

# 1245

International Brotherhood  
Of Electrical Workers  
Local 1245, AFL-CIO  
September 1992  
Vol. XLI No. 9

# UTILITY REPORTER

Trading away the USA?  
Page 4

**Q: Why register to vote?**  
**A: M \$ O \$ N \$ E \$ Y**

**F**orget the appeals to your patriotism. Forget your high school civics lesson.

What's really at stake in the election on Nov. 3 is *money*.

Cold hard cash.

These are the simple facts:

Over the last decade, a handful of your fellow citizens have looted America's fortune. Corporate tycoons and their junk bond bag men literally dismantled American industry for their own private enrichment.

They borrowed huge sums of money to take over many of America's healthiest industries, then paid themselves huge salaries as they slashed wages, sold off assets, closed plants, laid off thousands of workers, even seized the workers' pension funds.

And then there's the matter of your taxes. Does it seem like you're paying more than your fair share?

Well, you are.

Increase in total salaries of people earning more than \$1 million:  
**2,184%**

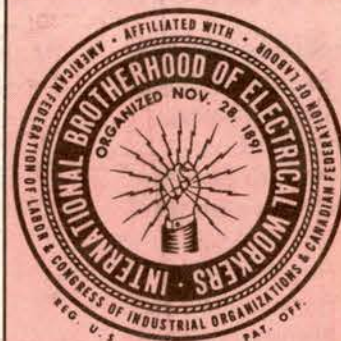
Rich folk did a whole lot better than you did in the 1980s. Not because they worked harder than you did, but because they took control of the government.  
**Your government.**

Increase in total salaries of people earning \$200,000 to \$1 million:  
**697%**

Increase in total salaries of people earning \$20,000 to \$50,000:  
**44%**

See PAGE 6

SOURCE: Internal Revenue Service, cited in:  
"America What Went Wrong?" by Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele



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## CALENDAR

September 12  
East Bay Pipeline  
Stewards Conference  
Walnut Creek, Ca.

September 19  
Sacramento Valley  
Stewards Conference  
Chico, Ca.

September 26  
Outside Line  
Stewards Conference  
San Bernardino, Ca.

October 5  
Last Day to  
Register to Vote

October 10  
Public Sector  
Stewards Conference  
Sacramento, Ca.

November 3  
US General Election  
**BE SURE TO VOTE!**



**Register to Vote by October 5.**  
**Californians can register by mail.**  
**Call 1-800-354-8683. Right now.**





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WIPA



## PG&amp;E gas serviceman to the rescue

**G**as Serviceman Bob West was finishing up some paperwork after completing a job in San Francisco's Mission District last month when a maroon van sped around the corner and parked near his PG&E truck.

"Two males got out and were walking away, and then started running," West recalled. "It seemed kind of odd."

West finished his paperwork and was driving away when a news report over the radio announced that a 1979 maroon van had been stolen on Mission Street, with a three-year-old child inside.

"I went back down the street and stopped next to the van," said West. When he saw the girl, West said he "just kind of started shaking. The adrenalin

was running through me that I had found this child who was kidnapped, that I had had a hand in finding her."

West called his supervisor and then waited until the police showed up. The child's very worried mother and god-mother were in the squad car.

According to West, both women had apparently left the van briefly to run errands, leaving the child in the van with the motor running.

He thinks the thieves probably didn't notice the child when they hopped into the van and sped away.

"Since I'm in the Mission every day I try to keep a watchful eye," said West, who was interviewed by a local radio station about his role as rescuer.

For one family, his vigilance made all the difference in the world.



Bob West

## APPOINTMENTS

PACIFIC GAS AND  
ELECTRIC COMPANY**Substation Rerate  
Committee**

John K. Brown

CONFERENCES AND  
CONVENTIONS**9th District Construction  
Organizing Course**

Art Murray

**Nevada State AFL-CIO  
Convention**

Kathy Tindall

John Stralla

Bob Vieira

Art Murray

Mike Grimm (Elected  
Delegate)**A. Philip Randolph  
Institute Western  
Regional Conference**

Norma Ricker

Thelma Dixon

Dorothy Fortier

Danny Jackson

CENTRAL LABOR  
COUNCILS**Northeastern Nevada  
Central Labor Council**

Dora Carone

Jan Peterson

Sandra Reynolds

**San Mateo Central Labor  
Council**

Kathy Maas

**Five Counties Central  
Labor Council**

Joe Kropholler

Ron Cochran

## Workers here and abroad

## Rolling the union on . . .

**Downward Trend:** At their present rate, business failures in the US in 1992 will set an all-time record. The previous record for most business failures in the US was 1991.

**Helping Workers Adjust:** The AFL-CIO is pressing Congress to enact an Economic Conversion program to help laid-off defense workers and their families adjust to the transition to a civilian economy. As many as one million US workers in defense and defense-related industries could lose their jobs by 1997 due to the end of the

Cold War. Prior to the 1992 election campaign, President Bush had offered no plan to assist such workers.

**Plus and Minus:** Which political party has the best economic track record? According to Harper's Index, the average percentage change in the Gross National Product during each four-year Democratic administration since 1949 is 20%. For each four-year Republican administration, the average is a negative 9%.

**Lebanese Topple Leader:** A series of general

strikes by trade unionists in Lebanon forced out the government of Omar Karame in May. The unionists demanded a government "able to redress the economic and social problems" facing the people of Lebanon. They say they will keep close watch on the new prime minister, Rachid Solh, and will judge him on his results.

**Backdoor:** Responding to a National Labor Relations Board complaint, the US Postal Service has agreed to stop using Employee Involvement committees to bypass the American Postal Workers Union. The union has refused to participate in the EI program, which was used by management in some locations as a backdoor way to deal with issues covered by the union contract.

**Who Needs the Boss?:** In a survey of 113 workers and corporate executives, 64% of the managers considered top management vital to the company's success. Only 40% of workers thought so.



SEPTEMBER 7-12

## Meeting change

Unit 2515, Modesto, has changed its meeting time to 5:30 p.m. Meetings will continue to be held on the same dates and at the same location.



Seven days in the caribbean

## POWER PAC supporter wins cruise

**J**oseph Audelo signed up as a member of POWER PAC, Local 1245's political action committee, because he thought it was important for people to "be aware of who they vote for and how it affects their job."

Little did he realize that his small contribution would pay off with a seven-day cruise for two in the Caribbean.

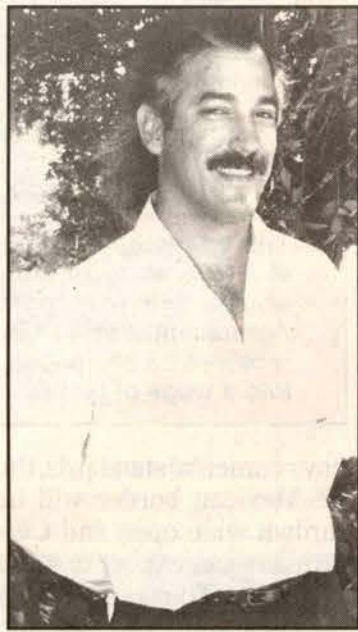
Audelo, an electric crew foreman for Pacific Gas & Electric in Oakland, was the winner in a drawing for the cruise at the Aug. 1 meeting of the Advisory Council. All Local 1245 members who signed up for POWER PAC prior to July 15 were entered into the drawing.

Audelo believes the political realm has a big influence on the lives of Local 1245 members, whether they realize it or not.

"Voting for the wrong person," Audelo said, "could in fact put you out of a job or change the way you work at PG&E." Especially, he noted, if the utility industry is deregulated as proposed by the national energy bill currently before Congress.

"It's extremely useful for a person like myself, who's busy a lot, to know who the union PAC is supporting" for political office, Audelo said. "We all believe in unionism, so we try to participate in that by buying union-made [products]. We want to do the same thing in politics by supporting politicians who believe in what we believe in."

Audelo acknowledged



Joseph Audelo

that some members object to the union's involvement in politics, particularly if the union supports politicians that some members don't care for.

"I can understand that," Audelo said, "but all the union is trying to do is protect its members."

Under its by-laws, the Local 1245 Executive Board is required to evaluate political candidates based on their views toward working people, and to make recommenda-

tions to the members. POWER PAC is one vehicle by which the Executive Board carries out that responsibility.

POWER PAC enables union members at PG&E to authorize a regular payroll deduction ranging from \$1 to \$10 per month (or more), which POWER PAC uses to assist candidates running for political office.

While union members by themselves cannot match the giant contributions that wealthy individuals and corporations can funnel to political candidates, by banding together in POWER PAC they can make their voices heard.

When our government considers bills on health care, family leave, scab labor, run-away shops, and other important labor issues, the only way working people will get a fair shake is if they help elect like-minded individuals to office.

Any union member at PG&E can sign up for POWER PAC. If you haven't signed up yet, contact the Local 1245 office in Walnut Creek. Call (510) 933-6060 and say you want to sign up for POWER PAC.

**"We all believe in unionism, so we try to participate in that by buying union-made [products]. We want to do the same thing in politics by supporting politicians who believe in what we believe in."**

Joe Audelo

## POINT OF VIEW

### We fought for what we have, now we must fight to keep it

Jack McNally, IBEW 1245 Business Manager

In September labor is honored with a holiday.

Labor Day is recognized by the federal, state and local governments as well as many business concerns. Most local unions have negotiated Labor Day as a paid holiday in their contracts.

Labor Day, with its leisure activities, is a good symbol of how unions have helped lift working people into the middle class. In fact, unions are largely responsible for *creating* the middle class in our society.

Collective bargaining has produced higher wages, pension plans, health insurance for ourselves and our families, and vacations and holidays like Labor Day that enable us to get away from the job for awhile.

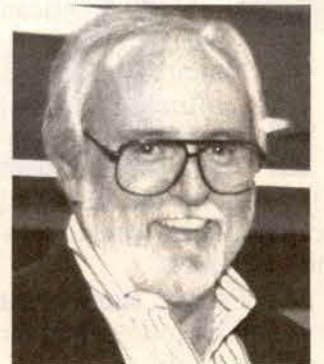
Collective bargaining has even improved standards for unorganized workers and some management employees whose salaries are linked to gains bargained by unions.

But today our wage levels, benefits, and working conditions are disintegrating. Many jobs have been eliminated, and many more lost to foreign lands. People who earned \$15 an hour are now making \$7 to \$8 an hour, often without benefits.

Over the last decade the White House, Congress and the regulators have manipulated the tax structure. They have manipulated the transportation, telecommunication, natural gas, and savings and loan industries. They have plans to greatly alter regulations for banks and electric utilities.

At the same time, they are manipulating laws and regulations to weaken the ability of labor unions to protect workers' living standards.

This so-called reform has played a direct role in the downward slide of the middle class, and the rise of



a new class of wealthy elite.

This is not something new. In the "Roaring Twenties", tax structures were changed and regulations manipulated to shift wealth to the rich, supposedly to pull the nation out of recession. Heard that before? After a decade of taking care of the wealthy, America suffered the Crash of '29.

It took many years of agony to come back from the Great Depression of the 1930s. To enhance recovery, far-reaching laws were enacted. The National Labor Relations Act, the Davis-Bacon prevailing wage act, the Fair Labor Standards Act, and the Social Security Act were all passed in the 1930s to give workers a level playing field with management.

Also passed was the Securities Act, which, in the words of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, was designed to "correct some of the evils which have been so glaringly revealed in the private exploitation of the public's money."

But in recent decades, protections for labor have been undermined and the middle class is now suffering the consequences.

Are we on the verge of another '29 crash?

Will Labor Day no longer be a paid holiday?

Our standard of living is not guaranteed. We fought to get it, we'll have to fight to keep it.

Are you registered to vote?

### Fight Back!

Too many elected officials have turned their backs on working people. The time has come to elect candidates who will stand *with* us.

**Together We Can Do It!**

Fight Back! Check off for POWER PAC!

For Local 1245 members at Pacific Gas & Electric Co.

POWER PAC!

POWER PAC!



# Trading away the USA?

North American Free Trade Agreement sells out American workers

By Eric Wolfe

**T**he North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) announced last month by President George Bush is great news for US-based companies who want to relocate to Mexico.

But it's not such great news for US workers and for the US economy.

As could be expected during a campaign year, Bush portrays NAFTA as a way to create jobs for US workers. But the treaty will almost certainly destroy far more US jobs than it creates as companies flee south to take advantage of Mexico's cheap labor.

Throughout the 1980s, the policies of Reagan and Bush

encouraged US corporations to slash wages, close plants, relocate outside the US, and avoid paying US corporate taxes. If NAFTA is approved by Congress, this dismantling of the US economy will accelerate.

Free-trade advocates argue that concessions by US workers are necessary to "streamline" American industry and make it more "competitive." But the corporations who will benefit from NAFTA have no allegiance to the American people. They're not even particularly concerned about reviving US industry.

They're concerned about profits for their shareholders. That's what they're in business for.

Take Zenith, for example. When Zenith recently an-

nounced it was closing its last remaining TV manufacturing plant in the US and moving production to Mexico, the company's chairman made all the usual noises about the need to remain competitive.

But why should US workers give a damn about Zenith's "competitiveness" if Zenith is no longer providing jobs in the US? What good is Zenith's competitiveness to the 1,350 Zenith employees in Springfield, Mo. whose jobs are being shipped down to Mexico?

When Zenith can escape paying wages to US workers, escape paying US corporate taxes, what the hell good is Zenith to us?

Since 1965, more than 1800 plants employing more than 500,000 people have been built in Mexico, mainly by corporations like Zenith moving their production out of the US. These plants, sometimes referred to as the maquiladora plants, employ 500,000 Mexican workers at an average hourly wage of \$1, including benefits. (See pay stub, reprinted above.)

NAFTA will accelerate this vast movement of industry and jobs to Mexico. A recent study by economists Raul Hinojosa-Ojeda and Robert McCleery predicts that NAFTA will entice US corporations to transfer an additional \$44 billion in capital—and another 500,000 jobs—to Mexico during this decade.

California has already been hard hit by corporate flight.

During the 1980s, thousands of Californians lost their jobs when GM closed an auto plant in Fremont and Ford closed a plant in Milpitas. In both cases, the production was transferred to Mexico.

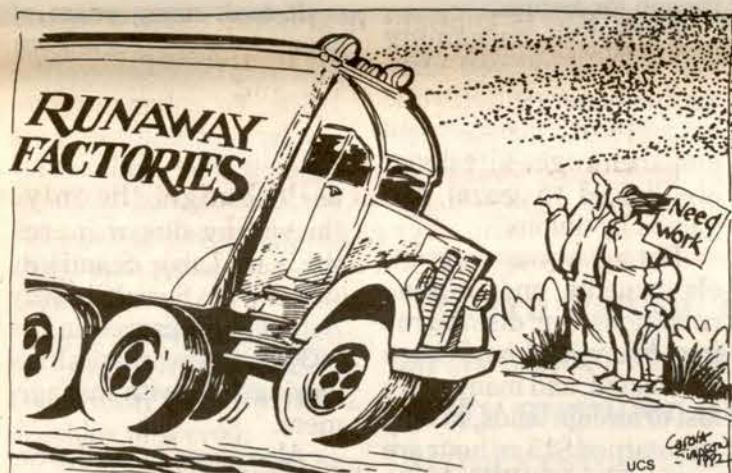
Hundreds more lost their jobs when Green Giant closed down in Watsonville and Vitro Glass closed down in San Leandro.

And the list goes on.

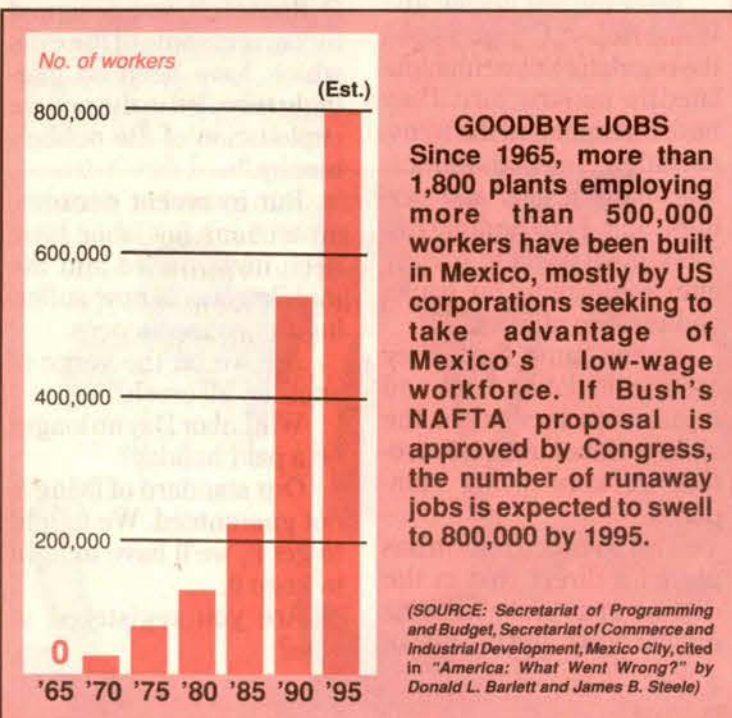
If NAFTA is approved by Congress without any provisions to enforce labor and

| CONDUCTORES Y COMPONENTES ELECTRICOS S.A. DE C.V. |         |           |           |          |    |
|---|---------|-----------|-----------|----------|----|
| HOURLY  | 15      | 91        | 00        | 04       | 91 |
| DEPARTAMENTO                                      | 2       | GP01      |           |          |    |
| PROCESADOR  | 42.50   | 68.731.59 | 4,165.00  | 8,327.00 |    |
| COMPENSACION                                      | 1.65    | 2,669.49  | 43.01     |          |    |
| SEPTIMO DIA                                       |         | 11,900.00 | 59.00     |          |    |
| BONO ROIS.  |         | 14,172.00 |           |          |    |
| ACUMULADO DE PAGOS                                |         | 97,471.99 | 4,171.99  |          |    |
| ACUMULADO ANUAL                                   | 907,832 | 11,900.00 | 93,308.00 |          |    |

This photocopy of an actual pay stub from a worker at a G.M. manufacturing plant in Juarez, Mexico, shows the true purpose of the Free Trade Agreement. For 44 hours of work this employee received 93,300 pesos, or \$30.49. That translates into a wage of just 69 cents per hour.



"BUSH DID PROMISE TO KEEP THE WHEELS OF INDUSTRY TURNING."



environmental standards, the US-Mexican border will be thrown wide open and Californians can expect to see a new wave of businesses pack up, close shop, and ship out.

Manufacturing workers are not the only ones at risk. As development opportunities and jobs disappear from US communities, there will be shrinking demand for utilities and other basic services. The jobs of Local 1245 members will be among those put at risk.

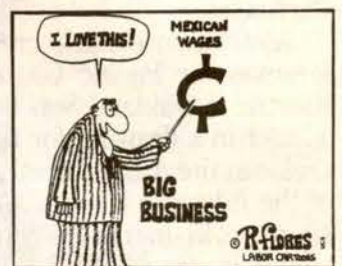
## America last

It is tempting to blame runaway shops on some kind of "invisible" marketplace forces that work in mysterious ways beyond the understanding of mere mortals like ourselves.

But there's no magic involved in the dismantling of US industry. For years, government policies have actively rewarded businesses that lay off US workers and leave the country.

The US Commerce Department—a part of our own federal government—has eagerly promoted corporate flight. In testimony to Congress in 1986, a Commerce Department official proclaimed:

**NAFTA, if approved, will be a new bonanza for the corporate elite who did so well during the 1980s. But their new riches will be paid for in lost jobs, lost opportunities, and lost hopes for US workers.**



"The Commerce Department supports participation in the maquiladora program by US industry because it helps US companies to remain healthy in the face of intense international competition."

Ronald Reagan and George Bush always professed to be strong patriots. But in the ways that count most to the US economy, the policies of Reagan and Bush have put America last.

NAFTA, if approved, will be a new bonanza for the corporate elite who did so well during the 1980s. But their new riches will be paid for in lost jobs, lost opportunities, and lost hope for US workers.

Bill Clinton, Democratic candidate for president, has expressed reservations about NAFTA and has pledged to not support any agreement that weakens environmental and labor standards.



# Who Do You Support for President?

The Utility Reporter recently put this question to members at PG&E's Concord and Hayward yards. Here are their responses.



Dave Sutton,  
Electric Construction Subforeman,  
Concord

## Clinton/Gore

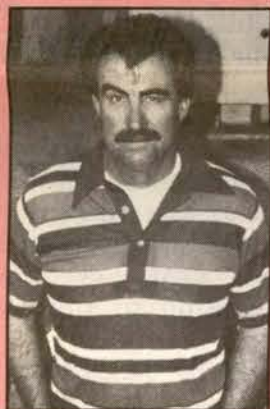
Historically the Republican Party has been anti-labor and anti-working people. We have to get control of the country. We have to put people back to work and I think the way you should do that is through the repair of our infrastructure: the roads, schools, libraries... The middle class has really taken it hard. I see the creation of a two-class system and I don't like that, because, as far as me and my family, we're going to be in the bottom class. Not anything's been done (under Bush) except for the very privileged few, the big corporations, people with money.



John Pirie,  
Lineman,  
Hayward

## Undecided

I don't like the Republicans... The working man supports the country and as far as I'm concerned he's being taken advantage of. He's not getting what he's paying for. [The Republican Party] responds to people with lots of money but not the people paying the bills. They've robbed 'em blind... I think a lot of our liberties have been sacrificed, in drug testing and other areas. It's been a constant battle to retain your civil liberties.



Rod Simas,  
Foreman,  
Hayward

## Clinton/Gore

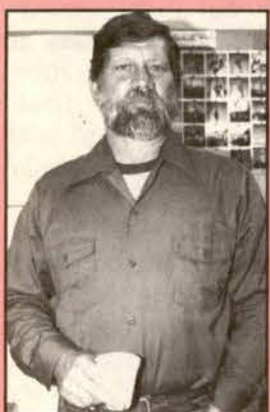
It's going to be the Democrats for sure. I think after 12 years everybody's had enough of what we're going through. I think everything [the Republicans] say is "no more taxes", and no more taxes has got us where we're at right now--we're right in the hole. Workers don't have any rights any more. It seems like 12 years of big business and the workers got the short end of everything. I think big business has had their chance and they messed everything up. I think workers need more power. Big business has all the power right now and they're just taking us right in the hole.



Mike Longo,  
Gas Construction Foreman,  
Concord

## Clinton/Gore

We talk about it at work quite a bit. We're getting the shaft by the Republican Party, the lower class and middle class people, we're getting tired of it. We need a change. The country is much worse off [the past 12 years]. As far as the budget, the only people who ever got anything out of it are the upper class. They're making out like bandits and we're the one's who are paying. The Republican Party is not taking care of the people at all. The schooling is not what it should be. That's our future. We need a change. Those guys have messed up this country long enough.



Rich Cowart,  
Lineman,  
Concord

## Clinton/Gore

We've had 12 years to see what the Republicans would do to protect the working people and they've done very little. I don't think we can afford another four years of that... The standard of living has dropped for the working man after tax dollars. Nominations to the Supreme Court are not aligned to protect the working man in general. The national debt is tremendous. They're taking from the working man to finance the deficit. It's not a rosy picture for the future as far as the working man's concerned.



Pam Caballero,  
Customer Service Representative,  
Hayward

## Clinton/Gore

I don't really want either one, but the lesser of two evils would be Clinton. I definitely don't care for Bush... I don't think Bush is seeing what's going on. He's more of a politician from the old school, and the old school doesn't work anymore. I believe he is not a fair practitioner of women's rights. I don't believe he has an understanding of the middle class. I don't think he sees what's going on in America. He's not concerned about jobs, he's not concerned about keeping jobs in the workforce.



## From PAGE ONE

Thanks to policies vigorously pursued by Ronald Reagan and George Bush, a major share of the nation's tax burden was shifted from corporations and wealthy Americans onto the backs of middle class working people.

During the presidential primaries last spring, George Bush accused Democrats of trying to stir up class warfare. It's class war all right, and it's been going on for ten years. But so far, the rich are the only ones fighting, while the middle class and the poor have taken all the casualties.

If middle class Americans do not register to vote, if we fail to fight back in 1992, this one-sided war will continue and our hardships will mount.

## Ravages of war

In their book "America: What Went Wrong", prize-winning journalists Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele paint a stark, detailed picture of the war that has ravaged the American middle class during the 1980s.

Between 1980 and 1989, total wages for all people earning between \$20,000 and \$50,000 went up an average

of 44%, not adjusting for inflation. During the same period, salaries for people who earned \$1 million or more went up 2,184%.

In other words, those who were already super-rich didn't do twice as good as you under Reagan-Bush. They didn't do three times as good as you or ten times as good as you.

They did 50 times as good as you. And they were doing a whole better than you to begin with.

Their success had nothing to do with being 50 times smarter than you, working 50 times harder than you, or doing work 50 times more valuable than you.

But it had a whole lot to do with special favors given to the rich and to corporations

under US tax policy, favors that were vastly expanded during the Reagan-Bush years.

## Favors for the rich

Take income taxes.

If you were making between \$30,000 and \$40,000 in the mid-1980s, the Reagan-Bush tax reform of 1986 cut your combined federal and Social Security tax by 7%, worth about \$500 to you annually.

But if you were making \$500,000 to \$1 million, your cut was 31%, worth about \$75,000 annually.

Corporations didn't do so badly, either, thanks to the increasing availability of tax breaks.

In the 1950s, corporations supplied 39% of the nation's revenues from income tax, while individuals supplied 61%. By the end of the 1980s, the corporate share had fallen to just 17%, while individuals supplied 83%.

That didn't happen by accident. It happened because of huge tax breaks granted to corporations by your elected leaders.

From 1980 to 1989, corporations escaped paying \$100 billion in taxes by taking a deduction known as Net Operating Loss (NOL). This loophole allows corporations to use past losses to avoid current taxes, even if the companies are now profitable and thriving.

## Corporate tax bonanza

An even bigger bonanza for corporations is the law that permits them to write off the interest they pay on corporate debt. This enormous loophole costs the US treasury nearly \$100 billion a year.

That's one trillion dollars during the 1980s that could have gone toward our schools, toward cleaning up the environment, or toward

rebuilding our nation's infrastructure, all of which would have helped the long-term productivity of our nation, while creating millions of new jobs and generating billions in badly-needed income tax revenue.

## Bleeding the US dry

The original intent of the tax break for corporate debt was to enable companies to borrow money to invest in new plant and equipment. And corporations borrowed a ton of money in the 1980s, \$1.3 trillion worth.

But they didn't borrow money to build America up. They borrowed it, and then began to bleed America dry. Jesse James would have envied the tactics of these modern-day bandits. In rough outline, here's how the corporate raiders practiced the art of looting, 20th century style.

First, locate a profitable, productive company and buy it with borrowed money.

Then, extract as much cash as possible, as quickly as possible, from the productive enterprise:

- Slash wages.
- Eliminate benefits.
- Raid the pension fund.
- Sell off assets.
- Lay off workers.

After you have driven the company to the edge of ruin, take the money and run.

Because of this orgy of debt-driven spending, corporations paid more in interest on corporate debt during the 1980s than in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and 1970s combined—\$2.2 trillion. As Barlett and Steele point out, that amount of money could have created 7 million manufacturing jobs, each paying \$25,000 a year.

## Trickle down?

The middle class was supposed to benefit from the

business boom of the 1980s. Remember? Wealth was supposed to "trickle down."

But it did not. Millions of Americans who had once earned middle class incomes suddenly found themselves unemployed, or stuck in low-paying jobs in the service sector.

"Sure Wall Street is whizzing," observed Jim Hightower, the Texas populist. "But it's whizzing on you and me."

According to the US Census Bureau, there were 7.8 million workers in 1979 living in poverty despite working fulltime. By 1990, that figure had ballooned to 14.4 million.

But relatively speaking, that's the good news. The bad news is that, if we keep on our present course, things are going to get worse.

Much worse.

## Into the toilet

Forget about little upswings in the economy. Look at fundamental conditions that will drive the US economy for the rest of the decade.

When you do, you will discover that there are at least three fundamental reasons why the toilet is where your standard of living is headed.

The first is the globalization of the US economy.

During the 1980s, corporate fast-buck artists told us that "restructuring" was needed to make US companies more efficient and thus more competitive. They restructured all right, but efficiency isn't what happened.

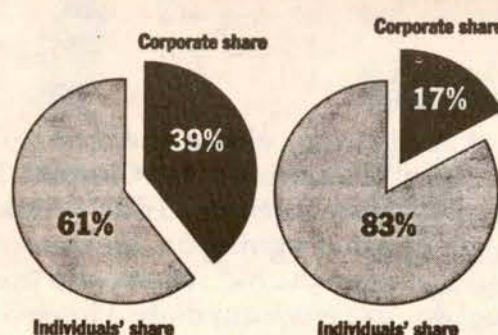
Instead, top executives grabbed huge salaries and bonuses while the grabbing was good, then bailed out in "golden parachutes" while working Americans crashed and burned.

In the 1990s, led by President Bush, the corporate crowd is now telling us that globalization of industry is what it will take to make US companies more efficient. Ratify the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), they tell us. Negotiate and ratify a new General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, they tell us. Do these things and everyone will become more prosperous.

## Corporations pay less, and individuals make up the difference

## Total U.S. income taxes collected

1950s 1980s



From the 1950s to the 1980s, taxes paid by corporations increased 264%...

...During that same period, tax payments by individuals soared 1,041%

SOURCE: Internal Revenue Service, cited in: "America What Went Wrong?" by Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele



It's trickle time, again.

But these trade agreements are not about efficiency. What the corporations are really after is greater freedom to move their production to foreign countries where labor is cheap and environmental regulations are loose.

Higher profits is the goal here. The rest is hot air.

(See "Trading Away the USA" on page 4 of this issue of Utility Reporter.)

### Deregulation

The second fundamental reason why your standard of living is heading toward the toilet is so-called deregulation.

Deregulation was supposed to make companies more efficient by removing burdensome government regulations. During the 1980s, the biggest experiments in deregulation were in trucking, the airlines, and Savings and Loans.

In the trucking and airline industries, deregulation led to cut-throat competition and corporate "restructuring", resulting in layoffs, wage losses, and the elimination of employee benefits.

Burdened by debt, trucking operators have taken safety shortcuts that put the public in jeopardy. A 1991 report by the US General Accounting Office noted that 70% of the trucks inspected by the Federal Highway Administration failed to receive a satisfactory rating for safety.

And those who fly on the nation's airlines should think about this: in 1980 the average age of the US airplane fleet was 7.5 years. Today, thanks to the economic pres-

ures imposed by deregulation, the average plane is 13.5 years old.

TWA is still flying a plane built in 1964.

But the jewel in the crown of deregulation under Reagan-Bush was the Savings and Loan industry. Taxpayers have just now begun picking up the tab for that fiasco. The final cost to you? At least \$500 billion.

Think of it this way: if you make \$20,000 to \$30,000 a year, every federal tax dollar you and *everybody else in your income bracket* pay for the next decade will, in effect, go to the Savings and Loan bailout.

Quite a chunk. But don't put your wallet away just yet. Next up for deregulation are the nation's banks and utilities.

Naturally this is being proposed in the name of "efficiency." But just in case something goes wrong, the tab will go the nation's taxpayers.

### National debt

The third fundamental reason why your standard of living is heading toward the toilet is the national debt.

As discussed above, by using one simple tax loophole (the deduction for interest payments on corporate debt), American corporations avoided paying about \$1 trillion in taxes during the 1980s. Lower tax rates for corporations and wealthy individuals during the 1980s cost the US treasury many more billions of dollars.

Because it came up short on tax revenues, the US government had to borrow money to continue operating. How much did the US gov-

ernment borrow during the 1980s?

During the last budget presided over by Jimmy Carter, the annual budget deficit came to \$74 billion. Reagan's first budget increased that annual deficit to \$120 billion. The next year the deficit spiraled to \$208 billion.

Last year's deficit, if you take away the Bush administration's Social Security accounting gimmicks, came to \$321 billion.

### Real consequences

This debt carries very real consequences for middle income taxpayers.

In 1960, \$9 out of every \$100 you paid in taxes went to paying interest on the national debt. That left \$91 to be spent on providing services.

In 1991, \$30 out of every

\$100 you paid in taxes went to paying interest on the national debt. That \$30 is not going toward roads or schools or new energy sources or technological innovation or anything else that will help you, the middle class American, or your kids.

Instead, that money is being taken out of your pocket and put in the pockets of wealthy investors, the bond buyers who loan the US government the money to keep operating.

In many cases, these are the same people who profited from the Reagan-Bush tax breaks for the rich in the first place.

### Ultimate loan-sharking

Barlett and Steele offer a graphic description of how the rich win, and how you lose:

"Think about the federal debt this way. Some years ago, your parents borrowed money from your rich uncle and now you must pay back the loan. Let's suppose that both you and your spouse work and your combined paychecks total \$600 a week.... Now, give your rich uncle \$180—or 30% of your income. Give him another \$180 next week. And every week for the rest of your life.

"And presume that when you die, your children will keep paying it. Except they will make the payments to the rich uncle's children."

Barlett and Steele call it

the "ultimate loan-sharking operation" because all the money that you are paying merely goes to paying the interest. The debt itself never goes away. You and your descendants pay forever.

It is, say Barlett and Steele, a scheme "that organized crime leaders could only dream about."

Incidentally, this is the same class of wealthy Americans that President Bush now wants to help out even more with a tax cut on capital gains, the centerpiece of his plan for economic "recovery". In fact, it's the *only* piece in his plan for economic recovery.

### What's at stake?

So what's at stake in this year's election? Money. Lots of it.

Why register? Why vote?

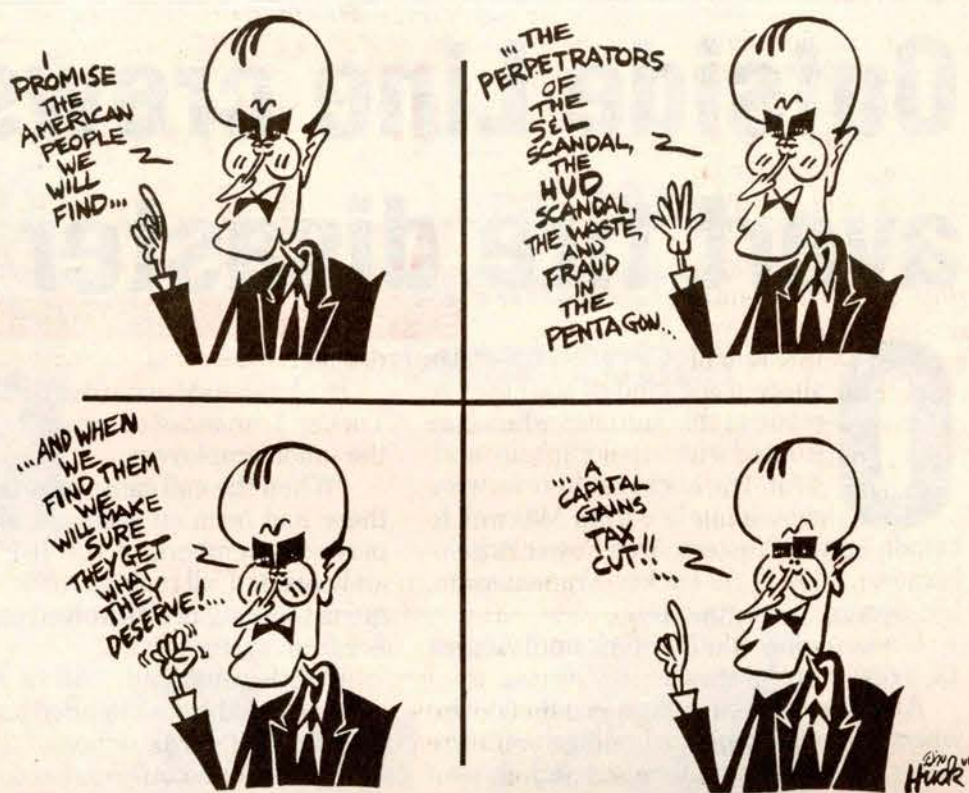
Well, maybe you're content to see a small group of rich and powerful people plunder our nation's riches and destroy the middle class.

But if you're not, maybe it's time to fight back.

And voting is the best place start.

(Third in a series on the US economy)

Want to know more? Go to your local bookstore and buy: "America: What Went Wrong?", by Pulitzer Prize winning journalists Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele. The publisher is Andrews and McMeel.



**Forget about little upswings in the economy. Look at fundamental conditions that will drive the US economy for the rest of the decade.**

**When you do, you will discover that there are at least three fundamental reasons why the toilet is where your standard of living is headed.**



# Outside Line crews avert fire disaster

**O**utside Line Construction crews showed the kind of stuff they're made of this summer when confronted with a major jobsite accident. The Local 1245 crews were rebuilding line from Maxwell to Olinda for the Western Area Power Administration, with F. A. Tucker Transmission, Inc. serving as contractor.

It was mostly routine work until August 12, a day tragedy struck.

A helicopter was pulling in a static wire when its rotor came into contact with the tower, sending the helicopter and its pilot crashing into nearby trees.

Crew members Bill Covey and Joe Johnson, who were at the other end of the pull, immediately jumped into their pickup and drove through a barbed wire fence to reach the crash site. Johnson used a fire extinguisher to put out flames surrounding the helicopter while Covey pulled the pilot, Bruce Wersel, from the wreckage and began to administer First Aid.

Meanwhile, the crash ignited a 200-acre fire that threatened to spread to nearby stands of timber.

Local 1245 Business Rep. Art Murray said alert union members, despite having no formal training in firefighting, reacted "almost instinctively" to the emergency and immediately began to cut fire lines.

Tragically, the pilot died from his injuries.

However, the courageous response by Local 1245 members to the fire helped prevent what could have been a major natural

disaster.

In a letter to Murray, Larry Wehrli of F.A. Tucker Transmission praised the efforts of the union employees.

"When the call came over the radio that there had been an accident, all of the employees, members of the IBEW, immediately reacted, all rushing to the scene... The quick thinking of all involved prevented the fire from spreading."

Wehrli continued: "All of the men involved are to be commended for their quick thinking and heroic actions."

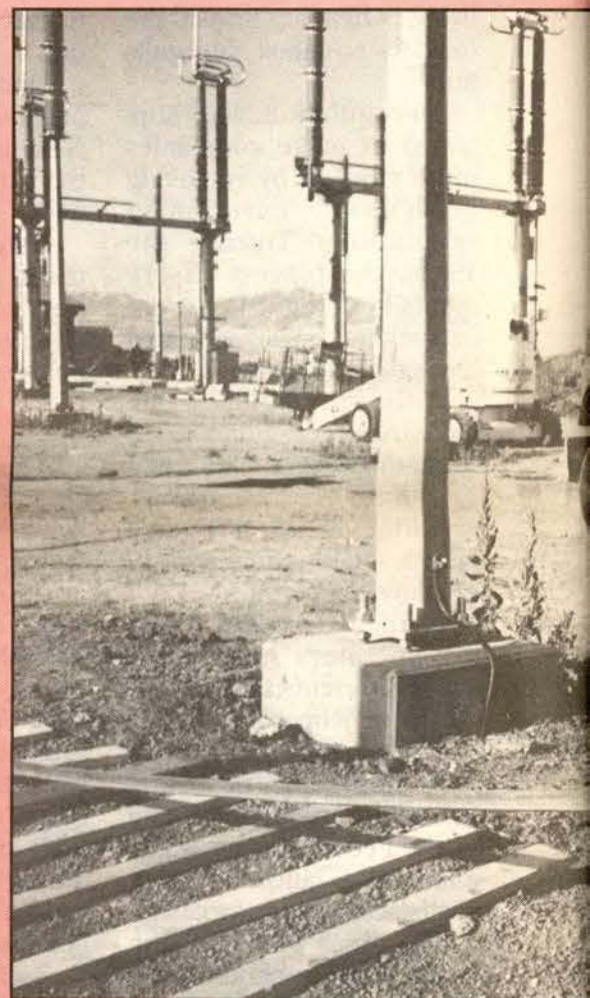
Another letter of commendation was received by the union from Thomas A. McBartlett, project superintendent for Union Power Construction Co.



Pat Howard, operating boom truck on footer crew.



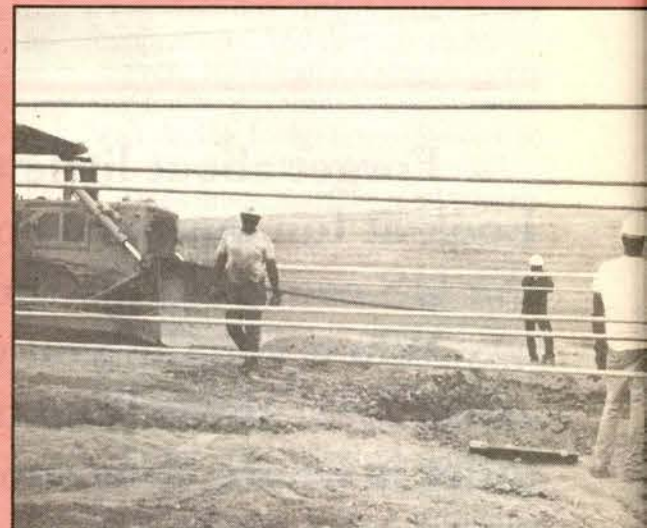
Footer crew (from left): Cliff Henexson, Raymond Alire, and Ralph Buckmaster Jr.



Al Wade (left) and Gordy Fredenburg, substation.



Working on the wire crew, pulling end (from left): Ken Anderson, Carroll Lewis, Bill Covey and David Goyer.



Working on the wire crew, tension end (from left): Crandall, Don Brown and Tom Davis.



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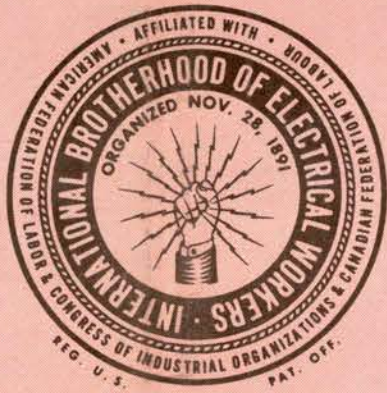
enexson, Raymond



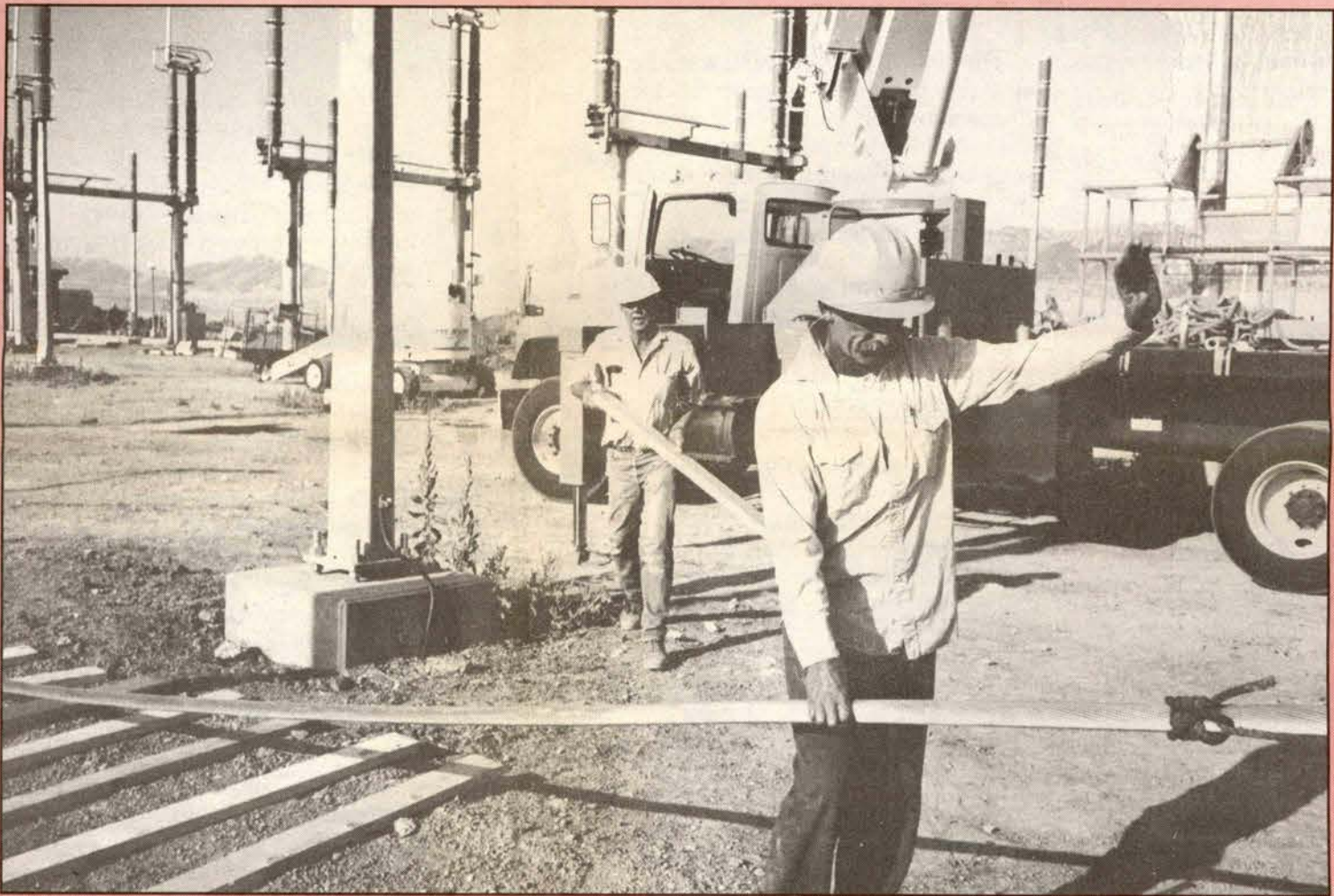
Bill Covey



Pat Howard, operating boom truck on footer crew.



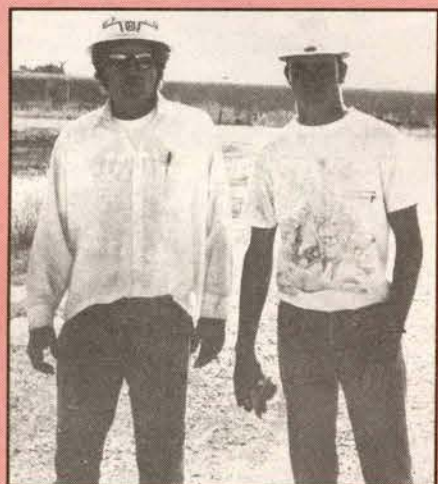
From left: Tom Heyl, Keith Barker and Mark Dennis.



Al Wade (left) and Gordy Fredenburg, substation crew.



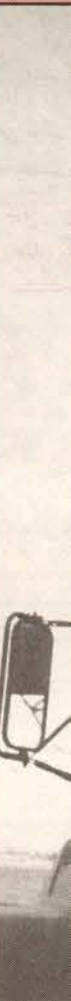
Working on the wire crew, tension end (from left): Jeff Madigan, Dan Crandall, Don Brown and Tom Davis.



Gary Nolen (left) and John Kropholler.

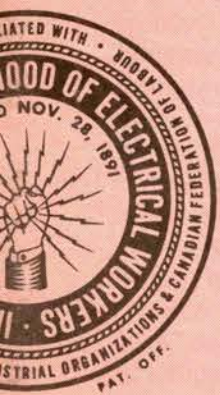


From left: Dav



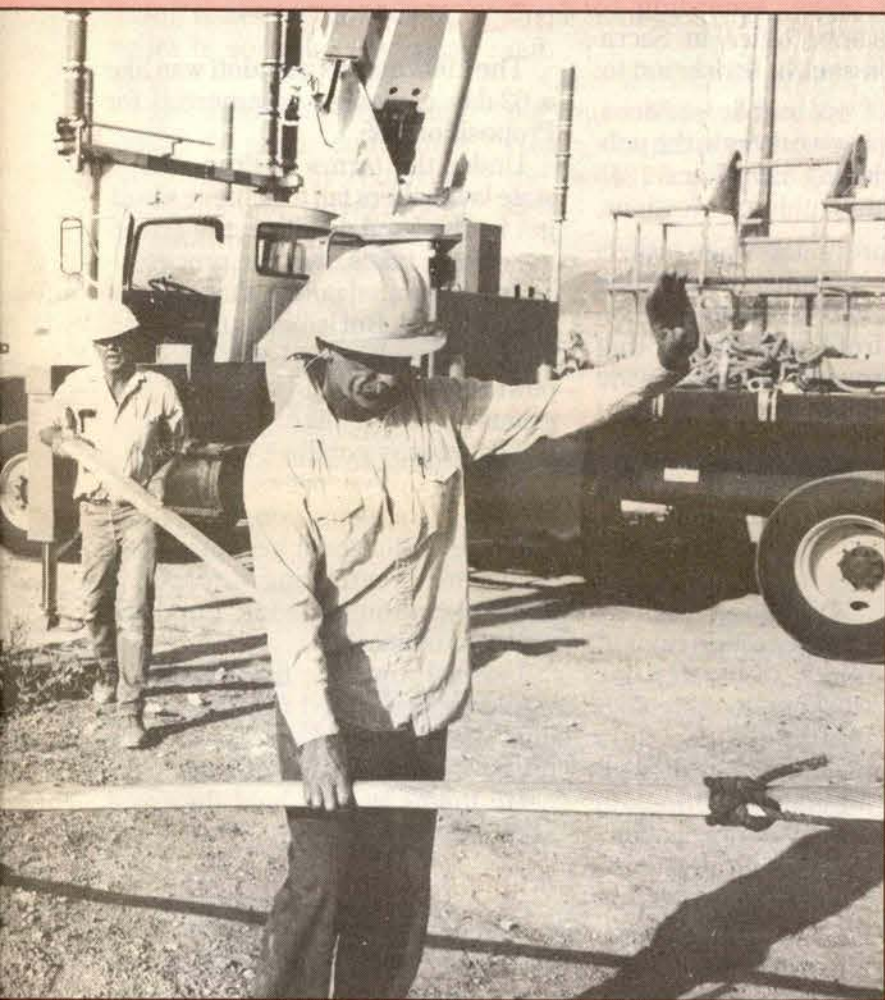
Mark D



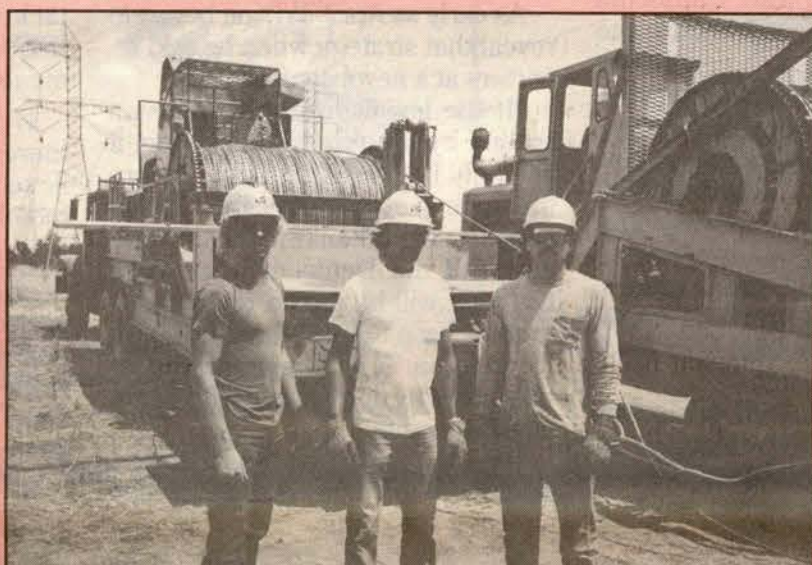


From left: Tom Heyl, Keith Barker and Mark Dennis.

## Local 1245 Outside Line Construction



on crew.



From left: David Goyer, Bill Covey and Ken Anderson.



Jeff Madigan, Dan



Gary Nolen (left) and John Kropholler.



Mark Dennis.



# The Governor Who Would Be King

**How Gov. Wilson manipulated California's budget process in a cynical attempt to grab dictatorial powers over public policy**

By Eric Wolfe

**W**hen the California budget crisis drew to its sorry conclusion on Sept. 2, weary voters were left to wonder if their state government had lost all ability to govern.

On one level, the crisis was about a state budget plagued by growing costs and shrinking tax revenues, where the primary focus of media accounts was the debate over funding levels for education.

But the 1992 budget crisis was more than an ill-advised attack on California's system of public education. It was the opening move in a naked grab for power by a governor who would be king.

The 1992 budget battle provides a chilling picture of how Gov. Wilson plans to set himself above the checks and balances of our democratic system, and what scores he intends to settle once he has ascended to the throne.

## Stoking voter frustration

Wilson came to the budget negotiations demanding huge cuts in funding for schools and community colleges. As far as he was concerned, that's where negotiations would start and where they would end.

The reality is that Wilson did not want to reach a budget agreement by the legal deadline. A budget stalemate gave Wilson an ideal opportunity to stoke voter frustration.

Wilson shrewdly calculated that the main outlet for that voter frustration would be to vote against the current members of the state senate and assembly—a majority of whom are Democrats—in this November's general election.

Because he doesn't come up for reelection himself until 1994, Wilson is insulated from the voters' wrath. So even when the Democrats gave in on most of his demands, Wilson continued to stonewall.

## Strategy revealed

This sandbagging of the Democrats during the 62-day budget stand-

off did not happen by accident. It was his strategy all along.

As early as April, Wilson began to reveal that strategy when he told reporters at a news conference:

"If the legislature fails to pass a budget by the required deadline, it will only be a matter of time before the state runs out of cash.... If that happens, then thanks to the intransigence of the Democratic majority, the state will be forced to do something it hasn't done since the Great Depression. It will begin paying its bills and meeting payroll with registered warrants."

With 3 months left to work out a solution, Wilson was already focused on fixing the blame.

On April 8, his communications director bluntly declared: "The longer it takes [to get a budget], the better case there is for electing a Republican legislature."

## Gunning for labor

Clever, eh? But that's not the half of it.

While most major newspapers focused on the battle over education, Wilson pursued another agenda behind the scenes.

He used the budget crisis to nurse his grudge against labor.

During budget negotiations, workers and their unions came under attack in four ways, according to IBEW's legislative office in Sacramento. Wilson sought legislation to:

1) Contract out public services, thereby stripping workers in the public sector—including many Local 1245 members—of their union protections.

2) Repeal prevailing wage protections on publicly-funded construction projects, in effect excluding union contractors from performing that work and throwing the door wide open to non-union and fly-by-night contractors.

3) Take away the current system of public employee retirement benefits and replace it with lower benefits.

4) Change Workers Compensation rules to make it harder for workers to establish injury claims, thus making it more difficult for injured workers to collect compensation.

Although all of these attacks were beaten back by Democrats in the legislature, they provide stark evidence of Wilson's on-going vendetta against working people.

And Proposition 165 shows how Wilson in-

tends to get the power to carry out this vendetta.

## Dictatorial powers

The 1992 budget standoff was like a 62-day campaign commercial for Proposition 165.

Under the terms of Prop. 165, if state lawmakers fail to achieve a budget by the legal deadline, the governor simply takes over the process.

To a frustrated public, that may not sound so bad. But it means the governor becomes King of California, empowered to eliminate whatever programs he doesn't like.

That means goodbye education. And goodbye prevailing wage, Workers Compensation, and public employee retirement benefits.

And hello contracting out of public services, which means goodbye union protections.

Under Prop. 165, the legislature would be prohibited from overturning Wilson's actions. In other words, the governor would hold all the cards.

He might as well hold the royal scepter.

## Frightening implications

The League of Women Voters, California State Employees Association, Congress of California Seniors, California Teachers Association, and the California Association of Highway Patrolmen have warned that Prop. 165 has "frightening" policy implications. And they are right.

Prop. 165 creates a strong incentive for the governor to *always* stonewall during budget negotiations so he can rule by fiat when talks fail.

Does this sound like good government to you? Does it sound like democracy?

When the governor possesses such sweeping powers to dictate policy, our elected legislators will, in a very real sense, be little more than democratic ornaments on the royal crown.

In this year's budget confrontation, Wilson cut \$2.2 billion in state aid to education. It was a sad day for the children of California.

If Proposition 165 passes in November, there is far worse to come.



Graphics: Lea Madison



**Proposition 165 would give the governor sweeping powers to dictate policy, turning our elected legislators into little more than democratic ornaments on the royal crown.**



## Merced Irrigation District

# Members rescue co-worker buried beneath D-4 Cat

**U**nion members at Merced Irrigation District reacted quickly when they saw the D-4 Cat fall on Bill Soito, burying him in the canal bank.

They dug. "They saw the back of his belt," said Local 1245 Business Representative Gary Mai. "That's all they could see. So they found which way his head was and started digging until they got his face clear."

Soito, an equipment operator at Merced ID and a union member since 1966, had been walking behind the D-4 Cat on top of the levee. The crew had been called out first thing in the morning to investigate a seepage problem.

When the earth gave way beneath him, Soito thought



Taking part in the rescue of Bill Soito were, from left: John Hicks, Carl Bronzini, Butch Witherell, Cliff Musick, Ed Del Dotto and John Goodson.

he was a goner.

"I really figured I was through. I didn't think I was going to make it," Soito told a reporter for the Merced Sun-Star.

It took about 10 minutes for Soito's co-workers to get his face clear by taking turns digging through several feet of wet and heavy ground.

"All I could hear was them

hollering at me to see if I were alive," Soito said.

"I kept thinking of my whole family and how great these guys were trying to get me out of there. I owe them my life; I really do."

Rescuing Soito were union members Carl Bronzini, John Hicks, Ed Del Dotto, Butch Witherell, Cliff Musick and John Goodson.

When the Cat was secured, they finished digging out Soito. He was then rushed by helicopter to Modesto Memorial Hospital.

Soito reportedly called the bumpy helicopter ride "the longest 18 minutes of my life."

But thanks to the quick response by his fellow workers, it was a ride that Soito lived to take.

## SMUD classifications modified

**R**ecent Letter Agreements between Local 1245 and the Sacramento Municipal Utility District have modified wage rates for certain classifications.

As a result of a Classification and Pay study conducted by SMUD, the regular, straight-time hourly rate of pay for Hydroelectric Operator was increased from \$20.52 to \$21.03. The increase was effective before the application of the scheduled 1992 general wage increase.

In another agreement, two

new classifications were created: Senior Tool Repairer and Lead Tool Repairer.

The Senior Tool Repairer will receive \$22.08 per hour. The Lead Tool Repairer was established as a temporary upgrade classification at a rate of \$19.88 per hour.

Another agreement created a new classification for temporary upgrade only for the Crafts Helpers at Central California Power Association steam plant (Geysers), who are required to rotate through assignments to work the Stretford system at CCPA.

## Contract helps avert layoffs in Oakland

**W**hen city and state budget writers start looking around for heads to chop, public employees will

find that a union contract is a mighty handy thing to have.

Union contract language recently prevented the City of Oakland from carrying out

threatened layoffs of Local 1245 members. Faced with revenue shortfalls, Oakland last spring announced a plan to lay off about 200 city employees, including five Local 1245 members.

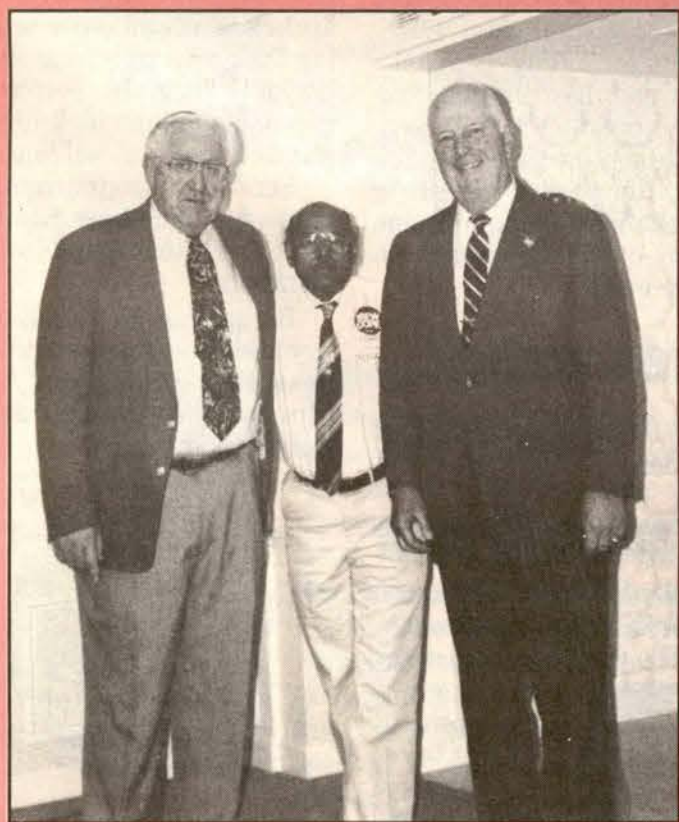
Local 1245, which represents city electricians and helpers, protested the proposed layoffs. A provision in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) prohibits layoffs or salary reductions if the city is contracting out any bargaining unit work.

The city later scaled back its plan, saying it would lay off only 125 employees, including three in the Local 1245 bargaining unit. Finally the city dropped the layoff idea altogether.

However, faced with the possible loss of state funding due to California's budget woes, the city said it planned to furlough its entire workforce for one week at year's end.

Local 1245 has grieved the decision, arguing that a furlough is simply another word for layoffs, which are prohibited by the MOU if work is being contracted out.

The union represents about 25 city employees.



DEMOCRATIC DELEGATE

Local 1245 member Nagaraja (Dada) Rao linked up with IBEW International Sec.-Treas. Jack Moore (left) and President J. J. Barry at the July Democratic National Convention in New York. Rao, a convention delegate, works at PG&E General Office in San Francisco.



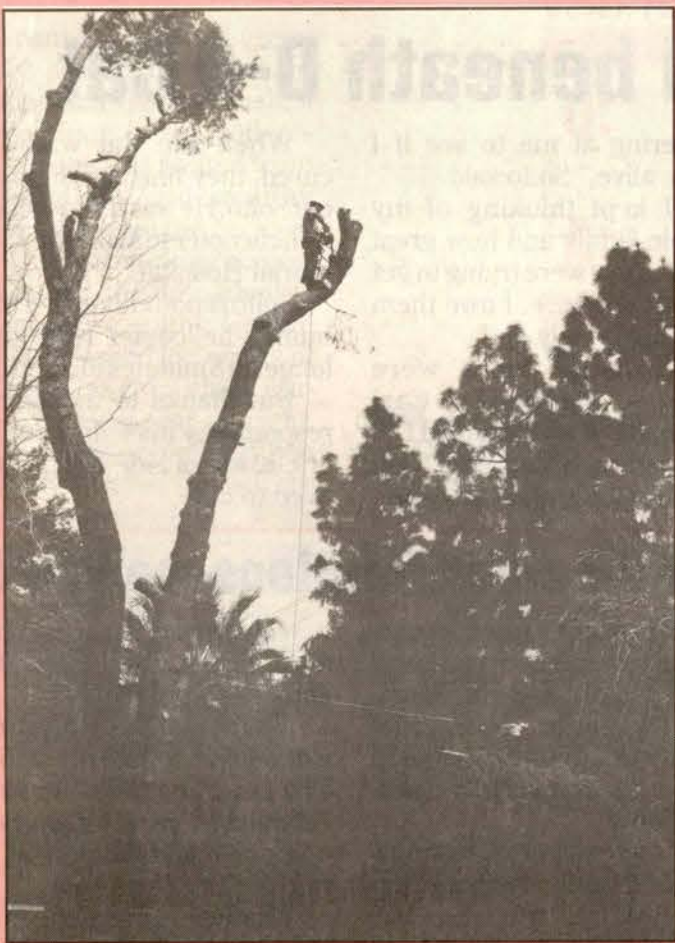
## 'Keep Us Close to Home'

One in Each Region: Keep Us Close to Home" was the message on T-shirts worn by many Local 1245 members at PG&E's Bayhill office in the Skyline Division last month.

Members were expressing their concern over a company proposal to reduce the number of telephone service centers from 31 to perhaps fewer than half a dozen.

Sporting the shirts are, standing, from left: Denise Alexander, Nora Joe, Evelyn Remidos, Terry Murray, Kathi Stephani, Nancy Connors, Steve Barros, Erlenda Gonzalez, Florence Brown, Bob Jovavich; front row, from left: Susan Tso, Steve Genis, Barbra Faen, Angie Bright, Remy Delmundo and Winnie Pon.





DAVEY TREE

Terry Dollar of Bakersfield, Ca., chunks out the main lead during a tree trimming operation for Davey Tree. Dollar was initiated into Local 1245 in 1986.

## Sonic TV

# Health benefits improved in bargaining

Local 1245 members at Sonic TV approved a new 3-year agreement that takes effect on Sept. 1.

The contract provides general wage increases of 1% in the first year, and 2% per year in the second and third years. It also provided an increase in the cap on what the company pays toward employees' medical insurance.

Currently the company will pay 90% of premiums up to a cap of \$185/month. The cap will be lifted to \$245 a month in the first year of the new contract, \$265 in the second year, and \$285 in the third year.

Meal allowances will be increased by about 50-cents per meal during each year of the contract.

According to Business Representative Mike

Haentjens, who helped negotiate the agreement, the contract also contains an anti-abrogation clause similar to the one in the PG&E contract. The Sonic agreement also provides for overtime-list posting.

Serving on the union's negotiating team, along with

Haentjens, were Scot Lawson, Dale Rogers and Jaime Tovar, with assistance from Business Representative Gary Hughes and Local 1245 staff attorney Tom Dalzell.

The contract covers 26 technicians and installers at Sonic.

## Shasta-Area PUD agreement hikes wages

Members of Local 1245 ratified a new three-year Memorandum of Understanding with the Shasta Dam Area Public Utility District to take effect July 1.

The MOU contains a 4.5% general wage increase during the first year, with cost of living adjustments on the first of July in 1993 and 1994. The agreement also provides inequity adjustments for various classifications ranging from 3% to 5%.

The agreement, which covers about 25 people, was negotiated by union mem-

bers Stephanie Tonsing and Ken Neilsen, along with Busi-

ness Representative Richard Hafner.

## Members ratify Paradise ID pact

Local 1245 members approved a new three-year agreement with Paradise Irrigation District that provides a 3% wage increase in the first year, along with hikes in the second and third years pegged to 75% of the Consumer Price Index.

The second and third year hikes carry a floor of 2.5% and a ceiling of 5%.

The pact contains new provisions for rest periods and

meals, and increases pension contributions from 9% to 10%.

The pact, covering utility workers, equipment operators, mechanics, and clerical workers, took effect July 1. Negotiating

the agreement were Jerry Lindville and Business Rep. Mickey Harrington.



Harrington

## Sacramento Regional Transit

# Union wins hikes despite budget mess

Local 1245 members preserved their benefits and won a wage increase during tough bargaining with Sacramento Regional Transit (RT).

The new agreement provides a 4% general wage increase effective in November 1992. Additional increases averaging 2% will be retroactive to March 1, 1992, but will not be paid out until November.

The unusual wage formula was worked out in response to uncertainty over the state's financial picture. The agreement was negotiated in the shadow of this summer's budget crisis in the state capitol.

At one point during negotiations, RT pleaded poverty and took all wage hikes off the table, according to union staff attorney Jane Brunner. When RT put some wages back on the table, the proposal was submitted to the union membership for a vote.

However, because the proposal contained cutbacks in medical, dental and vision benefits, union negotiators recommended a "No" vote.

Members followed the committee's advice, rejecting the proposal on a 1-108 vote.

In the second proposal, negotiators worked out the new wage formula and RT withdrew its proposed cutbacks in benefits.

In addition, RT agreed to speed up the process of providing medical benefits to new employees. Under the

old agreement, the employer picked up 70% of medical premiums during the first year, 80% during the second year, and 90% thereafter.

Under the new formula, new employees will have to wait only six months to be stepped up to 80% and another six months to be stepped up to 90%.

The agreement runs from March 1, 1992 to Feb. 28, 1993.

Serving on the union's negotiating team, along with Brunner, were Larnell Gill, Jim Watt, Kenny Doran, Michael Giannini, John Mendonca, Jr., and Local 1245 Business Representative Wayne Greer.

## Outside Line Construction

# Underground pact ratified

A new agreement for underground work in Outside Line Construction was overwhelmingly approved by members in a mail-ballot counted July 30.

The one-year contract, known formally as the Underground Systems in Streets and/or Established Easements for Utility Transmission and Distribution Systems, provides a 3.1% general wage increase. In addition, the parties agreed to develop job training and minimum qualifications for advancement.

The agreement, which takes effect Sept. 1, applies to two contractors performing underground work: Smith Dennison Construction and Southern Contractors. Engaged primarily in subdivision work, these contractors install conduits, transformers, splice boxes and secondary boxes, as well as performing their own trenching and backfill. They also perform gas installation, including plastic fusion and welding.

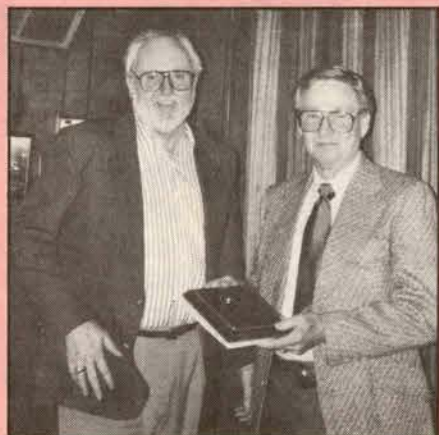
Smith Dennison currently employs 26 members. Southern Contractors employs 15 members.

Bargaining for the union were Ed Brockman and Business Representatives Art Murray, Rich Dunkin and Bobby Blair.



"If you're paying me too much, I must not be getting it all."





46 years: Art Hermal



45 years: Stan Justis



40 years: Milt Renfre



**30 years**



**25 years**



**20 years**

## Drum Division Pin Dinner honors long-time members

Members in the Drum Division were recognized for their long-time service to the union at a Pin Award ceremony on March 6. Those scheduled to be honored (but not necessarily present for the photos) were:

46 years: Art Hermal

45 years: Stan Justis

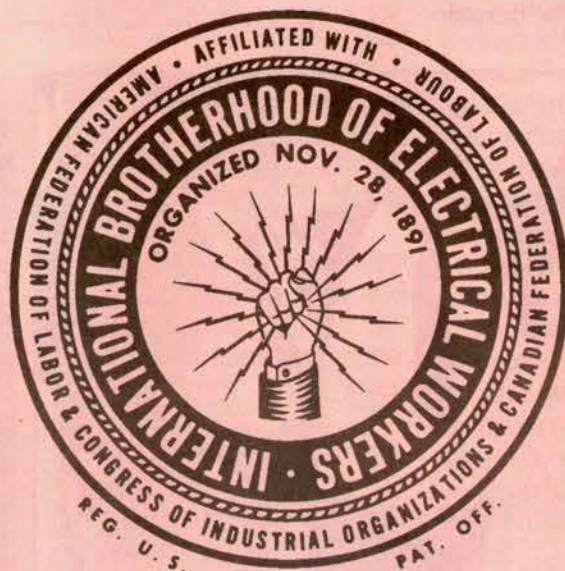
40 years: Milt Renfre

30 years: J. A. Beghetti, Robert Chunn, Bob Clay, Jim Elsie, Paul Henslee, Richard Moody, Don Short and James Whiting

25 years: Leo Starnes, Max Nevarez, Ronald Murch, Mervin McKenzie, Glendon McKague, George Hoak, John Fellman, and Gary Delbono

20 years: Darrell Woods, Paul Randall, James Paul, Gail Martin, Doanld Jacobson, Correll Hicks, Robert Fuentes, Richard Dickinson, Kenneth Casper

Photos by Ed Fortier





# Thanks, Orv!

**W**hen friends and co-workers took the microphone at the Aug. 1 party to celebrate the union career of Orville Owen, one theme ran through all of their comments: respect.

Owen, who first joined the union in 1949 while working for Sierra Pacific Power, won that respect through more than 40 years as a gas serviceman, union negotiator, Advisory Council member, union treasurer, organizer, business representative, and assistant business manager. He retired June 26.

"I will never forget his early union leadership talents and his almost reverent loyalty to his union and its members," said Ron Weakley in one of a series of tributes to Owen. Weakley, Local 1245 Business Manager from 1951 to 1971, hired Owen in 1962. Weakley noted that Owen, as a rank and file activist, had briefly taken a supervisory position at Sierra Pacific Power until an opening was made for him on the union staff.

Speculating on this attempt by Sierra Pacific to woo Owen away from the union, Weakley observed:

"Sierra Pacific found him to be an articulate, shrewd, and sometimes testy member of our union's negotiating committee and grievance committee. Orv was a massive presence at the bargain-

ing table, and I suspect that Sierra Pacific felt it better to have him on their side, rather than listening to him telling them why and where they were wrong."

Weakley went on to note that, as a union negotiator, Owen would gnaw on the stem of his ever-present pipe during bargaining "and almost bit it off when he got too fired up at the table."

However, kudos for Owen were not limited to events in the distant past. Local 1245 member Brad Merle praised Owen for his recent efforts on behalf of members at Wells REC, while Advisory Council member Jim Travis credited Owen with being the guiding spirit behind the recent victory over Asplundh Tree in last spring's strike.

Business Manager Jack McNally summed up the sentiments of all when he said that Owen was simply "a great human being."

Other union members paying tribute to Owen were Pat Gates, chair of the 1992 union election committee and

Tom Riley, president of the Local 1245 Retirees Club.

There were also words of praise from the opposition as employers stepped out of their official roles and paid tribute to the man who had fought them so vigorously across the bargaining table over the years.

Tom Robertson, director of Human Resources at Sierra Pacific Power, praised Owen's integrity as a negotiator, as did Howard Bowles, vice president and general manager of Davey Tree.

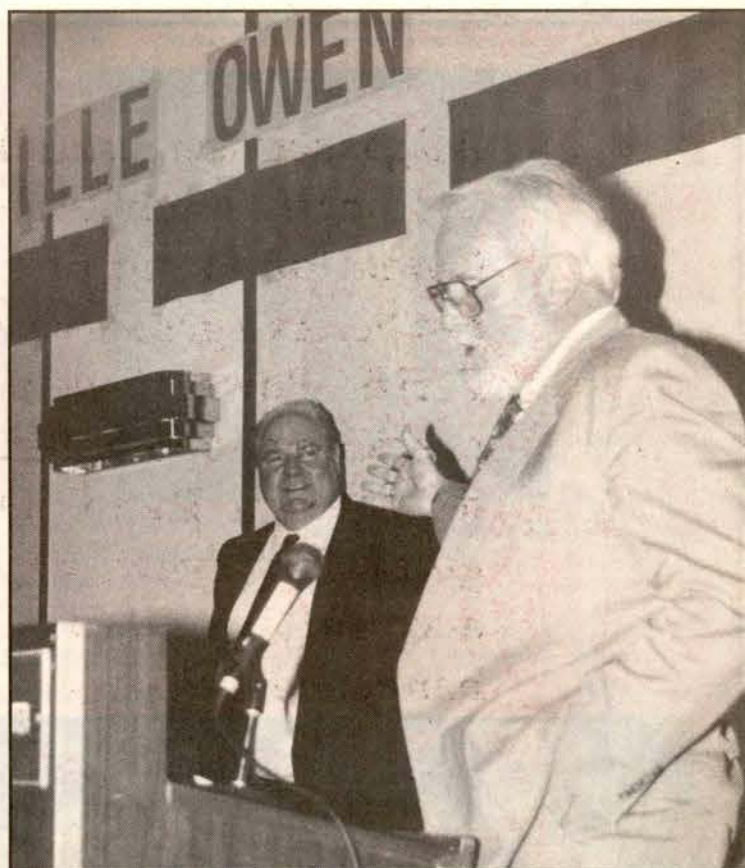
Robertson jokingly suggested that Owen was responsible for a tremendous gas explosion that leveled an entire city block in Reno in the 1950s because a pipe had been found at the scene of the accident.

Fortunately for Local 1245, Owen survived the blast (see story, next page).

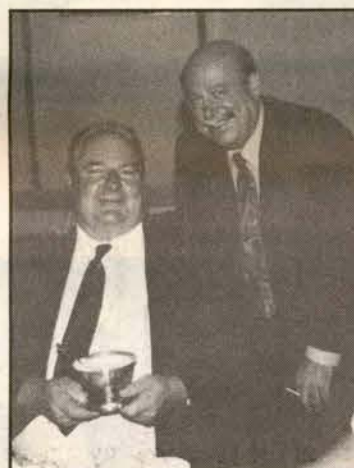
Now Owen has retired. But he hasn't faded into the sunset. He says he's already gearing up to help organize some new chapters of the Local 1245 Retirees Club.

**"Sierra Pacific found him to be an articulate, shrewd, and sometimes testy member of our union's negotiating committee and grievance committee. Orv was a massive presence at the bargaining table."**

*--Ron Weakley*



During the celebration of Orv Owen's career as a union man, Business Manager Jack McNally praised Orv as a union man and as a "great human being." (Photos: Eric Wolfe)



Among those paying tribute to Owen at the Aug. 1 celebration in Concord, Ca., was Local 1245 Senior Assistant Business Manager Darrel Mitchell, who served as Master of Ceremonies for the event.



Sierra Pacific's Tom Robertson praised Owen as a man of his word and a worthy adversary at the bargaining table.



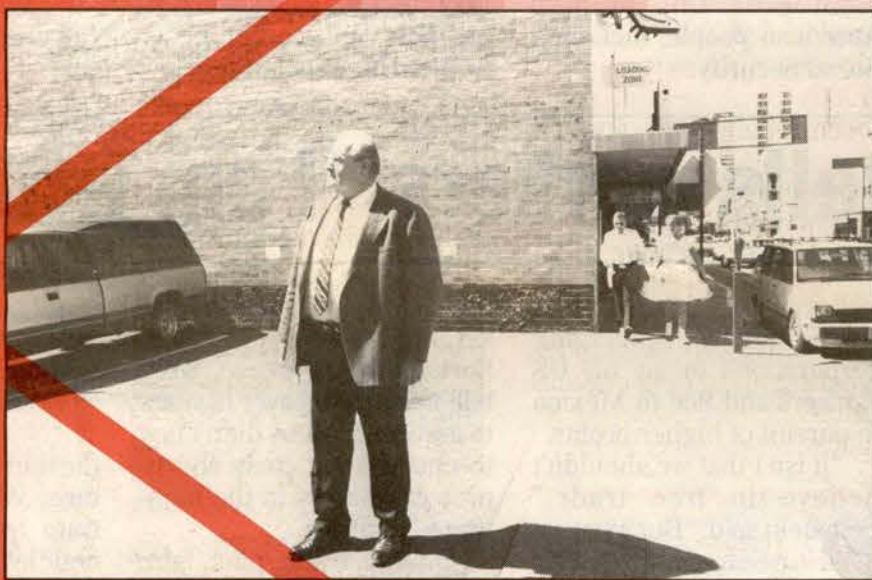
Celebrating Owen's contribution to the union are (at right, from left) Trevor Evans, a former member of the union's tree trimmer negotiating team and his wife, Advisory Council member Jim Travis, and Davey Tree General Manager Howard Bowles, himself a former member of Local 1245. At left, Owen shows his appreciation for two Local 1245 Business Managers: Ron Weakley and Jack McNally.





## EXPLOSION

All gas servicemen understand that working around gas can be dangerous. In February of 1955 Orville Owen found out just how dangerous gas can be. As a gas serviceman with Sierra Pacific Power Owen was told to check on a reported gas leak in downtown Reno. Owen gives this eyewitness account of what happened next...



Orville Owen at the present-day site of the gas explosion that leveled an entire city block in Reno 37 years ago. (Photo: Eric Wolfe)

"I got the guy to take me down into the basement. As soon as I got down there I knew I was in trouble. I said, 'We got to get out of here.' We just started to go up the stairs and it blew. And I could see a ball of fire--I can still see it just as plain today--as big as this building. And why I'm still on this earth, I'll never know. I knew I was in the air. I wasn't on firm ground. I was conscious yet I couldn't see."

there was any gas, there would be a real problem.

I really didn't know what the concentration was totally in the whole block, so I got the guy to take me down into the basement. As soon as I got down there I knew I was in trouble. I said the owner with me and I said, "We got to get out of here."

We had the block cleared. We just started to go up the stairs and it blew. And I could see a ball of fire, I can still see it just as plain today, as big as this building. And why I'm still on this earth, I'll never know. The good Lord had his arm around me. Because I could feel myself turning, you know, from the explosion.

I knew I was in the air. I wasn't on firm ground. I was conscious yet I couldn't see. I don't know if you've ever had that feeling; it's like you've been knocked out.

I came down and the next thing I knew I was buried from my hips down to my feet with bricks that had fallen in the explosion. And the owner of the store, I was laying right next to him, he was [buried too].

Before I could get free there was a second explosion. They had these irrigation channels covered with concrete under this building and there was gas accumulation there. Once the large explosion went off, it set off the other ones. And then it knocked a few more bricks down on us and then it just blew a hole, just blew out the whole back of the building.

I could see sunlight, so I was able to get him and I out of there.

The police department was there at that time. The whole block had blown up. The whole block, a city block. And the servicemen were looking for me because they knew I was in the building.

I don't know if you've ever seen a guy come out of a gas explosion, but your clothes are all ripped, my face and hands were burnt and your hair is just straight up because all you've got up in there is nothing but dirt.

And they said, "Come on, Orv, we gotta take you to the hospital."

I said, "Not until you take care of the old guy."

They didn't see the owner and then they saw him and they took him. He was in pretty bad shape. He made it, but he was an older guy and the shock of that could have taken him.

All I had was some burns. And I had sprained my ankle.

**I**t was in February of '55. I was a gas serviceman. I was on the afternoon shift. We still had the old propane air which was very fast. It's heavier than air. It will not rise, so if you have any gas leakage, it's gonna go down instead of up.

I'd received a call from our gas dispatcher saying that they had received a call, there was a gas leak, the smell of gas, downtown, at First and Sierra.

So I went down. You know, we had heard this before: "Yeah, I know it's a gas leak, oh yeah," and usually there wasn't a gas leak. But I went down and walked into the place they claimed had the odor and there was no smell of gas. There was the smell of paint. They were painting.

And then, when I went back to radio and tell them that it's all clear, they said:

"Well you better go across the street to Patterson's." It was just right across the street.

As soon as I walked in that place the gas was so thick you could chew it. So I radioed and told them to get over to the fire department:

"Send some help down here. I have to clear the whole block."

The fire department showed up and they sent one guy. I said, "You go this way and clear everybody out of these buildings and tell them to get back and I'll go this way."

In the meantime I had asked the owner of the building where the furnace was. They had an oil-fired furnace in the basement. It was in the wintertime and I was afraid that as soon as the thermostat calls for heat, that oil furnace would come on. If



## 'Invest in the US', Boxer urges

**B**arbara Boxer has a straight-forward plan for the US economy: "Invest in America."

In accepting the endorsement of the California AFL-CIO in her race for the US Senate, Boxer charged that the Reagan and Bush administrations had allowed America to decline as an economic power. She called upon working people to help her restore the American dream.

"The country is in trouble. You know it and I know it," Boxer declared.

She said the American dream "is slipping away" because the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George Bush lacked "the vision, the capacity and the compassion to lead our people."

Boxer linked America's economic problems to a failing education system.

Without adequate education, she asked, "How can we hope to compete?"

"Business people understand this. We recently asked American industrialists what we could do to help them," she said.

"I fully expected them to say, 'Lower my capital gains tax.' But they didn't. They said, 'Give us an educated workforce. We need a better-trained, better-educated workforce.'"

Boxer said, "Business gets it. Labor gets it. The only one who doesn't get it is George Bush."

While Bush claimed he wanted to be the "education president," he never lived up to his promise, according to Boxer, who called Bush a "status quo president."

Boxer called for a reduction in military spending for the defense of Europe and Asia and urged that the funds be invested in America, as Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton has proposed.

"We have to be vigilant. We need to have a plan to move from a military-based economy to a civilian-based economy," Boxer said, calling for a "capital transition fund" to assist defense-related companies in acquiring

**"We recently asked American industrialists what we could do to help them... They said, 'Give us an educated workforce. We need a better-trained, better-educated workforce.'"**

**"Business gets it. Labor gets it. The only one who doesn't get it is George Bush."**

*Barbara Boxer*

capital to keep jobs in the US.

"That's the kind of senator I'm going to be. I'm not going to throw up my hands and say there's nothing we can do."

Boxer criticized the proposed North American Free Trade Agreement, saying that such an agreement must be stopped "unless it protects

American jobs and unless it protects the environment."

Boxer's opponent in the race for the US Senate is right-wing extremist Bruce Herschenson, a sometime radio talk-show host who opposes virtually all government programs to help American people, including Social Security.



Barbara Boxer (Photo: Eric Wolfe)

"I'm a product of the American dream," Boxer told her union audience, recounting how her mother never finished high school and how

she herself obtained a free public education.

"I want to see all Americans have that chance," she said.

## Feinstein tells workers: 'I am with you'

**D**ianne Feinstein, candidate for the US Senate, got straight to the point when she addressed union members at the California AFL-CIO convention in July:

"I am with you on striker replacement."

"I am with you on family leave."

"I am with you on the North American Free Trade Agreement."

By supporting a ban on permanent replacement workers during strikes, Feinstein put herself squarely on the side of working men and women. In recent years, thousands of workers have lost their jobs to scab replacement workers, a practice that would be banned by the Workplace Fairness bill.

By supporting unpaid family leave for parents to care for a newborn or newly-adopted child, Feinstein demonstrated that she understands the importance of the parent-child relationship and the need to give parents time with their children when it is most needed.

By opposing George Bush's proposal for a North American Free Trade Agree-

ment, Feinstein showed she believes that government should not be encouraging corporations to lay off US workers and flee to Mexico in pursuit of higher profits.

"It isn't that we shouldn't believe in free trade," Feinstein said. "But what we need is free trade with a level playing field."

She said a free trade pact as proposed by Bush couldn't work in a situation where workers in a highly developed country like the US are expected to compete with workers in a country with low wages and few environmental protections.

Feinstein noted that when the European Common Market admitted low-wage Spain, Portugal and Greece, \$100 billion was spent over 12 years to assure that jobs didn't flee to cheap-labor areas and to protect workers in the high-wage countries.

Bush's trade pact, she said, contains no such safeguards for US workers.

Feinstein charged that Bush "has no program whatsoever to build our cities, improve our infrastructure, put people back to work and improve technology and teaching."

She urged a five-year plan

for investing money currently spent on the military to fund new transportation projects, schools, new technology and worker retraining.

"Now is the time to build the transportation infrastructure. We can attract bullet train technology, the magnetic levitation, the high-tech train and bus technology of the future, build it here in America, put our people back to work, and at the same time build the transportation system America needs," Feinstein said.

"That's an economic growth program I can believe in."

**President Bush "has no program whatsoever to build our cities, improve our infrastructure, put people back to work and improve technology and teaching."**

*Dianne Feinstein*



Dianne Feinstein (Photo: Eric Wolfe)