

APWSL JAPAN

APWSL-JAPAN

Aug 2000

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300Yen Vol. 10, No. 36

NEWSLETTER FROM ASIAN PACIFIC WORKERS' SOLIDARITY LINKS JAPAN

Kokuro struggle at its crisis:

Political settlement to exempt JR companies of their responsibilities

There have been some turbulent developments in the National Railways struggle since our last issue. On 21 April, 11 Japanese affiliates of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) signed a joint statement concerning the ILO recommendations for the Kokuro (Japan National Railways Workers' Union) case proposed by David Cockroft, the General Secretary of the ITF. On 18 May, Rengo signed the same joint statement. This was a significant step for the settlement of the prolonged railways workers struggle, because the plaintiff unions, Kokuro and Zendoro, were both not affiliates of Rengo. But on the other hand, moves for a political settlement were going on behind the scenes.

On 29 May, the Kokuro Executive Committee decided to approve the agreement of the four political parties on the settlement of the Kokuro case. The four parties are the three ruling coalition parties, the Liberal Democratic Party, the Komei Party and the Conservative Party, and an opposition party, the Social Democratic Party. The agreement consisted of four major points:

1 Kokuro should approve at its extraordinary general meeting that the new Japan Railways companies were not legally responsible for the dismissal of 1047 national railways workers.

2 After this decision by Kokuro, the ruling parties will ask the JR companies to start talking with Kokuro district headquarters for the rehiring of the dismissed workers.

3 The Social Democratic Party will ask Kokuro to



Members and supporters of Kokuro show placards saying NO to the four party agreement

drop all legal cases concerning this dispute.

4 The ruling parties and the Social Democratic Party will discuss the settlement money to be paid to Kokuro.

The Kokuro executive committee decided to hold its extraordinary general meeting on 1 July. Here is a report from Kuge Itaru on that meeting. Kuge is a Kokuro member and attended the meeting as an observer.

Worst outcome or starting point for new struggle?

by Kuge Itaru

An extraordinary general meeting of the Japan National Railways Workers' Union (Kokuro) was held on 1 July in Tokyo. The aim of the meeting was to approve exempting the JR companies from legal responsibilities for the dismissal of 1047 national railway workers. Two thirds of the dismissed workers were against this sudden switch of direction of their 13 years' struggle and were against holding the extraordinary meeting. So the dismissed workers and their families, together with their supporters, staged a sit-in in front of the

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meeting venue to prevent the holding of the meeting. As a result, the meeting was delayed for 5 hours and started after 6pm. After the deliberations, it became clear that conditions of the settlement such as the number of workers to be rehired by the JR companies and the amount of back-pay proposed by the four parties and the government were quite uncertain. But Miyasaka Yasuhisa, the Secretary General of Kokuro, summarized the discussion and tried to start voting on the motion. The dismissed workers and their families and other Kokuro members protested against voting by occupying the podium. This desperate action to protect the banners of the Kokuro struggle made the voting impossible and the meeting adjourned at 9 pm.

I could not get into the meeting room, so I watched the whole process of the meeting in a different room via a television screen. Wives of the dismissed workers were addressing the delegates not to give up the struggle. "You have no rights to change our lives." "The dismissed workers and the families are willing and able to fight on" "Don't discuss about excusing the JR companies, discuss how to defend and uphold the dignity of our union, Kokuro!" It is sad to admit that general meetings of Kokuro are not a place for lively debate. Decisions are made not on the floor but behind the scenes among the political caucuses. So there was no response from the delegates to these moving speeches by the dismissed workers and their family members. Everybody knew that supporters of the motion was the majority, so it was evident that the motion would be carried in a few minutes.

The drama started when the Secretary General was making his concluding remarks of the debate. The dismissed workers, their families and Kokuro members opposing the motion rushed to the podium and pushed away the safeguards protecting the podium. Dozens of the dismissed workers occupied the podium and the Secretary General and the Chair disappeared. The lights went out, but the dismissed members grabbed the microphone and appealed to the delegates one after the other. "It's better to live on without a victory than to make such a decision." "If Kokuro cannot fight on, it may acknowledge its defeat. We, the dismissed members, will fight on, so Kokuro should at least continue to support us." I was greatly moved by these words. I was at a loss what might happen and was just



Kokuro general meeting adjourned by the angry dismissed workers

gazing at the TV screen.

Suddenly the Chair came out of the wings and took the microphone and adjourned the meeting without giving the date of the reopening meeting. There was a great applause from the dismissed workers and its supporters. I also applauded in relief but I also felt that this was the worst outcome. I had believed that Kokuro would not give up fighting. But now Kokuro is on the verge of suicide. Only the desperate action of the dismissed workers stopped Kokuro from making a self-destructive decision. The major newspapers pointed out the next morning that the reopening meeting had nothing left to do but to vote on the motion.

I cannot do much but hope to raise up my voice to stop the reopening of the general meeting. The discussion of the motion should be continued among the rank and file members and the decision should be made at the annual general meeting and not at an extraordinary meeting. I am still dreaming that the worst outcome may be the starting point for a new struggle.

Kuge Itaru is a member of Kokuro and an ex-member of APWSL Japan. His report was translated by Yamasaki Seiichi, who also wrote the introduction.

Editor's note: The reopening meeting for Kokuro will be held on 26 August.

Report on the 11th AGM of APWSL Japan: APWSL Japan to support new Co-convener from Japan

by Yamasaki Seiichi

APWSL Japan was inaugurated in 1990 and has held its annual general meetings every July. So the 11th AGM was held in Osaka from 15 to 16 July.

On the first day, 23 attending members heard four reports on the major activities of the previous year. The four reports were on the following topics: 1) The tenth anniversary of the Asian Swamy case; 2) Support actions for the Chinese trainees in Fukui; 3) the seminar series in Tokyo on globalization, focusing on the messages left by Andy Banks; 4) International solidarity actions participated in by APWSL Japan members in Tokyo.

The main agenda of the AGM was to nominate Tono Haruhi as a Co-convener of the APWSL network. The meeting unanimously decided to nominate and support her as a new Co-convener. The two main activities for the 11th year of APWSL Japan will be attending the ASEM meeting in Korea this October and supporting the sub-regional coordinator, Lee Sung-Kyung, to hold

the East Asia Exchange program in Taiwan next year. The AGM also decided to start a debate on the social clause or linkage strategy issue in order to come up with a common standpoint on the issue.

The new representatives elected at the AGM are as follows;

National Facilitators: Tono Haruhi
Umatani Norichika
Co-coordinators: Watanabe Hiroshi
Niwa Michiharu

After the AGM some of the attendants met with Robert Reid, the former Co-convener of APWSL, who was visiting Japan to attend the Jubilee 2000 meeting in Okinawa. The APWSL Japan members heard his explanation for his resignation as Co-convener last year.

Yamasaki Seiichi is editor of the English newsletter and was previously coordinator of APWSL-Japan.

Observation From My Visit To Japan

by Andy Banks

Introduction

The purpose of this visit was to present three papers I had written: *Structure and Function of Labor Education in the United States*, *The Evolving Structure and Function of International Trade Secretariats*, and *The Development of International Campaign-Based Network Structures: A Case Study of the IBT and ITF World Council of UPS Unions* written with John Russo for the ILO.

I was also curious about how the Japanese labor movement had been functionally and structurally challenged by changes in the economy and the breakdown of resistance to the introduction of neo-liberal models into the Japanese economy. I was also interested in learning about an alternative model of unions – community unions –, which I had understood to be growing in number and importance.

The trip was successful on all counts (except my brief visit to a hospital to get a prescription for antibiotics.) Both RENGO and other trade union forces in Japan are looking to prepare themselves for the full onslaught of the American economic model. Relations between RENGO and the LPD government have never been worse; membership is slipping in the company-based unions that dominate the industry federation affiliates of RENGO; RENGO has developed a new Organizing Department and is actively developing with its affiliates a strategic organizing plan which includes organizing enterprises other than large companies.

Also, I discovered a vast network of trade union activists reminiscent of our own Jobs with Justice network in style and in structure. They concentrate their activities around contingent workers which in Japan means most workers in small and medium firms and an increasing number of workers in the large firms, women and immigrant workers. These activists concentrate their activities around 70 community unions who make up the National Network of Community Unions. These community unions spawn a number of projects that in turn are linked by networks; such as projects for equal rights for women, immigrant workers rights, campaigns against restructuring, and campaigns against contingent work such as part-time, temporary and fixed-term labor.

Some organizers of these community unions and contingent/women/immigrant worker networks have been persuaded by some RENGO affiliates and district offices to introduce this work in to the mainstream labor movement.

Background

In 1989, Japan's right social democratic labor center (DOMEI) and left social democratic labor center (SOHYO) merged to form RENGO. With this merger some left unions joined the communist party labor center (ZENROREN) and a small group of unions created a left of RENGO social democratic labor center (ZENROKYO) The vast majority of ZENROKYO's



Andy Banks reporting on the Battle of Seattle to an enthusiastic audience in Tokyo, May 11

members are dually affiliated to both ZENROKYO and RENGO.

ZENROKYO strategy seems to not be one of competition but built to express some union's desires to organize outside the rigid parameters of Japan's company-based unions and around issues such as globalization, rights of contingent workers, women workers and immigrant workers. Though the most visible community unions are affiliated to ZENROKYO with a membership in the tens of thousands, RENGO claims a much larger community union membership of about 156,000. This reflects how ZENROKYO's influence is greater than its numbers. Both RENGO and ZENROKYO community unions belong to the National Network of Community Unions.

It was the activists base of the community unions and ZENROKYO and the Asia Pacific Workers Solidarity Links – Japan (APWSL-Japan) that provided the organizational muscle behind the remarkable support work for the Japan segments of the Bridgestone Firestone campaign of the United Steel Workers of America and the New Otani Hotel campaign of the Hotel Employees Restaurant Employees Union campaign.

The Center for Transnational Labor Studies which hosted my visit is directed by Professor Totsuka Hideo, University of Tokyo. It is the primary source in Japan union circles of information regarding overseas issues such as new trade union strategies to confront globalization.

May 9

I attended a large meeting of about 70 officials of RENGO affiliates. The meeting was organized around the presentation of Takahashi Hitoshi, the organizing director of RENGO. Takahashi led a delegation of or-

ganizing directors of RENGO affiliates to the USA in January to study our methods of organizing. Their investigation included a half-day trip to the George Meany Center to discuss organizing education.

The report of the delegation was quite perceptive and went into great details as to the make up of US unions, organizing budget information of the AFL-CIO and qualifications of professional organizers in the US. I was asked to describe in detail the organizing processes developed by US unions. The discussion that followed was lively and positive.

May 10

I visited the Koto Community Union and the National Union of General Workers Tokyo South where I met with activists from the following organizations:

Koto Community Union
Tokyo Occupational Health and Safety Center
Japan Occupational Safety and Health Resource Center
National Union of General Workers Tokyo South
Equal Employment Opportunity Law Network
Study Group on Part Time Workers
Network on Temporary Workers
Network on Fixed Term Workers

May 11

I visited Kawasaki and interviewed the following groups:

Immigrant Workers Network
Migrant Solidarity Center
Filipino Workers Center Yokohama Archdiocese
Kanagawa City Union

In the evening, back in Tokyo my sponsor, the Asia Pacific Workers Solidarity Links- Japan, asked me to discuss the involvement of American unions in the demonstrations against the WTO in Seattle and the IMF and World Bank in Washington on April 16. The turnout of trade union activists was overflowing into the halls and demonstrates the electricity of this issue in Japan.

May 12

I visited with the organizing director and staff of RENGO where we exchanged information on the art of organizing in our respective countries. Later I met with RAILS, the RENGO-sponsored think tank and had an interesting discussion on the governance structure of Japanese corporations and new strategies in Japan on how to influence these structures with capital funds influenced or controlled by the Japanese trade union movement.

I also visited Shizouka to talk number of representatives of minority unions. These are unions that in Japan have the right to employer recognition upon the claim of even a single member. All of the minority unionists that I spoke with came from unions with only a handful of activists. They were proud of their status as minority unionists and strangely had no plans to become the majority union or even a mass-based union at their workplaces. They do mass militant demonstrations by linking together activists from minority unions in separate companies.

May 13

I spoke at a lecture sponsored by Professor Totsuka Hideo's Center for Transnational Labor Studies. I spoke about the structure and function of trade union education in the US and discovered that there are few well-developed trade union education structures in Japanese unions.

May 14

APWSL Japan sponsored a lecture by me on the topic of the structure and function of the International Trade Union Secretariats. A lively discussion followed on the possibility and necessity of reform in trade union international structures and activities. As was my experience at the earlier talk on the WTO, I was pleasantly surprised to discover how much activist and academic interest there was on this topic. Clearly, many trade unionists see the former "bubble economy" of Japan rapidly ceding turf to the "American model" of globalization and the Washington Consensus. They are eager and actively seeking global alliances to better understand and act upon the rapid changes taking place.

May 15

I met with hardcore activists from throughout Japan at this final lecture sponsored by an independent labor journal, Rodo Joho. I described the worldwide portion of the UPS campaign and strike. A very interesting discussion on the plight of contingent workers in Japan followed my presentation. As bad as the situation is in the USA, this problem is magnified even greater in Japan due principally to rigid policies by Japanese corporations to assign women workers and immigrant workers to life in a contingent worker hell.

Increasingly, with corporate downsizing, the introduction of neo-liberal models and the breakdown of Japan's promise of job security for the "salaried-man." I met also with activists of the ten-year old Japan Railroad struggle, where thousands union workers were sacked as a result of the government "privatizing" this railroad into six separate *government owned* companies. This shares many similarities with the PATCO strike in the United States.

Summary

Before this trip I never realized that Japan had such a vibrant and active base of activists unionists. I was constantly shocked by how much Japanese trade union activists knew about unions in the United states (and how little we know in the US labor movement about Japan. I made friends and comrades that I know I will work with and consult for the rest of my life.

There are very interesting signs that important elements in the powerful RENGO trade union federation are exploring possible applications of an activist and campaign model of unionism.

Andy Banks is a senior visiting faculty at the George Meany Center for Labor Studies, AFL-CIO. APWSL Japan invited him to Japan in May jointly with the Center for Transnational Labor Studies and Rodo Joho. He gave a series of lectures which sparked the interests of many Japanese workers in the American labor movement and also in the new labor strategies in the globalized economy. The following article shows one of the many repercussions of his visit to Japan.

Japanese women workers visit NY for International Women's Conference

by Sakakibara Hiromi

Andy Bank's visit to Japan had important meaning for the part-time workers' movement in Japan. We thought that the plight of part-time workers in the USA was worse than that of in Japan. The situation there is more terrible because discrimination exists not only by gender but also by race.

Banks talked about so many topics during his stay in Japan and I was very impressed by his story about the struggle of part-time workers in the USA. Especially, the struggle of the Teamsters at UPS was really fantastic. The Teamsters made careful plans; they flew over to many countries seeking solidarity and they won. I was surprised to know that many UPS workers in European countries had struck in sympathy for the American workers. I understand that the situation in Europe is much better; there is little or no discrimination between full-time workers and part-time workers.

Especially in Holland, there is a law forbidding discrimination by length of working hours. Even male specialists work part-time to fulfill their family responsibilities. So at first, the Dutch workers didn't understand why Teamsters were fighting against part-time work. Banks explained about the terrible situation in the US and they got angry and started to strike. As a result of the solidarity strike, the UPS lost 40% of its share in Europe.

Bank's presentation on the UPS struggle on May 15 was attended by many women members of community unions tackling the part-time workers' problem. Some of them were planning to visit New York to attend the UN International Women's Conference as unofficial NGOs. They asked Banks to make contact with women trade unionists in the US dealing this problem. It was pity that there was not enough time to set up a meeting in New York. But women workers delegates from Rengo had an appointment with Karen Nussbaum, director of the AFL-CIO Working Women's Department,

and other women leaders in the AFL-CIO. The delegates from the community unions were able to join the meeting. They were encouraged to hear the report of the activities of the AFL-CIO.

They found that the situation of women workers in the US was similar to that in Japan. Women's job opportunities are limited; wages are not equal to men's; many women workers are unorganized. There are few women leaders in the union because many women workers hesitate to become leaders. But women workers in the US challenged to change this situation. The AFL-CIO is spending 30% of its budget to organize, particularly among women workers. They have given chances to women members to learn how to become leaders. In 30 states, laws to achieve equal wages have been enacted. Women workers have succeeded in changing their situation.

The Japanese labor movement should learn how to actually change its situation. We must struggle together across borders.

Sakakibara Hiromi was an activist of the National Network of Community Unions and is a steering committee member of APWSL Japan.

Editor's Note: For the U.N. Conference held in New York in June 2000, a delegation of women's NGO representatives prepared in English a comprehensive report on the situation of women in Japan, including as paid workers. It is called the "Japan NGO Alternative Report: Towards the Special Session of the UN General Assembly, 'Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development, and Peace'". It was published in August 1999 and is available for 1,000 yen from the Japan NGO Report Preparatory Committee. Fax: 81-3-3407-7922; e-mail: jac@pop06.odn.ne.jp

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they were impressed yet again at the seriousness of the problem of the bases. At the Okinawa Rally that evening, the Philippine KMU delegate told the rally that they are planning a protest action at Japanese Embassy in Manila on July 20, the day of action to surround the Kadena Base. The Okinawan audience welcomed it with massive applause.

The Labour Summit attracted a lot of attention from the local press, and we were on the news every day. After the meeting, delegates commented that "it was of great significance that we held the Labour Summit in Okinawa, where the G8 is going to be held," (Taiwan CTU) "Thank you for inviting us. We wouldn't have understood the real Okinawa just by hearing about it in Hong Kong," (HKCTU) "Very fruitful exchange and discussion," (Philippines KMU) and we "hope for fraternal solidarity of the trade unions from 5 countries and regions - from joint declaration to joint action." (KCTU)

Overall, the Labour Summit achieved more than what we expected. And I feel the results will come out

in more concrete form in the future.

Neo Yamashita is General Secretary of Osaka Zenrokyo, a regional chapter of one of Japan's main national labor federations. This article was translated by Isu Naoko, one of the co-representatives of APWSL Japan and a member of the editorial committee.



Osaka Workers Organize an International Labor Summit to Parallel the G8 Summit

by Yamashita Neo

In Osaka, we have been strengthening the campaign against deregulation over the past few years. We have had rallies against the worsening of the labour standards and temporary work laws, mobilising up to 3000 workers. We participated in the national "caravan" against deregulation, and worked with small business organisations to fight as much as we could. However, despite our efforts, deregulation in the labour sector has been pushed through in one area after another.

The "Battle of Seattle" against the WTO last Autumn was a big shock to us, firstly, because of the impact of the battle. Secondly, it shocked us because we had not even thought of participating in the protest. This brought home to us that our campaign against deregulation was only based on a "one country" viewpoint, and we have not had sufficient discussion on the globalisation of economy, which is the background to deregulation.

If the objective of the G8 Okinawa Summit was in negotiating the interests of the major countries and promoting globalisation of economy and deregulation, we, as workers and trade unionists, could not just sit and watch. We have been fighting against deregulation in Japan as trade unions, we felt that we should be calling on unions in the Asia-Pacific Area, also affected by the globalisation, to share our experiences and to discuss the future of the movement. This was the idea behind the call for the "Labour Summit" even if our influence was not strong enough. Also, by hosting the Labour Summit in Okinawa, we hoped that the problem of US bases in Okinawa would be made clearer to the unions in the Asia-Pacific, in order to open the way for support and solidarity with the fight to get rid of US bases in Okinawa.

This is how we started - we sent invitations to the trade union federations in 10 different countries and regions, and organised receptions in Osaka and



Representatives from Trade Union Federations in East Asia gather to discuss the problems of deregulation and U.S. bases in Okinawa on July 1-3.

Okinawa. Despite the fact that there was only two months' notice, we had delegates from the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), Taiwan Confederation of Trade Unions (TCTU), Philippine KMU and Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU). The New Zealand TUF sent a message of solidarity. The Russian SOTSPROF delegation could not get here due to a visa problem.

On the afternoon of June 30, "The Labour Summit Conference against Deregulation in Okinawa 2000" was held with a preliminary meeting in Osaka. Each union expressed its expectations of the Labour Summit, and preliminary discussions to draw up the draft joint declaration were held. It was only a preliminary meeting but nevertheless the discussion was lively.

In the evening, we held a rally in Osaka. A big banner decorated the stage. The rally began with dynamic drumming by the Kansai Ready-mix Concrete Workers Union, followed by a thrilling guitar solo to welcome the guests. The hall was filled with over 500 workers and citizens.

On July 1, the Labour Summit moved on to Okinawa. With the participation of Okinawa Regional Office of All Japan Dockworkers Union and Okinawa High School Teachers Union, and other workers in Okinawa, a discussion was held on deregulation and the US base problem in Okinawa. In the discussion, it was reported that in all the regions, casual labour has increased sharply because of the globalisation of the economy, and it was confirmed by all the delegates that "there is a limit to struggles within one company, or in one country." This discussion was concluded in the joint declaration which was adopted on July 3.

On July 2, delegates visited the bases and had an exchange with "Life Defense Group" in Henoko, where

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Delegates from Asia line up on stage at the Labor Summit rally in Osaka on June 30, 2000.

Letters to the Editor

Japanese Standards or Double Standards?

by Syed Shahir

Well known for their "Zero Defect" campaigns and their honour in delivering high quality products Japanese multinationals exact stringent productivity demands on their overseas workers. And, as their profitability margins show, they get what they demand. When Japanese multinationals deal with overseas workers, however, they practice blatant and exploitative double standards. While insisting on the same productivity standards as in Japan, they also short-change workers on the terms and conditions in existence at home.

Take for example the most basic issue of working hours. The Labour Standards Law of Japan clearly states that an "employer shall not have a worker work more than 40 hours per week, excluding rest periods." But taking advantage of lax Malaysian labour laws, the same multinationals ensure that Malaysian workers work for 48 hours per week, effectively denying them the benefit of a 5 day work week that their Japanese counterparts enjoy for doing the same work.

In wider industrial relations with trade unions, the same double standard prevails. While the Japanese firms embrace their own company unions as members of their family and are willing to recognize and conduct amicable industrial relations, their attitude towards Malaysian trade unions is unrelentingly hostile.

In automobile parts manufacturing, for instance, Japanese companies holding stakes in nine different plants are willfully dragging their feet on according simple recognition to branches of the National Union of Transport Equipment and Allied Industries Workers. Furthermore, as the experience of our Japanese brothers has shown, the so-called "family" atmosphere of the Japanese workplace is just another ideological tool to keep workers docile in getting their due and exercising their rights.

In situations where unions have already won their recognition, Japanese multinationals take another about face by not adhering to Malaysian law,

which requires Collective Agreement negotiations to be conducted every three years. These firms also dispute the Malaysian practice of granting annual increments, as set apart from the salary revisions, brought about through triennial CA negotiations.

But back home in Japan these multinationals are well known for adhering to the time-honoured convention of granting concessions to unions during their "Shunto Offensives." At the onset of the Japanese spring, unions make demands on companies to grant concessions based on changes to the consumer price index, company performance and national economic conditions. Companies usually comply with these demands, and more importantly, are ready and willing to conduct these annual negotiations with the unions.

Finally, nowhere is the conduct of Japanese multinationals so clearly discriminatory as in the treatment of expatriate Japanese managers and technical staff in overseas plants. Drawing high salaries and an astonishing array of perks and allowances, these small number of elite staff command high-class lifestyles costing millions of ringgit -- millions, which were created by the blood and sweat of their Malaysian workers.

It is time that Japanese multinationals are made aware that their double standards and discriminatory treatment of their overseas workers are unacceptable. It violates any basic sense of equality between people, and exploits abusive working conditions that may exist in developing countries. Since Malaysian workers are making major contributions to the wealth and prosperity of Japanese firms and the Japanese economy, then they are also entitled, at the very least, to the same treatment accorded to their Japanese brothers.

Syed Shahir is an Executive Secretary of the National Union of Transport Equipment and Allied Industries Workers, Malaysia. He was elected as the regional co-ordinator for South East Asia at the Regional Co-ordinator Meeting of APWSL held in Bangkok this April.

My Impressions of the April 16 March in Washington and Beyond

by Valentina Judge

As I walked among the thousands of rally-goers in Washington DC on April 16 (A16), I was struck by the tremendous diversity of this group, particularly the large number of young people. Many in their teens and early twenties, they brought a level of energy and renewed spirit that I had not seen in a very long time.

Washington DC, as the seat of U.S. democracy, experiences numerous rallies throughout the course of each year, particularly in the spring. A16 set itself apart from the others by broadcasting a message that global social justice issues could no longer be swept aside when top political and economic leaders gathered to decide the fates of world economies. And it was a youth that has tired of the excesses of capitalism that helped force this elite group of decision makers to address poverty, debt relief and other human rights in their closed meetings that weekend in April.

The colorful combination of youth groups, labor unions, religious groups, and others also showed that we are entering into an era of increased solidarity among groups that until recently tended to labor separately toward their respective goals of social justice.

What also struck me on a more sobering note was the excessive police presence. I found it sadly ironic that in this seat of American democracy, free speech and movement were severely curtailed. For weeks the District of Columbia prepared a police state, and by the day of the main rally, 90 blocks had been closed off. While violence was at a minimum during the actions, I don't believe there was any reason to expect violence. In Washington DC, it seemed the leadership decided it was worth shutting down a significant part of the city rather than working with the different groups to find a

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way for the IMF and World Bank meetings to be more open.

I am encouraged by the activism and energy displayed by the many groups involved in A16, and it looks like this will continue. Demonstrations and rallies are planned for the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia and the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles. I anticipate renewed and strengthened activities at college campuses through such groups as the United Students Against Sweatshops. I believe too that the labor movement in the US

will continue to expand its fight for better lives for working people through continued and strengthened ties not only to the communities its members belong to but also the communities across other borders.

The work of APWSL is an important, pioneering part of this movement. I hope we can bring more of its work to the United States to inform and teach labor union and other worker activists how grassroots activism can make a difference.

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