



The Maine Commons

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Warren's \$78 Million Warehouse

BY JINX

The following is a typical day in the life of a prisoner at the Maine State Prison in Warren. Although names and dates have been changed to protect the innocent (and the guilty), all of the incidences have happened, and are happening now.

I was awakened by that noise again - that unbearable static, followed by the "bugle," and then the command: "ATTENTION! COUNT TIME! MAJOR COUNT! ALL PRISONERS WILL TURN THEIR CELL LIGHTS ON, AND SIT OR STAND FOR COUNT!!!" They say there's something wrong with the intercom system - that's what the static and ear-piercing volume is all about. They claim to be in the process of fixing it. They've been claiming that for the 10 months we've been here. The volume is so high it literally hurts my ears, and causes me to cringe. In the cell blocks most of the words spoken over the system can't be understood.

My name is Jinx. It's 5:40 a.m. I'm woken up every morning at this time by that racket for the "major count." I still don't know what a minor, or any other count, is. Hang on -here comes the guard. He's staring me down, all the while rattling my door to make sure it's locked. Where was I? Oh yeah, 5:40 a.m., and although the doors won't open for breakfast for at least an hour and a half, they want me to get up. I don't understand any of this. There's a bright light on in my cell 24 hours a day. The guard has seen me all night. Why would I have to turn on the 2'x4' light fixture that has those really bright bulbs you see at the supermarket? None of the administrators want to answer that question.

I normally go back to sleep until it's closer to breakfast, but that wouldn't be smart today. They've told us that sometime today we would be moving to a vacant cell block so the contractors can come in to "do" the floors. Then we'll move back. I don't see anything wrong with the floors, at least not in this block. Besides, they've only been walked on for 10 months. Maybe the warden has a cousin in the floor business. I hear stories like that all of the time.

So here I sit, looking around at my Spartan existence. Not much in here. Some books. A typewriter and a radio are my prized pos-

WARREN: CONTINUED ON PG. 18

Maine's Anti-War Movement Heats Up



Special pull-out section on anti-war organizing in Maine: pages 11-14

Photo taken at Feb. 15 Anti-War Rally, Portland, Maine photo credit: Sky Hall

Life Without Great Northern

BY CATHERINE SCHMITT

MILLINOCKET - On a morning like this, gray and humid with approaching snow, the air should be filled with the odor of soggy pulp and ironed paper. Steam should billow from the smokestacks in a different shade of white than the clouds. But the downtown streets are quiet in Millinocket this morning. Wisps of smoke trickle from the Great Northern Paper mill, last exhalations of the magic city in the wilderness.

Since Great Northern Paper shut down its mills in East Millinocket and

Millinocket and filed for bankruptcy in January, more than 1,100 employees have been laid off. Repercussions are being felt throughout the Katahdin region and across the state. Because this is a story best told by those affected, I met with John Freeman, who worked in Great Northern's Millinocket mill for almost thirty years. John pulled up to the McDonald's in Millinocket in a red Jeep. A bumper sticker on the back reads "This family supported by Maine's working forests."

John's most recent position was as a

GNP: CONTINUED ON PG. 16

Anita

BY HEATHER BLANCHARD

The final bus stopped in front of a small, no-frills bar and store on a dirt road. I shielded my eyes against the bright Brazilian sun and looked up to where the massive encampment of Anita Garibaldi stretched across the hillside. The sheer size of it was overwhelming. Two thousand families had constructed makeshift "houses" out of scrap wood and tarps and even plastic trash bags to keep out Brazil's torrential rains.

A Story About Homelessness and Resistance in Brazil

I have to admit that at first glance, Anita didn't look all that glamorous, but she had a way of growing on me. In contrast to black plastic to keep out the rain, a white rose-bush bloomed in a dooryard. Curtains hung in the windows and children pushed each other on a homemade tree-swing. Vines climbed around rustic garden gates, and Anita Garibaldi was alive and thriving with the spirit of her people.

Anita Garibaldi is an encampment of the MTST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem

Articles in this issue of
The Maine Commons

Letters to the Editors	pg.2
Maine Commons FAQ	pg.3
Plum Creek Part 2	pg.4
BY JOSHUA LAMBERT	
Anti-Racist Organizing	pg.6
BY KATE BRENNAN	
Being Somali In Maine	pg.7
TALK BY FATUMA & ALI	
Small Story About Brazil	pg.8
BY LAURA CHILDS	
Who Loves You?	pg.9
FABLE BY HERSCHEL STERNLIEB	
Solidarity Calendar	pg.10
Peace Rally Speech	pg.11
BY CHARLOTTE ALDEBRON	
Feb. 15 Newswire Posts	pg.12
Respect Your Enemies Part 2	pg.13
BY GEORGE CAFFENTZIS	
Mainers March ...Away	pg.14
BY W.T. WHITNEY, JR.	
Katahdin Area Solidarity	pg.16
BY JACK MCKAY	
Bottom Of The Ramp	pg.17
BY NORM MELDRUM	
Letter from Bob Walters	pg.17
Prison Queen	pg.19
BY RITA DIXIT-KUBIAK	
Acrostic #267	pg.20
BY HERSCHEL STERNLIEB	
Skowhegan Textile Strike	pg.20
BY GRAHAM HALEY	
News Blurbs	pg.21
Interview with Mike Reynolds	pg.22
Dear Revolutionary Abby	pg.24

Please help keep this paper alive -- pass it on when you're done with it.

Also ... If you are a business owner in possession of a large stack you no longer want, please do not dispose of them, but be in touch with us by mail or email so we can arrange retrieval.

Teto), which means "Movement of Workers Without a Roof." The MTST is a 1990's urban offshoot of the Landless Rural Worker's Movement, or MST. The MST is not only the largest grassroots organization in the world, but its land occupations have proved a successful tool in land reform. In the Brazilian constitution, land that isn't being used for a "social function," such as providing food and/or housing, may be legally occupied and the title granted to those who would put it to use.

Our guide, Joao, led us to a large garden plot.

ANITA: CONTINUED ON PG. 8


GNP: CONTINUED FROM PG. 1

papermaker, although he's held various positions throughout the years. "I started out as a temporary position in the mill back in 1974. I was eighteen. I went in with the intent that maybe I would pursue a secondary education later on. Then I got in there and started making the big money and I stayed. And I like the area and I met my wife and we ended up having a child and we stayed here. I've been here for 29 years now. I guess I don't know if that was a good decision now or not." But John's attitude speaks otherwise. I get the feeling he'd go back to the mill right now if the gates opened up.

John is laid off and collecting unemployment. For two years John's wife, Laviana, has been working for a construction company in Portland. She travels over two hundred miles and stays with her brother during the week. There are many families that are not so fortunate. "Some of these people were the sole bread earners, and those families are really crushed. They've got mortgage payments, probably got a big car payment, maybe a camp payment, I can't even imagine how they are doing it."

Still, the shutdown was not much of a surprise. The millworkers have grown very thick-skinned over the past twenty years, as Great Northern went through a steady series of mergers, ownership changes, and temporary shut downs. "It's been like a plague for the community for so long. We were such a large size and had so many machines operating. Through the years we would lose and lose and lose... I don't think it happened over night. When the big conglomerates started coming in and purchasing, they took profits out of this community and brought them down south and invested it in their mills. We never really had too much of an investment up here in these mills. So in result, your left with older machines, outdated machines, that can't compete with the bigger machines that are out there.

"The employees always expected that this place just couldn't go on running the operation the way they were doing it. And we all could foresee this, we didn't want to believe it, but we kept saying 'My god, look at the debt.' And we kept hearing, 'Oh, the railroad's not coming in today,' or 'This company has to be cut a check before they'll bring woodchips in,' so there was speculation that maybe it had finally come to a head. When they first told us that they were shutting down, they said it was only going be for a two-week period of time. I walked out that day and I said 'This might be my last day coming in here' and sure enough it was my last day. So we've always felt that it was moving in that direction, but we just didn't want to believe that it was happening. And then a week or so later we realized that they were going through bankruptcy and that hit home, and then the fears really started coming: 'Where are we gonna go from here?' Where are you going to go, especially with just a high school education and papermaking in your back pocket?"

The amount of support for communities affected by the Great Northern shutdown has been tremendous. "It's almost unforeseeable even, how much support there has been across the state, it's been dramatic. People are helping in dramatic

ways." John also notes that there is a sense of pride among the local families, and despite the availability of assistance for food and even fuel, only some of the more than 1,100 families affected have sought assistance. This is sure to change, however, as time goes by and people are still out of work.

As with most company towns, Great Northern makes up the majority of the tax base in Millinocket and East Millinocket. Millinocket has made efforts to diversify the tax base, but other area towns are still highly dependent on the mill. There has also been discussion about consolidating schools and town services in Millinocket, East Millinocket, and Medway. This may be critical, especially for the school system. "When I graduated from high school it was a class of close to 300. If these graduating classes now hit 100 they're lucky. I think our kindergarten class now is 28 kids. There's no young kids here anymore, everybody's left. The only people that are working here are older. There's a few younger families, but very few in comparison to what it used to be in the 70s when I graduated from high school."

The future of Great Northern is still uncertain. The Governor has appointed an interim team of officials to try to find a new owner. The uncertainty has led to a feeling of limbo and uneasiness. In the meantime, John and many other former GNP employees have been visiting the KATEC career center. John says the center is helpful, and it keeps his mind focused. He's taking some computer classes and is considering a career in electronics, something he has always been interested in.

"I'm 48 years old, even if I do get a secondary education I'll be over 50 by the time I get out. You know with a high school education there's not that many opportunities out there. I feel that maybe with my involvement and my experiences in the mill outside of just my education, that I'll probably be called back. Or if I do have to reaply the chances of me getting back in are probably pretty good. Hopefully I don't have to leave the area. I've got a beautiful home here, it's bad enough my wife's had to leave. That makes it hard when we're trying to make ends meet... This is a one horse town. There's nothing else left here. If you want to live here, you've got to travel to go work."

"I would say a majority of the employees want to return to work in the mill, but I think they know in the back of their minds that not all of them are going to get called back up. I know some people that have had it, this is the last straw, some of them are just pursuing their education and they don't want to go back, they have no plans to go back. They're just fed up, they're fed up with the uncertainty. They've had enough. They just want to get on with their lives without Great Northern Paper in it."

It might be several months before a final decision is made about the mills, before people in the Millinocket area get any kind of closure. Until then, like John, they will try to imagine a life without Great Northern.

-CATHERINE SCHMITT

Solidarity with the Katahdin Area

BY JACK MCKAY

We've seen corporate greed stealing our jobs and sending them to sweatshops overseas in the shoes, apparel and assorted industries. Forget about country, no time for patriotism, we are told, this is the iron law of economics. Besides, they tell us that these industries are more suited for developing nations like Mexico or China.

Now it turns out that the most capital-intensive industry around, papermaking, also looks overseas for cheap labor costs. In a recent industry article, International Paper (IP) vice-president Richard Phillips states that "estimated labor costs per operating man-year in the United States... are 50% - 2000% higher than in competitor nations." So, the strategy of some companies with older mills, called "assets" by Phillips, is to first "harvest the asset until it becomes unprofitable" and "to make no investment in the declining asset but take the money overseas to a new location better situated to a growth market and manufacturing base with lower costs."

So some of Maine's paper companies have been "harvesting" money from plants here and taking it to low-wage, low-cost, low-regulation locations in Russia, Indonesia, Brazil, Argentina, etc.

Welcome to a new chapter in the "free trade" saga, and this tale strikes home. Millinocket and the Penobscot Valley are ground zero.

International Paper's Vice President also tells us that sometimes a few mergers and consolidations are thrown into the mix to make it all the more palatable and squeeze more money out of the "asset." Phillips describes this as "phase 4": the mill "has reached the end of its useful life and is only attractive to a new owner who may be able to reduce personnel, bargain for more contract flexibility, renegotiate wage rates, and secure tax incentives..." When Inexcon purchased the Millinocket mills in 1999, they negotiated a contract, which had \$65 million worth of concessions spread over five years. One example of the concession was workers paying \$181 a week for health insurance. The company gained tax breaks, sold hundreds of thousands of acres of the woodland and its valuable hydroelectric system.

This February in court, in front of over 50 Millinocket workers and all the media, the lawyer for the Boeing Corporation (as by far the largest creditor, the banking wing of the airplane manufacturer effectively owns the company), warned that in order for a mill to be profitable, the unions had to play a big part (read concessions) and the property tax rate would need to be cut. The lawyer even specified that the school district would need to re-arrange its priorities.

What they don't tell us is that in order to "harvest" the money and "take the money overseas", these companies need the support of the U.S. government. Our government negotiates the "free trade" deals like NAFTA, and the WTO, which provide the security needed for these companies to invest all that money and "harvest" all the new money from the "asset" now located in Mexico or China. General Motors is the largest private sector employer in Mexico and it has got the full guarantee from our government that those "assets" will be able to grow money for decades to come.

(By the way, Boeing, the largest airplane manufacturer in the world, has made the parts of its airplanes in China for many years, and was one of the strongest lobbyists for China's admittance to the WTO.)

The Greater Bangor Area Central Labor Council has joined in coalition with Food AND Medicine and PICA to educate and organize around these issues of corporate greed and governmental mismanagement, and strengthen our unions. So far, this effort has received the financial and political support of the Southern Maine and Central Maine Labor Councils, the Maine Labor Council, and District 99 of the Machinists.

This coalition is working to help re-build the Katahdin Area Labor Council with the following goals in mind:

1. Build support for politicians who support us
2. Educate the union members and the public about the benefits of union solidarity, how it helps members and how it is a great thing for our country.
3. Join with allies to educate and organize around corporate greed, corporate driven globalization along with ways to build grassroots support for governmental policies, which help the majority of Americans, not just the rich.

It is crucial for tens of thousands of workers in Maine -- and in fact for a good portion of our economy -- that we continue to have a strong manufacturing base and a strong paper industry for generations to come.

It may prove that the mills in Millinocket need tax assistance to survive, and they should have it. But we should make sure that wealthy companies aren't just "harvesting" both the mills and our tax dollars to "send the money overseas".

Further, our politicians should look at our trade policies which support (and sometimes force) U.S. manufacturing companies to move production overseas to re-import into the U.S.

The new management team lead by Jim Giffune, well respected by many, is charged