoped that the ingrained cultural posits of individualism and authoritarianism could be, in part, replaced with a new cooperativism compatible with the basic principles of socialism.

As Free Vermont began to reach out to the communes, they soon launched a number of co-ops across the state. In Brattleboro they opened a free auto shop (Liberation Garage) and worker-owned and operated restaurant (the Common Ground). They began dozens of food purchasing co-ops. A free health clinic was formed in Burlington. A children's collective school called Red Paint was formed in southern Vermont. A Peoples' Bank was started whereby economically better off communes deposited money that could be accessed by communes of lesser means. They organized forums against the war, organized woman's groups, and around ecological issues. Free Vermont also printed a leftist newspaper which was distributed by the thousands in the high schools and communes alike. In the north, where many communes focused on agricultural pursuits, farming co-ops were formed. Attempts were made to circumvent the highly capitalistic produce markets in Boston and New York by establishing a cooperative distribution center. The success of these endeavors varied, but for a few years, perhaps between 1969-1973, one could squint their eyes and almost see the outline of a true cultural revolution on the horizon. Free Vermont, though counting a hardcore activist base of no more 100, soon attracted ten times that many fellow travelers; a sizable force in a state that at that time had a total population of less than 400,000 people.

John Douglas, co-founder of Free Vermont and current Charlotte resident, recalls "[Our goal was] fucking revolution! Free Vermont was... the umbrella organization we had put together... We traveled around Vermont rooting out communes and collectives. We really were focused on bringing the state together politically around [opposition to] the war [in Vietnam], around the [Black] Panthers, [and] Civil Rights."

Roz Payne, who later went on to form another Free Vermont commune in Burlington called Green Mountain Red states, "We were living together and we were trying to create a better world together... We were trying to make changes in our lives and the politics of the world as far as racism and imperialism and capitalism."

But the story of Free Vermont is not the whole story. In Plainfield the Maple Hill Commune, which had dealings with Free Vermont but should not be considered part of its political core, also had their own impact on their surroundings.

Jim Higgins, a former Maple Hill resident and presently a writer for the Barre-Montpelier Times Argus, recalls "[In 1971] I went on to form the Plainfield Co-op with a lot of my old communards... One of our goals was to bring into our co-op network local born adults. It was an energetic effort to reach out with our ideas of cooperative business practices and wholesome food and subverting the system as it were through tremendously reduced prices... There was many

co-op discussions about products we would offer that would bridge the gap, so we vigorously pursued non-food products from [wood]stoves to chainsaws, to ball jars, snowshoes, [and] skis; products that generally had interest to those around us who would not necessarily be interested in brown rice and soy beans. That helped a great deal simply breaking social barriers. They had to come into the co-op to buy it. ”

The experience of the Maple Hill Commune, who also took an active role in organizing demonstrations and teach-ins to end the conflict in Vietnam, is not dissimilar from experiences of dozens of other communes across the state. In short, the Commune Movement was a force, or at least a point of conversation, in many a small Vermont town.

Internally, a good number if not most communes sought to break the subtle and not so subtle chains of sexism. More often than not (and as a rule on Free Vermont Communes), decisions were made democratically, by all the members, housework was expected from males, while tasks such a splitting winter wood was also done by women. Childcare was collectivized and was performed by both sexes. Political meetings would include woman’s caucuses. The Liberation Garage in Brattleboro held free auto repair classes, organized by Jane Kramer, especially aimed at teaching women how to fix their cars and trucks. In Burlington the Green Mountain Red collective was pivotal in opening a free woman’s health clinic (which today is merged with the local Planned Parenthood). The Red Clover Collective organized a touring performance which taught and celebrated woman’s history.

In many ways, Vermont communes, or at least the more politically active communes, did not suffer the same fractures that much of the broader U.S. left did when feminism came into its own in the early 70s. This was a result of the genesis of the Free Vermont Movement. Free Vermont was essentially founded by the Red Clover Collective, which itself was an outgrowth of the older Newsreel Collective. And here, the Newsreel Collective already recognized the problems of internal sexism and found ways of correcting these tendencies.

Roz Payne, who was considered one of the political heavies of the movement, contends, “Free Vermont was a political activity that we had undertaken to organize and politicize all the [Vermont] communes. And we’re the ones that...came out of a Newsreel Collective that talked about woman’s issues starting in 67, 68, and 69 when we were making films in New York and we had those discussions. ‘Why were only the women holding the microphones...and why are all the men holding the cameras?’ Then John Douglas got cameras for [women] to use... These were issues that we brought up earlier. So we already had those issues [dealt with]... I never felt oppressed in my commune around the women or the men.”

However, their efforts did not result in perfection. Female communitarian, Lou Andrews, recalls her days on the rural Franklin Commune (which was a core Free Vermont commune) as a time where she felt more liberated than previously in mainstream society, but one where men still had a disproportionate influence upon the general direction of the commune. In her opinion this influence was a subconscious force; one that was not guaranteed by formal process, but one that existed none the less.

As far as the division of labor goes, Lou, who now lives in Burlington, assesses her commune as a mixed bag, but one that clearly falls more in the direction of sex equality than does the traditional nuclear model. “It was always a struggle to get men to do the dishes... [But] we all gardened. Men and women canned the food. Men and women drove the horses. And men and women did the sugaring, although it was men who primarily were what we called ‘the firemen’

who in the sugar house fed the wood into the evaporator. And that was kind of a little macho deal going on. Cause they got to where cowboy chaps (ha ha ha).”

Roz, current resident of Richmond VT, also recalls that not all communes were free of the traditional divisions of labor based on sex. “You’d find some of the more rural communes the women were in the kitchen, and the men were outdoors doing stuff. So [Free Vermont] would talk about that, and we would have women’s meetings, a communal women’s grouping that would break off to discuss the things that were happening with various people.”

While Free Vermont sought to build equitable relations on the communes and a radical base of operations in the Green Mountains, it did not lose sight of its second purpose. As the local counter-culture became better organized, aid was offered to the urban revolutionary movement. In some instances children of Black Panthers from the eastern cities were sent north to attend the Red Paint collective school. Political aid was offered too. One former communard (who will remain unnamed) contends that the first dynamite procured by the Weather Underground Organization [an armed leftist group who carried out 27 bombings between 1969-1977 including those on the US Capital Building and the Pentagon] came from a granite quarry in Barre. John Douglas, for his part, states that Free Vermont helped establish safe houses for Weathermen and Black Panthers who went underground. They also facilitated clandestine border crossings into Quebec. But these activities were not committed without a price. Free Vermont communes were raided by the police and FBI. Government informants were known to be operating in many quarters. Douglas tells of a gathering he attended at the Franklin Commune (in far northern Vermont) where a group of federal agents posing as bikers offered to provide them with hand grenades and dynamite. Douglas declined. This surveillance and harassment ultimately led to a pervasive atmosphere of paranoia and tension. In turn these pressures contributed to the eventual decline of the movement.

While many of the hippy communes collapsed due to lack of rational internal organization or focus [see Barry Laffan, *Communal Organization and Social Transition*, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 1997] the decline of the more overtly political communes has more to do with political repression, disillusionment (as neither the local or urban insurrections came to pass), and again a new round of burn out. Just as they were compelled to evacuate the cities by the end of the 60s, the radical communards felt an increasing pressure, though be it maybe in a more personalized and defuse form, to abandon their communal lands in the face of a new backlash of political repression and interpersonal pressures. By 1976, following the end of the Vietnam War, less than half of the original 100 communes remained. By 1980 all but a few were gone. While many former communards remained in Vermont, and while a number of the institutions they founded continued, the general trend was overwhelmingly a turn away from models espousing collective living and working. Instead they increasingly turned to a private home life, or a traditional nuclear family arrangement. Cooperative farms were replaced with privately owned and operated organic farms. Radical agricultural organizations, such as the Northeast Organic Farmer Association (NOFA), drifted into a modest liberal reformism. Calls for insurrection were heard less, while calls for issue based reformism became louder. Where in 1970 the battle cry was for a complete new left social revolution, the mantra of the 80s was for a nuclear freeze. In short, as the Commune Movement broke down, and as its participants began to return to more individualistic-traditional living arrangements, their politics, though remaining left, grew more moderate.

During the declining phase of the Franklin Commune it is interesting to note the further observations of Lou Andrew. She contends that when the difficulties of operating the collective farm were exasperated by a serious house fire, it was the men who were the first ones to leave the commune, and oftentimes Vermont too. On the other hand she notes that the women were more apt to try to work through the difficulties longer and ultimately, to at least remain in Vermont. Andrews speculates that the reason for this dynamic is because women found their social relations and power within a communal structure to be more liberated than that which they previously experienced in mainstream America. The men on the other hand had a male dominated outside world to return to where they would at least be afforded the same limited rights and privileges that were too often elusive to women.

In the end the Commune Movement did not vanish into thin air, nor did all communards drop out of the social and political arena. The Vermont of today is inescapably a product of those times, just as it is also a product of other progressive migrations; be it radicals coming north during the Great Depression, the anarchist and socialist labor movement brought by Italian immigrants in 1900, or yeoman farmers/Green Mountain Boys who pioneered Vermont during the 1760-70s. The Commune Movement is just the latest of these defining eras of Vermont's history, and its epitaphs and advancements are perhaps most apparent in their relative newness. The Bread & Puppet Theater (now considered a staple of Vermont culture), the dozens of food co-ops (perhaps the most per-capita in the world), a large free health clinic in Burlington (now employing over 60 people), a number of worker-run businesses (i.e. the Common Ground in Brattleboro), NOFA (and by extension Rural Vermont which began through NOFA), and countless farmers' markets are all direct results of organizing done by Free Vermont and the communards of the 60s and 70s. However, its true legacy can perhaps best be seen through its indirect contributions.

Generational diffusion of the basic values of the 60-70s counter-culture has resulted in the left being more firmly embedded in all corners of Vermont making the state the most progressive in the country; the only state never visited by President G.W. Bush. In recent years Vermont (population 600,000) has led the nation in many important social issues. Universal healthcare is provided for all its children (and will continue to be regardless of the eventual outcome of the Federal SCHIP debate), funding for public education has essentially been socialized, gay couples retain the same civil rights as straight couples, and more than 70% of the people firmly oppose the war in Iraq (in 2003 three thousand marched on the rural state capital to oppose the war). Even Vermont's organized labor is greatly influenced by the Commune Movement.

In 1998 a Central Vermont anarchist group known as the #10 Collective [themselves members of the Love & Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation and largely influenced by the political teachings of Vermont 60s radical Murray Bookchin] played a lead role in forming the Vermont Workers' Center. One of the prime movers of this collective was a young man named Jason Winston. Jason, like thousands of other native born Vermonters, was the child of counter-culture parents. And today the Workers' Center, with a constituency above 20,000, functions as a grand coalition of most the major Vermont labor unions as well as individual workers. As such Vermont labor has been a leader in opposing the current war, and in the fight for the establishment of single payer universal healthcare. This fact can also be understood as another indirect influence of the leftism of the 60-70s. In a word, those communards that stayed, those that organized, those that eventually became neighbors and friends with thousands of native working class Vermonters, did in fact have an impact on public opinion.

Electorally Vermont, unlike most of the US, recognizes four major political parties. In addition to the Democrats and Republicans, there is also the very far left Liberty Union Party. This party, which received 5.7% of the vote for State Treasurer in 2006, was formed in the 70s as the electoral expression of the Commune Movement. Besides the Liberty Union, there is also the social-democratic oriented Vermont Progressive Party. The Progressives were formed by former Liberty Union member Bernie Sanders (now serving as the first socialist in the US Senate) and includes many activists and supporters from the commune days. Sanders won his first election in 1981, becoming the socialist mayor of Burlington. He formed the Progressive Coalition, the forerunner of the Progressive Party, shortly thereafter. His victory was a result not only of gaining the backing of key unions, but also of support work done by former communards. One such communard, Barbara Nolfy of the Franklin Commune, went on to serve in his administration as a member of a newly organized Burlington Woman's Counsel. Furthermore, Progressive Party Chairman Anthony Pollina (who won 25% of the vote in the 2002 Lieutenant Governor's race and is currently considering a run for Governor in 2008) was once an organizer with counter-culture allied NOFA. Presently the Progressives are the strongest third party in the nation, with six seats in the State Legislator (including the Chair of the House Agriculture Committee), the Mayorship of the largest city (Burlington, population: 39,000), several City Council positions, and countless Town Select Board seats as well as lesser elected posts.

And again, our present seems to be witnessing a generational revival of cooperativism. In 2006, on the heels of greatly falling wholesale milk prices, the Dairy Farmers of Vermont (co-founded by Anthony Pollina) opened a farmer owned milk processing plant in Hardwick. More generally, of the forty worker-owned businesses in the state (which employ 2000 people), 10% are organized as democratic co-ops. From the Red House construction company in Burlington, to the Brattleboro Tech Collective, to the popular Langdon Street Café and Black Sheep bookstore in Montpelier, worker and farmer co-ops are again on the rise.

But just as the Commune Movement has had its effects on Old Vermont, Old Vermont has had its effects on the counter-culture activists and institutions that have survived. Its long standing tradition of local democracy through Town Meeting has focused much of the continuing political angst of the left out of closed off communities, and into the directly democratic Town Halls, where their ideas have spread throughout the population. It should come as no surprise that hundreds of Vermont towns have passed resolutions against the war, for the impeachment of the President, against GMOs, and in support of universal healthcare. And where the old co-ops have drifted into more traditional business practices, the unions have been there to organize the workers [such as the United Electrical Workers at Montpelier's Hunger Mountain Co-op, and Burlington's City Market –both of which are large area employers]. In a very real sense the relationship between Old Vermont and the Vermont of the communes has become symbiotic; elements of each driving the state in both a more democratic and more socialistic direction.

This continuing trend to the left can even be observed in the declarations of the State's General Assembly and other bodies of Vermonters who have gathered in capital building in Montpelier. Pressured from below, in 2007 the State Senate passed a resolution calling for the impeachment of President Bush, and both the House and Senate passed a resolution calling for a military withdrawal from Iraq. In 2003, the day the U.S. invaded Iraq, hundreds of Vermonters met in the State House where they unanimously passed resolutions condemning the acts of the Federal Government as illegal and immoral. And again in 2006 more than 200 Vermonters held a meeting in the State House to discuss the possibility of secession from the United States (a cause now supported

by 13% of the population). Former communards and 60s-70s radicals were undoubtedly present at both events. All these declarations, as symbolic as they may be, point to the leftward trajectory of politics in Vermont; a trajectory which, in part, was set in course by the Commune Movement a generation before.

The final chapter on Vermont's Commune Movement cannot be written until history reveals whether or not those heady days of the 60s and 70s were a cultural abrasion, or an immediate harbinger of things to come.

For Robert Houriet the future, and therefore the past, holds a bitter promise. "We were just ahead of the economy," says Robert. "We were trying to go back to 1930 at a time when the economy was going off the scale in terms of abundance. A false abundance, as it turns out... [The final victory of the cooperative movement] will have to be economically determined. People will do this because they have to, because they choose to do what is possible. And what becomes possible is [determined] when the price of oil becomes too high, when the price to the environment becomes too high not to do it that way. Not for idealistic reasons, but because they have to. The farmer [for example] will feel the pinch... -they can't achieve the mechanization, the storage, the distribution without doing it cooperatively. So cooperativism will become efficient. It will become necessary that people adopt cooperative methods."

Chapter VIII: The Abenaki/Native Americans

People of the Dawn: The Struggle for Abenaki Sovereignty Continues (2003)

Swanton Vermont, 2003 –More than 10,000 years before Europeans stepped foot on the shores of what is now called North America, Native Americans hunted and fished the forests and rivers of Vermont.¹ Many archaeologists contend that these natives were the distant ancestors of the contemporary Vermont Abenaki Tribes. By the time European settlers began to colonize New England in the 1600s, Abenaki communities, with an estimated combined population of 10,000, were firmly rooted in what is now considered Vermont. While other bands, numbering upwards of 30,000, existed in Maine, New Hampshire, and Quebec. Such communities were in continual existence within the Green Mountains hundreds, if not thousands of years before the first Englishman felled his first tree in this northern forest.

Today, the Missisquoi Abenaki tribe [one of four Abenaki Tribes in Vermont] has an estimated population of over 1200. The Missisquoi Tribe exists on the west side of the Green Mountains, along Lake Champlain and its tributaries with the highest concentration being in the north, in and around the towns of Swanton and Highgate. Central to the Swanton area is the Missisquoi River, which provides good agricultural land along its floodplain. [Other Tribes with varying populations exist in the Northeast Kingdom, the Nulhegan, in mid-Vermont along the Connecticut River, the Koasek, and in southern Vermont, the Elnu.] For the Missisquoi Abenaki, the Town of Swanton is not only the location of a contemporary indigenous community, but represents a continuous Abenaki presence in the region dating back at least 200 years prior to the establishment of the Republic of Vermont in the late 1700s. The only exception to this continuity is found during brief periods of evacuation in the face of British and American military aggression, and during a one year period between 1730-1731 when it was temporarily abandoned in the face of a massive smallpox epidemic (a disease carried to North America by way of European settlers). Currently state officials do not recognize the existence of the Missisquoi Abenaki [or any other Abenaki Tribe] in Vermont. The Vermont Abenaki Tribes hold no reservation land and no *recognized* form of self-government. This denial of Abenaki sovereignty goes so far that when archaeologists find what are clearly remains, the State of Vermont forces them to be sent to recognized Abenaki bands in Quebec. Ironically enough, the Vermont Chamber of Commerce has named the annual Shelburne Native American Pow Wow, a cultural event largely organized by the Missisquoi Abenaki such as Barre resident Jenny Brinks, one of the top ten summer events. While at the same time the state continues to deny the ancestors of the event organizers even the small dignity of a Green Mountain burial.

A Peoples' History

¹ 2017 Note From The Author: The article was first published in Catamount Tavern News, 2003.



Artwork By Xavier Massot

Historically, the Abenaki have fared worse than other eastern tribes such as those within the Iroquois Confederation. In part this difference can be attributed to the Abenaki's reoccurring military alliance with the French in Quebec, in opposition to the British in the south. While the French were more interested in maintaining a lucrative fur trade with the natives, British imperial policy centered on the goal of forming permanent settlements and gaining absolute authority over the lands that they claimed. The Abenaki fought alongside the French in 1701-1713, 1744-1748, and 1755-1763. This animosity towards the British Empire can be attributed to the Abenaki's correct understanding of the early presence of British colonizers as a direct threat to the integrity of their historic territory. From 1717 onwards, British colonizers migrated up the Connecticut River valley in increasing numbers, forcibly driving indigenous people further north. In addition, where British entered, settlers occupied much of the quality farmland along river floodplains. Contrary to popular myth, many Native Americans were accomplished farmers by the time of European contact. In fact it was native people that taught the English how to cultivate corn, prepare maple syrup, and produce many other agricultural products. It is thought that the Abenaki had more than 250 acres under cultivation along the Champaign Valley alone by the early 1600s; no easy feat prior to the invention of modern farm equipment (see Sultzman, *Abenaki History*, www.tolatsga.org/aben). Therefore, the European seizure of native farmland began to take a devastating toll on the Missisquoi Abenaki who relied on the cultivation of corn, beans, and squash (the three sisters) as a staple of their diet.

Between 1677 and through the conclusion of "Greylock's War" in 1727 (*a period of fifty years*), the Abenaki, armed with French guns, fought the British continually in a struggle to retain their territory and political autonomy. Their method of warfare was one of hit and run. They employed guerilla tactics, much like the later Green Mountain Boys, and coordinated the evacuation of villages upon encroachment of British troops. In their time they were legendary for their ability to disappear into the forest, only to re-group and attack British outposts when least expected. At times such tactical retreats forced the Missisquoi Abenaki to temporarily seek refuge among related bands in Quebec; these Abenaki retreated but *never* surrendered or ceded any land to the British, Vermonters, or Americans. However, these withdrawals rarely lasted more than two or three years and inevitably ended in the reoccupation of their traditional homelands along the western shores of Lake Champlain, and throughout the Green Mountains, as soon as hostilities cooled or at such a time when British forces seemed exhausted.

This method of struggle, one of resistance and periodic withdrawal, has been used by contemporary state officials to justify their position that the Missisquoi Abenaki [or any other Abenaki Tribe] have not had a continuous existence in Vermont, and thus has served as a means through which to deny the granting of recognition. Here the argument runs that since the Abenaki periodically retreated from their historical territory, their status as a continuous indigenous people in Vermont has been forever compromised.

By the time of the Revolutionary War the Abenaki still effectively held large portions of Maine, New Hampshire, Quebec, and northern Vermont. The Missisquoi Abenaki, located in the strategic northwestern region separating British controlled Quebec and revolutionary Vermont, were divided as to which side, if any, to support. To quote Native American historian Lee Sultzman, "The American Revolution presented the Abenaki with two poor choices between Americans who were taking their land and the British who were giving it away." Here some Abenaki allied themselves with the revolutionaries against their now common enemy, the Brits. Some hoped that with the expulsion of British forces from North America the Abenaki would be in a better

position to retain autonomy. Still, other Abenaki's hoped that the defeat of the British would lead to a return of the French, with whom they previously shared a more or less amicable trading and political relationship. History was to prove tragic. The victory of the revolution, while freeing colonists from the yoke of British imperialism, left the Abenaki more exposed than ever.

During the revolution, many Missisquoi Abenaki again retreated north into southern Quebec. As the war died down, they began to return to their traditional lands in northwest Vermont. In 1790 there were at least 70, and maybe as high as 200, Abenaki living in 50 cabins in the areas around present day Swanton. In contrast, there were as estimated 74 Vermonters of European decent living in the same region (see Haviland and Powers, *The Original Vermonters*, University Press of New England, 1981). However, the number of non-native immigrants to the region increased the number of European inhabitants to 858 by 1800. As such demographics trends continued, pressure was put on the Abenaki to abandon their lands. "In 1789, some Abenaki requested compensation for loss of their lands, which they never got; a year later a number of families left to settle in Odanak [Quebec]." (ibid) Even so, relatively large numbers of Missisquoi Abenaki refused to leave the Champlain Valley. Proof of this is born out in the records of Catholic churches that still list numerous names of Abenaki families living in Vermont in their official records throughout the late 1770s, 1800s, and 1900s.

All told the remaining Abenaki petitioned the State of Vermont for granting of a recognized homeland in 1798, 1800, 1912, 1826, 1853, and 1874. All these requests were rejected.

Many of these remaining Abenaki survived by blending into the Euro/Vermont status quo. They gave up traditional dress, used modern tools, lived in cabins as opposed to wigwags, and in general made themselves *appear* like the Europeans around them. While they *seemingly* integrated themselves into the larger Vermont culture, they continued to stay in close touch with each other, and retained their cultural heritage, if only in a more secretive form.

By 1850 a number of these families began to concentrate in the Back Bay area of Swanton. However, some extended families continued to live in a more seasonal, migratory fashion. As recent as 1930 a number of Abenaki families, perhaps three bands numbering 150 persons, lived by hunting, fishing, gathering, and traditional crafts production at Grand Isle, St. Albans, and the Missisquoi River regions (ibid).

It is difficult to estimate the number of Abenaki living in Vermont between 1920 up until the 1970s. Vermont of the 20s was the staging ground for the movement to enact forced sterilization laws aimed at "idiots, imbeciles, feebleminded, or insane persons likely to procreate." (see Gallagher, *Breeding Better Vermonters*, University Press of New England, 1999) This movement, ostensibly grounded upon the since discredited "science" of eugenics was often used as a tool of the Anglo-Protestant ruling class to weaken, incarcerate, and sterilize elements from the lower and working classes, as well as "non-white" minority groups (ibid). In the 1930s, Dr. Henry F. Perkins, a University of Vermont professor, and chief architect of the Vermont eugenics project, received a personal letter from then dictator of Fascist Germany, Adolph Hitler, thanking him for "showing how much can be done, in so little time."

Forced sterilization became sanctioned in Vermont law in 1931. In its wake, large numbers of Abenaki fell victim to the racist and classist standards of normative social behavior. Large sections of *known* Abenaki were sterilized, perhaps thousands. This situation drove the Abenaki further underground. Now, public acknowledgement of native heritage ran the risk of state reproductive repression. In other words, the genocidal policies of the Euro/American elite, as set forth from

the time of Columbus on continued, if only under the sanitized justification of a now dead and discredited science. The affects are still being felt today.

During a phone interview, Chief April Rushlow, current elected leader of the Missisquoi Abenaki Tribe, questioned whether or not forced sterilization has ever ended. Chief Rushlow stated that she has two aunts that were forcibly sterilized, and, at 34, this is not exactly ancient history. Chief Rushlow further asserted that “some elders still won’t say they are Abenaki because of the eugenics movement. To me that is very sad.”

The 1970s: A Decade of Renewed Pride & Resistance

By the 1970s Native Americans across North America began to build a movement towards the reemergence of traditional native culture, as well as gaining back their political self-determination, which had been devastated through centuries of Euro-American imperialism. In 1973 armed contingents of the American Indian Movement (AIM) occupied Wounded Knee, South Dakota; site of the horrific massacre of hundreds if unarmed Sioux Indians (some men, but mostly women and children) at the hands of the U.S. Calvary in 1890. There, in protest of the continuing impoverishment and political domination of native people, they held the U.S. military at bay for more than 70 days with little more than .22s and old shotguns. Daily struggles for native rights remained intense across the continent throughout the 70s. This decade also brought forth a resurgence of “Indian Pride” and self-assertiveness in regards to native issues and concerns.

In was during this time that the Vermont Abenaki began to build their own movement for self-determination and cultural renewal. Their situation differed from many other native struggles in that they were, and remain, unrecognized by the state and federal government. In short, the Abenaki did not and do not, have any land in the form of a reservation. In kind, these Abenaki do not even have the slight degree of recognized self-rule that many other native people retain. Therefore, one of the primary goals of this internal resurgence was to gain recognition, and in turn, to secure land which they could be more free to administer according to their own initiative.

In 1972 the Missisquoi formed a Tribal Council. This Council was, and continues to be, democratically elected by tribal members, and is composed of seven members, and a Chief that is empowered to cast a vote on any Council decisions that may initially result in a tie. Homer St. Francis was elected Chief, and retained that position until 1996. In 1975, the Odanak and Becancour Band Councils officially recognized this Tribal Council. The following year, the Council presented the State of Vermont with a petition containing 1400 signatures (many from non-Abenaki Vermonters), demanding that the Abenaki be granted the right to hunt and fish without being subject to state regulations.

The motivation for this campaign stemmed from relatively new state fish and wildlife regulations that came into being in the 1960s. These regulations severely hampered the Abenaki’s ability to subsist and make a living, as many such native people were compelled to engage in such activity for basic survival. Here we must recall that from the early 1700s onward, European settlers had illegally appropriated Abenaki farmland, and hunting and fishing therefore took on a much more prominent role as a means of survival.

Chief Homer St. Francis further clarified the Abenaki position at a 1977 University of Vermont forum on native issues. There, he stated that the Abenaki did not intend to take unlimited game and fish, but rather to be empowered to regulate these practices for themselves in such a way that sustained the wildlife population, while simultaneously best serving native needs.

On Thanksgiving Day, 1976, then Vermont Governor Thomas Salmon-Democrat granted official recognition to the Missisquoi Abenaki in Executive Order #36. This order also established a

commission on Indian affairs that was charged with looking into Abenaki requests such as those relating to the regulation of fish and game. This recognition was rescinded the following year by Governor Richard Snelling-Republican in Executive Order #3.

The Abenaki responded to Executive Order #3 by holding a “fish-in” on April 22, 1978, wherein large number of natives fished the Missisquoi River in flagrant violation of state regulations. Their goal was to make public their demand to be allowed to fish for basic subsistence, and not be subject to state limits, or licensing fees. Thirty-four persons were cited by state officials for fishing without a license.

Around this time the Missisquoi Abenaki Tribal Council also began to issue car and truck license plates and claimed this to be a right of the Abenaki Nation. State officials disagreed and numerous citations were given out by law enforcement. In many cases vehicles were impounded. Here the Abenaki set up a defense fund and often allocated money to native individuals to pay the accrued costs.

Vermont Abenaki in The 1980s & 1990s

Throughout the 80s and 90s the fight for recognition continued. Time and again the Missisquoi Tribal Council and Abenaki people challenged the near monopoly of political power enjoyed and protected by the politicians in Montpelier. Actions targeting hunting and fishing regulations, as well as other aspects of Abenaki sovereignty multiplied.

In 1989 Vermont District Court Judge Joseph Wolchip upheld Abenaki aboriginal title and rights to parts of ancestral land, now referred to as northern Vermont, and recognized that they have the same rights to hunt, fish, and travel as their ancestors did. Like with Governor Salmon’s Executive Order #36, this was soon overturned by the Vermont Supreme Court on June 12th, 1992. With that ruling, the Vermont State Prosecutors Office and local law enforcement began to step up their legal maneuvers and harassment against Abenaki caught breaking disputed regulations.

The Battle For Sovereignty Today [2003]

Currently the Missisquoi Abenaki, their Tribal Council, and Chief April Rushlow are engaged in programs which seek to teach their history and language to tribal members and other interested parties. Politically they have filed documents with the federal government requesting recognition. The decision is still pending, although they have been first in line on a waiting list for review for more than seven years. In the meantime, they do receive a limited amount of money from the federal government which goes toward the educational needs of Abenaki children, and they receive a limited amount of funds from the Department of Labor. But without full state or federal recognition, Abenaki youth, most coming from lower income households, do not qualify for Native American college scholarship programs.

Here in Vermont, the City of Burlington (which has long elected Progressives to the Mayorship and many City Council seats), and three other towns have voted to recognize the Abenaki Nation. Also, one year ago (2002) all thirty Vermont State Senators, and one hundred and ten members of the Vermont House of Representatives publically endorsed recognition. However, resulting legislation was stalled in committee. The Executive Branch of state government is still adamantly opposed to the granting Abenaki sovereignty rights. According to Bill Giffin of the Attorney General’s Office, the Missisquoi Abenaki fail to meet the basic federal criteria for recognition. In a phone interview Giffin asserted that 1.) anthropologists, historians, and archaeologists fail to support Abenaki historical and territorial claims, 2.) the Abenaki, with the exception of the 1970s till today, have not existed as a distinct community for 200 years, 3.) prior to 1970 they failed to retain political influence and authority among their own people, and 4.) the Vermont Abenaki

cannot trace their lineage to the historical Abenaki. Giffin argued that those calling themselves Abenaki are, for the most part, descendants of French Canadians. Chief Rushlow, for her part, countered that those assertions are “bologna.”

These claims serve as the basis through which the state continues to keep the Missisquoi Abenaki [and other Abenaki Tribes] under Vermont jurisdiction. However, do they stand up to the facts? Two Vermont archaeologists [who work for the University of Vermont Consulting Archaeology Program] who were interviewed for this article disagree. Both contend that their findings at sites throughout Vermont clearly indicate a historical presence of the Abenaki. Archaeologist Kate Patterson stated, “Every farmer in Vermont, anyone who has ever used a plow near a good water source has found evidence of Native Americans in this state.”

The other Archaeologist, who wishes to remain unnamed, believes that there is a strong case for Abenaki recognition, and states that he is a firm supporter of Abenaki sovereignty. In addition, many historians have made compelling cases, intentionally or not, for recognition.

William Haviland and Marjory Power’s groundbreaking 1981 book *The Original Vermonters* clearly demonstrates the continuing and distinct presence of Abenaki in Vermont from times prior to European contact through the present. These findings are supported by the works of other historians and anthropologists; Bea Nelson of the Northeast Kingdom Historical Society, and Lee Sultzman, to name but two. And again, would not the fact that the Abenaki, living in Vermont, petitioned the government for recognition in 1798, 1800, 1812, 1826, 1853, 1874, and 1976 prove their continuing presence? If they did not exist in Vermont at these times, are we to believe that some long dead apparition filed these petitions on their behalf? Such findings and public records stand in contradiction to points one and two of the claims made by the Attorney General’s Office. Points three and four also must be understood in a correct historical perspective.

Traditionally the Abenaki, unlike tribes such as the Mohawk, organized themselves in a very decentralized and democratic manner. Extended family units would select a representative to serve on a kind of Tribal Council, and tribal decisions were made through a democratic process. When larger tribal decisions were not required, individual extended families acted autonomously from each other. After the Abenaki were essentially driven underground following the expulsion of the British, extended family units retained a close connection with each other. Mutual aid was given when necessary, and traditional practices were continued away from the racist eyes of authority.

In essence these continuing family ties represent a link between internal political structure prior to the American Revolution and the *public* reemergence of the Missisquoi Tribal Council in 1972. Although they did not position themselves as a *public* political force, it would be absurd to hold them to such a criteria when a public presence could have resulted in land seizures (late 1700s through 1800s), or sterilization (after 1931). No one would claim that Jews did not exist in Germany during the Third Riche, even if they were forced to take secret refuge in closets, basements, and attics, and it would be just as absurd to argue the Abenaki did not exist in Vermont during the 200 years of blatant racial oppression.

As for at the Attorney General’s Office claim that many current Vermont Abenaki are descendants of French Canadians, this claim has more than a touch of truth to it. Many Abenaki do have *some* French blood in their veins. Early French settlers, unlike the English, married into Abenaki bands. In the French culture of Quebec as in the Abenaki culture of Vermont, there was not the racist stigma attributed to such love relationships. Any of these French citizens eventually become absorbed into Abenaki culture and communities. It would appear to be a continuing

posit of prejudice within the ruling class of current society that still demand some sort of “racial purity” from indigenous minority groups in order for them to officially recognize their existence. Oddly enough, Native Americans are the only people on earth that the American government defined by bloodlines rather than culture and self-identification. Regardless, public records in churches and numerous towns demonstrate the Abenaki lineage of hundreds of natives still living in Vermont today [see Haviland and Powers, *The Original Vermonters*, page 249-250]. Besides this, the fact that hundreds of men, woman, and children presently residing in Vermont have publically come forth and identified themselves as Abenaki, despite the history of discrimination and harassment, should serve as a reality check for government officials still bent on continuing a policy of denial.

In addition to the above arguments against recognition, former Governor Howard Dean and a number of other Vermont lawmakers oppose Abenaki sovereignty based on the fear that the granting of a reservation would bring with it the opening of casinos. However, many Abenaki traditionalists have made it very clear that they do not have any interest in promoting organized gambling. Chief Rushlow, while stating that any final decision would have to be made democratically by all the people of the Tribes, points out that the Missisquoi Abenaki are currently permitted to organize bingo nights at their Tribal Headquarters in Swanton, yet have no interest in doing so. For Abenaki, the issue at stake is the dignity and historical justice that goes along with sovereignty, not the money that could be generated through blackjack, roulette, and powerball.

In light of the failure of the state and federal governments, perhaps it is time for sympathetic Vermonters to again bring the issue of Abenaki sovereignty to their respective Town Meetings. Perhaps recognition should be granted town by town, with each resolution calling on local law enforcement to respect Abenaki hunting, fishing, and travel rights. Tribal leaders are currently discussing such an approach. Perhaps more public demonstrations and direct actions are called for.

What is certain is that the Vermont Abenaki population has been decimated over the course of hundreds of years largely due to European and American wars of aggression, sterilization, and foreign disease. The Vermont Abenaki population [approximate total of 2500] is 75% below estimated levels prior to European contact. These Abenaki make up less than one half of a percent of the total Vermont population. The vast majority is poor and working class. A number are presently serving time within Vermont prisons, some, according to Chief Rushlow, for political reasons.

After hundreds of years of oppression and disenfranchisement, state recognition would seem the right thing to do. If even a relatively small amount of Vermont land was purchased and then handed over to the Abenaki to be self-administered, the state would begin to set right the unspeakable wrongs of the past.

At a time when all Vermonters are struggling to retain their autonomy in the face of corporate consolidation and the expansion of the powers of the federal government, the cry of the Abenaki must not fall on deaf ears. If we the people of Vermont are to not only stand up to the encroaching threats to our freedoms, but to win a more directly democratic society, we must all face up to the wrongs committed by the ruling class of past generations. We must clearly see that those original Vermonters, the Abenaki, have suffered at government hands. We must make amends in order that we can stand together in good faith and with a clear conscious as autonomous equals and

defend the democratic traditions of all people against the growing forces of greed, bureaucracy, and militarism.

While the Abenaki struggle for recognition and self-determination is likely to continue for years to come, I for one take heart in the possibility that on a summer morning, while driving up Route 7, there is still a good chance you will pass a car proudly bearing the Abenaki nation license plate. The Abenaki still live among us, like it or not, and with or without recognition they will continue to exist as a proud and independent people in the land which they have lived in from times unmemorable.

For more information on Abenaki struggles, past and present, contact the Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi at: 100 Grand Avenue, Swanton, VT 05488.

New Dawn for Abenaki: Original Vermonters Recognized (2006)

Montpelier Vermont, 2006- On April fifth, the Vermont House of Representatives voted to officially recognize the continuing existence of the Vermont Abenaki.² While the bill, which passed unanimously on a voice vote, still has to be reconciled with the previously passed Senate version, lawmakers say that recognition is a done deal, and will become law by the end of this session. Abenaki leaders, such as Chief April Rushlow and the Swanton based Tribal Council [of the Missisquoi/Sokoki band], are expressing relief and joy over the General Assembly's decision. State recognition will mean that the tribe will be allowed to sell traditional crafts as "Native American Made." In addition, Abenaki [may] now qualify for certain Federal grants aimed to help Indian youth attain [quality] education. However members of the General Assembly are quick to point out that recognition will not open any legal doors to land claims, nor does it allow the tribe(s) to administer their own hunting and fishing regulations. The Vermont House was "courageously" moved to recognize the existence of the Abenaki after the Federal government denied national recognition in November. The Fed's denial effectively shuts the legal door on land claims and political self-rule. Therefore, although Vermont politicians, both Republican and Democrat, have long sought to stifle recognition in the hopes of keeping a lid on Abenaki autonomy, they no longer had anything to fear. Even so, the Abenaki and their supporters are seeing state recognition as a step in the right direction. Tribal member Debbie Bezio told the AP, "I'm elated... [The Abenaki] will be able to have a sense of pride back... We'll have our chance to have our rights."

However, as things stand, those legal rights remain limited. In fact, House leaders point out that recognition will grant them no special rights. Therefore, it is likely that the Abenaki struggle for meaningful sovereignty has by no means reached an end; perhaps just a new beginning.

Where will the struggle go from here? In this moment of symbolic triumph, few are commenting on the next path. Still, it is clear that the [Vermont] Abenaki, a people that has faced down centuries of attempted genocide, deserve their own land, or at least their own sovereignty. Toward this end, it would only seem just, if the state, at the minimum, began a volunteer program

² 2017 Note From The Author: This article was first published in Catamount Tavern News, 2006. While this official recognition was historically important, the law was found to be too vague to qualify Vermont Abenaki with certain rights that typically come with state recognition. Therefore, the Vermont Legislature crafted a new bill which created a more formal recognition process which would go through a recommendation process through the Vermont Commission of Native American Affairs, and then sanctioned by the Vermont General Assembly. As a result the all four tribes achieved a higher form of recognition between 2010-2011. I had the pleasure of serving on the Commission, appointed by Governor Peter Shumlin-Democrat, in 2011 when we shepherd through recognition of the Missisquoi.



Wooden statue honoring Abenaki Chief Greylock, Burlington VT

of land repatriation, paid for by tax dollars, in the area of Swanton [and in other areas where the Abenaki population is concentrated]. Once sufficient land is procured, Abenaki should be free to administer that area autonomously. On the other hand, if the Abenaki themselves decide that they would prefer to remain within the political structure of Vermont, and recognizing the disbursement of Abenaki population across the state, Abenaki should be given a special charter from the state that recognizes them essentially as an at-large town. Such a charter, the parameters of which negotiated between the state and tribal leaders, would be the basis for the Abenaki to meet on their own on Town Meeting day to discuss and vote on issues relevant to the native population, as well as give a recognized voice in the democratic process which most Vermonters take for granted. Anything less, lacks the real empowerment that the Abenaki both deserve and have an inalienable right to. After all, the Abenaki lived here for hundreds of years before the first European settler stepped foot in New England, and to deny them their right to sovereignty is nothing but a continuation of 400 years of oppression. And that is unacceptable.

Vermont Sierra Club Helps Build Abenaki Tribal Forest (2012)



Chair of the VT Commission on Native American Affairs & former Nulhegan Abenaki Chief
Luke Willard at 2012 May Day rally

Northeast Kingdom Vermont, Fall 2012- As the Conservation Organizer for the Vermont Sierra Club I am happy to report that in 2012 we made extraordinary progress in advancing a new Tribal

³ 2017 Note From The Author: A version of this letter was sent to members of the Vermont Sierra Club in 2012.

Forest model of conservation in Vermont.³ And now, with your support, we intend to close on the first Nulhegan Abenaki Tribal Forest in over 200 years by the first of the year.

This first, modestly sized, tribal forest (70 beautiful acres in the heart of Nulhegan traditional territory) will be in Barton, in the Northeast Kingdom, and will be owned directly by the Nulhegan Abenaki Tribe, with permanent conservation easements on the land held by the Vermont Land Trust and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB).

With help from many friends and partners, such as the Vermont Workers Center and Northeast Kingdom State Senator Vince Illuzzi-Republican, we successfully gained the support of the Town of Barton for the project, and have now secured \$112,000 in grant funding for the land purchase through VHCB.

This first model forest will forever conserve the land as wildlife habitat, and will allow the Tribe to generate up to 1000 gallons, annually, of maple syrup. Through this activity the Tribe will generate up to \$30,000 a year in gross revenue, which, in turn, they can invest in further forest purchases or social programs for their low income tribal citizens. This first tribal forest will also allow the Nulhegan Abenaki a place to hunt, gather, and pursue tribal-community gardens in existing clearings.

But for us, this is not an end; it is a beginning. The truth of the matter is we are not saving our forests through one successful, tribal forest project, no matter how historic it is. From an environmental point of view, this project is important because it serves as a pilot program; a working model that can be replicated on a grand scale; as an Abenaki State Forest!

We have therefore brought our idea to the Governor, the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, and the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation. Over the summer we presented the state with a petition signed by over 1000 Vermonters stating our common support for new tribal forests. We, along with the Chief of the Nulhegan Abenaki Tribe, Don Stevens, also met with the head of the Agency of Natural Resources, Secretary Deb Markowitz, and Commissioner Snyder of Forests, Parks and Recreation. We made our case, and, in turn, heard their point of view. As a result, the State of Vermont is now open to the basic concept of Abenaki State Forests, as a place where the state would still retain ownership and official management responsibilities, but where the Tribes may be allotted a special relationship to the forests whereby they may utilize the land for low impact cultural activities, gathering of resources, access to firewood, and possibly sugaring rights. This understanding is still a work in progress, but we are very pleased to report that the state is open to the idea. In fact Secretary Markowitz has told us that Vermont would "consider" a proposal for a new Abenaki State Forest through the regular, competitive, application process.

So of course we still have a very long row to hoe, but with the establishment of this first 70 acre Abenaki Tribal Forest, we will have a real working example of what we are aiming for. In turn, we look forward to pivoting the Our Forests Our Future campaign towards a large Abenaki State Forest project after we close on this first project. And with your continuing support and direct participation, we intend to further pursue this innovative tribal-state model in order to achieve meaningful forest conservation, and sustainable social, economic, and cultural development opportunities for Vermont's lowest income and most endangered of peoples; the Abenaki.

As a final note, for those of you who were not at last spring's May Day rally in Montpelier, below are the words spoken by former Nulhegan Chief Luke Willard:⁴

Hello Vermont Workers, Farmers, Environmentalists, Abenaki, and Revolutionaries!!! My name is Luke Willard. I'm the Chairman of the Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs, a Firefighter and Rescuer, and I'm a Conservation Organizer for the Vermont Sierra Club and the Nulhegan Abenaki Tribe in the Northeast Kingdom. Just over a year ago, I was here to celebrate the state recognition of the Nulhegan, of which I am a member, and Elnu Abenaki tribes, and I'm very happy to report that I will be here again six days from now to celebrate the state recognition of two more tribes... the Koasek and the Missisquoi!

As a Conservation Organizer, it is my job to work at the grassroots level to encourage communities to create their own Town and Tribal Forests. We call it the OUR Forests OUR Future initiative... and we do not stand alone! So I give a shout out to the Vermont Workers Center, the AFL-CIO, 350 Vermont, and many others.

So what is Our Forests Our Future? My people have known for centuries that the land we walk upon is a gift. From this land, my people were able to meet their every need while maintaining the health and beauty of the land we call N'dakinna in the Abenaki language. Today, most know it as the Green Mountain State... Vermont. Unfortunately though, this gift has been taken for granted.

Greedy corporations, self-interested out-of-staters, and even some Vermonters who have traded in their birthright for real or imagined swollen bank accounts, do not see the majestic mountains, and miles of forests. They do not see the herbs of spring, the bounties of late summer, and the colors of autumn. They do not hear the ripples of a mountain stream, the call of the loon, or the wind as it dances with leaves of a giant Vermont maple. They do not benefit from growing organic vegetables or the blessing of a deer or moose who sacrifices itself to complete the circle of life. They only see potential development, dollar signs, a place to put their pollution, and an investment in vacation home development for the wealthy who reside in lands far south of these green and rugged hills. These people, the advisories of Vermont's working families, only hear what they want to hear. They only see the alleged benefit from the gain of elitist non-productive economic and political power, and they seek to exchange that which could serve the community, for the destruction that can only result from their personal gain. This is the challenge set before us as we, today, declare that a healthy and vibrant forest, a clean and sustainable environment, is a basic birth right of all Vermonters!

My people, the Abenaki, also know that this planet is changing. Our climate is changing. But as we adapt to these changes, it is necessary for us to lend a hand to our four-legged friends so that they may adapt to our changing environment by establishing forested migration corridors particularly in the northeast so that animals have a safe route from the spine of the Green Mountains to the vast forests of northern New Hampshire, Maine, and Quebec. We propose doing so through the creation of a mosaic of new town and tribal forests!

But let us not forget the two-legged creatures... you and me. Moms, Dads, Grandmothers, Grandfathers, and our greatest resource... our children. In exchange for our stewardship... yours and mine... Town forests and tribal forests can provide clean air to breathe and clean water to drink. They can also provide essential food and medicines that haven't been poisoned by synthetic fertilizers, hormones, and genetically modified organisms... Firewood for the disadvantaged and/

⁴ 2017 Note From The Author: Chief Willard's May Day speech was co-written by Willard and Van Deusen.

or elderly... Cooperative maple sugaring... and a place for teachings our children the simplicity of sustainable living and stewardship!

Last year, over 1500 people signed our petition for the creation of new town forests. These petitions were delivered to the Governor and leaders of the Vermont General Assembly. We are pleased to report that this year the Governor is supporting increased funding for the Vermont Housing and Conservation Fund. This year, though, we are circulating a new petition... one that will demonstrate Vermont's overwhelming support for Tribal Forests! It is our intention, this summer, to deliver this petition to the Governor, and to work with the administration to secure the first true and new Abenaki forest in over 200 years!

After 400 years of oppression, genocide, eugenics, and the near eradication of our culture and our people, it is time that the first Vermonters, the original Vermonters, the Abenaki, win back a meaningful piece of what was once all ours! We demand tribal-communal lands that we can hunt, fish, gather wood, and medicine. We demand a return of those tools of nature which were stolen from us generations ago. We do not stand before you today asking that we become a ward of the state. No my fellow Vermonters; we stand before you today to demand that we be allowed the resources to not only safeguard our environment, but also to take care of our own people!! We here today to declare that the time has come to establish Abenaki Tribal Forests in the Great State of Vermont!

Let me be as clear as I can... We do not seek acceptance or recognition from a federal government which is marred in blood, war, imperialism (both abroad and at home), corruption, inaction, and failure. We do not seek rights to gambling or other vices. We simply seek to work with the State of Vermont in setting aside lands which we can preserve in its natural state, and work according to our traditions; those which predate 1492 and 1791. We seek a place in these Green Hills that we can, again, call our own!

And here, we know we are not alone. We have been working with the Vermont Sierra Club and others represented in this crowd today to achieve these goals. We understand that our battle will only be won through a grand and united Popular Front composed of all those individuals and organizations who are gathered here today in solidarity! And in turn, we, the Nulhegan Abenaki, look forward to working with you to see that Vermont Put's People and The Planet First!

So, as the sun goes down over this failed empire of greed, we, the Abenaki people, the People of the Dawn, reach out our hand in friendship to all Vermonters; be they the sons and daughters of the Green Mountain Boys, the grandchildren of Québécois immigrants, or more recent arrivals. Together we are Vermont Strong and together we will win!

When I step down from this podium, I will have one goal and that is to collect your signatures showing your solidarity and support for the Abenaki people, tribal forests, preserving our environment and all those who inhabit it.

SUPPORT THE NULHEGAN ABENAKI TRIBE!

SUPPORT TRIBAL AND TOWN FORESTS!

FREEDOM AND UNITY!!

Chapter IX: Anti-Fascism

The Siege Of Lewiston: An Interview With Lady, Soldier Against Fascism (2005)



Members of The Green Mountain Anarchist Collective, David Van Deusen holding banner far left, Lady center, fist in air, lead Black Bloc march against fascism, Lewiston Maine, 2003

On January 11th, 2003, a mass contingent of anti-racists squared off against the forces of irrational hate as encapsulated in the Midwest based, neo-Nazi, World Church of the Creator (WCC), and the West Virginia based National Alliance (NA).¹ The WCC and NA targeted Lewiston for recruitment following racist public statements by the city's mayor aimed at the local Somali community. The confrontation took place on the outskirts of the working class city of Lewiston, Maine, in front of a National Guard Armory. There, 500 anti-racists pushed themselves through police barricades in order to stand witness against the 30 or so fascists meeting, under heavy police protection, inside the armory. In addition to this protest, an estimated 5000 Lewiston residents partook in a "diversity rally" across town.

¹ 2017 Note From The Author: A version of this interview was first printed in The Black Bloc Papers, Breaking

Of the 500 protesters at the scene, 50 marched in a tight Black Bloc formation. While the Bloc itself, primarily composed of Northeast Federation of Anarcho Communists (NEFAC) and Anti-Racist Action (ARA) members, may have been relatively small, it served an indispensable role in the overall action. In the front line of the Black Bloc was the Green Mountain Anarchist Collective (GMAC); first among GMAC was “Lady.”

Lady, 25, is currently a member of NEFAC-Vermont, and was a longtime member of Columbus ARA (Ohio). She is a veteran of numerous Black Bloc actions, and has been influential in the class struggle anarchist community for many years. She was born and raised in Columbus, Ohio, and moved to Vermont after the Quebec City riots in 2001. She works as a waitress in a diner.

David Van Deusen: You, as a member of the Green Mountain Anarchist Collective, were one of the primary organizers of the Lewiston Black Bloc. Can you tell me why you took on this project on?

Lady: Vermont does not currently have any white supremacist groups that are organizing publicly. When we heard about Maine and their situation, I was approached by a woman who was formerly interested in ARA, I immediately knew that I could be an asset. People tend to think that Vermont and Maine are a lot alike, and they aren't. So I was eager to jump into this one, not only because my boots were getting dusty, but because I didn't want those boneheads to come towards Vermont.

Van Deusen: To what extent did you find support among the locals in and around Lewiston?

Lady: There was a group of political communal living kids who called themselves the J.E.D. collective who were eager and supportive to try new tactics. They hadn't done this type of organizing and they were surprised that they now had to. As far as the other townies were concerned, there were three types: 1. the people who were preoccupied with the peace rally that was being organized (liberals, police, religious folk) 2. Somalian people and they were cautious but definitely aware of who was coming to town, and 3. Working class people who weren't affected in their daily routine.

Van Deusen: How do you think the overall action would have gone if there was no Black Bloc?

Lady: It's usually not the case that I say this, but some community members would not have heard about this. We got information out days before the protest, as well as flyering a follow up the day after. I honestly believe that the three Somali men, a few independent media types, and at least 20 local kids, that were with us would not have come out to where the National Alliance was recruiting that day.

Van Deusen: Peace rally? Is that like a protest against the white supremacists?

Lady: At every anticipated fascist hoopla, where the police think a good amount of attention will be drawn, these rallies are organized. They are always away from where the white power dudes are, and almost always in a closed off building. Two things right away should key you in to the fact that this is an attempt to pacify people: 1. The police and liberal groups work together, and; 2. A closed off building (i.e. no traffic or pedestrians notice you, and you can't get outta there very easily). They are organized in good spirit, but distract from the real problem. The issue at hand that day was not the peaceful people in the gymnasium, but the white supremacist organizers hovering at the end of the neighborhood trying to pick off some welfare white boys who agree “Yeah! How come the Somali's get all the jobs and food stamps?! I'm hungry! I can't find work!” White power organizers become powerful because people pray inside closed doors when they have public rallies.

Van Deusen: You were also present in York, Pennsylvania, during the street fighting with the Hammerskins. How did Lewiston compare to your experiences in York?

Lady: Lewiston was a lot more focused in terms of outreach to the community. Because York had previously seen this sort of thing happen, and had a deadly history with white supremacists, we took for granted that people knew what was up. But we should have, as always, done more community outreach in the way of flyering and perhaps door knocking. York was constant defense and offense. Hammerskins are street thugs, and we stepped to that in York. There's always penis' hanging to the grounds who are game to jump in the mix, but the kind of dialogue we got going among townspeople in Lewiston took effort. The kind that anyone can do, no matter what age or size. Some of the conversations I had with people were amazing. Don't get me wrong, we need [anti-fascist] skinheads and random thugs to roll with us on the street, but there ain't many who are material to talk to community members with me. I think they prefer it that way, so it all works out.

Van Deusen: What other Black Blocs have you marched in?

Lady: WTO (Seattle) in 1999, DC-IMF 2000, Boston-Debates 2000, Cincinnati-TABD 2000, Quebec City 2001, York-2001, Lewiston-2002, and about ten in between of smaller, non-memorable blocs.

Van Deusen: In your opinion, what are the differences between Black Blocs at anti-fascist actions compared to broader, larger, anti-globalization actions?

Lady: They make so much more sense to me. Hello? I want to, like, win and stuff. I've had to fight so much of my life, that I don't exert the energy unless I know I can make a difference somehow. After Quebec City 2001, I finished my anti-globalization stride. It's not that blocs can't be effective in these type of demonstrations, but after 9-11 I seriously question if I'm gonna make more of a difference joining in against the 40,000 well equipped New York City pigs, or sitting in my local bar talking to the fat republican dude on the barstool next to me. I seem to have more luck with the fat dude. I just don't have enough macho angst to throw random rocks anymore. I like to hit people with them! Blocs have been so much more useful when it comes to anti-fascist street work. That's how they started out anyways. It's a tactic—use it but don't over-use it.

Van Deusen: What makes for effective Black Blocs?

Lady: I don't really know how to answer this question. You have to believe in what you are fighting for. You have to put petty political differences aside and realize what you agree on, and you have to have a plan that is not only realistic, but collaborated on by at least a few experienced people.

Van Deusen: What is the relation between the struggle towards anarchism and militant street actions?

Lady: You can't believe in anarchism if your only efforts are reading and writing about it. That's great to have your head straight on the subject, but you don't have your heart in it if you can't integrate the belief into your everyday life, as well as notice what already exists around you. I never started reading about anarchism until about 5 years ago, but I've been involved in local street work for at least 8, hell my family was a local struggle. Usually, but not always, it's the poor kids who live the struggle and rebel against the class system, while others read about it. And ultimately, it's those who really make a difference that you see willing to interact with the general public, and not just the AK Press catalogue. Don't get me wrong, I'm not putting down

Glass Press Shawnee Mission, KS, 2010.

reading, it's just a lot more valuable to figure out how to integrate the ideas into conversations with people at work, grocery stores, Taco Bell, and the bar; because those are the people who would get out on the street with you, not the intellectual types.

Van Deusen: How do you see Black Blocs developing in the future?

Lady: Honestly, I'm not sure. Unfortunately, I see some of the calls that get put out and some of the people involved and I worry that youth are misled into believing that black makes them invisible. It is a tactic, a dangerous tactic, and it is not always appropriate. On the other hand, I see anarchists bashing it because of the violence it can entail, and how people tend to take on leadership roles. These people have usually never been in one, do not know that they work sometimes, and do not see that violence is being used as a tactic. Because of this, it should be seen as a little brigade where, naturally, a few may facilitate connections with the group. But all bloc'ers go into a Black Bloc with this presumption. It is not the absence of order a street crew desires or its pacifism that will accomplish the goals set out by the bloc. A certain amount of trust is necessary, but I am certainly glad a few step up for duties at every action or it wouldn't work.

Van Deusen: I understand that you have been involved in a number of labor/union struggles both in Ohio and now in New England. Can you elaborate on this?

Lady: Because I am a class struggle anarchist, I am realistic in understanding that to make any headway I need to work within pre-existing unions and agitate for democracy. So, I have always worked with labor unions on a local level. I've done everything from stocking food pantries for locked out steelworkers in Mansfield, Ohio, to agitating for unions in a city-wide campaign.

Van Deusen: Do you believe that there is a place for Black Blocs on union picket lines?

Lady: Absolutely. If you think about it, the most effective picket lines are organized like so. They do not wear black nor are they very obvious about breaking laws, but much is the same. You got a person who is always yelling in the bullhorn and seems to get the rest of the people riled up, you got a plan before hand with specific goals, and you got police on the other side. You got signs, and, depending on the picket, several people ready to throw down if necessary. They want their jobs back. They want to keep the scabs or delivery trucks from getting in. They also, like Black Blocs, need to convince the community to get behind them on their issue.

Van Deusen: To what extent is community organizing (i.e. anti-war, unions, etc.) important to the overall social movement, and to what extent are Black Blocs and other forms of militant street protests important for the overall social movement? Are they mutually exclusive or complimentary?

Lady: The most successful Black Bloc will be complimented with community organizing. However, the most successful community organizing does not mean deploying a Black Bloc. Like I keep saying—it is a tactic to be used when other means will not be effective by themselves. There has to be a willingness to fight for what you believe in (literally) but people have their strengths and weaknesses. Community organizing is as simple as encouraging a dialogue between you and your neighbor about what's going on in the world, and saying something that sticks and gets repeated. A combination of dialogue and willingness to fight in public are essential qualities to anyone who believes in contributing to social change.

Van Deusen: What personally draws you to Black Bloc actions?

Lady: What currently draws me to them is other people's belief in me as a political womyn. I offer help to anyone who asks me for it, but other than that, and my uppity nature, I am drawn to

them when I believe they are necessary to achieve the goal at hand, or when I think other people are overlooking it as a possibility.

Van Deusen: What sort of environment did you grow up in? What is your class background?

Lady: There were 5 of us kids in a 2.5 bedroom house in the Midwest. I grew up in a community that was 50% white and 50% black and 100% working class. Poor people were always looking for the next poor sucka to rob. We weren't a loving family—it was traumatic—but we agreed on the things we thought were wrong with the world. The pigs, lifestyles of the rich & famous, and not having health care. And we agreed on the things that made life easier too: bicycles, waterparks, *Married With Children*, and pot. My mom wasn't affiliated with any political name badge. She never registered to vote in her life because she thought it didn't matter. She understood the dichotomy between upper class and lower class though, as most working class people do. She just wasn't strong enough to be a mom and stay alive for the toils of work as a poor womyn. I can't blame her. My class background is still the same today, but now I send money home to support my sisters and mom.

Van Deusen: What will it take for working people to overcome capitalism?

Lady: Are you serious? Um, world peace? Well, I don't think working people will ever overcome it, even if I wake tomorrow and the revolution is here. There will always be greedy people in the world. But when the social system has changed enough here to quell some of the every-person-for-themselves attitude, then we can begin to re-learn what was common to communities before capitalism became so advanced. These social system changes have to include the basic necessities such as food, health care, childcare, education, housing, and transportation. When these necessities are spread out more, we will see a drop in working class people pitted against each other, things like theft and drug related casualties (whatever it takes to get money and whatever misguided acts of violence used). We can begin to shift from a competitive (we will still have sports of course, working people need sports!) to a nurturing and more sharing way of community life. Only then can we begin to see a shift in the effects and thought patterns on capitalism. I've always said that revolution is what I want in this country, but it won't happen in any of our lifetimes. Success in making a complete change in our economic system (that is, capitalism to socialism) will occur in steps. I can agitate for those steps every day in my life, and am realistic about the outcome. I might kick racist organizers out of my neighborhood, I might keep a Starbucks from opening, I might help unionize my workplace, I might pass out literature every chance I get, I might give someone something I don't need, I might have children some day and pass on my wisdom and convictions; it's all about taking steps—it's not a sprint, but a marathon. Sometimes people can't see the miles in front of them.

Wolf Hunt In The Kingdom: Minutemen Draw Rain & Protesters to Derby Line (2006)

"The Gods of the Hills are Not the Gods of the Valleys." -Ethan Allen

Northeast Kingdom, Vermont, 2006- On the morning of Saturday October 15th, I got in a truck and headed north towards Derby Line.² I really should have been home bringing in the last of the winter wood; if not the wood, then turning over the garden one last time before the autumn snow.

² 2017 Note From The Author: This article was first printed in Catamount Tavern News, 2006. The title comes from the Green Mountain Boys referring to their armed anti-Yorker operations as "going on a wolf hunt" in the 1770s.



Québécois protesters marching to meet Vermont protesters, resisting the presence of the Minutemen on northern VT boarder

But what the hell, if I were home the downpour would have likely kept me in by the woodstove anyway. Besides, I considered it my duty as a Vermonter to attend a certain un-welcoming party for a group of out-of-staters less interested in the foliage than in our rugged boarder with Quebec—the group was *The Minutemen*.

Borders, Guns, and Murder

The Minutemen are a quasi-vigilante organization founded in the spring of 2005 by Jim Gilchrist and Chris Simcox, both of California. This past year they mobilized hundreds of people in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California to set up armed camps along the Mexican border. The goal of the group is to prevent undocumented immigrants from crossing into the U.S., and to further pressure the Federal Government into adopting a more militarized border policy. The Minutemen also claim that their “border patrols” help protect the nation from drug trafficking and terrorist attack.

The group’s modus operandi has been to occupy public lands just within the U.S. border. This area is then divided into small camps that run parallel to the frontier for several miles, each within a short distance of the next. The Minutemen claim that their method of enforcement is limited to calling in the Border Patrol when and if they spot “suspicious activity”. However, frontier regions surrounding Minuteman encampments have increasingly played host to a number of mysterious shootings directed against the local Mexican population.

In May, masked vigilantes armed with assault rifles detained a van containing 18 Mexican nationals. The occupants were ordered to exit the vehicle. The driver, Apolinar Ortega Sanchez, was then promptly executed. The assault occurred on the southern side of the border, near the town of Columbus, New Mexico. Eyewitnesses reported that the gunmen spoke poor Spanish and, after the killing, sped off in the direction of the U.S. Not surprisingly Minutemen spokesmen deny any responsibility for the action. Even so, Patricia Gonzalez, the Attorney General of the Chihuahua Province (where the murder took place) is not convinced. She is currently investigating potential links between the attack and the Minutemen organization. [Minuteman Violence in New Mexico, *La Voz de Aztlan*, New Mexico Independent Media Center, June 20, 2005]

In California, near the Minuteman monitored Tecate-Campo border crossing, two more Mexicans were shot. One, Estrada Martinez, took a bullet after crossing 200 yards into the U.S. Jose Humberto Rivara Perez was shot in the knee while standing 20 yards within Mexican territory. Again the Minutemen deny any official involvement. [Minutemen: A home for extremists, Independent Media Center, August 08, 2005]

Based on the evidence currently available, these attacks cannot be definitively linked to the Minutemen. Even so, the proximity of the organization’s presence, as well as the timing and targets, can’t help but cast suspicion in their direction. Even if the group’s leadership had no knowledge of the shootings, it is easy to comprehend rank and file members striking out on their own. Given the Minutemen’s growing constituency of organized racists, this scenario is not only possible, but likely.

Where There Is Smoke, There Is Fire

Gilchrist and Simcox routinely contend that the Minutemen are opposed to undocumented immigrants, but do not advocate racism as a justification for their actions. However, the facts on the ground tell a different tale. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), an organization which monitors hate groups, reports that the neo-nazi National Alliance have enthusiastically endorsed the Minutemen’s actions and are serving as armed Minutemen volunteers. The white supremacist Aryan Nation group have also endorsed the Minuteman project, calling it a “white

pride event”, and have been actively recruiting within their ranks for project collaborators. [The Minuteman Project: Modern Day Slave Patrols, www.infoshop.org, July 08 2005]

On July 30th Save Our State (SOS), an offshoot of the Minutemen also founded by Gilchrist, hosted an anti-immigration rally in southern California. In attendance, were contingents of fascists openly flying swastika flags. The event organizer who refers to herself as OCAngel resigned from the Minutemen/SOS shortly thereafter. As for the reasons, OCAngel cited SOS’s cozy relationship with neo-nazis and further alleged that she was the target of anti-Semitic threats. [Minutemen: A home for extremists, Independent Media Center, August 08, 2005]

The Minutemen also admit having Glenn Spencer (of the white supremacist Voices of Citizens Together group) and Joe McCrutchen (of the Council of Concerned Citizens-CCC) as members. The CCC has a long history of knowingly receiving operating capital from the Pioneer Foundation. Formed in 1937, the foundation’s first priority was to build public support for Adolph Hitler’s Nazi regime. Since then, they have “funded studies of eugenics and the alleged links between race and intelligence.” [Report Issued By One Peoples’ Project, July 2, 2005, www.onepeoplesproject.com]

These intra-organizational networks among the Minutemen and the fringe right were further on display during a June 25th Minutemen/ United Patriots of America (UPA) rally in Bridgewater, New Jersey. There, the Minutemen and associated UPA shared the speakers’ podium with event headliner John Clark. Clark spoke on behalf of the American Immigration Control Foundation (AICF) and the California Coalition for Immigration Reform (CCIR), of which Gilchrist is also a member. The AICF is led by John Vinson, who is himself a member of the CCC [Anti-Racist Action Report, July 2nd, 2005]. The AIFC and CCIR uphold the bizarre theory that Mexico is conspiring to send immigrants into the western United States as part of a grand strategy to reclaim the lands ceded to the U.S. more than one and a half centuries ago. All three of these Minutemen allied bodies (the CCC, AICF, and CCIR) are listed as hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center. As for Clark’s speech, it amounted to a verbal attack on Mexican people, going so far as saying, “[Mexicans] have no respect... They’ve killed people’s livestock, they defecate on peoples’ porches.” [Minuteman Project Disrupted In New Jersey, One People’s Project and NJ Indymedia, www.infoshop.org, June 26, 2005]

Clark’s racist depiction of Mexicans mirrors the views of Chris Simcox. Prior to founding the Minutemen, Simcox publicly stated that “[illegal immigrants] have no problem slitting your throat and taking your money or selling drugs to your kids or raping your daughter and they are evil people.” [Arizona Showdown, David Holthouse, Reporting for the SPLC] Such skewered views of Mexicans and immigrants appear to be dovetailing with the racist and jingoistic beliefs of fringe fascist elements. As neo-nazis and extremists are made to feel comfortable within the Minutemen, and as the Minutemen are made to appear “main stream” by certain media outlets it should not be surprising that one Mexican lies dead and two more have already been shot. What should be surprising is that the body count is not higher.

From Mexico To Canada

In the summer of 2005, the Minutemen announced that they would begin to build a presence in all fifty states (a project that is far from fruition). In August the group made plans to patrol New England’s Northeast border with Quebec and New Brunswick. Vermont was targeted as a launching point. Derby Line was the intended location of their first action in the Green Mountains. October 15th was the decided date.

The Minutemen expected to announce their intentions and then sign up Vermonters to their cause. In turn, these recruits would play a critical role in local organizing efforts. Going into the operation they had no members in the Green Mountains, let alone near the northern border. And again, unlike in the Southwest, the Vermont-Quebec frontier is primarily composed of privately owned land. If the Minutemen were to import their Arizona model to the Northeast, the building of a local support network including landowners would be essential.

Minutemen and Vermonters

Once the Minutemen's intentions were uncovered, a number of Vermonters began to organize against them. A diverse coalition composed of concerned Northeast Kingdom residents, peace activists, immigrant rights advocates, union members, and socialists, began to take form. By early October they put the word out that an anti-Minuteman rally would be held in Derby Line the same time and day the Minutemen planned to be active in the town.

Unlike in other states (such as California where Governor Swartzwelder welcomed them as heroes), Vermont's elected officials turned a cold shoulder to the Minutemen. Not one local politician came out in support of the group. Governor Jim Douglas went so far as to tell them they were not welcome. And again, not a single Vermonter elected to join the organization, let alone allow them access to privately owned land on the border.

An open letter to the Minutemen from Thomas Naylor, founder of the Second Vermont Republic, and the Green Mountain Anarchist Collective read:

"Vermonters know what is best for Vermont and we do not accept the inclusion of your radical anti-immigrant ideology rooted in your racist worldview in our Green Mountains. We the Vermonter; the Quebecois, the Abenaki and the sons and daughters of Ethan Allen, birthed in the spirit of self-determination, direct democracy, and self-governance have determined: We don't want you and your ilk in our mountains."

Vermonters To Minutemen: Go Home!

I approached the Town Green at eleven AM and was met by a number of other like-minded individuals. No Minutemen. By noon fifty people were gathered near the main road. Many carried signs reading "No One is Illegal" and "Flatlanders Go Home." The largest banner, made by folks from the Kingdom, read "Vermont: 200 Years of The Underground Rail Road/ Minutemen = KKK."

The protesters came from many northern towns including St. Johnsbury, Glover, Cabot, Montpelier, and Burlington. Speakers talked through a blow horn denouncing the Minutemen to the crowd. Jim Ramey, a Montgomery Center native and member of the International Socialist Organization thundered to the crowd:

"It is very positive that wherever the Minutemen go they are opposed. Even in the woods of Vermont they are opposed. The people of this country see the hypocrisy in the Minutemen's beliefs. The problems facing the common people are such that they cannot be scapegoated away [on Mexicans or Quebecois]."

Jim's words were met with cheers from the crowd. His statements were in reference to recent anti-Minutemen demonstrations in Los Angeles, Washington, Chicago, New York, New Jersey, California, and even in New Mexico. Some of these rallies were quite large, most notably in Chicago where thousands turned out. The bulk of them resulted in protesters greatly outnumbering Minutemen supporters.

I asked one protester, Wes Hamilton, a bartender from Middlesex [worker-owner of the Langdon Street Café], why he came out to the demonstration. He answered, "It's important for Vermonters to stand up against bigotry."

I asked another, Jeremy Ripin, an archeologist from Moretown, if he had a message for the Minutemen. Referencing the Green Mountain Boys struggle against New York landowners in the early 1770s, he shot back in no uncertain terms, "In the spirit of Ethan Allen, we will drive them from our hills like we did the Yorkers of old." Some Vermonters I spoke with, eager to confront the Minutemen, spent part of the morning scouring the town centers and back roads of the Northeast Kingdom looking for signs of them. No luck.

With the Minutemen nowhere to be seen, the crowd eventually marched to the official border crossing into Quebec. Meeting them there were another twenty five to thirty anti-Minutemen protesters from Quebec. Great cheers went through both crowds as they approached one another. Separated by an arbitrary concrete marker delineating the frontier, Vermonters and Quebecois shook hands, exchanged messages of friendship and camaraderie, and even kicked a soccer ball back and forth across the border.

Anticlimax: Minutemen Walk In The Rain

After receiving no local public support, and aware of the planned demonstration (where they would be outnumbered more than five to one), Jeff Buck, northeast Minutemen coordinator from Framingham, MA, and his cohorts decided to quietly change the location of their border action. Accompanied by eight persons from as far away as New Jersey (none of them had any ties to Vermont) Buck walked the bike path in Newport along Lake Memphremagog. Yvonne Abraham, a Boston Globe reporter who walked with them in the pouring rain, stated that the Minutemen soon became disoriented and unsure of the direction of the border. At one point they were compelled to knock on a door and inquire which way was north. [Volunteers Get Cold Reception In Vermont, Yvonne Abraham, Boston Globe, October 16th, 2005]

All told, the minutemen failed to intercept any immigrants, and they failed to build any local presence. On the contrary, the next morning Minuteman Jeff Buck found a note under his truck window reading "Flatlander Go Home." The air was let out of one of his tires. Buck returned to Massachusetts.

Chapter X: On Elections

Vermont 2006 Elections: Socialist Sanders to U.S. Senate (2006)



Socialist Bernie Sanders

Montpelier, VT, November 2006- The 2006 elections will be remembered as the “Year of the Democrat.”¹ Nationally the Democratic Party gained control of the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representative; the first time they have held such power since 1994. Polls indicate that voters’ rebuke of the Republican Party had much to do with the meat grinder that is the war in Iraq. With nearly 3000 U.S. soldiers dead, tens-of-thousands wounded, and victory (whatever that looks like) about as likely as a thunder storm in February, the vast majority of Americans now want the troops to be brought home. In Vermont, where Bush’s approval rating is below 25%, a disproportionate number of folks voted for the Democratic Party. Overall turnout was over 60%.

Displaying their discontent with recent Republicans policy, Vermonters will send two Democrats and one Independent (Sanders - who will caucus with the Democrats) to Washington, D. C. as their sole representative. Regardless, Vermonters should not expect much to change in D.C. In two years’ time, it is unlikely that our troops will be out of Iraq, or that the nation will

¹ 2017 Note From The Author: This article was first published in Catamount Tavern News, 2006.

establish universal healthcare. In fact, we will be lucky if Washington does so much as to raise the Federal minimum wage to \$7 an hour (a number still below Vermont's legal minimum.)

In the Green Mountains, self-described, democratic socialist Bernie Sanders won a staggering 64.5% of the vote, easily crushing Republican millionaire, Richard Tarrant who came in a distant second with 32.3%.² Sanders, perhaps the most popular politician in the State, strongly opposes the war in Iraq, and is seen as a solid ally by small farmers & organized labor alike. Also in the race were five other candidates, (all left of the Democrats), including political maverick Peter Diamondstone of the Liberty Union Party, winning 801 votes, and Craig Hill of the Vermont Green Party, winning 1536 votes. As an interesting side note, Diamondstone, the one-time friend of Sanders turned arch-enemy, was arrested at one candidate debate after he refused to leave the stage following a verbal altercation with Sanders supporters in the audience. Diamondstone, who has unsuccessfully run against Bernie in the past, contends that Bernie has forsaken his leftist roots while on his long ascent to political power. Diamondstone, along with the other four alternative candidates combined for 2% of the vote.

Sanders's victory marks the first time in the nation's history that a socialist will serve in the U.S. Senate. Also making history was the out-of-touch, right-wing looser Richard Tarrant, who spent over seven million dollars (much from his own swollen bank accounts) in the most expensive defeat in Vermont political history. Tarrant also set the dubious record of spending more money per-vote-received than in any Senatorial election in U.S. history. This lopsided contest was a surprise to few. In the weeks before the election, numerous Tarrant lawn signs were altered in the Burlington area so as to read "Tyrant." Other indicators that Rich was headed for electoral humiliation came during the Vermont AFL-CIO's September conference in Killington. Tarrant, who was not invited, made a brief appearance where he was immediately heckled and yelled out of the union gathering. Sanders, on the other hand, delivered the key note address at the labor conference. In the end, voters were turned off by Tarrant's negative campaign tactics. Embracing instead, Bernie's promise to fight on behalf of working families. Luckily for looser Tarrant, he owns two multimillion-dollar homes in Florida, where until recently he was a legal resident that he can retreat to, among other like-minded members of the ruling class, far from his Green Mountain detractors.³

In the race to replace Sanders in the U.S. Congress, Democrat Peter Welch defeated moderate Republican Martha Rainville. Welch received 53.2% as compared to Rainville's 44.5%. Plain speaking populist Dennis Morrisseau, a founding member of the Liberty Union Party and running on the 'Impeach Bush Now' line, finished 3rd with 1,390 votes. Morrisseau was endorsed by Vermont media juggernaut The Comic News. Six other candidates, including Jane Newton of the Liberty Union, winning 721 votes, and Bruce Marshall of the Greens, winning 994 votes, appeared on the ballot. All represented differing leftist perspectives and combined for 1.3%.

The race for Governor ended with no surprises. Incumbent Republican Jim Douglas won by carrying 56.3% (less than in 2004), as opposed to the Democratic Scudder Parker's 41.1%. Coming in third was independent Cris Ericson, previously of the now defunct [or perhaps past figment of her past imagination] Marijuana Party (2477 votes), Fourth was the Green Party's Jim Hogue, with 1936 votes. Hogue ran as a staunch separatist, seeking to establish Vermont as an indepen-

² 2017 Note From The Author: Bernie would go on to run for U.S. President in the Democratic Primary in 2016 (receiving more votes than any other self-described socialist in the history of the U.S.).

³ 2017 Note From The Author: After his election defeat, Tarrant did in fact move back to Florida.

dent republic. Hogue's candidacy had the potential to garner much higher vote totals than panned out, as a recent UVM poll indicated that 8% of Vermonters support independence, but was limited by a weak over-all campaign that received little media attention. In addition, Hogue's allegations that the Federal government was covertly responsible for the September 11th, 2001 attacks may have sounded crazy to many Vermonters. Also on the ballot was Bob Skold of the Liberty Union (638 votes) and Ben Clark of the Vermont Localist Party (1216 votes), both on the left.

For Lieutenant Governor, Republican Brian Dubie won a third term, defeating top challenger Democrat Matt Dunne. Dubie won a slim majority of 51.1% as opposed to Dunne's 45.4%. Progressive Party challenger, Dr. Marvin Malek, who campaigned heavily on establishing a universal single payer healthcare system, finished with a disappointing 2.1%. Liberty Union Party member Mal Herbert received 1.1%.

Winning reelection as State Treasurer was Democrat Jeb Spaulding with 94%. His only challenger was Murray Ngoima of the Liberty Union, who won on 14,018 of the ballots (5.7%). While losing by over 94% may seem like nothing to celebrate, the far left socialist Liberty Union did win a victory of sort. By breaking the 5% mark in a statewide race, the party retained its place as a recognized "major party" in Vermont, and will therefore automatically be granted a full candidate slate in the 2008 elections. As such they will again be able to discuss social, environmental and economic issues that are important to working people in the 2008 debates. So for now, the Liberty Union continues on as Vermont's fourth major party.

In a very close race for Auditor of Accounts, Republican incumbent, Randy Brock was narrowly defeated by Democrat Tom Salmon. Neither of the top vote getters won a clear majority, both finishing with 44.4%. In a strong third was Martha Abbot of the Progressive Party who received 9.3%. In fourth was the Liberty Union's Jerry Levy with 1.6%. (Levy's totals were far below the 2004 elections, when he finished with over 5% of the vote in the same race, guaranteeing major party status for his party - in 2004 a Progressive did not run for the position.) Unlike the election of Governor or Lieutenant Governor, the Vermont constitution allows for a person to be declared winner in the race for Auditor even if they do not receive a clear majority. (If no majority is reached in the contest for Governor or Lieutenant Governor, the victor is decided by a vote in the General Assembly.) The Auditor's race was ultimately decided by a special recount. This was the first time a statewide election has gone through such a process since 1980, when Democrat Patrick Leahy beat Republican Stewart Ledbetter for U.S. Senate.

The closeness of the contest can be attributed to two facts: 1.) Many Vermonter's voted the Democratic line this year in reaction to the failures of the national Republican Party, and 2.) Salmon is the son of a former Governor and therefore had a strong and positive name recognition. Democratic Governor Thomas Salmon was the first to officially recognize the Abenaki [a recognition which was rescinded by the new Governor Richard Snelling-Republican]. Without such name recognition it is likely that the Progressive, who ran a solid campaign, would have ended with closer to 20% of the vote, with incumbent Brock winning. In the end, Brock's narrow defeat should be seen as a serious blow to the state Republican Party. In a word, the Republican's tenure in the statewide office may be numbered. In addition, the fact that Abbot not only broke the 5% mark, but ended with close to 10%, not only secured the Prog's place as a "major party", but demonstrated that they are not a fringe force in the field of electoral politics. Abbot pulled 2% higher than the best Prog vote getter in 2004, (Steve Hintgten, who ran for Lieutenant Governor finished with 7%.)

And finally, the tightness of this contest may put additional pressure on the General Assembly to pass Instant Run Off Voting legislation. Lest Vermonters forget that the Brock-Salmon totals were so close (the contest being decided by no more than a few score of votes) that the Liberty Union's 4229, let alone the Progressive's 23,545 (both pre-recount vote totals) could have swung the election either way. And again the minority victory of Salmon demonstrates the electoral folly of the Progressives and the Liberty Union (as well as other left parties) running candidates against each other in various races. While there are serious differences between Vermont's further left parties, these differences are mitigated by practical similarities. For example, all left parties support a single payer healthcare system, the right and duty of workers to unionize, the development of clean, alternative energy sources, and all support bringing Vermont National Guard troops home from Iraq. It would have been an electoral tragedy, if the tables were turned and it was the Progs who lost to the Republicans or Democrats by a few dozen votes, with the Liberty Union playing part of capitalist kingmaker.

As this race demonstrated, a mere 1% of the vote is sometimes all it takes to throw an election to either camp. While this time the potential victors were both of the status quo parties (Republican and Democrat) it is not hard to foresee a time when the outcome will be between socialist or capitalist. With this in mind, it would do service to all left parties, if they could agree not to fight against each other in elections to come. But considering the recent track record of all involved, this cannibalistic tendency is likely to continue.

In other statewide races, incumbent Democrat Deb Markowitz (72.6%) defeated Republican Cheryl Moomey (25.3%), and Liberty Union candidate Boots Wardinski (1.9%) for Secretary of State. Incumbent Democrat William Sorrell will return to serve another term as Attorney General. Sorrell won 69.3% of the vote, as compared to Republican Dennis Carver's 27% and Liberty Union candidate Rosemarie Jackoski's 3.5%.

The struggle to control Vermont's General Assembly ended with Democrats building upon their majorities in the Vermont Senate and House. The combined center-left (Democrats, Progressives, and Independents) now have a slim veto proof majority in both bodies of the state legislature. Dems surprised many by picking up Senate and House seats in Rutland County, typically considered a Republican stronghold. The Senate is now 23 Democrats vs. 7 Republicans. The House is 93 Democrat, 6 Progressive, 1 Independent and 50 Republican.⁴

While Democrat victories bode poorly for the Republicans, the growing strength of the Progs was ostensibly bucked by a Progressive incumbent losing in the Northeast Kingdom to moderate Republican (and well-known publisher of the Northland Journal) Scott Wheeler, and by a number of close defeats in the Burlington area. The Progs, however, retained their 2004 seat total by Sarah Hatch Davis' upset victory in Washington County. Davis, who was strongly supported by organized labor, defeated her Republican rival. The Progs, who are the most successful "third party" in the nation, now claim Vermont House seats in the Burlington area, Windom, Windsor, and Orange Counties, as well as the Northeast Kingdom. In addition, they claim the mayorship of the city of Vergennes. The Liberty Union's lone candidate for the Vermont Senate (Windom County) lost to the Democrats. On the far right, the Libertarian Party (who opposes the minimum wage and supports the causes of capitalism over working people) lost in all of its bids for

⁴ 2017 Note From The Author: As of 2017, the Democrats still control the Vermont Senate & House, but the Progressives now have 3 Senators, 7 State Reps, and the offices of State Auditor (Doug Hoffer) and Lieutenant Governor (David Zuckerman). In addition Bernie Sanders (who founded the Progressive Party after leaving the Liberty Union Party), although officially an independent, remains as one of Vermont's U.S. Senators.

the General Assembly (In the 2006 election the Libertarians decided to focus their energies on winning representation in the General Assembly as opposed to running candidates for statewide office.)

All told, the election results point to the decreasing power of the Republicans, the non-existent power of the further-right Libertarians, and what may turn out to be a long tenure of power for the Vermont Democratic Party. However, just as many Vermonters voted Democratic as a reaction against the national Republican Party, it is likely that many of these same voters will veer toward the Progressives (with a small number going to other leftists parties) as the shortcomings of the Democrats become unavoidably apparent. And again, the small percentages received by the Liberty Union, the Vermont Green Party and other left groups, as compared to previous election, can, in part, be attributed to the “out with the Republicans, end the war in Iraq” sentiment; a sentiment that translated into mass votes for the Democrats.

While the majority of Vermonters support a single payer universal healthcare system as well as livable wages, and while close to 80% oppose the war in Iraq, the Vermont Democratic Party is unlikely to exercise the political will to address these issues in any comprehensive manner in the near future. As voters become disenfranchised with the status quo, it is unlikely that they will turn towards the more conservative Republicans, or radical capitalist Libertarians. Rather it will be the Progs, the social-democratic principles they support, and to a much lesser extent the other small left parties who stand to electorally gain from the imminent failures of the soft-left Democrats. Despite Progressive disappointments in the 2006 election (they were expected to win at least 10 total seats in the General Assembly), they were smart to focus on local races in this cycle. Even by losing, they continued to build a strong party apparatus in many working class districts, including the Old North End of Burlington. This door-to-door, person-to-person party building is what they will need to break through as a force capable of challenging Democratic homogeneity in the coming years. However, for them to do this, they will need to field a very strong candidate in at least one statewide race in 2008; a candidate that has the honest ability to win, not just reach a third place, double digit finish.

The short list for such a candidate is limited. Burlington Mayor, Bob Kiss has burned his chances of ever winning a statewide race by recently talking about limited gun control (Vermont is essentially void of such gun laws and changing the status quo on this issue is very unpopular on both the right and the left.) P-State Rep., David Zuckerman could be a very credible challenge, but his position as Chair of the House, Agriculture Committee makes him a risky bet.⁵ If he were to lose in a statewide race, even if it were close, the Progs would presumably also face losing control of this important committee. One possibility would be recruiting a challenger from within the ranks of organized labor. Vermont State Employees’ Association President Ed Stanak would be a strong choice.⁶

As leader of the 8,000 strong state workers union he would start out-of-the-gate with a serious constituency. Also, his demonstrated public speaking skills and knowledge of many issues that effect working people would make him hard to beat in most races. The question is not whether or not Stanak would make a strong candidate, but rather, if the Progs could convince him to run.

⁵ 2017 Note From The Author: David Zuckerman was elected as a State Senator in 2012 and as Vermont Lieutenant Governor in 2016.

⁶ 2017 Note From The Author: Ed Stanak was the Progressive Party candidate for Vermont Attorney General in 2012 receiving 5.5% of the vote.

Also in the wings is farm organizer, WDEV radio host, and current Prog chair, Anthony Pollina.⁷ Pollina could make a contest out of any race, and since successfully opening a farmer owned milk processing plant in Hardwick (a project he has been working on for a number of years,) it would seem that he will again have time to set his eyes on state office. If not Stanak, then Pollina. The party needs them and the sort of interest that they would generate, especially if they hope to build on their current 6 house seats.

The Republicans, for their part, will not recover from their recent losses. But, they will retain office of Governor until Douglas decides to step aside. Let folks remember that it's been over 40 years since Vermonters have voted a sitting Governor out of office. However, once Douglas does step aside, they are unlikely to field a candidate who could outpace the growing center-left majority.⁸

Dubie's job security is a different story. Dubie barely received a majority this year (51%) and should be seen as vulnerable in 2008, especially in a three way race where no one wins a clear majority. Her it becomes more likely that the center-left General Assembly would vote in someone other than the Republican.

The future of other "third parties" is also in the balance in the coming years. The old socialist Liberty Union Party (the party that at one time counted Bernie Sanders as Party Chairman) hardly made an effort in this election, if in the last ten years they ever have. Many of their candidates didn't even bother to make it to their respective Vermont Public Radio debates, and few bothered to hold or attend other campaign events. Furthermore, throughout the years the party has made little effort to build its electoral or activist base. While individual party members such as Jane Newton have been active in various social movements (Newton has long been involved in the efforts to shut down the Vermont Yankee nuclear plant) the party has not been an organizing or driving force in these movements. In addition, the party has never won representation in the State House. And while the Liberty union may hold values that are shared by many Vermonters (free higher education, opposition to foreign wars, universal health care, workplace democracy, etc.,) it is hard for folks to take them serious enough to trust their vote to them. Even their perennial candidates (when they do show up to debates) often seem unpracticed in public speaking, and sometimes defer to other candidates as the likely winners when the votes are cast. And again when running head to head with other small left parties in 2006 they continually finished behind them. For example, the Liberty Union finished well behind the Progressives in the races for Auditor and Lieutenant Governor, and even came in behind the Vermont Green Party (who is considered a "minor party") in the contests for U.S. Senate, U.S. House, and Governor. If not for being the only opposition party for State Treasurer (as well as a respectable finish for Attorney General) the Liberty Union would be considered dead in the water. Could it be that the Vermont Greens are slated to become Vermont's next fourth major party? All this said, in 2008 it will probably be the case that the Liberty Union again finds itself running as the only opposition in a less visible statewide race, and will therefore again win the required 5% to remain a major party.⁹

⁷ 2017 Note From The Author: Anthony Pollina ran for Governor in 2008, coming in second to the winning Republican candidate. Pollina received 21.8% of the vote, finishing above the Democratic Party candidate. Pollina was elected as a Vermont State Senator in 2010.

⁸ 2017 Note From The Author: Democrat Peter Shumlin was elected Governor after Douglas retired from public office in 2010.

⁹ 2017 Note From The Author: In 2008 & 2010 the Vermont Liberty Union Party failed to qualify for major party status, but regained in in 2012 with its candidate for Secretary of State, Mary Alice Herbert, winning 13.1% of the vote.

As alluded to above, the Vermont Green Party currently has what the Liberty Union does not; a pulse. While their positions are not as radical or comprehensive as the Liberty Union, they are left of the Democrats and seem to have the optimism and energy that the Liberty Union has been lacking since the 1980's. If in 2008, this party were to run in a low profile statewide race, one that did not include a Progressive candidate, it is likely that they will rise to major party status. Even so, in an already divided left (Progs, Liberty Union) it is hard to see the Greens growing into a serious electoral force, especially, if they continue to trumpet 9-11 conspiracy theories (as candidates did in the last election) that can't do anything but make them look a bit crazy to the general public (even if they turn out to be partially right).¹⁰

On the far right, the Libertarians are all but done. For years they failed to win more than a couple percentage points in any statewide race (relegating themselves to perennial minor party status) and in 2006 their plan to focus on Vermont House races (where they often ran on a joint Libertarian/Republican ticket) resulted in no victories. While party leader, Hardy Manchia will keep the ghost of the party marginally active, it is extremely unlikely that they will gain any foothold in any aspect of Vermont politics. And from the point of view of small farmers and working people, this is a good thing. Where working Vermonters are struggling to turn back the tide of capitalist inequalities, the Libertarians seek to set the market "free" as it was prior to the Great Depression.

Finally, while it is only speculative, Vermonters should look for the next two to five years to give birth to a new party. As the Second Vermont Republic organization stagnates, it will become tempting for its supporters to form their own electoral party. If they do so, and, if this party takes basic socialist positions beyond independence, such a party could quickly become a major force in the state. CT News will be sure to keep you informed about any developments.¹¹

So, as the sun goes down over the 2006 election cycle, and as a new legislator (one composed of the center-left) takes it's seats in the State House, we here at Catamount Tavern News remind Vermonters that while the General Assembly and other state offices may have real effects upon working people's lives, electoral politics should always be understood as inherently flawed. Remember, it was through a direct form of Town Meeting democracy that the old Republic of Vermont was founded, and it will only be through the emergence, again, of an empowered Town Meeting along with democratic worker and farmer councils that true freedom, democracy, and equality will be established in our Green Mountains. Freedom and Unity.

The Man Who Would Be King: Interview With Vermont Progressive Anthony Pollina (2007)

Montpelier VT, November 2007 - Anthony Pollina: a name which is known in every house and in every rural town across the Green Mountains, but for the moment, a name known to few outside

Herbert was the only opposition candidate running against the Democrat.

¹⁰ 2017 Note From The Author: Soon after the 2006 election, the Vermont Green Party diapered from the political scene.

¹¹ 2017 Note From The Author: Vermont separatists, following a poll stating 13% public support for Vermont leaving the union, ran a slate of candidates in the 2010 General Election but failed to articulate a clear leftist platform. All their candidates lost, with their best candidate finish being for Lieutenant Governor where they received 3.7% of the vote.



Pollina, left, across from Van Deusen and VSEA-AOT union workers at Vermont Statehouse, 2014

of left-leaning Vermont.¹² Pollina is a farm organizer, Vermont Progressive Party Chair, populist radio host of Equal Time, WDEV 550AM, firebrand speaker at labor rallies and picket lines and possible, if not likely heavy weight contender for Vermont Governor in 2008. Pollina, like a character in a Steinbeck novel, harkens back to the days of the socialist populist rabble rousers who traveled the countryside by train during the Great Depression. But Pollina is no mere retrofitted radical. He and his social democratic Vermont Progressive Party, (founded by socialist U.S. Senator, Bernie Sanders-VT) are a real force in the Green Mountains (population 600,000). They control six seats in the General Assembly (including the Chair of the important House Agriculture Committee¹³), the Mayorship of the largest city¹⁴ (Burlington, population 39,000), and have run strong in statewide elections against Democrats and Republicans alike. They also have countless Party members across the state elected to local offices from Selectpersons to Town Constables. In organized labor their members include officers in the Vermont AFL-CIO Executive Board, as well as a number of influential persons in the National Educators Association (Vermont) and the Vermont State Employees' Association. Many more rank & file union members belong to the Party. In addition, the Progressives find support among Vermont's small farmers, whose struggles they have been at the forefront of supporting. The Party's statement of principles and general platform, in addition to upholding such basic rights as real livable wages, affordable housing, free college tuition, and universal single payer healthcare, includes the socialist assertion that "human labor is the key to creation of wealth. We challenge the assumed right to derive vast wealth from ownership or position." The Party, who is clearly on the left, does not support gun control.

The Progressives first bid for statewide office was in 2000, in which Pollina, running against incumbent Democrat Howard Dean (who is viewed as a centrist to Vermonters), won 10% of the vote. Two years later, with the endorsement of the Vermont AFL-CIO, he won 25% of the vote in the race for Lieutenant Governor. As a result of his high profile farm organizing campaigns, his tenacious support of organized labor, and his frequent speeches around the state, many believe his popularity, as well as that of the Party, to be on the rise. While Progressives, who are hands down the most successful third party in the union, and Pollina in particular, are often accused of playing the role of "spoiler" (benefiting Republicans) by the powerful Vermont Democratic Party, there are small signs, or at least possibilities, that the Democrats, who control both chambers of the General Assembly, may step aside and let him have it out with the moderate three term Republican Governor, Jim Douglas in the 2008 election.¹⁵ Pollina himself says that he has been approached by a number of Democrats urging him to run. Senate President Pro-Tem Peter Shumlin-D¹⁶ has publicly mused that Pollina could be a candidate that could bring people together. The pressure on the Vermont Democratic Party to support or at least tolerate Pollina as the candidate increased this September when the Vermont AFL-CIO Executive Board, who historically endorses the Democratic nomination, was rumored to have passed a resolution, calling for the Democrats to refrain from running against Pollina, if he so chooses to be the 2008

¹² 2017 Note From The Author: This interview was first published in Catamount Tavern News in 2007. Pollina ran for Vermont Governor in 2008. He finished second (with more votes than the Democrat) with 21.8% of the vote. In 2010 Pollina ran for the Vermont Senate for Washington County, as a Progressive, and won. He went on to win reelection in 2012, 2014, and 2016.

¹³ 2017 Note From The Author: David Zuckerman, future VT State Senator & Lieutenant Governor.

¹⁴ 2017 Note From The Author: Bob Kiss.

¹⁵ 2017 Note From The Author: The Democrats did run a candidate for Governor in 2008; Gay Symington, who was Speaker of the Vermont House. She finished third behind Douglas and Pollina.

¹⁶ 2017 Note From The Author: Shumlin would go on to serve three terms as VT Governor from 2010 on.

Progressive Party candidate for Governor. If he does, and, if he were to win, his victory would make history and solidify Vermont's claim as a territory in opposition to the rightwing draft witnessed in much of the rest of the nation. Even, if he were to make it close, say within a 5% margin of victory, the Progressives would no doubt walk away invigorated as a party, and in a strong position for the 2010 Vermont General Election.

On a late fall evening, I sat with Anthony in the Dairy Farmers of Vermont office on Elm Street in Montpelier (State capital: population 7,800). I arrived for the interview at 6:00 PM, and the door was unlocked. Pollina sat alone at his desk running numbers for the Vermont Milk Company (a farmer controlled processing plant in the Northeast Kingdom that he helped to form). The modest office was lit by a single lamp. We talked Vermont politics candidly for an hour.

David Van Deusen: You've been organizing the dairy farmers. Before that you were organizing with Rural Vermont, before that with the Northeast Organic Farmers' Association (NOFA).

Anthony Pollina: In between with VPIRG... I worked with NOFA back in the late 70s-early 80's and then I founded Rural Vermont in 1985. I went to work for [then socialist Congressman - now Senator] Bernie Sanders back in 1990... and then I went to VPIRG in 1995 as the interim Executive Director... After that I was the VPIRG Policy Director until 2000. I also ran [as a Progressive for Governor] against Howard Dean. Since then, I have started the Vermont Milk Company.

Van Deusen: You've been organizing around farmer's issues since the late '70s. What is it that draws you to that?

Anthony Pollina: Well there really is two things, and I don't know which comes first. One is the people, quite frankly. Farmers and people who are farming, [those who are] working the land, are just about the most genuine people you could work with. So, I find myself drawn to that type of work because of the people I've come to know through it. Other than that, the issues around agriculture and food bring together a lot of the issues that we all care about - you know, economic justice, social justice, environmental justice. They seem to come together in many ways around agriculture - or at least they have for me. I've worked on other issues too, obviously, but I find myself drawn back to work on agriculture and food issues. If you're talking about economic development, you're talking about agriculture. Environmental policy? Agriculture. Worker exploitation? Agriculture. On the other hand, when you talk about the positive things that bring people together, you're also talking about agriculture. It's 'culture' that's why its 'agriculture' because it is a lot about who we are as people. Whether it's free trade or local economic development there seems to be a piece in it that comes back around to working on those issues.

Van Deusen: The Vermont Milk Company? How is that coming along?

Anthony Pollina: One of the most important things about the milk company is that it's a business enterprise that is the direct result of a grassroots organizing effort that [local family] farmers undertook close to three years ago. Those farmers were looking for a way to regain control over their milk and their [rapidly falling] income. They were looking for a way to take some milk out of the commodity market, add value to it, and put that money in their pockets. They were also looking for a way for consumers to directly support them...

We had a committee, which was primarily farmers, and traveled around the state and had a lot of meetings and talked to a lot of [other] farmers. We then held meetings with the major milk handlers and talked about ways in which they could work directly with the farmers to help them through this *and got nowhere!* As we went through this process more and more, the farmers said

the only way to do this is to have our own brand - our own processing facility. So it's important to me that it came from that.

We started the business about a year ago; 'we' meaning a group of farmers, myself and a few other non-farmers, and it is different than any other dairy business that I'm aware of. It has a fair trade mission... It is Vermont owned and farmer controlled in the sense that the board of directors is dominated by farmers, and we're committed to paying the farmers a stable minimum price. Right now the price that is the minimum is \$15 a hundred weight. Of course, the price of milk is [currently] well over that so we make that higher price. But when the price goes down, we have that floor that we won't go below.

Last year at this time the price of milk generally was eleven dollars, twelve perhaps; we were paying \$15... In the last couple weeks the price of milk was \$23. What we do in that case is we match the market price. We basically use [the] St. Albans [Co-op] as our benchmark... But we also don't charge the farmers' for the trucking of the milk from the farm to the plant [in Hardwick], which other handlers of milk companies do.

Van Deusen: Can you tell me how much does the average farmer pay for 'stop fees' and 'hauling fees?'

Anthony Pollina: Not really, because they [the farmer] doesn't even really know. It's a very complicated formula. It varies a little from farm to farm... I've heard it to be as low as thirty cents a hundred weight, and as much as seventy cents a hundred weight... But let's say its fifty cents a hundred weight on average. [On top of the fifty cents the farmer] pays a 'stop charge', which is \$7 to \$9 every time the truck stops at their farm... That's every day or every other day, as it depends on the farm. [In addition] right now, they're paying fuel surcharges, which, of course, [the farmer] can't pass on to anybody. They [are compelled] to pay promotion fees that go into the federal and state promotion programs. [Even more, while] it depends on the handler, I know that this year a number of them were paying extra assessments to help their companies overcome bad debt... So when you look in the newspaper and read that the price of milk is whatever, say \$12, farmers are not getting \$12. Some of them are getting close to \$10 [-amounts which translate into mass foreclosures of family farms]. The media doesn't report the net. They're reporting what the federal government or market order says the price is.

So just to finish this thought: [The Vermont Milk Company] pays the farmers a fair price, we pay for the transportation, we keep the money here in Vermont, and we're adding value to it. So, it's a fair trade product. [And often with fair trade products] we talk about fair trade coffee, fair trade chocolate, fair trade crafts [all imported goods]. What we want people to talk about more is *domestic fair trade - Vermont fair trade*. So that is what is so important about the [Vermont Milk] Company.

We make cheese, we make ice cream, we make yogurt, and like any start up there are a lot of challenges and we've just come to the end of our first year. We're looking at the places where we made money and the places where we didn't and we're figuring out how to go forward. It has been extremely exciting and extremely challenging and extremely rewarding. And it has kept us very busy because there are a lot of moving parts.

I frankly think that there are some folks out there in the industry that would rather we not succeed. I really do. We're trying to create a model [that is] pretty similar, but a little different, than a worker owned [co-op]... And, if we can make it work, *and we will*, I think it will be a model for [farmers] around Vermont, as well as other places.

Van Deusen: In twenty years from now, do you see farmer controlled milk companies like this operating in several counties?

Anthony Pollina: I would say most likely... This has already come up. People have said "can we do one in southern Vermont? Can we do one in Chittenden County?" The short answer is "sure" - but it is quite complicated. Let's make sure this one [in Hardwick] becomes established, so we really understand what it takes. We've really learned a lot in this process. Sometimes there's talk about expanding the Hardwick location. Sometimes there's talk of doing it somewhere else. Right now we're not ready to do either of those things, but both of them get thought about a lot. People come and visit the plant all the time, and talk about that. I think there is potential...

Van Deusen: In general terms, what is the state of the farmer's movement today in Vermont?

Anthony Pollina: In some ways, it tends to follow milk prices up and down. Like any group of people, when times are tough they tend to motivate, and right now, for what it's worth, the price of [raw] milk has been pretty good... On the other hand, farmers lost so much money over the last year or two that even though the price of milk doubled they are really struggling to catch up... They're trying to deal now with the higher prices of corn and feed.

There has also been something else which has been going on, which we have been somewhat involved in, but not as directly, which is a group of farmers [Dairy Farmers Working Together] that started in Vermont..., which has been traveling around the country to try to see if they can get Congress to develop a supply management system... And those folks... went to California, they went to Wisconsin, they went to Washington... [This] is good and something that we all have worked on a long time. So, a lot of what's been going on, and I don't mean this negatively, has been that... a lot of attention has been turned towards Washington... But, I think we can do better by focusing on state and local policy because, I guess, I have a little more faith in [Vermonters] ability to change than I do with the federal [government]...

The other thing that is happening, which is interesting, is this movement toward the development of a Vermont fair trade designation. There is growing evidence that people in the region... will pay a fair price for dairy products that are designated to be fair trade products. So, we are trying to figure out what that means and how to put it to people. It's really like the early days of the organic movement when people were trying to figure out what the standards would be. So that's what has been going on...

The other people who have been really good for farmers in Vermont lately have been the public school' cafeteria workers. [They] have now become the frontline in supporting local agriculture.

Van Deusen: Have they been buying local products?

Anthony Pollina: Yes, they've been going out of their way to buy local.

Van Deusen: Is that having a big impact on small local farms?

Anthony Pollina: It is, [but] it's not big enough to solve the problem, but it's big enough to set the example that, if public schools can do this... maybe the big institutions in the state, the IBM's and the National Life's can start figuring it out. I mean that, if the cafeteria lady at the Holland Elementary School can find a way to buy local, you would think that the cooks at National Life would be able to do the same?

Van Deusen: Does Vermont need its own state based subsidies program for family farms? Do we need a base price for farm commodities?

Anthony Pollina: The wording is complicate. When you say a "subsidy" I would say no, [but], if there was a way in setting a base price that farmers got through the market - in other words, if St. Albans, and Agrimark, and Dairy Farmers of America [the organizations that control most

of the milk in Vermont] simply said that we are going to pay farmers no less than \$16 a hundred weight and were going to pass that on to the consumers, wherever they may be, that would be great. We'd be getting the marketplace to pay that price. That is what the organic companies do. They set a minimum price and that's it... [But] these entities, the St. Albans and the Agrimark say they can't do that. They say they don't really control where the milk goes. It's a legitimate discussion, [however] I don't really believe that. They could play a strong role [advocating for the farmers]... i think it would be a good idea to do what we [The Vermont Milk Company] are doing. We're saying we're not going to pay less than \$15 a hundred weight.

Van Deusen: But can you rely on the free market to figure this out on its own?

Anthony Pollina: No.

Van Deusen: Does the state have to be involved?

Anthony Pollina: What we need to do is find ways [for the state] to invest in local processing, because, if there is more local processing for dairy and other products... those processors will be able to put those products out in the marketplace with the minimum price attached to them. I think that would make a big difference.

Van Deusen: So let me see if I'm following you. You contend that instead of the state taking a direct role in such a process [i.e. ownership] you advocate the state acting to economically support endeavors from groups like Dairy Farmers of Vermont?

Anthony Pollina: Right, right. Basically, there are things that the state could do immediately... The State of Vermont could actually commit to buying local products. You know Jim Douglas goes on the radio and runs these ads that say 'buy local - it's just that simple.' Well, if it's just that simple, Jim, why aren't you doing it? [And here] when we say 'the state' I mean UVM, the state colleges, the prisons, the public schools. But that could also extend to things like Fletcher Allen [hospital in Burlington] which receives public money. If they all bought dairy from the Vermont Milk Company it would be glorious. If they all decided that they were going to buy Vermont hamburger... well, what they would say is that 'Vermont hamburger is not there.' Well if *you* tell us you're gonna buy it, we [the Vermont farmers] will bring you the hamburger. We were talking about all this at a meeting I was at last night on a farm in Franklin County.

So how do you build the infrastructure necessary to meet the demand of the state and other consumers? It means you need a place where you can keep frozen hamburger over the winter... So what the state can do is it could provide the capital to support those kinds of endeavors. The Governor says that 'the state doesn't do that' but two years ago the [Vermont] legislature was close to appropriating half a million dollars to support in-state dairy processing... The Governor killed that bill. Literally the same week or so the [Democratic] legislature and [Republican] Governor have half a million dollars to the Ski Areas' Association to promote skiing in Vermont because they had a 'tough' winter. Well dairy farmers have had a tough life! The ski industry has had a tough last season.

Van Deusen: Most ski areas are owned by out-of-staters.

Anthony Pollina: Well of course! They are owned by the big corporations whether in-state or out-of-state and they have resources. So they [the government] literally said 'no' to the agriculture infrastructure, and it was a half a million dollar appropriation...

Van Deusen: Less than a dollar a person for every Vermonter.

Anthony Pollina: Yeah, and [instead] they gave it to the ski areas to *advertise*. The ski areas admitted a couple months later that they only spent half of it because the season ended, and they put the other half in the bank!

So are there ways to raise capital and to make that capital available to entrepreneurs or groups of farmers or other Vermonters who want to build processing plants or have a place to freeze vegetables or have more meat processing? There are always ways to do that.

Van Deusen: So where has Governor Douglas been in the big picture?

Anthony Pollina: Absolutely nowhere, that's the thing! Missing in action! He talks about it a little bit, but as far as I can tell there has been very little effort made to create an investment in infrastructure. [Even so,] there have been a couple of small things that are underway [through the current government]. Although, I haven't seen it yet, somebody has set aside [resources] for a mobile slaughter house that could go around and slaughter larger animals on the farm. [This] would make it easier for people to do that kind of stuff.

Van Deusen: Who would own or control the operation?

Anthony Pollina: That right now is unclear to me... We have to find a way to invest at [a higher] level in Vermont. So there has been this talk about the mobile slaughter house, [the government] has given some grants to schools to buy local, but we're really missing the boat. We should be talking about a plan, an agricultural development plan that would require some investment in this industry. The problem is when Jim Douglas hears the word investment he says 'you want to raise my taxes.' And that is not necessarily what I'm talking about. What I'm talking about is coming up with capital through a variety of ways. There is plenty of money in Vermont. The question is what are we doing with it?

Van Deusen: Well you hear Douglas say "higher taxes, higher taxes" what you don't hear politicians talk about is whether you are talking about taxing the average working person or are you talking about taxing the [wealthy] Richard Tarrants of the state? For somebody who is engaged in politics, is there something to be lost for a person to say 'hell yeah, we're going to tax the Richard Tarrants and we are going to create a mobile slaughter house?'

Anthony Pollina: First of all, you don't want to increase taxes on working Vermonters because they are the ones who are struggling. What they are struggling with though is not their taxes. What they are struggling with is their healthcare, energy costs, transportation and housing. The Governor will tell you that taxes are the biggest problem working families have. He's wrong. The biggest problems, in terms of chunks of their family incomes, is housing, healthcare, and energy. And food comes after that. Those are much more of a burden on families than taxes are. On the one hand, you don't want to raise their taxes, but on the other hand, you want to reduce some of those other costs as well.

There was a study that came out recently that said, compared to the twelve other states that they looked at Vermont had the fairest tax system of all. [This] means that we as Vermonters have done a very good job of being fair to working families when it comes to taxes. That is something Jim Douglas doesn't tell people about.

Having said that, I do believe there are ways to bring Vermonters together to talk about whether to make changes to our tax system [and to do so in a way that does] not burden working families. We can make changes in the way we tax capital gains in Vermont that would bring in money. But, I actually have a different idea, to tell you the truth! When I think about capital, I look at institutions in Vermont who have a lot of wealth. The obvious ones... are UVM, Fletcher Allen, and the state colleges. They have portfolios, they make investments. They have endowments and that kind of stuff. [Vermont] has told them over the years, "don't invest in tobacco. Don't invest in Darfur." We have never told them to invest in Vermont. I think we could work with them or require them, depending on how it shakes out, to put a percentage of their endowment into an

equity fund that would then be used to support rural entrepreneurs and others who would be able to then set up processing plants... distribution networks, whatever it takes. I think we could make that happen... They are [already] using our money! UVM is supported by us! Fletcher Allen uses medicade/medicare. They use public dollars. Why don't they give a little back to the local public? We used to call it 2% for Vermont. [Why not tell them] to put 2% of their portfolio into this fund?... Then [after they did that] you ask other large businesses, private entities, to do it. If National Life of Vermont put 2% of their investment portfolio into a Vermont... rural development fund, we would have all the resources we would need to invest... So again, I think there are ways in which we can change the discussion about what we mean by investment in Vermont, and that is part of what I would like to do.

How about we have a Vermont credit card? Vermonters use their credit cards to buy their boots and to go out to dinner. Visa and L.L. Bean even has their own credit card. Let's face it. U.S. Airways has a credit card. Everybody gets a cut and there is a lot of interest that is obviously gained from credit cards. Where is it going? Why don't we sit down at the table and think about whether or not we could direct Vermont's spending into Vermont more. I think Vermonters would like to have that conversation.

Van Deusen: You have recently been going around the state talking to people about many of these ideas. What are your goals in this endeavor?

Anthony Pollina: It's about allowing Vermonters to have a vision and to move forward with it. I do think that in particular [living] under Jim Douglas has made it more difficult for us [common people] to talk about the challenges we face and the big issues and [for us] to try to find solutions. Jim Douglas has basically put creativity on hold when it comes to state government. He explains to us often what we *cannot* do; he tells us why we couldn't buy those dams on the Connecticut River, why we couldn't invest in the energy efficiency program, why we don't have real healthcare reform, why we couldn't invest in the agricultural infrastructure. He talks a lot about why we can't do things. The first thing we have to do is get Vermonters to stop talking about what we cannot do and actually start to talk about what we can do...

Just recently there were some people getting together to talk about affordable housing. You know, sort of what you would call affordable housing advocates and activists sitting down with government agencies and they [asked] "why isn't the Governor here as part of this conversation?" and the Governor's people said "it's not appropriate for him to sit down with special interest [groups]." I'm sure he sits down with the Chamber of Commerce and other people! It's ridiculous! My point is he is not engaged with talking to Vermonters about how we're going to deal with the things we need to deal with.

Part of it is getting people to change their frame of mind, getting them to feel optimistic about themselves again. Jim Douglas [on the other hand] tells us that "we are the most taxed state in the country," which is not true if you're a working Vermonter. He tells us business doesn't want to be here. He tells us that young people don't want to be here. He tells us we can't afford to live here. You listen to Jim Douglas long enough and you want to leave! This is not the guy you want leading the way to creative solutions to solving problems... So, I think part of it is getting people together to start having the conversations...

On the [energy] efficiency issue that's just a question of making it clear to Vermonters what that was about. [Douglas] at one point said expanding [the state's] energy efficiency program beyond electricity was about taxes! He literally at one point was quoted saying "this is all about taxes." Somebody should tell the man he's wrong! Somebody should stand there and say "this is

not true.” This is about saving businesses money, that’s what this is about. It’s about creating jobs. It’s about reducing energy costs. It’s about expanding a program that has already been identified as one of the best things Vermont has ever done! But he gets away with saying it’s just about taxes. So let’s talk about that.

When you talk about healthcare reform, what he talks about is [how] “we can’t raise taxes” but we can spend a lot of public dollars on Catamount Health. For some reason, that’s okay. We can spend tobacco money or little bits from pots of money from here and there, but we can’t sit down and really talk about the fact that if [Vermont] publicly funded healthcare, you would actually eliminate premiums! So, in that case you may actually be talking about a tax, you’re talking about public financing of healthcare, and where he would immediately run away from that I would say ‘well wait a minute.’ If I were going to use public financing and you were going to pay no healthcare premium, and your [real] costs were going to go down, would you like to at least talk about that? I think most Vermonters would at least say ‘let’s at least talk about that.’

With energy, I think we’re missing the boat. Vermont Yankee [nuclear power plant in Vermont]¹⁷ is going to meltdown before we figure out how to replace that power. So we’re wasting time. It’s unfortunate, because we are running out of time when it comes to energy. With energy and healthcare you need to really change that whole conversation and talk to Vermonters about the reality check as related to taxes. [The Governor] tells us we’re the most taxed state in the nation. That’s just not true if you’re a working Vermonter.

Van Deusen: Vermont currently receives one third of its energy needs from Vermont Yankee, another third from Hydro Quebec, and the rest from small local sources such as dams, wood burning plants, and some methane and wind. Can Vermont be energy self-sufficient without the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant?

Anthony Pollina: Can we be more energy independent? The answer is yes. [Unfortunately] we missed the boat in some degree [when the state] did not buy the dams on the Connecticut River and we’re going to live to regret that. [Even so] we could find Vermont scale wind power that people could relate to and support. [But] the best way to become energy independence is by using less energy. And that is what that energy efficiency program has done and could do more of. So are we ever going to be as energy independent as much as a lot of us would like to be? Probably not in our lifetimes unless we find [the means] to make it happen. But can we become more energy independent? The answer is yes... Then the [other] big issue is cars. We have done nothing in Vermont for public transportation.

Van Deusen: I was recently in the Northeast Kingdom and I observed that they were tearing up miles of old railroad tracks. It seems like a further move away from that?

Anthony Pollina: Well what the Governor wants to do, if he has way, he would invest hundreds of millions of dollars in the Circ Highway to move people in a circle around Burlington. [This is] very indicative of the way Jim Douglas thinks about policy... The studies have shown that the Circ Highway is not going to reduce commuting time. It’s not going to create jobs [in] a healthy local economy, and it’s not really going to reduce accidents. I’m not even sure what the whole purpose of the Circ Highway is at this point, but Douglas still supports it. He thinks it’s something we really have to do. That’s a couple hundred million dollars that we could be investing in something else.

¹⁷ 2017 Note From The Author: Following massive public pressure, Vermont Yankee was shuttered for good in 2014.

Van Deusen: Given the current make-up of the Vermont General Assembly, [overwhelmingly Democrat, with six Progressives], with the right person as Governor, can Vermont be the first U.S. state to achieve universal single payer healthcare? Could we move towards real livable wages? Can this be done in the next five years? Are these things possible?

Anthony Pollina: Yes! Yes, they are possible. I don't really know what the time frame is because I'm not sure [how strong] the resistance will be. Both the things that you mention are things that Vermonters support. When you ask Vermonters, if they support universal healthcare [and], if they're willing to finance it... the answer is yes. The majority want to move in that direction. What it's going to take is a person who is willing to have that conversation with Vermonters, and then is willing to stand up with them.

Van Deusen: Are you going to be that person?

Anthony Pollina: I don't know. I think, if I were Governor, I would be that person. Whether I'm going to be Governor right now or not is unknown because I have a lot of things that need to be figured out before we can really make that decision.

Van Deusen: I understand that you have had conversations with Matt Dunne [*2006 Democratic candidate for Lieutenant Governor and rumored 2008 candidate for Governor.]

Anthony Pollina: Well, yes. I've talked with a number of those [Democratic] folks, including Matt Dunne [as well as] the Chair of the Vermont Democratic Party. You know, you sit and you drink coffee and you talk about what may or may not happen... From my point of view, what those conversations are mostly about [comes down to] 'is there a way that Vermonters can come together, and, for lack of a better word, unite around a candidate and build a grassroots movement strong enough to defeat Jim Douglas. Could Democrats, Progressives, disaffected Republicans, independents, and people who are getting fed up with the way Jim Douglas treats Vermonters come together to defeat him. Everybody says they want to do that. Everybody says that's what we need to do. And then we move into a discussion about who might be suited to do that. I certainly have given reasons as to why I think I can do that [but] I'm not 100% certain I'm ready to give up the other things I'm doing. We've [also] talked about [if] there are Democrats who could be able to play that role as well. [However] I, quite honestly, think the list is relatively short for most of the Progressives I talk to, but we're not closing the door to those options.

Van Deusen: But how much confidence do you have in the Democratic Party in Vermont?

Anthony Pollina: What I think would be best would be to take [and incorporate] some of the good work that the grassroots Democrats have done and want to do. You know the Democratic Party is pretty broad in Vermont and obviously it is capable of electing people. [Most of] our Congressional delegation [and] most of our state office holders are Democrats. And I think most [rank and file] Democrats believe in universal healthcare and livable wages. Those are things Vermonters do believe in. For some reason, that Democratic base has been unable to capture and shape the debate in a way that really moves beyond the politics of Jim Douglas. So I think there is a lot of good folks there, but what is lacking... is a leader at the statewide level who can better articulate it in a way that would motivate Vermonters to dump Jim Douglas and [instead] take on a Governor who supports those things.

So when you're talking about the Democrats... a lot of them are neighbors and friends... The question is "given their majority [in the General Assembly] why are they not able to better control the debate? I don't know why they can't do that. I just know that they can't.

Van Deusen: Some people would say the Democrats have a long history of half measures, symbolic actions.

Anthony Pollina: Sure! First of all because they are a broad party in a sense there are a lot of [internal] factions. There are a lot of legislators who are Democrats who are not inspired by things like universal healthcare. [But] I think, Democrats as Vermonters are, but that doesn't mean that their elected officials are all committed to the same agenda. So that is one thing. I think that sometimes some of the people in the Democratic Party fall for Jim Douglas' political line. They maybe start to believe that Vermonters don't want to talk about these things. Some of them have come to rely over the years on the same sources of political power and money [as the Republicans] and they don't want to alienate those people...

A reporter said to me recently that "I don't get the feeling that you're talking to the Democratic powers that be." And I assume she meant these mythical people who live in Burlington who have a lot of money who tell Democrats what to do! Ha! I don't even know who those people are!

Van Deusen: State Senator Hinda Miller could probably tell you.

Anthony Pollina: And you know what? I haven't asked! But that's what the reporter said to me. So I told her "you're absolutely right. Why would I be talking to those people, while I'm talking to people who live in communities where there are working people, who are farmers, those who are the base of the Vermont political movement, who are going to defeat Jim Douglas. Those wealthier people, who like to pull the strings, are not necessarily committed to defeating Jim Douglas. It's people in the countryside who are committed to defeating Jim Douglas. I'm talking to those people! I'm not going to start a campaign from the top down. You start a campaign from the ground up because it is those people, the farmers and the working people and [organized] labor. It's those people who are going to do the grunt work of making the campaign.

Van Deusen: Rumor has it the Vermont AFL-CIO President Lindol Atkins is ready to back you for Governor. Have you been talking to the AFL?

Anthony Pollina: I was at their convention [in September] and I spoke with people there and I felt like there was a lot of support there. I did encourage them to play an active role in deciding who the candidates should be. What happens all the time is that the Democrats pick a candidate and then organized labor is expected to endorse that candidate. And I just suggested that they play a more active role, not just this time, but all the time.

Van Deusen: The war in Iraq?

Anthony Pollina: What would you do with six hundred billion dollars? I mean everything we're talking about would not even be an issue, if we weren't throwing all that money at a war, which is immoral, unjust, unnecessary, and ironically enough, opposed by 70% of the American public. You talk about democracy, and then you talk about how 70% of Americans don't want something, yet we have it; in this case, a war. It tells you something about the Democratic Party on the national level.

Van Deusen: Can a Governor of Vermont find a way to bring the Vermont National Guard troops home?

Anthony Pollina: I think a Vermont Governor could look for a way... I don't say this definitively, but I believe that there are some rules about how the National Guard can be used or not used and at the discretion of the Governor. So I think that could be looked at... There are certainly ways in which the Governor could mobilize Vermonters to put pressure at the national level to put an end to a war that the great majority of Vermonters don't want to be in.

You know we have all these distinctions in Vermont. They tell us "this is the best place to live," "Burlington is the best place to raise kids." Recently, we've been designated the "smartest state" based on how kids test - but we also have the rather dubious distinction of being the highest

number of deaths per capita in Iraq and we don't really need that. That doesn't rank with those others.

[At this point of the interview, Anthony's wife Deborah, appeared in the doorway.]

Deborah Pollina: Hi. I was just a little worried because you said you were going to call me when you were done.

Anthony Pollina: Well, I guess I'm not done. I was going to call you.

Van Deusen: It's my fault.

Anthony Pollina: I can be done any second, but I haven't finished doing what I was supposed to do. Are you in a hurry?

Deborah Pollina: I guess I was ready to go home, yeah.

Anthony Pollina: Okay.

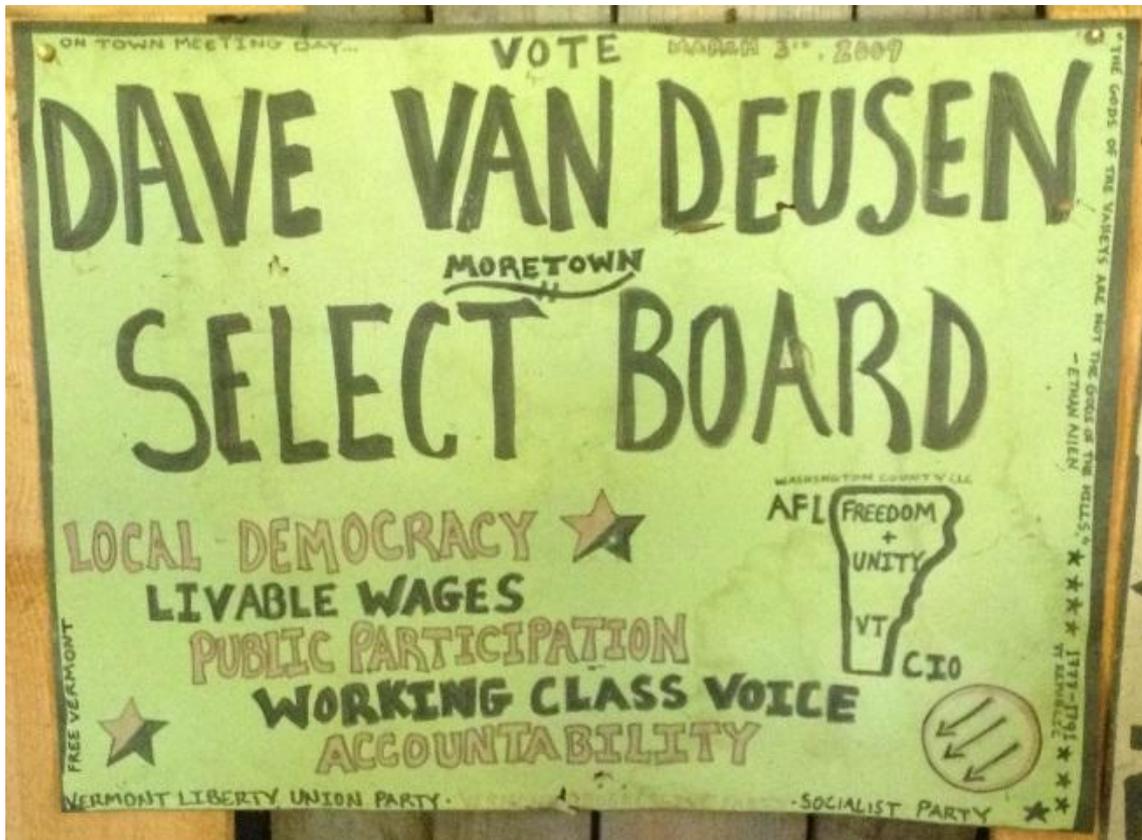
Van Deusen: We can wrap this up. Any final words?

Anthony Pollina: No.

[We both laughed.]

Van Deusen: Thanks Anthony.

Dave Van Deusen, Candidate for Moretown Select Board (2009)



Van Deusen campaign poster, 2009

Town Meeting Day, March 2009

Ten Point Platform

1. **STRENGTHENING LOCAL DEMOCRACY & MAJORITY RULE** — As Selectperson I will support maximum democratic participation in town government (hearings, special town meetings, testimony, etc), and make Select Board business transparent and accessible to all residents.¹⁸ In the spirit of local democracy, I support making the town Planning Commissioners elected positions, and hold that shorter terms for elected town officers makes them more accountable to the people. And finally, I also pledge to support the majority opinion of town residence on issues, even if that opinion is counter to my personal feelings.

2. **LEADERSHIP** —I will demonstrate leadership on issues through community dialogue, open debate, and consensus building.

3. **BUILDING THE CAPITAL SAVINGS FUND, PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE** —I will strive to maximize town money in a Capital Savings Fund (a fund made up of money generated by the landfill, and NOT accessible for short term town expenditures), with an eye to make that money, in the long run, sustainably generate more resources for town based public programs for local youth, elderly, poor and working people. I favor putting half of the annual landfill money into this fund (\$200,000).

4. **TAX RELIEF FOR WORKING PEOPLE** —In the short term, I will seek to use one quarter of the annual landfill funds (\$100,000) to lower property tax and provide a renters rebate for individuals making under \$50,000 a year, and families making under \$100,000 a year. This tax & rent relief would last at least as long as the duration of this current economic crisis, and would come in the form of an annual check, from the town, to qualifying households.

The remaining money annually generated from the landfill (\$100,000) should be placed in a Capital Development Fund, and should be used as needed by the town subject to the approval of the voters.

5. **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & GOOD JOBS** — concerning the proposed quarry on Route 100B, I would support the current majority opinion NOT to allow the quarry. This majority opinion has been demonstrated through public votes, such as empowering the Select Board to enact temporary zoning on 100B (in response to the proposed quarry), and the vote to adopt new permanent zoning regulations (which would not allow future quarry development on 100B).

However, I do favor responsible development. We need good jobs for Moretown's residents. Therefore, regarding major development proposals I would look closely at the type of jobs that would be created. Would they pay livable, family supporting wages? Would they provide health-care? Would they provide a good pension and other benefits? Would they be union jobs? Would the operation be employee owned or at least Vermonter owned? Would an effort be made to hire local residents? If a major development project met most or all of these criteria, and assuming it could pass a basic environmental muster, I would support it. If, on the other hand, such a project

¹⁸ 2017 Note From The Author: This platform was composed in 2009, and provided to voters in the Town of Moretown. I won this election with the endorsement of the Vermont Progressive Party, Vermont Liberty Union Party, & Vermont AFL-CIO. In my two terms I was not successful in carrying out large portions of my platform. The fact was that I was one vote on a five person board. The other board members, while being good people who cared for the local community, were much more conservative than myself. Even so, we were successful in provide livable wages for all non-elected town employees, doubling property tax relief for disabled military vets, opening up the Town Hall for a free children's play group, and generally increased public participation in town government. Much of my platform may have been possible over time, but after two terms I decided that my time on political matters was better served working within organized labor and within other aspects of the movement.

only created a small number of low paying jobs with no benefits, and was not projected to boost the town's tax base or meet recognized community needs, I would be unlikely to support it. We need responsible development and an economy that works for all our residents, not more avenues for the few to get rich and those who work 40 hours a week to remain poor.

6. **LIVABLE WAGES** — I would support a policy whereby all individuals employed or individually contracted by the town be paid (at minimum) a livable wage of \$12.71 an hour as defined by the Vermont Job Gap Study. I would also uphold a policy whereby all businesses contracted by the town guarantee that their employees are also paid (at minimum) a livable wage. Finally, I would seek to hire local town residents and town business first.

7. **SUPPORT FOR LOCAL AGRICULTURE** — I would support a policy whereby the elementary school, when possible, purchase locally produced healthy food from area farmers.

8. **LOCAL WOOD HEAT FOR PUBLIC BUILDINGS** — I would explore installing a wood-chip furnace in the elementary school and woodstoves/furnaces in the other town buildings. If this happened, such wood should be acquired from local Moretown loggers, and sustainably harvested from town land when possible.

9. **ACCOUNTABLE LAW ENFORCEMENT** — On law enforcement, I would support the town relying more on active constables. These are the elected officers of the community, and are in the best position to deal with any law issues that come up in our town.

10. **ADVOCATE FOR MORETOWN** — On behalf of the residents of Moretown, I would use my position as Selectperson to pressure our legislators in Montpelier to adequately fund health and human services. Every year on Town Meeting Day we (and many other towns) vote a sum of about \$10,000 to support various community & health programs across our region. While, for the most part, these are great organizations that currently need our support, the truth is if the state did their part they would not need our money and we could use our limited resources in other ways. For example, we could better fund our town library, and/or we could increase after school programs.

**SUPPORT LOCAL TOWN MEETING DEMOCRACY
& THE VERMONT WAY OF LIFE!
ON TOWN MEETING DAY VOTE
DAVE VAN DEUSEN FOR MORETOWN SELECT BOARD.**

VALLEY REPORTER QUESTIONS FOR SELECT BOARD CANDIDATE DAVE VAN DEUSEN (2010)

Moretown Vermont, February 2010

Valley Reporter: Why are you running for town office?

Moretown Selectman Dave Van Deusen: I am running for a seat on the Select Board because I want to continue being a voice for the working families of Moretown.¹⁹ In 2009 I worked very hard to make sure that you were informed about what was going on in our town. I did my best to further bring you into this process so that the many, and not the few, had a say as to what

¹⁹ 2017 Note From The Author: These questions were provided to all Moretown Select Board candidates in Moretown. The written response was published in the Valley Reporter in 2010. I won this election (with the endorsement of the Vermont Progressive Party, Vermont Liberty Union Party, VT chapter of the Socialist Party USA & Vermont AFL-CIO) receiving the most votes of any candidate running for Select Board that year.



David Van Deusen with hunting rifle in front of his cabin in Moretown VT, circa 2009

was happening in our local government. If reelected I will continue to explore ways to give the public more oversight regarding town affairs, and I will do my best to exercise common sense when making day to day decisions in my role as Selectman.

Valley Reporter: Any experience?

Van Deusen: In 2006 I was appointed Moretown Representative to the Regional Planning Commission by the Select Board. In 2007 I was elected to First Constable. And then in 2009 I won a seat on Select Board [endorsed by the Vermont Progressive Party, Vermont Liberty Union Party, and Vermont AFL-CIO], where I have been serving since. Outside of town government, I am a currently an officer in the Washington County Central Labor Council. In 2007 and 2009 I was elected District Vice President of the Vermont AFL-CIO.

So yes, I have experience in local government and a record of organizing on a statewide basis on behalf of working families. In Moretown I successfully advocated for “livable wages” for town employees, oversaw the Town Hall renovation project and worked on broadening local public participation in town affairs. On a statewide basis with the AFL-CIO I have worked towards universal healthcare reform, on revitalizing the labor movement, and broadening rank and file participation in union affairs.

Valley Reporter: What, in your opinion, are the most pressing issues facing Moretown residents?

Van Deusen: Due to the continuing economic downturn, taxes are especially an issue this year for both blue and white collar workers. The fact is that many people have been laid-off, many have had their hours reduced, and many more have seen a pay freeze or reduction (all the while Wall Street continues to make a killing). Truth be told, folks are going to have a hard time meeting their basic needs and paying their property taxes this year. Therefore we need to look at ways to reduce the tax burden without reducing necessary services.

One way to do this would be to make the way we off-set property taxes with landfill revenue more equitable per household. The way it is currently done is that we simply reduce the overall tax rate. In 2009 this regressive system translated into a person with a home in Moretown valued at one million dollars receiving \$1200 in tax subsidies. The person with the one hundred thousand dollar home saw only \$120 in tax savings. The renter, of course, saw nothing. This system of subsidies is not equitable or fair to the regular people who are struggling to get by. Instead we should find better ways use a portion of our landfill revenue; ways that level the playing field and benefit all of us equally. If we did this, taxes for average households would go drastically down, and we would not be in the false predicament of having to reduce jobs or services at the municipal level.

Even so, understand that any use of our landfill money (which is forecasted at \$400,000 a year for maybe 15 more years), and specifically any change in the way we use this money, would have to be debated and voted on by you at a duly warned Town Meeting. This should not be for the Select Board to decide on their own.

Valley Reporter: Should the environmental court rule in Rivers’ favor, do you think the town should continue with the quarry appeal process?

Van Deusen: If the court rules in the towns favor, I have little doubt that Mr. Rivers will appeal. In this case I understand that the cost for fighting such an appeal could be as low as \$1000. In this scenario I would support using funds from within the 2010 budget for defending the decision of our local Development Review Board by continuing proceedings.

On the other hand, if Mr. Rivers wins this stage of litigation, it could cost upwards of \$30,000 for the town to file their own appeal. In this scenario I support the use of minimal town funds to begin legal proceedings (\$12,000 is already set aside for anticipated lawyers' fees in our 2010 budget). That said, I would go a step further and advocate for a town wide vote to see if we should spend more than what we have in our legal budget on further litigation.

Valley Reporter: Do you think the town should continue to fund the library?

Van Deusen: Absolutely. Libraries are cornerstones of communities, and the price we pay to maintain ours, per working class household, is small. For instance, at an annual operating cost of \$18,000, a family who owns a \$100,000 house pays \$10 in taxes towards the library. A family with a \$200,000 house pays \$20. And a renter pays nothing.

When you reflect that the average price of a single new book is \$18, or that a family membership fee to the Montpelier library is \$44, I think you can see that we are doing quite well for our money here in Moretown.

I would also like to remind folks that although our library is small, they are able to get you just about any book through the inter-library loan system. So please do take advantage of this community resource.

Valley Reporter: Are you in support of the town's potential contract renewal with the Washington County Sheriff's Department?

Van Deusen: No. We have contracted with the Sheriff's Department for 5 years or so now. In that time I have not noticed crime going down, or up for that matter. In recent years we have spent a lot of money on the sheriffs for very little coverage. Also, when we do contract with them the town has essentially no oversight regarding how, when, where they patrol. In my mind this is a bad use of tax payer money.

What we should be doing is electing constables that are willing to get the necessary certifications in order that they can better patrol our roads. Unlike sheriff's deputies, constables are elected directly by us, are accountable directly to us, and are in a better position to serve the needs of the community. And finally, we need to change the term that constables serve from one year to two (as it takes nearly a year to get all the training), and properly fund this important town department.

**David Van Deusen has been endorsed by the Vermont Liberty Union Party, the Vermont Progressive Party, the Socialist Party USA, and the Green Mountain Labor Council AFL-CIO.*

Concerning The Vote For The Next VT AFL-CIO President (2010)

November 17th, 2010

Now that Democrat Shumlin has been elected Governor, the approaching question is who will step in to provide new leadership within the State AFL-CIO.²⁰ And here, assuming Lindol Atkins (AFSCME) does not run for re-election, I have made no secret that I have an interest in

²⁰ 2017 Note From The Author: This communication was provided to key union officers and leaders within the Vermont AFL-CIO in 2010. In the end I was unable to secure the support of the Vermont AFT. Without the support of the AFT (who decided to run their own candidate) it was not realistically possible to win an election against a more conservative slate likely backed by the IBEW and AFSCME. Therefore I instead ran for Member-At-Large (a position on the on the five person Executive Committee). I won this race (along with the AFT candidate for President Ben Johnson and OPIU candidate Traven Leyshon for Secretary-Treasurer) as part of a pro-reform slate.



this outcome... Currently I am considering a run for Vermont AFL-CIO President. My question to you is this: is there a path through which I can count on you for support?

In my estimation the state federation currently lacks cohesive or compelling vision. I say this from observing from the inside (two terms on the Executive Board as a District Vice President) and from the outside (as a longtime rank and file UAW 1981 member & former Teamsters). The fact that we had to mobilize (against VT AFL-CIO Vice President Jill Charbonneau and some IBEW officers) to make sure Republican Brian Dubie did not become our new Governor speaks volumes to our current problems.

Here are the facts: The VT AFL has a shirking membership of less than 9,000 members. While Vermonters generally are becoming more supportive of a progressive public agenda, the VT AFL commits its limited resources to reactive politics geared towards holding the line with what we have, as opposed to spearheading the fight for what we want and what should be. And as any football fan can tell you, the best defense is a good offence.

On the other hand, I contend that we have a historic opportunity to reverse this trend, build new members, increase inter-union solidarity, and win far reaching victories for working people across Vermont. But we both know that this will be unlikely without a meaningful change in our union leadership.

In brief, I am starting to formulate a platform through which to build a campaign for this contest (the below is a work in progress). I also foresee the need for me to engage in a smart internal grassroots effort if we are to win. I recognize that Jill will have the full backing of the IBEW in her bid against us. This is a large, but surmountable obstacle.

Below you will find some initial thoughts pertaining to a platform aimed at growing our power as the Vermont AFL-CIO. By all means, I welcome any criticisms, disagreements, or suggestions as to where else we need to be looking.

1. We must build our organizing capacity by aggressively lobbying the national AFL for resources to increase outreach and hire organizers.
2. We must make the most out of what we already have by starting an internship program aimed at college students, like that which is already done by the Vermont Workers' Center and the Vermont State Employees' Association. These interns would serve as grassroots organizers, to be placed at the disposal of our strategic organizing campaigns.
3. The State AFL should devote 55% of its time and manpower to aiding existing organizing drives conducted by our union locals.
4. Our legislative work should seek to either place the AFL at the forefront of progressive issues that claim support from large portions of working families (ie single payer healthcare), or to ease the road for major organizing campaigns (ie early childhood educators), or to build livable wage jobs (ie public commitment to Project Labor Agreements and an end to nonunion private contractors performing public services). In a word, our legislative efforts must seek to further build power, and not just react to those who seek the disempowerment of organized labor.
5. All of our efforts must be accompanied by a comprehensive media and public outreach strategy.

6. The internal process of the State AFL-CIO must become transparent, democratic, and encourage a constructive debate on the issues facing organized labor and working families in general. Towards this end we must BEGIN to engage our rank & file members through regular communication through mailings and web outreach.
7. We must build a new generation of union leaders by placing a priority in engaging our young rank & file members. Towards this end we should create special delegate positions for young workers and apprentices in order that they are encouraged to attend and take an active part in our conventions.

Of course I am very interested to hear your thoughts on all of this. I would also welcome a chance to sit down with you over a beer to see what you think is possible. What do you think?

Solidarity,

Dave Van Deusen

Dave Van Deusen For Vermont AFL-CIO Member-At-Large/Executive Committee (2011)



Vermont AFL-CIO Leaders,

It has been my honor to work alongside all of you for two full terms now as a District Vice President from Washington, Lamoille, and Orange Counties, to have served at the VT AFL-CIO's Liaison to the Healthcare is a Human Right campaign in 2009, and on the Single Payer Healthcare Organizing Committee since 2010.²¹ Together we have played a historic role in charting the course for a Vermont based single payer healthcare system. We have also done a fine job in standing up for working families across Vermont on numerous issues. However, our historic task of building power for working people is far from done, and there is much still to do.

Therefore, at the September VT AFL-CIO convention I intend to run for the Member-At-Large position on the Executive Board. I have decided to do so in light of Ralph Montefusco's decision to not seek reelection to this post.

²¹ 2017 Note From The Author: This communication was sent to Vermont AFL-CIO officers from the 70 +/- union locals in 2011. I won this contested race at the September 2011 VT AFL-CIO convention, receiving more votes than any other candidate in a contested race at that convention. This win situated me as the fourth highest ranking officer in the Vermont AFL-CIO.

If elected to this position, with your support, I would seek to prioritize the below five issues/principles:

1. **A continuing and proactive engagement on the VT Single Payer Healthcare effort.** Vermont stands to make history by becoming the first state in the nation to provide its people public healthcare as a basic right. By achieving this, we will also be taking healthcare largely out of contract negotiations. Doing this will allow us to focus on gains in wages, and other issues. While great progress has already been made on this issue, there is still a long way to go. We owe it to working Vermonters to play an active role in forming this debate, and making sure that the final outcome best suits the needs of union members and working people in general.
2. **Concerted support from the State Labor Council for all new organizing drives, especially the AFT's early childhood educator efforts which is looking to add 10,000 new members to the VT AFL-CIO.** While the VT AFL-CIO has close to 10,000 members, we need to grow that base in order to build more power. If the AFT is successful in organizing early childhood educators (ie day care providers) we will be doubling our current membership. This would be a historic step in the right direction. That said, the State AFL-CIO must be prepared to lend solidarity in every way (requested) and possible to this campaign and any other efforts initiated by organized labor to increase our overall union density in the Green Mountains.
3. **Making sure that Green Jobs are union jobs and Vermont jobs.** With five major wind farm projects being planned (or already underway) for Vermont, we need to make sure that the construction jobs that these projects offer are good, local, livable wage jobs with benefits, and that workers on these projects are protected and served by union representation. I would seek to work with and at the direction of the Vermont Building and Construction Trades on this important issue. These green construction projects will be the bread and butter of our Building Trades for years to come, and we need to guarantee that they uplift the standard of living for Vermont workers and their families.
4. **Openness, transparency, and rank and file participation in VT AFL-CIO affairs.** The best union leaders in the state are only as powerful as the rank and file that stand actively behind them. Therefore we must seek ways mobilize our members. Every time a union leader stands in front of a speakers' podium, we must seek to have rank and file union members ready and willing to do what it takes to win on an issue. In part, the way to achieve this is for our statewide leadership to keep our members better informed, and engaged in the political process. To achieve this, we must guarantee transparency and democratic participation in our internal process. Our members must know that they have a stake and a voice in union policy.
5. **Maximizing the power of the VT AFL-CIO by building strong cooperative relations with non-AFL unions and other social and community organizations that represent regular Vermonters.** Where ever possible, the VT AFL-CIO and other non-AFL unions should speak with one voice concerning issues that affect Vermont workers. After all, we have 10,000 members, but when one includes the VSEA, NEA, UE, Teamsters, Vermont Workers' Center, etc. we have well over 30,000 members. And again, where ever possible we

should seek to form positive working relations with organizations outside of labor. We should work with environmentalists on Green Jobs issues, and with citizens groups like VPIRG on healthcare and other issues. By working together with our natural allies, we will be amplifying our voice, and giving strength to the broader movement in Vermont which seeks to put the interests of the people above and beyond the interests of capital, entrenched power, and the status quo.

In conclusion, I want to again ask for the support and vote of yourself and your union for the position of Member-At-Large at our September convention. Together I have no doubt that we will continue to build a powerful movement of Working Vermonters that is capable of achieving historic victories and working class power.

In Solidarity,

Dave Van Deusen,

NWU/UAW Local 1981

PS I welcome any thoughts or comments on how we can best achieve our common goals during the course of the next two years.

VT 2014 Election Analysis From The Fringe (2014)

Progressives Make Gains

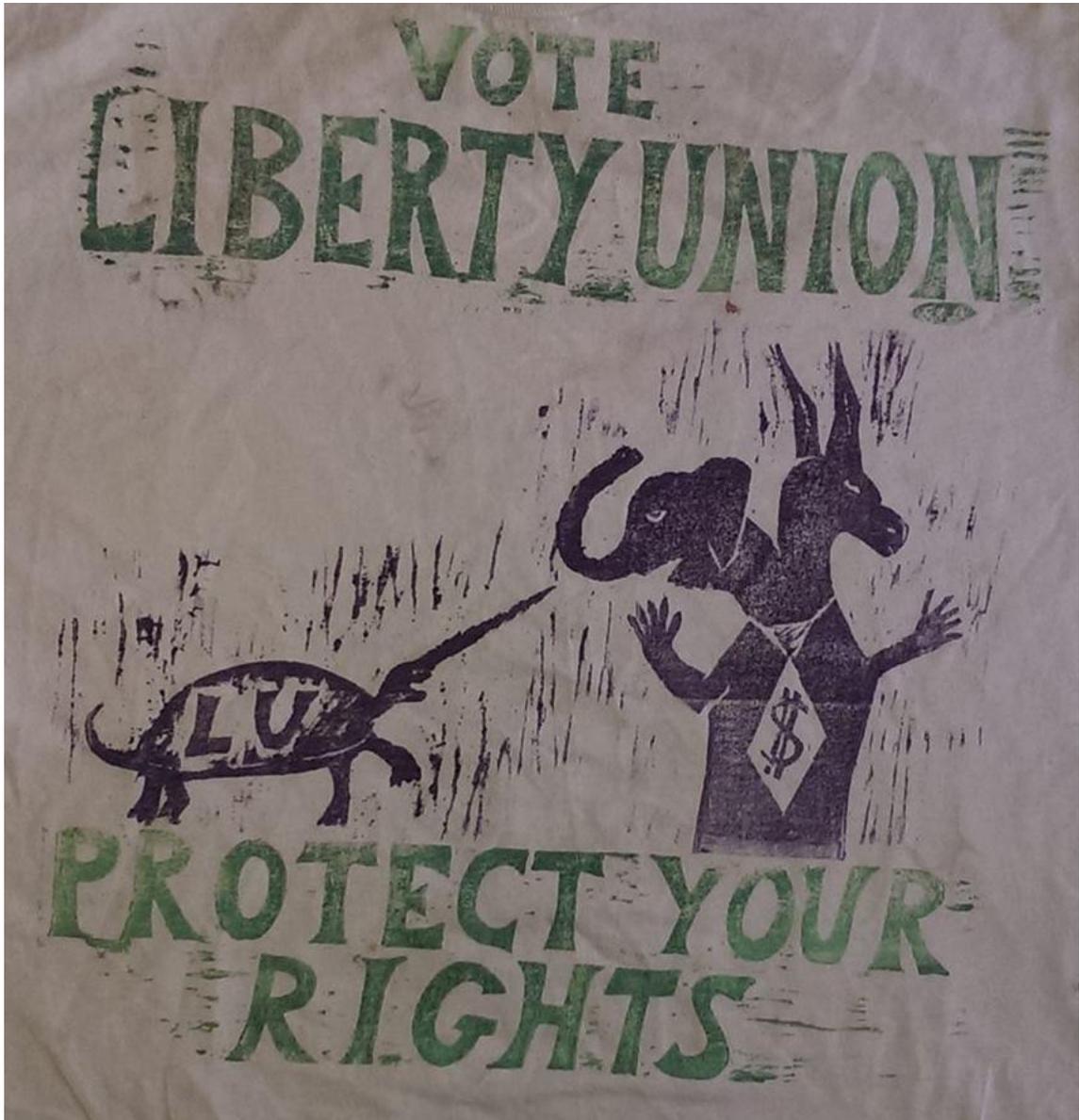
Respectable Showing For Liberty Union Socialists

Radical-Capitalist Libertarians Fall Flat

Montpelier VT, November 6 2014- Thus far, one of the more interesting aspects of the 2014 Vermont election was the relative strength of the Progressive Party & and the respectable showings of the Vermont Liberty Union Party.²² **The Democratic Party**, in a year that saw record low turnout (43.7%) [in a Presidential year it is not unheard of for voter turnout in Vermont to break 70%], had a net loss of eleven in the VT House, and two in the VT Senate (and a surprisingly close contest for Governor-which their candidate Peter Shumlin won). Even so, and even with voting patterns seemingly favoring the right, the Democrats retained a commanding lead in both the VT House and VT Senate. And while the Republicans made some gains (small in the big political scheme of things) the further left also did better than traditional election logic would seem to allow for.

The Progressive Party (who are essentially social-democrats and who firmly support single payer healthcare) saw a net gain in the Legislature (from eight to ten -seven in the House, three in the Senate). This marks the Party's highest numbers in the General Assembly since its inception. The Progs [founded by Bernie Sanders], the most successful third party in the nation, also had respectable showings in a number of statewide races (LT Gov: Corren 36.05%, Treasurer: Schramm 17.30%, Secretary of State: Eastwood 14.5%). The Progressive backed candidate for Auditor (Doug Hoffer who, like Dean Corren, also had the Democratic nomination) saw returns that rival those witnessed in Banana Republics; 99.06% (*Doug also ran unopposed*).

²² 2017 Note From The Author: This article was first published in Green Mountain Daily & on the Vermont Liberty Union Part's website in 2014. The Vermont Democratic Party and Democratic Governor Peter Shumlin did in fact abandon some of their left leaning policy objectives, killing single payer healthcare legislation in the process.



Vermont Liberty Union Party campaign material

The Liberty Union Party (which is aligned with the Socialist Party USA, and who represent a far left, squarely anti-capitalist political perspective) also did surprisingly well in their defeat. In fact this may be their best election (not including the few instances where they won an isolated municipal race) for the Party in their 40+ year history. The Liberty Union, although not winning any contest, received 8.3% for Treasurer (Murray Ngoima), 10.32% for Secretary of State (Mary Alice Herbert), and 3.94% for Attorney General (Rosemary Jackowski). In the Secretary of State contest, it is not surprising that they were uncompetitive with the Democratic nominee (and landslide winner) Jim Condos (74.75%), but it is almost shocking that they reached double digits and were competitive with the second place Progressive Party candidate (Ben Eastwood). Beyond the statewide contests, the Liberty Union also captured 13.91% of the vote for Grand Island State Senate (Ben Bosley). Their two candidates for Windham County State Senate, Jerry Levy & Aaron Diamondstone received a respectable 5% & 4.64%. Not as impressive (but still better than past lows) was their 0.87% or 1,673 votes for Governor (Peter Diamondstone), their 1.74% or 3,347 votes for Lt Gov (Brown), & their 1.08% or 2,071 votes for US Representative (Andrews). What was impressive was that some LU candidates, such as Andrews, more actively campaigned on their ideas [something that the LU has not done much of in many years]. Perhaps the Liberty Union's relatively meaningful performance will inspire the Progressive Party to suggest an accommodation with the Party? The fact that the Liberty Union did not run a candidate for Auditor (against Hoffer) may have been an act of good faith offered from one aspect of the electoral left to another. Or perhaps they simply could not recruit a candidate. Regardless, in a tight race, a few percentage points can be the difference between winning and losing. Splitting the third party left vote seems something less than desirable if a goal is to win. But then again, the Liberty Union cannot be accused of ever making a fetish of winning.

On the opposite side of the 'third party' equation, the **Vermont Libertarian Party**, despite relatively good media attention, articulate performances by Feliciano in the Governor's debates, and a political buzz, failed to win major party status (which, among other things requires that one or more candidate receive 5% or better in a statewide race). The Party's standard bearer (and only statewide candidate), Feliciano, gave voice to a free market capitalist alternative for Vermont, and ended up with 4.36% of the vote. While 4.36% marks the best statewide showing for a Libertarian candidate to date, it failed to be a breakthrough year. In the fourteen other races it took part in, like the Liberty Union Party, it failed to win any, and it finished last in each. Given the low turnout, given that the participating electorate in this given year should have leaned more Republican and more conservative (i.e. older voters who tend to participate in off years, those motivated by distrust of pending government healthcare, etc.), it does not appear likely that the Libertarians will emerge as a meaningful political force in Vermont for the foreseeable future. Clearly Vermont is not ready to catapult from the most progressive state in the nation, to the most free market based in the nation.

Low turnout elections statistically favor the right. This was a very low turnout year (the lowest ever). The right (specifically **the Republican Party**) made some small gains. The further right (the Libertarians) failed to capitalize. On the left, the Democrats, perception aside, largely held the line. The Progressives made gains. The Liberty Union did better than expected. If this is the low water mark for voter participation, despite the discussions to the contrary, this would seem

Shumlin suffered increased unaffordability from the public as a result, and did not seek reelection in 2016.

to signal looming trouble for Vermont Republicans (and Libertarians) in 2016. Come 2016 voter turnout will likely be 60-70% due to a Presidential contest. If this is the best that the right wing can muster in Vermont, it is a storm easily weathered. The trick for the left is not to let a few noises in the woods spook them away from the path of real reform. Kill single payer, and kill new attempts at expanding workers' rights, and come the next midterm election, perhaps more than half the people will once again choose to stay home. And if the Democrats do not want to see their numbers erode further, perhaps they should implement such reforms now, instead of passing bills that achieve them at some point in the future (90% Renewable Energy: 2050, \$10.50 Minimum Wage: 2018, Single Payer: 2017). In brief, people need to see improvements now. If not, maybe those who do vote in the next midterm election will continue to move in new directions.

Farewell From Your Constable (2015)



David Van Deusen, with fedora, and father, also David Van Deusen, to his left with hat and glasses, at May Day march, Montpelier VT, 2014

March 1, 2015
Moretown Folks,

It has been my great honor and privilege to serve as your elected First Constable for three terms.²³ However, this year I have decided to step aside, and not put my name forth for re-election. I have made this decision in order to create more time to spend the next year focusing on my family (which now includes two young children), and my professional work as Senior Union Representative with the Vermont State Employees' Association (specifically representing the 1200 Agency of Transportation workers throughout Vermont).

²³ 2017 Note From The Author: This letter was posted to the Moretown community on Front Porch Forum and printed in the Valley Reporter in 2015.

I was first elected Constable in 2007, then served two terms on the Select Board (2009-2011-Endorsed by the Progressive and Liberty Union Parties), and then again as Constable (endorsed by the Progressive Party). Prior to this (2006) I served our community one year as your delegate to the Regional Planning Commission. During all these times it was my absolute pleasure to work on behalf of this community which I love. It is therefore with some reluctance that I contemplate a Town Meeting Day for the first time in nine years where I will not be putting my name forward in the hopes of serving the People of Moretown. Even so, with a growing family, and given my responsibilities in serving Vermont's hard working road crews (through the VSEA), it is the right decision at this time.

During my years as Constable I recall the most challenging time (not surprisingly) as during the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Irene. In the days following this disaster myself, Mike Demingware (the Second Constable), Raymond Munn (Fayston Constable), along with a number of volunteers from the Moretown Fire Department organized 24 hour patrols of the village, and manned roadblocks on the few remaining access ways leading into town. We also made a concerted effort to distribute boxes of National Guard issued food rations to isolated homesteads. Our goal on the patrols (especially concerning the ones at night) were to ensure the security of temporarily abandoned village homes and people's personal belongings (much of which were drying out on people's mud caked front yards). The point of the roadblocks were to exclude non-essential traffic into the Village (in order not to kick up more dust and/or create traffic related safety concerns for local volunteers). On these fronts I venture to say we were successful despite next to no sleep (*for days on end*). Eventually, through my (and the Select Board's) direct discussions with the Governor Peter Shumlin [and US Senator Bernie Sanders], we were able to secure State Police night patrols which allowed myself and others to get some much needed sleep. And I, like the hundreds of folks that worked sun up to sun down getting the Village and peoples' homes back in some kind of order, never charged the community even a penny for all the hours put in. But of course Irene was the exception...

More typically, perhaps in 2007, I remember getting a call from a neighbor on Jones Brook Road about a domesticated duck that had taken up residence under his house. On this occasion myself and a friend (Xavier Massot) spent an afternoon running around this house trying to capture the fugitive duck. In time, it was Xavier who had the genius idea of tossing his old army coat over the duck, at which point we apprehended the escapee. The next hour was spent trying to deduce who the duck belonged to (and it turned out it came down from another neighbor's house on Herring Brook Road). Soon the case was closed, and I was able to have a beer and reflect on a day well spent!

In short, it has truly been an honor and a pleasure to serve on behalf of Moretown. Understand that even as I decline to run for local office on this particular Town Meeting Day, I remain dedicated to public service, and advancing the interests of Moretown's (and Vermont's) working families. In the coming days, weeks, and months I will be dedicating my political activities to turning back Governor Shumlin's intentions to place what amounts to a special targeted tax on State workers (i.e. his desire to roll back modest agreed upon wage increases in an effort to fill a budget gap that his Administration created) and his intent to gut the public services that low income Vermonters are compelled to rely on (in order to maintain a modicum of dignity in their living standards). So while I more fully turn my attention to these difficult tasks, I offer support and well wishes to whoever wins the seat of Moretown's First Constable.

In conclusion, I look forward to seeing each and every one of you, my friends and neighbors, this Tuesday, at Town Meeting Day. Solidarity!

Dave Van Deusen, March 1st, 2015

Moretown First Constable (until Tuesday)

Moretown, Vermont

Chapter XI: On The Road

AMERICAN DREAMS - WESTERN GREYHOUND (1995)



Personal Journal Entry, July 21, 1995: Flying past suburban shadows at 60 mph on greyhound, heading east, stopping only for too few smoke & meal breaks and too often for unknown reasons other than to annoy passengers eager to be further from what they left behind in San Francisco or points thereafter; *The American West* by bus.¹

In Sacramento, I had an untoasted-cold bagel with cream cheese then back on the road. Someone said something about the American River, but we kept going anyway. Greyhound never does stop for beauty alone, but it did stop somewhere in the Sierra Nevadas for a smoke. Beauty by happenstance. A child cried.

Reno for dinner, 6:00pm, no time to gamble. I only have \$25. I wasn't hungry but it was a dinner stop. Cup of black coffee and toast. Now 23 dollars remaining in my pocket. I had a smoke; GPC brand. In a greyhound minute we'll all be off again –some to work construction in Salk Lake City, others to climb the Rockies for a summer adventure.

Two passengers across the aisle are from the Czech Republic here to tour the USA for first time; oh how huge the States must seem to them. They tell me the Republic is doing fine now, turning capitalist; they hope the US will befriend it; “money abundant, only a few minor problems brought about by turning free market; drugs, robberies, murders, depression”; nothing the USA didn't have to deal with 100 years ago (and failed).

Some on the bus must assuredly be visiting family, or meeting their sweetheart in some small Utah town (population 300). Still others are probably embarking on one last trip knowing that they are dying; all of us are definitely dying in the way that life hinges its meaning on this common conclusion. I suppose I am dying in that way too, but I'm also headin' to Denver.

My girl will be in Denver to meet me. So will Jerry, sunburnt and tired from the road, riding his 1100cc motorcycle all the way from Jacksonville. Scott's still lingering in SF trying to hustle a way out while sleeping with an attractive Height Street waitress 10 years older than him. Hollywood must seem so far away from him now.

Tomorrow Colorado! Hopefully I'll be able to turn \$130 in food stamps into an adequate purse to present to my girl for fuel to get us back over the mountains. Salvation is never free.

The bus is pushing east again; wrestling with the hills and contemplating the desert and with the desert, and I sit and contemplate contemplation. Tomorrow Denver; but first we will face the wheeled asphalt night and see what's around the next bend.

Night Patrol With The Vermont National Guard: In The Shadow of Katrina and Iraq (2005)

Jefferson Parish, LA, September, 2005 - The Vermont National Guard has been distributing food and patrolling neighborhoods in Jefferson Parish for the last week.² On Tuesday, September 6th, I joined them on their first night patrol. At six PM, still light, I boarded a truck with ten solders from the 1st of the 86th Field Artillery. All of these men served eleven months in Iraq. They returned home February 29th, 2005.

As we left the gates of their headquarters, an old middle school, the solders loaded their M-16s. They had no more idea of what to expect than I did. All we knew were the images of chaos that flashed upon the nightly news several days before.

¹ 2018 Note From The Author: This is a personal journal entry from July 21, 1995.

² 2017 Note From The Author: This article was first published in Whirlwind, a special Hurricane Katrina publi-



New Orleans In Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina

We rolled through the streets of Jefferson Parish. Katrina's devastating power was evident. Telephone poles were snapped like toothpicks. Roofs were ripped from their beams. Electricity was still out. One gas station was simply flattened. I had never seen anything like it. A soldier turned towards me and said, "Better than we seen in Baghdad."

We reached the sector assigned to the unit. Holms Avenue. The truck drove through the area to get a feel for it. One house had the entire second floor wall torn from its framing. I could see into what was once a person's bedroom. It looked like a giant, postmodern dollhouse, made to appear in a war zone.

Four Guardsmen were dropped off at one end of the street. Four more at the other. I departed with the later. The two groups were maybe three miles apart. The plan was for them to slowly walk towards each other, with the truck patrolling in-between.

As we walked Sergeant Cramdon, the squad leader, said how strange this felt. All the open windows, all the alleyways; this would be a very dangerous situation back in Baghdad. Maybe subconsciously, maybe through intent, the group fell into military formation. It was the first time this unit was activated for such duty since Iraq. We continued on.

The subtropical heat barreled down on us. I asked how they were doing in their heavy fatigues. "Every one of us was over [for eleven months]. We went on the last deployment to Iraq. I'm used to the heat. The humidity is another story," said Sergeant Cramdon.

Moving into the side streets of what appeared to be a working class neighborhood of small ranch houses, it was not long before we heard gunshots. They came in groups of four and five. Fifteen shots in all, emanating from a few blocks away. The squad leader called for backup. When the truck arrived they moved towards the shots. A few residents, those who refused to evacuate, directed the Guard towards the perceived source. I was given the advice that "If we get shot at, find cover wherever you can."

The search lasted a good twenty minutes. No shooter was found. Still, walking through the neighborhood, the soldiers were busy. A number of people standing in their driveways would ask, "When is the power coming on? Will you be patrolling all night? How are things going?" For most, this was the first sign of a government response to the destruction since the storm hit, nearly a week before. The Vermonters would stop, answer what they could, remind them of the encroaching curfew, and then be on their way.

As night drew near the two groups converged. The commanding officer decided that they would stay in and about the truck, together, for the remainder of the shift. They would patrol this way, for safety, until the sun came up.

Standing around the truck, we talked to pass the time. I asked what they thought about this assignment. Sergeant Cramdon answered, "[Compared with the Regular Army] We're more public friendly." This was a telling statement as it was rumored that tens of thousands of Regular Army troops were heading for the New Orleans area. The conversation quickly headed to their experiences in Iraq, and how the Vermont Guard approached their duties there.

Oversees they were assigned to protect military convoys passing through the Baghdad area. This is one of the most dangerous assignments in the occupied region.

Sergeant Scott, who in the civilian world works as an auto mechanic in Burlington, stated, "These guys [some Regular Army] don't understand. You don't want to piss off the people who live in your back yard." Another Soldier added, "One guy got shot at the north gate there [in Iraq], and two days later we got mortared."

I asked if there was a 'cause and effect' regarding their conduct in Baghdad. "Exactly," responded Sergeant Cramdon. "You just want to keep the peace in the community. Let them know your there, but let them know you're not there... When we were over in Iraq we were never proactive, we were always reactive," said Cramdon.

Sergeant Scott continued, "Like two days after we got mortared, [the sheik] had heads at the front gate." Cramdon continued, "The sheik had somebody's head... Cause he knew that there'd be repercussions to whoever was mortaring the base so he came up with their heads."

I asked them what is the real situation in Iraq, how is the war progressing? Scott responded, "There's the people who like us, the people that don't like us but don't fuck with us, and then there's the people who fuck with us."

Another soldier stated, "a lot of the insurgents pulled out of Falujah [when we attacked it]. Soon as we go into Falujah all hell broke loose in Baghdad." Scott inserted, "In Ramadi too. That's where our guys are being hit hard now... From what I understand we're getting beat up pretty good over there too. We're losing a lot of Vermonters over there now."

All talked of having to fire their weapons regularly. One soldier, helmet pushed forward, nearly sleeping, said he only fired his gun once in eleven months. The others looked at him. Some with near disbelief. Still leaning back, hardly bothering to open his eyes he said, "We threw rocks when other people were shooting bullets."

"Rocks don't do to good when they're shooting bullets at you," argued Sergeant Cramdon. I thought of the Palestinian youth who throw stones as the Israeli Army. Sergeant Cramdon was right; their fate is often death.

The stone thrower answered, "We [his unit] didn't get shot at."

"You didn't get shot at? I can't believe it. That's unbelievable," countered Cramdon. "We all were getting fucking plowed every day... Thirteen days straight we got hit."

I foolishly pointed out the obvious and said that it must have been stressful. Sergeant Cramdon pardoned my flair for the obvious and answered, "That's the biggest question I got when we came back. 'It must have been stressful.' To be quite honest with you, I slept better on nights that we came back that we got hit... because you leave the wire and it's all bottled up in you. Stress and everything, you know. So when you get hit you start firing back and all the stress that you had built up in you comes out. I slept like a baby on the nights when we got hit."

As the night wore on, there was little to do but maintain vigilance, smoke cigarettes, and talk. I looked up and noticed the stars. I thought how ironic it was that many local residents were seeing the beauty of the stars for the first time in their lives thanks only to this sea of destruction. The moment of reflection did not last long. The conversation again became gravely serious. Again recollections of Baghdad filled the space.

"[In Iraq we'd see] kids taking tires off of burning trucks. Tires would be on fire and they'd be rolling them down the road," said Cramdon. "Pissing fucking fuel all over the ground... They'd be bare foot running in there trying to get what they could," added Scott.

Sergeant Cramdon continued, "We got hit one time under 51 Alpha. It swept the whole underside of a trailer out. Flames everywhere. This truck was blazing. And they [kids] had the back of that [trailer] open, unloading it... MSR was two miles down the road, and that truck was half unloaded by the time that MSR patrol got there." A soldier proclaimed, "Any thieves or anything around here, they got nothing on those Iraqis."

cation of the Northeast Federation of Anarcho Communists, 2005.

Intermittently throughout the night we would board the truck and drive up and down Holms avenue. Flashlights would keep track of the passing landscape. From Holms we could see the raised highway, 90, which lead over the Mississippi Bridge into New Orleans.

Looking at the underpass just outside the unit's area of patrol, Sergeant Cramdon stated, "[In Iraq] when you drove by they used to blow them [improvised explosives] up head level at you. At this bridge, 51 Alpha, is where a lot of shit hit the fan. Right in-between my two Humvees, I was in the middle, and they blew it up right in-between and missed everybody. I don't know how they missed everybody, but they missed everybody. Unbelievable. Right at head level too. A lot of it over there was just luck. A lot of people were unlucky, a lot of people were very lucky"

A different Guardsman discussed his experience. "It was ok when you got passed the bridge, you know. Me being a driver and having a freakin' [explosive] go off and having my driver side door blown open and having stuff flying out, it kinda scarred the shit out of me... They couldn't really prepare us for it [in training]. You kinda learned as you went."

Sergeant Cramdon went on to discuss other aspects of convoys in Iraq, "You'll be driving down the road and these fuckers don't want to wait for you behind the convoy. You're doing sixty mile per hour in the convoy, but they want to do sixty-five, seventy. They'll get into the oncoming lane and just play chicken all the way down the road. And then you'll just see it. WHAM!... Multi-car pileup cause he hit another car head on, there had to be fourteen-fifteen dead people there... [Including] a dead infant."

"I thought it was a doll. Two guys came running up. Picked it up. It was a baby. Just jello-mutilated," said another soldier.

Much of the night was spent speaking of war. When I asked what it was like coming home, one Guardsman, who will remain unnamed recalled, "When I came back, I was having some issues with not being able to calm down. I was wound up all the time. Maybe three or four times I had slight anxiety attacks. I'd have to get up and walk around, and calm myself down. I went into the doctor cause one day my heart was flipping out, shit like that." He went on, "so I went to my doctor and he [said] 'it seems you got a little bit of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder going on. And it's not like I'm depressed, or suicidal or anything, I'm just wound up, you know? I don't know if you've heard of the drug zoloft or what not, but that shits expensive."

"Did the military pay for it?" I asked.

"I went to my regular doctor and they're not VA certified, so I went to the VA to go get it covered through the Veterans Administration, and they don't buy name brand drugs, they use generic shit. The shit that they gave me makes me sick. Makes me want to throw up. So I kind of stopped taking it."

Another soldier interjected, "I haven't hardly slept since we've been back"

The night eventually grew into morning. As the six o'clock hour again approached, we headed back towards the base. I asked when is the soonest the unit can be ordered back to Iraq?

"February," came the reply. Someone questioned, "Does this deployment extend that?" Sergeant Cramdon answered, "No, this is [a] state [mission]." "Shit," said another.

If it were a federally directed mission, their likely re-deployment to Iraq would be pushed back. "One Weekend a Month." My ass.

One soldier announced, "Fuck that. I'm not going back." Another answered, "You'll have to if they call you up." It was left at that.

I inquired, "How long will the war last? How long do you think it will go on for?" Many answered "Forever." Others nodded in agreement.

As we pulled into the HQ, the officer gave the order to unload their weapons.

“All Weapons are cleared.”

I asked how long they would be deployed in Louisiana? A soldier replied, “no Idea. Until they tell us to go home.”

* *David Van Deusen is a member of the National Writers Union, UAW Local 1981. He recently spent five days in the New Orleans area. He is a resident of Moretown, Vermont.*

The Other Campaign: Zapatistas Seek United Left (2006)

San Cristobal, Mexico, January 1st 2006 -Deep in the Mountains and jungles of Chiapas, populated primarily with indigenous peasants, stirs a force which is seeking to upstage the high financed drama of the 2006 Mexican presidential election.³ The force grows out of rebel occupied territory held by the EZLN, commonly known as the Zapatistas. The Zapatistas control five regions in Chiapas. Each of these regions includes many small villages, containing a total population in the tens of thousands. Since an armed uprising launched on January 1st, 1994 (the day NAFTA went into effect) these communities have been administered autonomously, guided by humanitarian principles, and utilizing directly democratic decision-making structures at a local level. Their autonomy stems from a shaky cease fire agreement with the Mexican government which has more or less been in effect since the mid-nineties, and is guarded by a standing rebel army estimated to be in the thousands. However, over the course of the last five years the EZLN, who have political aspirations far beyond Chiapas, has found itself more and more isolated from the larger, but fragmented, Mexican left. This isolation has greatly hampered Zapatista attempts to expand their practical influence beyond their few rural strongholds.

In a bold attempt to break free of their current limitations, the General Command of the EZLN issued in June a communiqué known as the Sixth Declaration From The Lacondra Jungle announcing a national initiative aimed at uniting the entirety of the non-electoral Mexican left. The initiative, which will consist of Subcommandante Marcos (the most prominent EZLN figure) and other Zapatista leaders traveling throughout the nation in order to speak with and listen to hundreds of grassroots organizations and thousands of working people, is being called the Other Campaign. According to EZLN spokespeople, the basic goal of the campaign is to begin to foment a united left platform, strategy, and bottom up organization based on the opinions, experiences, and needs of the majority of the Mexican people. For the EZLN such an effort is necessary if the needs of the estimated 80% of Mexicans who are currently living in poverty are to be fundamentally addressed.

In addition, the declaration entailed a condemnation of the left leaning Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD), which they equated with the other electoral parties as essentially working against the common interest of the Mexican people. The document, in reference to an indigenous rights law passed in congress which failed to deliver upon negotiated EZLN demands, stated, “The day that the politicians of the PRI, PAN, and PRD approved a law that does not serve, they killed dialogue, and they clearly said that it does not matter what they agree to or sign because they will not keep their word.”

The announcement of the Other Campaign, timed to coincide with the 2006 Mexican presidential race and set to begin with a march and mass rally in San Cristobal on January 1st, has

³ 2017 Note From The Author: Article first published in the Vermont Guardian, Upside Down World, at Cata-mountain Tavern News, 2006.



Subcommandante Marcos, Chiapas Mexico, circa 2006

been met with both excitement and trepidation throughout the country. Although the EZLN has stopped short of calling for a boycott of the national elections, many liberals fear that their condemnation of the PRD will tip the polls in favor of the center-right National Action Party (PAN), or the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) –which is also on the right. At present, Andres Manuel Lopez, former Mayor of Mexico City, of the PRD, maintains an eleven-point lead in the polls over his closest rival, Roberto Madrazo of the PRI.

In addition to the debate about the EZLN's potential effects on the presidential race, speculation has surfaced that Subcommandante Marcos and the EZLN are trying to transition away from their role as armed revolutionaries, and are setting themselves up for an electoral campaign of their own in 2012. These are charges that the EZLN deny.

On the night of December 31st I made my way, by truck into Zapatista held territory. Seven hours outside of San Cristobal (including two hours on rugged dirt roads) I reached the remote mountain town of La Garrucha. There I sat down with Lieutenant Colonel Moises of the EZLN. Moises reaffirmed that the EZLN, "is not looking for electoral power."

The Colonel, like other Zapatista leaders, did not call for a nationwide electoral boycott, but did reiterate the EZLN's lack of faith in the official electoral process. He went on to clarify that "the Zapatistas do not vote [in sanctioned Mexican elections]."

As for the charge that the EZLN is unequivocally turning away from armed struggle, or that they are exerting pressure on other Mexican groups to forego such activities, Moises asserted that the EZLN fully intends on retaining their armed formations even when engaging in nonviolent social organizing beyond Chiapas. He continued saying, "the Zapatistas began with armed struggle. Therefore it is not the Zapatistas' business to tell anyone else how to struggle."

On the Other Campaign, the Colonel expressed a guarded optimism stating, "The Other Campaign is just beginning and there is no way to tell what civil society will think about it... It will affect civil society in some way. A lot of people may not understand, a lot will. The campaign is just beginning, so we will see."

Moises concluded the interview by saying, "the small farmers in Mexico have been forgotten and that is a focus of this campaign... This Campaign is part of their struggle."

The following day, an estimated one thousand masked Zapatistas embarked from La Garrucha to San Cristobal (a city which was briefly held by the EZLN in 1994) where the Other Campaign would be officially launched. Leading the caravan was Subcommandante Marcos, riding a motorcycle. Thousands more Zapatistas made their way from other EZLN communities. Along the route whole indigenous towns, men, woman, and children, turned out along the roads to wave, cheer, and sing songs of support for the Zapatistas and their cause.

The caravans converged on San Cristobal just as night set in. There, over 15,000 Zapatistas marched in four lines through the streets of the city. Chants of "Viva Zapata! Viva La Zapatista! Viva La Revolution! Long Live Zapata, The Struggle Continues!" rang through the cool night air.

The march emptied into the city's main square. The crowd grew to an estimated 20,000. Taking the stage were a number of Zapatista leaders. One after another called for all of Mexico's working people and farmers to unite against their common enemies and build a new kind of power outside the confines of traditional politics.

One Zapatista speaker bellowed, "We will reach out to workers in the cities because we [the indigenous farmers] are already organized... The Other Campaign will bring the struggle we deal with in our day-to-day life [across all of Mexico]. The rich cannot continue to put the oppression down onto the small farmers and further down onto the earth, because the earth cannot stand

it anymore... The workers and farmers will bring justice, liberation, and freedom to Mexico this year, starting January first, 2006!”

The following speaker, Comandante Keli, asserted, “This struggle is not just for men [but also for women]... We all must work together for all of our freedoms... The new junta [must] encompass everyone, and at its center it [must be] anti-capitalist.”

One demonstrator, Ugel, a student from Mexico City who came to Chiapas to show his support for the EZLN and the Other Campaign told me, “I support the organizing of all the people. [The Other Campaign] is about the people making their own organization so they can decide [things] for themselves instead of one person [the president] deciding for all. I think this movement is going to make a new political structure for the participation of farmers, students, and workers. That is what the political class has not allowed for eighty or ninety years.”

The final speaker to take the stage was Subcommandante Marcos. Addressing the crowd Marcos said, “You are our partners... The left organizations, the anarchists, the groups that are not defined... man or woman... We want you to help us talk with the workers in the city and in the world!”

He continued, “Everyone will have a place in the Other Campaign. Like Zapatistas we will defend our base [areas]... [Yet] we are prepared to talk and listen to that person who is in the back. They are very important... For the first time we finish January First not yelling EZLN, instead we yell that we are partners! Viva! Long live the revolution!”

The crowd roared in applause. For the moment an unmistakable feeling of optimism filled the air of this old Mexican city. However, it will be a long road before the Zapatistas can claim victory over the traditional political forces that are entrenched in Mexican society. That road will take EZLN leaders to all corners of the nation over the course of the coming year. What will come from this campaign is yet to be written.

The French Connection: An Interview With Xavier Massot On The Growing Unrest In France (2006)

Paris, France & Brattleboro, Vermont March 31, 2006 –Over the course of the last 30 days France has been rocked by a series of escalating demonstrations and mass labor strikes.⁴ The unrest is by and large a reaction to a new law passed by the center-right government that repeals job security guarantees for young workers. Where previously all French workers were protected against unjust firings, now many people, mainly those 28 and younger, can be fired at any time during a two year probationary period. The French working class and student population has outright rejected the new measures and have demanded their immediate repeal. While the government has thus far refused to rescind the law, millions of students and workers have repeatedly marched in the streets of every major French city and have crippled capitalist institutions by walking off their jobs by the hundreds of thousands. Many of these demonstrations have turned violent, with workers and students fighting police with stones and makeshift batons. As of writing, no compromise is in sight. While the government has offered to negotiate with the unions, organized labor has refused to come to the table until the law is first repealed.

⁴ 2017 Note From The Author: This interview was first published in Catamount Tavern News, 2006.



Scenes from the 2006 riots, Paris, France

Catamount Tavern News interviewed Xavier Massot, who currently resides in Paris, about the situation. Mr. Massot, 29, a longtime Brattleboro resident and former Mike's bartender (on Elliot Street) is an artist and co-author of the Black Bloc Papers. He is also a self-described anarchist and former guitar player for the Putnigs (a southern Vermont rock & roll band). He holds dual citizenship in France (where he was born) and the U.S. He is an ethnic Breton. Xavier has been living in Paris for the last six months and is due to return to the Green Mountains later this spring. We talked to him by phone.

David Van Deusen: Mr. Massot, what can you tell us about the situation on the ground in Paris?

Xavier Massot: There are thousands of demonstrators in the streets nearly every day. Most are students and workers. A few hundred [a very small minority] appear to be fascists who are not out to protest the law, but to physically attack the left. They [the fascists] are also being counter attacked by the anarchists... But mostly people are angry about the government...

While I am generally in agreement with the students and striking workers... it should be understood that the law itself is not necessarily all *that* bad. It is just what has been picked up as the topic. The greater thing [motivating people] is a general sense of being a *pissed off society*.

Van Deusen: Workers and students are by far the largest segment of protesters. Besides the obvious issue of 'workers rights' what is bringing these people in the streets by the millions?

Xavier Massot: Young people in France, much like in America, are realizing that for the first time in a long time that they are in the frontline of a new generation that is not going to do as well as the generations before them. This tends to motivate people... [Also] France has a culture of protest. It's not as alien or as shocking for people to go out in the street and complain out loud about what they are pissed about as it is in the U.S. [Protest] is a custom, you know? In fact, when you are trying to get somewhere by subway in Paris, depending on the day and if you didn't see the news the night before, there is a good chance the trains aren't going to be running [because of a strike].

Van Deusen: What can you tell us about the law itself?

Xavier Massot: The thing that stinks about it is that it amounts to a two year contract, so you basically are on a two year probation with your employer [during which you can be fired at any time and for any reason]... If you switch to another company during those two years then you have to start all over again... [the law is also] misleading. In its official title it includes the term "First Employment" in the name, but it has nothing to do with whether or not you're at your first job because you could be 26 and by the time you get out from under it your 28... or even older... The thing is [the law] was poorly delivered, it was hastily written, and nobody important was first consulted... It was a totally botched, hurried job.

Van Deusen: In the face of growing public pressure, will the government repeal the law?

Xavier Massot: I'm not sure. If I had to guess I would say either the Prime Minister will resign and the law will stay, or the law will go and the Prime Minister will stay.

Van Deusen: Right now France provides people with many social benefits such as universal healthcare, 6 week paid vacations, subsidized higher education, a thirty-five hour work week, etc.. Do you see this law as the first step in an attempt to dismantle the French social system? Are there parallels between what is going on in France today, and Margaret Thatcher's dismantling of the British welfare state in the 1980s?

Xavier Massot: No. No I don't think that [the French social system] is something anyone wants to lose.

Van Deusen: What was the government's intention with the law? What did they hope to get out of it?

Xavier Massot: The notion was, I think, that it was going to be a quick fix –a way to satisfy the immigrant underclass which is mostly North African and Arabs. [As far as the government was concerned] the thought was that if you make it easier to fire people, then employers would be quicker to hire people, especially those from the immigrant minority who suffer high unemployment. But [the law] was poorly written, and ultimately a waste of time... It was a clumsy attempt at something, and it shows the bad faith of the politicians who put it together.

Van Deusen: So the government's idea was that they would create more jobs, especially for minorities, by allowing the bosses to fire people more freely, and now, of course, the young people and workers (immigrants included) are rejecting the plan as no more than a weakening of workers' rights. With that being said, could you elaborate on the situation regarding the Arabs and North African population in France?

Xavier Massot: [in the 1980s] French President Francois Mitterrand [a Socialist] said that 'France is a land of asylum', which is true but... [that statement] brought a lot more immigrants than I think *he* was arguing for. [Eds: *The North African and Arab population in France accounts for 10% of the total population.*] That has become a problem because on the one hand a lot of French people are resentful of the immigrants when they really shouldn't be. On the other hand a lot of immigrants are angry because they think they got sold onto the wrong deal. So that is going to have to be figured out... Everybody is pissed off. That is the problem.

Van Deusen: Of course late last year much of France was ablaze with riots emanating from immigrant ghettos. The rioters claimed that they were reacting to institutional racism of the French State. How deep does racism against Arabs and North Africans go in France? Have you personally witness such racism?

Xavier Massot: In certain housing projects, in some of the newer nicer ones, there is a quota on apartments based on last names. So if you have a foreign sounding last name there will be something like only three slots open. So they will only have something like two Arabs out of every fifty people... Speaking personally, my sister and her fiancé were trying to get an apartment, and his last name is a Greek name... And if my parents [who are from France and have French sounding names] hadn't interceded on his behalf they wouldn't have been allowed to move in because the owner didn't want a foreigner in the building.

Van Deusen: I would like to get back to the current situation with the strikes and demonstrations. What do you see being the short and long term effects of this upheaval?

Xavier Massot: The one group who may experience a lasting change from all this is the unions. They are really pissed and they've been waiting for something like this for a while now. The [center-right] Prime Minister slapped them around for a little but when they've wanted to talk to him, so they are pretty outranged... [The unions] have handled these protests really well. They've gone out and really talked to people. They're the once who have made the politicians move the most... I think a lot of people who are protesting students right now will have more of an affinity for the unions when they get into the workplace.

As far as the electoral tide goes [in the upcoming national elections], I'd say of the young vote... maybe 70%... will go overwhelmingly to the left [Socialist Party] but not the hard left... [However] the syndrome of the [moderate] left and [moderate] right seeming very much the same, as in the U.S., is very much a tendency in France... Therefore, I think French politics will begin to change... In the next couple of years someone may get elected who is not from the middle-left or middle-

right [i.e. someone from the neo-Trotskyite Parties or the far right National Front]. That is very possible.

Van Deusen: Is the popular uprising dynamic enough to affect change in the short term which transcends electoral politics? Can a socialist direct democracy emerge from this struggle?

Xavier Massot: The protests have created a sense of unity among a large chunk of society, but at the same time there is not going to be a French Revolution over this... I think France is going to remain a parliamentary system for a long time. But I think that increasingly the people who are in the parliament are going to become a lot more representative of the people who would want a direct democracy. Either that or the shit is going to hit the fan more and more... [Already] the country is averaging two major riots a year... If the government does not become more responsive, the nature of the strikes and protests are definitely going to become more still. I think people are going to get to the point where they are really willing to let society grind to a halt.

Fighting with cops [alone] isn't going to do that much. The politicians are still going to be behind their walls. But when their wallets really start hurting, that is when decisions are going to be made... That is already happening. A lot of [politicians] are pretty worried right now about the reaction of foreign investors because at the moment most of these politicians are ruled by the economy, and that is what they base their decisions on... If the people take back their economy, then those who are presently keeping them from it will definitely be out the window.

Van Deusen: What lessons could groups in Vermont, such as the Vermont Workers' Center and/or the AFL-CIO learn from the streets of France?

Xavier Massot: Number one, that there is no harm in getting out there and telling people that you're displeased about shit. Although compared to most of America I'd say Vermont is pretty good as far as that goes... Having been to enough states in the union, as far as the political consciousness of the average worker, its higher [in Vermont] than a lot of the rest of the country... As far as attitude goes... Vermonters have quite a bit in common with French workers.

Van Deusen: Could you expand upon these commonalities?

Xavier Massot: They both share a sense of solidarity. Of course other people have this too, but with Vermonters it goes very deep because they tend to know each other personally... Maybe it's because of the small population.

You know I was just in Brittany [a rural ethnically Gaelic province in the northwest], and Brittany is a lot like Vermont, both good and bad. It's a place where many of the age-old industries, things like farming, are dying. The region is surviving because of its reputation... Like other small rural regions in France, Brittany is increasingly getting by, in part, through a growing tourism industry. But unlike Vermont, this industry is owned by local people. What Vermont can take from France is that they should be careful to not have out-of-staters run [or own] its tourism for its profit and take the profits from it. The people who live there should reap the benefits.

Van Deusen: In France many aspects of different industries are owned by the state. Do you advocate that portions of Vermont's economy, such as ski resorts, be owned by the state and/or be run cooperatively by the workers?

Xavier Massot: Ideally [the tourist industry in Vermont] should be owned by Vermonters... Seeing the way the state is economically set up it would be really sane and a nice thing if a large part of the revenue of the industry was something that went back to *all* Vermonters.

Van Deusen: Finally, to get back on point, so you have any last thoughts on the situation in France?

Xavier Massot: Again, if France needs anything right now it is not more laws. There is already such a bureaucracy here and this law is just adding to it, which is exactly what people don't want... If [the Prime Minister] had made a law that was a blank piece of paper it couldn't have been any stupider.

Van Deusen: Mr. Massot, thank you for your time, and good luck in the streets.

RESOLUTION IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE STRUGGLE IN ROJAVA – GREEN MOUNTAIN CENTRAL LABOR COUNCIL-AFL-CIO (2018)



February, 2018 Whereas: Organized Labor must stand in solidarity with working people in all parts of the world when they rise up to defend their rights and when they struggle to build a better, more democratic and more socialist world;⁵

The People of Rojava, northern Syria, have risen up in order to combat ISIS and the dictatorship;

The People of Rojava, through their armed forces known as the People's Protection Units (YPG) & the Woman's Protection Units (YPJ) and allied militias, have liberated large sections of northern Syria from ISIS and the dictatorship;

The People of Rojava are presently defending themselves bravely against ISIS and Turkish aggression;

The People of Rojava seek to establish a libertarian-socialist, anti-fascist, secular, multi-ethnic society, with equal rights for men and woman;

The People of Rojava's struggle for true freedom is a beacon of light in the Middle East and across the globe;

The People of Rojava are politically influenced by the libertarian and socialist writings of Vermont Murray Bookchin and strive towards a political system similar to our own Town Meeting form of democracy;

Thousands of non-natives to Syria, including citizens of the United States of America, have seen the justice of the struggle in Rojava and, like with the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War, have taken it upon themselves to travel to Rojava in order to become international volunteers within the YPG/YPJ;

Therefore, let it be resolved that: The Green Mountain Central Labor Council of the Vermont AFL-CIO recognizes the struggle in Rojava to be THE liberation struggle of our day on par with Spain in 1936, and the Paris Commune of 1871;

The Green Mountain Central Labor Council of the Vermont AFL-CIO stands in solidarity with the people of Rojava, the People's Protection Units (YPG), and the Woman's Protection Units (YPJ) in their historic struggle to establish a free society in what is presently northern Syria;

The Green Mountain Central Labor Council of the Vermont AFL-CIO encourages Vermont Union members to lend support to the people of Rojava, the YPG, and the YPJ;

The Green Mountain Central Labor Council of the Vermont AFL-CIO (upon request from a returning international volunteer as made to the President of this Central Labor Council) shall seek to provide three months of housing and sustenance and shall assist them in finding Union employment;

The Green Mountain Central Labor Council of the Vermont AFL-CIO calls on the Governor of Vermont and the Legislature to declare Vermont a sanctuary State for all returning international volunteers who have fought alongside the YPG/YPJ;

The Green Mountain Central Labor Council of the Vermont AFL-CIO calls on the Governor of Vermont and the Legislature to consider legislation which would make all state based benefits available to Vermont National Guard veterans also available to returning international volunteers who served in the YPG/YPJ, who choose to make Vermont their home;

The Green Mountain Central Labor Council of the Vermont AFL-CIO shall donate the sum of \$500 to Hevya Sor (the Kurdish Red Crescent), an organization which provides direct support to the People of Rojava, including the donation of medicine and medical equipment;

⁵ 2018 Note From The Author: This resolution was passed by the Green Mountain Central Labor Council of the Vermont AFL-CIO on February 25, 2018. President of the Green Mountain Central Labor Council: Traven Leyshon.

The Green Mountain Central Labor Council of the Vermont AFL-CIO calls on the Government of the United States of America to provide increased direct military assistance to the YPG/YPJ, to condemn Turkish aggression, and to refrain from any actions which would seek to influence or moderate the political development and trajectory of Rojava;

The Green Mountain Central Labor Council shall provide this resolution to our Governor, Lt Governor, Congressional Delegation, elected members of the General Assembly, all fifty State Labor Councils of the AFL-CIO, and shall make it available to The People of Vermont.

In Solidarity, The Green Mountain Central Labor Council AFL-CIO

TRUMP'S BETRAYAL OF ROJAVA – PARIS COMMUNE FALLS AGAIN? (2018)

The resolution was drafted by David Van Deusen.



December 22, 2018, Vermont -As an American, as a Vermonter, and as a Labor leader I have marched many times against US lead wars.⁶ However, I do not oppose wars and US military action because I assert war as always unjust and always unnecessary. I am not philosophically a Kantian; this is not a moral imperative for me. I am also no liberal. If truth be told it was only through war and armed conflict that Vermont and the United States became republics free from the British Empire. And like the US, Ireland would still be an exploited outpost in the same empire if it were not for the force of arms demonstrated by the IRA. Cuba, today, without their victorious 1959 revolution, likewise would remain an economic colony of America. And further, it was only through the Allied war effort that Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy & their murderous ideologies were crushed for generations. But since my birth, from the Vietnam War, to armed interventions against Latin America, up through the invasion of Iraq, I am hard pressed to find a US military intervention that, by purpose or accident, carried with it an intrinsic moral clarity; rather contemporary US military action time and again has been launched to serve the interests of corporations and a tiny minority of wealthy elite.

For these reasons I was proud to serve as a Vermont AFL-CIO officer when we were aligned with US Labor Against The War, and when our Unions called for the rapid withdrawal of all American troops from Iraq. I was also proud to have helped write the Vermont AFL-CIO resolution stating our solidarity with the Longshoremen when they conducted a one day strike, shutting down West Coast ports as an act of resistance against the Iraq War. And even now I am supportive of calls coming to finally end the generation-long war in Afghanistan. But again, I do not condemn such military actions because I am a pacifist or because I am rejecting the notion of war in and of itself. I do so because I judge the conflicts which the US engages in, much more often than not, as wrong and immoral based on the specific facts and specific interests being served by these imperialistic conflicts.

For some years now the United States has provided arms and limited Special Forces support (now 2000 boots on the ground) to the Kurdish lead YPG/YPJ in Syria. The YPG/YPJ has used these arms to extend their control over most of northern Syria. They have effectively engaged ISIS, driving them out of the north. They have also held the dictatorship at bay (and they have brought a relative stability to this region of Syria). But what deserves our respect is not simply their military prowess, but rather the type of society which they seek to create in liberated areas. They hold socialist tendencies, but what sets them apart is their desire to organize their world according to directly democratic means; something like a secular, decentralized, Town Meeting system where all the people have an actual voice and an unabstracted vote concerning the issues that face them as a people and as a community. Here they take political influence from the Vermont anarchist sociologist Murray Bookchin. Their vision, similar to that espoused by the EZLN & the Zapatistas (Chiapas, Mexico), is as far reaching as that which was dreamed of on CNT/FAI barricades in Spain from 1936-1939. Their fight has parallels to Mahkno and his brigades in the Ukraine in 1919. They do not fight for an ethnic Kurdish state, but rather for a new social formation whereby the individual and the community collectively control the world in which they live. Their dreams, perhaps, are not dissimilar to those who manned the walls of the Paris in 1871. And to this very point in time, remarkably, they have been winning.

⁶ 2018 Note From The Author: This op-ed was originally published in The Caledonian Record, ibrattleboro, Enough Is Enough, Anarkismo, The Anarchist News, etc. in December, 2018.

The historical significance of what they have been achieving in Rojava (northern Syria) has not been lost on those in other nations who also can imagine what a truly democratic and equitable society could look like. Presently hundreds, if not thousands, of regular working people (Americans included) have made the difficult journey to Syria in order stand with them, rifle in hand, to fight for this common dream. And many have died defending this dream from ISIS, from Turkey, and from those who instead seek the domination and brutality of a misguided & twisted Islamic state or the repression which a dictatorship or new form of fascism brings in its wake. And still they fight, and still they organize a direct democracy, composed of Kurds & Arabs, in the lands which they have freed.

And now, our own (so called) President Donald Trump has announced his intent to withdraw the 2000 brave American troops currently deployed in this region (and who by circumstance fight with honor alongside YPG/YPJ). And even tonight, Turkey stands in wait, sharpening their swords...

But given the long history of the US imperialism and economic subjugation, why has the US supported them? Some would argue that the very presence of US guns mark the YPG/YPJ as no more than pawns of a morally questionable US foreign policy. Some would say they are dupes of the CIA. After all, why would the US elite support a revolution which seeks to topple the exploitive American capitalism which underpins the old world order (and which continues to sell out American and foreign workers alike)? How can this be? The answer is simple... The United States has supported this revolution because YPG/YPJ are fiercely opposed to ISIS and are effective fighters. The US therefore has acted on the premise that the enemy of my enemy is my friend (at least for a time).

No one should be under any illusion that the US ruling class has supported the YPG/YPJ because they approve of the cooperative democratic society which they seek to create. The ruling elite of the US (Republican & Democrat) would be perfectly happy supporting an authoritarian dictator as long as such a strongman would support America's perceived long term economic and strategic interests. But as it turns out, few in northern Syria were or are willing to engage in a protracted fight just to see the deck chairs of authoritarian politics rearranged. But the people have been willing to fight (and die) for something much more far reaching. And this has transformed the YPG/YPJ into something far more significant than a regional militia; it has made them into a multi-ethnic force capable of constantly beating back ISIS and other reactionary elements in Syria. And for America, the short term aim was always to diminish ISIS. Here, as the YPG/YPJ was compelled to face existential enemies on all fronts, they were glad to accept guns and logistical support from wherever they would come. When a man's house is on fire he does not stop to ask the politics of the one who hands him a bucket of water. If that bucket comes from a Republican, it does not make him a Republican. Thus the US support for the YPG/YPJ was nothing more than a temporary marriage of convenience, and the YPG/YPJ are not defined by the politics (and motivations) of those that offer them material aid.

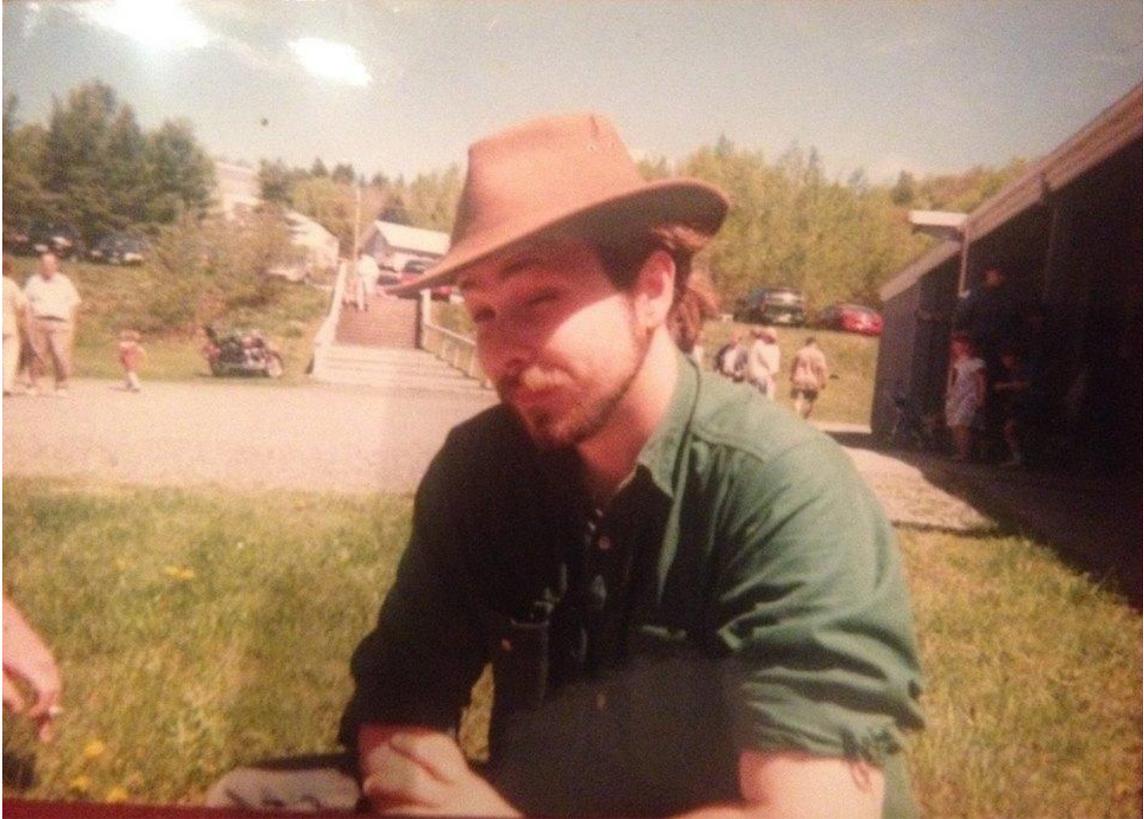
But now, after the YPG/YPJ has diminished ISIS and pushed them into more remote areas, Trump has grown tired of this marriage and his Administration's true face has begun to look up to again reveal its twisted contours. Trump would have American troops evacuate in order to turn their attention to other more sinister projects (such as those transpiring on our southern

border). And no matter that the second largest army in NATO (the increasingly Islamic-Fascist Turks) have announced their desire to launch invasions of northern Syria with the sole aim of crushing this experiment in direct democracy, the United States of America is preparing to look the other way. The reactionary government of Turkey, under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, views the YPG/YPJ as a threat in that they represent an alternative not only for Syria but also for Turkey. Further driving Ankara's genocidal ambitions, is the government's view of the YPG/YPJ as having close links to the armed PKK (which operates within Kurdish-Turkey and which shares similar politics with their Syrian cousins). What gives Erdoğan & the Turks pause, for now, is the presence of American troops. Once this deterrent is removed, it is hard to envision a chain of events which does not include a devastating invasion of this island of hope, this city on the hill overlooking the chaos that is the Middle East. And no matter how America got there, once America leaves Trump will own the history that follows. If the Paris Commune must fall again let it be known that the invaders were enabled by a country which once called itself great.

In Solidarity with the YPG/YPJ & The Struggle in Rojava, David Van Deusen, District Vice President of the Vermont AFL-CIO

Chapter XII: Coda/Sports & Politics

THE RHYTHM OF BASEBALL - REFLECTIONS FROM A CABIN
(1999)



David Van Deusen, Vermont, 1999

Personal Journal Entry - July 13, 1999, Northeast Kingdom, Vermont: It's been some time now since I called that 10x10 cabin deep in the woods my home.¹ But while I sit here, in this old Northeast Kingdom farmhouse listening to the All-Star Game on the radio, I think of the simple and brilliant pleasure of being back in the cabin in the autumn and listening to a ballgame on my ragged little AM/FM/Shortwave.

Cold winds blowing outside and a fire in my woodstove. Baseball! –Never quite coming in real good, but always adequate. –The transmission fading in and out, like a thought in the back of your mind. Sometimes I'd fall asleep by the 7th. Sometimes I'd boil some creek water, make coffee, take tobacco from the tin, roll a cigarette or two, and finish it out even if into extra innings.

As I write, this season's All-Star Game just ended. American League won 4-1.

But the Cabin... You know with baseball, with me, it's not always about who wins and sometimes it's not even about what happens. Don't get me wrong; I've gone through those games where I'm at the edge of my seat focused on my team like the fate of the world depends on it. But sometimes it's just the fact of it being there that matters; an anchor of continuity; a familiar ritual; a certain rhythm as indicative of summer as blinking of fireflies. Sometimes it's just nice in and of itself.

This time last year I was camped under a small canvas tarp at 9000 feet outside the tiny town of Ward Colorado (population: 300?). Ward, you must understand is a strange town for Babylon – carrying a torch for 1968. They say the Weathermen and Black Panthers were hid up there back in the day. And on the edge of town now are junked-painted cars that folks say stand there like post-modern sentinels; as barriers in waiting for when the shit final does go down. In short, Ward doesn't really like outsiders (or so it kinda feels on first impression, or so you are told in Boulder or Nederland). Anyway, it was in the forest outside of Ward, not knowing anyone within miles, that I made camp.

That night I hiked to their tavern on the outskirts of town. The All-Star Game was on the TV behind the bar. Beer in hand, it was not long before I got talking baseball with the guys next to me. As we drank and watched we began to reminisce about the clutch hits of Nettles, wall like defense of Fisk, and of other greats from days now past. I spent nearly the last of my money drinking cheap beer and watching the game with these previously unknown and supposedly unwelcoming folks. And there it was... WE were experiencing the game together; the chasms of insider/outsider were bridged. That game was played in Denver.

Tonight I sit in our hopeful commune in northern New England and drink and smoke cigarettes while the game was played in Boston.

Someone once said that baseball is our national pastime because all of us are failed baseball players... In some ways that may be true. But I have doubts as to how much we really failed.

-From Mudville

B-Hop's Claim Racist? (2013)

In an October 17th [2013] article in *Ring Magazine's* online publication (Hopkins on Boxing and Black Fighters by Lem Satterfield), Philadelphia boxing legend and reigning IBF light heavy-weight champion Bernard Hopkins stated:

¹ 2018 Note From The Author: This is a personal journal entry from July 13, 1999.



Irish writer James Joyce & Black American boxer Bernard Hopkins

“The great Sugar Ray Leonard, right now, if he was boxing, the way that they want you to fight, the people that pull the strings of the puppet, he would be boring today. Ray Robinson – the great Robinson – would be boring today...Because the feeders of the people that buy entertainment. They’re being fed that if they duck, don’t buy it. If they’re slick, and they beat [their opponent] nine out of the 12 rounds, and the guy just can’t hit him because they were slick and smart enough to hit and not get hit, ‘He’s not crowd-pleasing, he don’t sell tickets.’ Because they done fed the followers and they done fed [that] to the customers. The customers will drink anything that you give them if it’s promoted right...But when you take away the skill and you take away the slick, and you take away the boxing ability and say that’s not entertaining, or that’s not entertainment, then, to me, it’s like trying to erase a culture that you know has dominated the sport way back then where you were slick. And I’m talking about black fighters. Yes, I said it.”

The above quotes, and more found in the article, have led some boxing fans to charge Bernard Hopkins, who is an African American, with being racist.² Hence, the question remains, is racism a legitimate concern here?

No.

It is not racist to recognize that different cultures, different subcultures, produce different styles and different ways of approaching the arts, society, and boxing as well. The Irish, for example, have a certain literary history based on their experience of English oppression and subsequent material poverty that produced a very specific trajectory of poetry and fiction. Now of course that does not mean only the Irish can write poetry and fiction, it is just to say that they have developed those arts in a way which is particular to them, and a great treasure for the entire

² 2017 Note From The Author: Article was first published in Boxing.com, 2013.

world. It is not racist to say this. Likewise, it is far from racist to say that it was American Black culture (including its more immediate three-century back-story of Euro-American oppression) that produced the Blues and then Jazz. That said, some white guys, here and there, got good at these forms of music (“Take Five” anyone?), but that does not negate the fact that these art forms (these types of music) are a contribution from American Black culture. And again, the Irish do not exceed at literature because they are Irish, and the Blacks do not exceed at Jazz because they are Black. Rather, granting a similar cultural starting point, you could give any ethnicity or nationality some centuries of the same experience they went through (and go through) as a people and smart money would be you find the same basic result. If the Irish occupied England for 800 years, I have 20 down that the English would have their own James Joyce. Of course this is not to say that only the Irish can write, or only the Blacks can compose music; it’s just to recognize that these cultures developed their own special forms that most would agree is something genius to behold. And boxing is no different.

One culture produces one way of approaching the subject, while another produces something different. Hopkins is right that a case can be made that Blacks have developed an American boxing form which is both slick and effective (hit, move, avoid two punches, move and hit again). On the other hand, Mexican culture has tended to produce fighters which are huge on heart, bravado, and balls, but less interested in the slick aspect. Not that there are not exceptions to the rule (the great George Foreman after all was not exactly slick), but it is more true than not. Making a statement of this sort is no different than recognizing that different cultures have developed different types of music, measures of beauty, etc. There is nothing racist in this assertion. The one difference is that in poetry or music we, together, can only come to general agreements (or disagreements) about what we feel is the more interesting or developed style. In boxing, we pit those styles, and, by extension, cultures of boxing against each other in the ring, and at the end of the night, one hand is raised, one remains lowered, and often there is blood.

So I offer Bernard a “cheers” and (as a Dutch American who had the pleasure of spending a little time in a boxing gym years ago) I give him that the Black, slick, style of hitting and not being hit (from Robinson, to Leonard, to Mayweather, to Roy Jones, to Hopkins) often (all else being equal) rises above those competing styles that it faces in the squared circle. I also give him that for the capitalists, the marketing executives, and big media heads they employ (who are all upper-class, and mostly White) are in fact trying to sell us a reality in which those Blacks who are winning, those most often from the forgotten America, are in fact the enemy of our passive viewing pleasures; even if they know only victory in the ring, they are in fact an enemy we should consider lost; that is what The Market would have us believe. When real life cannot be obliterated by fact, the sophist’s plausible retreat is denial wrapped in the fog of repetition. So Hopkins wins again, Mayweather wins again, but they really lost because they did not stand in the center of the ring and get their heads smashed in so we can see more blood. And HBO would rather play a decade old rebroadcast of a bloodbath than give you the Cuban Master, Guillermo Rigondeaux, in the actual here and now. Not that Gatti vs. Ward was not great in its own way, but really, we did see what happened when Gatti stepped into the ring with Mayweather. But here I digress.

The above, of course, is a little black and white. As I said before, there are exceptions, shades of gray and sometimes good reason for divergence. Wladimir Klitschko is a very defensive boxer; he doesn’t like to get hit, he’s Ukrainian, and was trained into this form by Emanuel Steward who was a Black man from Detroit. Canelo Alvarez is, in all likelihood, ultimately of Irish heritage,

but learned to box in Mexico where he was immersed and assimilated into a proud Mexican culture. So no surprise he fights like a Mexican. Joe Calzaghe? Slick as hell, fast, combo puncher, and didn't get hit much. His trainer was his old man. His old man was a Jazz musician. And you know what, getting back to music, the Stones were pretty fucking badass, and they were importing Black R&B back to America from the American Muddy Waters records they heard in England. Just because the Stones were White does not make R&B a product of European culture, and Calzaghe (who is Welch—don't know if the English historically consider the Welch White) does not make slick boxing a Welch art form. But at the end of the day, slick boxing is largely a Black contribution to the sport, and the fact is the corporate machines that feed us our likes and dislikes according to what they perceive as in their self-interest, does not like it and, presumably, does not like that the slick boxer often emerges with the win. Back in the day they didn't like it when Jack Johnson or Muhammad Ali was champion either; but back in the day their reasons were often a little more blunt. Slick boxing a Black achievement? It could be argued. Slick boxing as a more effective form of the art? More than not. Racist? Nah. Just the opposite man.

Ali: The Peoples' Champ Is Gone (2016)



Ali

“He who is not courageous enough to take risks will accomplish nothing in life.”

-Muhammad Ali

Cabot VT 2016- Very sad news... We have lost the Greatest Of All-Time: Muhammad Ali.³

Such a brave brave man in and out of the ring. He conquered Liston (twice), Frazier (two out of three), and Foreman. And we never even saw him fight in his prime... In those years he was barred from boxing and had his passport taken away for his refusal to fight in the unjust Vietnam War (a stance he took out of principle alone; if he did allow himself to be drafted, he would have had a cake walk of PR appearances and exhibition matches). In short he was a true Peoples' Champ; one who stood up for the underdog, the working man, against imperialism, and for Black Liberation. He himself was the underdog when he first challenged Sonny Liston for the belt in 1964 (Ali won by TKO & won the rematch by KO), and later when fought George Foreman in Zaire at the Rumble In The Jungle in 1974. Prior to the Foreman fight, pundits expressed concern that he would not only lose, but be killed at the hands of Foreman's awesome power. Not only to did he face this challenge like a man, but he knocked Foreman out in round 8 to regain the Heavy Weight Championship of the World.

He was the Greatest, no doubt, and he will be missed by hundreds-of-millions (myself first among them). RIP champ.

SPACEMAN: Of Roadkill & Governors (2016)

Bill Lee Seeks To Be Labor's Anti-Candidate In 2016 Vermont Governors' Race

Montpelier, Vermont, 8/23/16- Anyone who grew up in New England or Quebec in the 1970s, any baseball fan really, knows tales of the Spaceman.⁴ Pitching for the Boston Red Sox from 1969-1978 and the Montreal Expos from 1979-1982, yarns of Bill sprinkling "marijuana dust" on his pancakes to help him cope with big city bus fumes abound. We Vermonters know him as an adoptive (and eccentric) favorite son, involving himself politically in support of single payer healthcare and endorsing Anthony Pollina's own 2008 run for governor. Now the Spaceman is running for Governor in his own right; as the candidate of the Vermont Liberty Union Party. To his right is Republican Phil Scott. Also to his right is Democrat Sue Minter. Bill may be one part conservative but he is also two parts socialist (and three parts tell-it-like-it-is *or should be* maverick). His name recognition is strong enough to cause concern among some Democratic Party insiders (*will he draw votes from Minter?*), and his policy positions are out-side-the-box enough to, perhaps, gain interest among working class voters who may otherwise lean towards racecar driving Scott. With a campaign war chest of 20 bucks (*American –not Canadian*), he may be something greater than long shot to win, but what he lacks in traditional political advantages he makes up for in candor. All told, he is the curveball in this year's election. And oh, he also wants the vote of the union worker.

I had the pleasure of interviewing Bill, by phone, while he was in in New Brunswick, Canada, doing a community fund raiser with former ball player Matt Stairs.

³ 2017 Note From The Author: Article first published in the Times Argus and the Hardwick Gazette, and was read by the station owner (Ken Squire) on WDEV 550 AM in 2016. In addition, due to a request from myself (Van Deusen) Democratic Governor Peter Shumlin issued an official proclamation stating that June 14th, 2016, would be recognized by the State of Vermont as Muhammad Ali Day.

⁴ 2017 Note From The Author: Interview first published in Infoshop News, Counter Punch (which I sent it to upon the encouragement of labor writer/organizer Steve Early), and Dissident Voices, 2016. Bill Lee went on to receive 2.83% of the vote (including mine) in the 2016 Vermont General Election.



Spaceman Bill Lee

Dave Van Deusen: Bill, I appreciate your out-spokenness on issues, and your time with the Sox, and somewhat with the Expos (I'm more of a Sox guy myself). I understand you are running for Governor of Vermont and would welcome the vote of union workers.

Spaceman Bill Lee: [Look,] I have created more millionaires [out of working people] than anybody in the history of unions. I took the money from the billionaires [owners] and gave it to [Major League Baseball] players.

Van Deusen: let's talk about that. You were playing during the 81' strike, right?

Spaceman: Yes, I was elected Player Rep [for the players union] in 70' for the American League, after Gary Peters was going to be released, and then in two years I was the head Rep for the American League [serving with Marvin] Miller, & Dick Moss; Joe Torre was the rep for the National League. [Together] we started arbitration, we started free agency with the Sykes decision and basically opened up [pay] from [a minimum of] \$9500 a year pay to \$502,000 [a year] where they are right now.

Van Deusen: Perhaps many people don't understand that before the MLB Players Association really got strong, under Marvin Miller, the average pay was something like nine thousand bucks a year. Is that accurate? I remember reading Ball Four [by Jim Bouton], great book, where he talks about that; same kind of wages guys were getting working at a non-union warehouse.

Spaceman: Yes. And eventually we [MLB ball players] got to be where we made 8 times more the average worker. Then it jumped highly after free agency. I got very upset that they were making too much money. That's my socialist views under Eugene Debs. I kinda wanted to give some of the money back, or redistribute it through the minor league/AAA, but the major leagues would have nothing to do with that. Then I got up to the 81' strike, and I was basically gone cause the 82' season came and I got released in May from Montreal for sticking up for Rodney Scott. But the amazing thing is I lead the team in ERA at 2.94 and I hit a 348 BA; I lead the team in hitting and I got released.

Van Deusen: Wait a second.. You're telling me you lead the team in hitting?!

Spaceman: Hitting AND ERA and I got released.

Van Deusen: That's impressive. I did not know you had a history as a batting-pitcher (excuse my ignorance of baseball history).

Spaceman: Yeah, I was a good hitter at the end. Donald Corrin gave me really good contact lenses. My vision got better. I got really good at hitting. [More recently] I lead the Vermont league in hitting one year and I also won the VT State championship two years ago with [Burlington Mayor] Miro Weinberger behind the plate. I am still playing, I continue to play.

Van Deusen: But wait, can you go back to why you were fired from the Expos? Do I understand right that you were sticking up for a co-worker and management did not like that?

Spaceman: Rodney Scott. That was our second basemen. Before Dick Williams was fired he called him our most valuable player, our most unsung hero; he was a great defensive second baseman ; he played D, knocked the ball down, kept a lot of runs from scoring, and he was a good base runner and he could sacrifice. In the three years we put him at second base, we almost won the National League pennant [each of those years]. Now Fanny comes in, gets rid of him and I just went nuts; I snapped. I agree I snapped. [Fanny] tried to fight me, and I wanted to fight him, and he wouldn't and he ran away. Then I went to [this area in Montreal] and wrote him a note 'you meet me there and I'll kick your ass...' They made a movie about it, called "Spaceman.". It just came out. There will be showings in Waitsfield, Warren, and Burlington sometime coming up pretty soon. It's amazing. I didn't plan the movie and I didn't plan running for Governor. I was

told to run by Peter Dimondstone. And when Peter Diamondstone says I'm the solution, then you know we got a really good problem. (hahaha)

Van Deusen: So you have played ball since the 1960s, before that really, going back to little league.

Spaceman: I only missed one year when I had my shoulder surgery in 1994. I rehabbed it good and came back and played in Venezuela; I played all over Cuba; I have played all around. I have probably won more games than Satchel Paige. I'm blessed.

Van Deusen: That's awesome... Getting back to Marvin Miller, didn't he come from the Steel Workers before he represented MLB Players?

Spaceman: Yes he did. He worked under John L Lewis. FDR anointed Lewis as head of the Steel Workers [Lewis was head of the United Coal Miners of America, was a founder of the CIO, and played a key role in the formation of the United Steel Workers of America], and Marvin learned from him then came to us and basically said 'you guys gotta get together.' When he saw the contract discrepancies and the fact that the Reserve Clause kept you in perpetuity with one organization, and that if you had a bad season the owners could cut your pay by 20%... [For example] there was a great player... He led the league in home runs (although his team came in last place) and the owner cut his pay by 20%. He asked 'why -I lead the league in home runs' and the owner said, 'yeah but we could have finished last without that.' So that's basically the way the owners 'respected' labor back then, and Marvin jumped on it, and I jumped on it with him and the rest is history.

Union Arbitration & Labor Board Appointees

Van Deusen: Let's bring that up to the present... I have been a union officer and/or a union rep for many years. As such I know that in past years State employees, tried to establish third party, traditional, binding arbitration and the State was very resistant to that. Right now final resolve to settle disputes means going to the Labor Board. The Labor Board process is very legalistic, very much like going to court; it's not geared towards a regular person being able to go to advocate for themselves. The process also takes lots of time. So: 1.) As Governor, would you support State employees having the right to third party arbitration; and 2.) What role would you see organized labor playing in regards to your appointments to the Labor Board?

Spaceman: Well, third party [arbitration] is a great idea. I don't know why they don't do that. As for the Labor Relation Board that we [MLB Players] had, they put in Sykes for us (he was the third person). You had someone from the owners, someone from the union, and Sykes. Sykes agreed with us on arbitration and on the Reserve Clause. So appointing the right people to get them into the right position, you guys [organized labor] need to stick together and really be firm on that. I'll help you *anyway* I can. 'Workers of the world unite' -that's what I've always been about; I've been a Samuel Gompers [American Federation of Labor supporter and a] Wobblie and I've even gone further than that being a Eugene Debs [socialist].

US Senator Bernie Sanders

Van Deusen: Debs of course is somebody that Senator Bernie Sanders is a huge proponent of. What's your opinion about the recent Bernie Sanders campaign for US President?

Spaceman: I was *for* him and not *against* Hilary... I am a Bernie guy. I [helped] get him elected as a Congressman when he was petitioning in Hardwick a long time ago. I've been with Bernie for a long time. I believe he's always had his heart in the right place. But now he is [working in] the Democratic Party and that's just a tough party to deal with... [Bernie] could have stayed Independent. I would have liked to have seen what would have happened if [he] ran as a third

party candidate. I believe Trump would have blown away, faded away, and his supporters would have gone with Bernie. I thought in my heart that they are not that dumb, to stick with Donald Trump. Maybe I 'underestimate the gullibility of the American public', [to quote] PT Barnum.

[In *my* campaign for Governor] I don't take any money. I have only received \$20 and that was from a 91 year old from Wisconsin Rapids who wrote me a check and said 'I want you to cash this because I have a friend who after you [do] will buy it from me for \$40.' That's my only campaign contribution. I don't want money from anybody. My [policy] decisions are based on what's good for the planet first and what's good for the workers on the planet second (as far as humankind goes)... [We need to protect] endangered species. You know there is a Madagascar periwinkle endangered that has the highest alkaloid composition of any plant on earth and it reduces cancer. If that plant goes extinct, we go extinct. I am pro-labor, but not at the expense of [being] pro-earth.

The Working Class & The Economy

Van Deusen: Well, speaking of endangered species, what about the middle class?

Spaceman: Exactly. We gotta create more jobs in Vermont that are based on our natural resources which is our woods, our maple syrup. You know we can raise more sheep. We can create a wood product unlike the particle board that causes cancer. Why can't *we* invent and design for the real world? I am a [advocate] of Buckminster Fuller and Victor Papanek. Papanek says we need to design for the real world. We don't design for the real world. We design for the petroleum industry; we design for the big companies; we design for the things that are gonna give the 2% [the richest of the rich] more money. If we designed differently, for the workers, the jobs would stay in America... We [the workers] will be a dominate force in the future. And the death of the Republican Party will be good for us. I hope it comes quicker than not...

My theory is that the workers are responsible for making the goods and providing the services and therefore they should have a bigger piece of the pie... In baseball [the bosses] never opened their books. They never put the money on the table and that is what got them wrong. When you get the owners and these people to put the money on the table you realize the discrepancy between the worker and the owner is larger than you think. That money [should] go to the worker and that is what I have always believed... When the middle class gets more money, they spend more money and everybody's happy. I'm not a trickle down economist. I never believed in Reagan. I only believed in McCarthy actually a long time before that and I believed in a guy named Fred Harris from Oklahoma. Those are the only guys I really liked (and Ralph Nader).

Van Deusen: I assume you mean *Eugene* McCarthy and not *Joe* McCarthy?

Spaceman: Oh, for sure. Eugene McCarthy. (haha)

Van Deusen: So I suppose then that you support fair raises for union workers?

Spaceman: Yes. Most definitely. You produce the goods, you produce the services... Thomas Malthus was wrong. The Malthusian notion that all the economists and all the right-wingers and all the conservatives use was wrong. Population does not grow exponentially and goods and services don't grow arithmetically. His theory is the theory of most of the economic models that we see and it's wrong. With the advent of new technology we are going to be able to feed all the people all the time [so to speak]. That's what I've always believed.

On The Democratic & Republican Parties

Van Deusen: Let's talk about the Democratic & Republican Parties. Of course we have two other major party candidates for Governor. We have Sue Minter who has said her top priority as

Governor will be gun control, and for the Republican Party we have Phil Scott, who I understand is for (so called) right-to-work anti-union legislation.

Spaceman: Both are bad. Sue Minter is gonna lose if she keeps the gun thing as her priority [as opposed to] jobs and keeping people in the State of Vermont... She has got to be a little more flexible when it comes to guns in Vermont. Guns are not our problem in Vermont. Guns are a problem in inner-cities, guns are a problem in the south, guns are a problem in a lot of places, but guns are not a problem in Vermont... I have tons of guns. I'm a responsible hunter. I eat road kill and pick up hitch hikers. When I get on the debates I am gonna show that I am more conservative than the Republican and more liberal than the Democrat. I am both. In other words I represent both ends of the spectrum. I will prove it. I pick up all my cans, I harvest all my potatoes by hand, I don't use machinery... I am very much pro-worker, but I'm kinda anti-technology which is a funny combination...

Tax The Rich Or Open The Contracts?

Van Deusen: Let's talk about some of the workers represented by public sector unions in Vermont. I know for a fact that one of the things union members very much care about is making sure 'a deal is a deal.' A couple years ago State employees settled their contracts, and a couple months later Governor Shumlin wanted them to reopen them to give back money to the State. Shumlin, of course, refused to endorse any raising of revenue by taxing rich folk or out-of-staters. As Governor, how would you deal with a financial situation where revenues were falling short? Would you ask the State workers to give back their hard earned raises or would you be willing to consider increasing taxes on those who could afford it [i.e. the wealthy]?

Spaceman: I'm a big proponent of raising taxes on the [richest] 2%... I think there are five Saudi Arabian princes living in Stowe and they use that airport over there (the Morrisville-Stowe Airport). How [else] we gonna get more money? We're gonna make sure we all buy from Vermont; we [need to] buy in Vermont; make sure things stay in Vermont; we don't go to the Walmart across [the river] in New Hampshire. [But if you do] you should pay a percentage of that back to the State. I believe in supporting the little guy through buying Vermont products and keeping the money within the State.

Privatization

Van Deusen: Fair enough. Another issue the VT Democrats have supported in recent years is privatization. Governor Shumlin and the other Democrats in power, for example, supported the privatization of Workers Comp. Workers Comp historically is administered by State employees who are union members. Yet the Governor has taken bids from out-of-state corporations to do this work. As Governor would you continue to push for privatization?

Spaceman: No. I won't privatize anything. I am a collectivist. I believe we will get it done within [a collectivist] system... I would [also] keep everything within the State. We're all in this boat together. [In addition] we need to find a way to get [more] outside revenue from outside the State. I believe the Vermont label is golden. I know a lady in Morrisville who opened a "Vermont" peanut butter company. She couldn't do that in the State of New York ["New York Peanut Butter Company" doesn't have the same ring], and now she is making money right here. We need to keep more jobs in Vermont and gain more revenue.

Healthcare

Van Deusen: Healthcare... How do you envision a healthcare system under your Governorship?

Spaceman: Wow. You know I want the Canadian plan. My theory is if we can't do it in the State [because of the Democratic & Republican legislators] were gonna do what Bernie did earlier [rent busses] and we can all go up and get our x-ray for \$18 in Sherbrook Quebec. Why not? If it's better on one side of the boarder or the other, we'll erase that northern border and [develop] a relationship [with Provence Québec]. I don't know how the Federal Government is gonna like it, but I want Vermonters to have free access to Quebec healthcare. I use it. My doctor, my dermatologist, my dentist, my orthopedic surgeon, all my x-rays, [I have] everything done in Quebec. I don't do anything in the State of Vermont because I can do it in Quebec. I played for the [Montreal] Expos, and I know how their system works. And if they say it doesn't work, it's [just] the Republicans using that fear mongering tactic.

Van Deusen: You are saying that until we fix our healthcare system it makes sense for us to cultivate a government to government understanding, concerning healthcare access, between Vermont and Quebec? And until we get this fixed, this is the one place where we should break the 'buy Vermont' rule?

Spaceman: Yes. [And right now we all should] get [our] pharmaceuticals up there. Get everything you need. But look in a healthier environment you won't need as much. Get the kids out there, get them running at an early age. Get them in track, in gymnastics, you put physical education back into things, and people will not become sedentary. And, I'm gonna ban Bud- Lite if elected too. -I'm a bottle bill guy; a buy-local drink-local beer guy; pay a little extra and put the money back in your own economy and don't give it to someone else; don't give it to outside corporations.

Renewable Energy

Van Deusen: Earlier you said that the environment is a priority for you. What is your position on wind power?

Spaceman: Those windmills up in the Northeast Kingdom weren't put there for the benefit of Albany [Vermont]; they weren't put there for the benefit of Montpelier; they were put there for the benefit of the big money guys down in Connecticut and for Metro Gas up in Montreal. We're not reaping the benefits of that wind generated power. I want little, redesigned windmills on everybody's house that will spin around and make it so you don't have to pay for energy ever again.

Van Deusen: If, for sake of discussion, we do consider there to be a need for large energy producing plants, should they be owned by the public as opposed to a private for profit corporation?

Spaceman: Oh, for sure. JP Morgan Chase owns the grid. Every system that you see is [intended] to keep the little guy out. Like Bernie said, it's a rigged system.

Town Meeting

Van Deusen: Town Meeting? What role do you see Town Meeting playing in the future of Vermont?

Spaceman: I like everyone getting up... Most the people in Vermont are very conservative but they have a very liberal heart and they always take care of their neighbors. [For example] the hay on my field was gonna be brush-hogged and the guy that was gonna do it said 'Bill this hay's too good. Give it to one of your neighbors.' And I said, 'Your right. The Stoddard's need that hay, therefore the hay goes to the Stoddard's... and that's how Vermont works, and that's how its gonna work for forever, and that's part of your 'Town Meeting.' I think reason always comes out and those loud mouths that are out there [you know them], the right-wingers always get talked down by the normal people.

Support From Union Workers

Van Deusen: When union members vote, tell me why they should vote for you and not Phil Scott and not Sue Minter?

Spaceman: Those two are vestiges of the past and not the future and we gotta move into the future. It's gonna be painful at stops, but I'm the only guy to get you into the future and to get the model differently. The model is flawed; thereby you gotta change the model... The Republican and Democratic Party are of the past. You got to be progressive, you got to move forward. I'm the only guy that can out-conservative the right-wingers because I drive a 96' Buick (it my father's car), I repair it down at Denton's Auto all the time, (by the Craftsbury Garage) and everything I do stays within the State of Vermont.

Van Deusen: So you say you are the future. So for the average working class man or woman, what does that future look like with you as Governor?

Spaceman: You're gonna be happy to go to work. You're gonna be happy to see your paycheck. You're gonna be happy and you're gonna be content. You're gonna be healthy. You're just gonna be better off. As long as everyone makes more money and everybody is more equal, the world is healthier and happier. When you have divisions between a tool and dye maker in India making so much, and a guy in Detroit making so much, well Buckminster Fuller says that model does not work in the future. And you cannot tie yourself to fossil fuels. You have to tie yourself to the future... [Right now America] is not willing to do that. We keep sucking our thumbs and looking back.

Montreal Vs. Vermont

Van Deusen: One thing I absolutely have to take issue with you on.. This will be a tough question.. But I understand that you advocate in favor of bringing back the Montreal Expos. But as a candidate for Governor of the State of Vermont, would it not be more appropriate advocate for the creation of a Vermont MLB team, perhaps using the Green Bay Packers model whereby the team is owned by a city or, in this case, the State?

Spaceman: Haha. The trouble with Vermont is that the people of the north can't [often enough] get to the south, and the people of the south cant [often enough] get to the north. [But the thing is] I'm an Expos guy and I don't believe in boarders. I do not see a border between Burlington and Montreal. I do not see it. I see it as another American League team that would draw Red Sox fans through the State of Vermont, and we would pick them up by the heals and we would shake the change out of their pockets.

Van Deusen: Hahaha. I like it.

Spaceman: It will pay for everything (haha)! Think of it, you would have 17 ball games. You gonna get 30,000 Red Sox fans a game. That's 510,000 people passing through our state. And that's only one direction. They gotta go back home too!

Van Deusen: Well maybe we can put tolls at the entrances to New Hampshire and Massachusetts?

Spaceman: Exactly, all the way. I am a firm believer that if we put an American League team there it will benefit us exponentially.

Last Word

Van Deusen: Well Bill, I have very much enjoyed this interview. Are there any last words you would like to provide to Vermont's union members about your run for Vermont Governor?

Spaceman: I ask that you provide them with a letter I wrote to my younger self that was published in the Players Tribune. It will give them an idea of who I am... Also, I am the only

candidate that hasn't taken a dime from anybody [except that 20 bucks from the 91 year old in Wisconsin]. I'm the only guy whose pockets are clean and whose hands are clean; I am the only one who has no [obligations] to fulfill. The fact is I have always been on the worker's side. As Cassy Stengel once said, 'you can look it up.'

Van Deusen: Will do. Give um' hell and good luck Bill.

Letter To My Younger Self:

www.theplayerstribune.com

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



David Van Deusen
Anarchist, Socialist, & Anti-Fascist Writings of David Van Deusen 1995-2018

Catamount Tavern Press
David Van Deusen, B. 1973-Catamount Tavern Press Montpelier, Vermont, 2017 (and 2018)
Anti-Copy Right - No Rights Reserved As Long As Any Reprinting's Are Not Used For
Capitalist Profit

theanarchistlibrary.org