1985

In-Plant Strategies: The Cement Workers' Experience

Tom Balanoff
In-Plant Strategies: The Cement Workers’ Experience

Abstract

[Excerpt] This article explains the basic elements of the cement workers’ experience with in-plant strategies. Those of us who have witnessed and have been involved in this struggle think other unionists should consider this strategy as a possible option in the difficult kinds of situations many unions face today.

Keywords

in-plant strategies, cement workers

This article is available in Labor Research Review: https://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/lrr/vol1/iss7/12
In-Plant Str

Cement workers in Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania.

It's 6:30 in the morning entrance of a cement pla children, retirees from th proclaiming contract dem panicky phone calls are m gone on strike.'

But at 6:50 the ceme families and supporters, I Solidarity Forever.

As this scene shows, the and maintain an industry More than 8,000 of their the country have been w the face of companies' p campaign, the cement wc Brotherhood of Boilerm contracts expired. Instead which the Boilermakers Though most cement w

* Tom Balasoff is Director of Te of Boilermakers, Ship Builders
In-Plant Strategies:

The Cement Workers' Experience

- Tom Balanoff

It's 6:30 in the morning as a diverse group of pickets circle the entrance of a cement plant. Cement workers, their spouses and children, retirees from the plant and other supporters carry signs proclaiming contract demands. Inside the administration building, panicky phone calls are made to top management, "They've finally gone on strike."

But at 6:50 the cement workers bid good morning to their families and supporters, line-up and march into the plant singing Solidarity Forever.

As this scene shows, the cement workers' effort to win a contract and maintain an industry standard is not a typical labor struggle. More than 8,000 of them in some 50 cement plants throughout the country have been without a contract since May 1, 1984. In the face of companies' preparations for an all-out union-busting campaign, the cement workers—represented by the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers—chose not to strike when their contracts expired. Instead, they've engaged in a protracted struggle which the Boilermakers call "in-plant strategies."

Though most cement workers have still not won a contract, they...
have not accepted a bad contract either. And, the local lodges are stronger and more vigorous after more than a year of struggle than they were when it began. While working without a contract goes against the best instincts of union workers and while in-plant strategies involve terrain unfamiliar to most unionists, this new strategy draws on some of the basic roots of unionism—solidarity, disciplined collective action, and unity in determination and endurance.

This article explains the basic elements of the cement workers' experience with in-plant strategies. Those of us who have witnessed and have been involved in this struggle think other unionists should consider this strategy as a possible option in the difficult kinds of situations many unions face today.

THE STRIKE AS A MANAGEMENT WEAPON

A combination of economic and political factors has rendered the strike ineffective in many situations throughout the 1980s. Chronically depressed conditions in the manufacturing sector and persistently high general unemployment have created a large reserve of unemployed workers available to replace strikers. These adverse economic conditions have transpired in a correspondingly unfavorable political climate. Ronald Reagan's prompt action to bust PATCO was a clear signal that he intended to use the influence of his administration to destroy the basic balance of power that has existed between labor and management since the end of World War II.

Reagan has advanced his as who share his views to the Although Reagan has not at NLRA (an effort that would b many changes have been interpretations of the Act. By the intent of the law, the Re basic rights to unions and v Complementing this develop and growing sophistication initial growth of union-bustin their efforts were concentrat non-union workplaces. With goals, union-busters have been assault against organized w Given the economic and p the late 1970s, it is not diffic have been successful in the case merely in marginally ( has also occurred in highly collective bargaining relat In many situations, the stri weapon in the employers' a busting a union, the strike b Union-busters commonly situations as a means toward Typically, employers set drastic cuts in wages, fringe while carefully appearing management negotiators a declare impasse because or can legally implement its ! Historically, unions will st Union-busters tell employer under these circumstance considered "economic stri "wages, hours and terms at the law "economic stri permanently replaced.

The union strike strategy who are determined to replacements. Strikers are employers can find scabs
Reagan has advanced his assault on labor by nominating people who share his views to the National Labor Relations Board. Although Reagan has not attempted to legislatively change the NLRA (an effort that would be politically difficult to accomplish), many changes have been made through administrative interpretations of the Act. By relying on technicalities instead of the intent of the law, the Reagan NLRB has successfully denied basic rights to unions and workers.

Complementing this development is the continued expansion and growing sophistication of union-busting consultants. The initial growth of union-busting firms took place in the 1970s, when their efforts were concentrated on thwarting organizing drives at non-union workplaces. With an NLRB more sympathetic to their goals, union-busters have broadened their activities to include an assault against organized workplaces.

Given the economic and political climate that has existed since the late 1970s, it is not difficult to understand why so few strikes have been successful in the last five years. This has not been the case merely in marginally organized industries; strike-breaking has also occurred in highly organized industries with long-term collective bargaining relationships.

In many situations, the strike has actually become the strongest weapon in the employers' arsenal. If an employer is intent upon busting a union, the strike becomes an integral part of this effort. Union-busters commonly advise employers to create strike situations as a means toward creating a "union-free environment."

Typically, employers set on busting their unions will propose drastic cuts in wages, fringe benefits and working conditions, and while carefully appearing to bargain, they do not. Actually, management negotiators are trying to position themselves to declare impasse because once impasse is declared the company can legally implement its final offer.

Historically, unions will strike when negotiations reach impasse. Union-busters tell employers that unions "instinctively" will strike under these circumstances. In such situations, strikers are considered "economic strikers" because they are striking over "wages, hours and terms and conditions of employment." Under the law "economic strikers cannot be fired, but they can be permanently replaced."

The union strike strategy plays right into the hands of employers who are determined to bust the union through permanent replacements. Strikers are doomed to fail in such situations if employers can find scabs with the skills necessary to run their
operation. When permanent replacements are introduced, the entire nature of a strike changes. Workers are no longer striking for better wages and conditions, or to resist concessions, but are striking for their jobs. Striking workers are defined as part of the bargaining unit for one year from the date a strike begins. After a strike has lasted one year, employers petition for decertification; as only the replacement employees can vote, the union is usually decertified, the strike is broken and the workers have lost their jobs.

Oftentimes employers set on busting the union will commit unfair labor practices, such as "surface bargaining"—where a party enters into negotiations without a sincere desire to adjust the parties' differences and to reach an agreement. If the NLRB finds management guilty of this practice, the employer cannot legally implement its final offer. More importantly, if an unfair labor practice (ULP) exists, workers can strike their employer over the practice and be protected from permanent replacement. This is one of the basic differences between economic strikers and ULP strikers. If workers strike over the charge that their employer engaged in surface bargaining and that charge is upheld by the NLRB, they cannot be permanently replaced and they are compensated for lost wages and benefits from the time management implemented its final offer. Unfortunately, under the Reagan NLRB, even the most blatant cases of surface bargaining are routinely dismissed as "hard bargaining" on the part of employers.

Within this relatively new and discouraging framework, the Boilermakers' leadership has sought to develop new strategies in collective bargaining. The historic success of strikes was based on the economic pressure they brought to bear upon companies, and the union understands the critical importance of developing other strategies that can create effective economic pressure. While the strike weapon has not been abandoned, its use is judiciously employed and only after full examination of the facts important to determine realistically its likely effectueness.

THE IN-PLANT CONCEPT

The in-plant strategy is based on the premise that organized, conscientious and disciplined workers can have a high degree of control over a workplace. Through a combination of work practice and concerted activity on-the-job, workers can wield great control over a company's ability to run a plant the way it would like it to run.

The concept of organized workers in an in-plant strategy has
introduced, the longer striking concessions, but are used as part of the strike begins. After a decertification; a union is usually actions taken by the party to adjust the law. If the NLRB finds employer cannot legally decertify a union, it will commit strikes and ULP they will be upheld by the court and they are able to unionize again. From the time a party files a complaint with the NLRB, there is a framework, the union must prove that pressure is being brought to bear on the part of the employer over the framework. The higher the level of understanding workers have of the in-plant strategy, the greater the resulting degree of unity and organization necessary to implement it. It is important that workers understand the basic concepts of the in-plant strategy: 1) The jobs they have are their jobs and the employer is trying to take them away. 2) The employer's actions will, at the very least, dramatically reduce the workers' standard of living. 3) Through unity and discipline, workers can stay in a plant and legally apply pressure from the inside. If workers do not understand who their enemy is, what their struggle is all about and the power they hold in the plant, the in-plant strategy cannot be successful.

In the plant, pressure is brought to bear on an employer through a combination of concerted activities, utilization of outside agencies, and work practices. In conducting any of these activities,
it is necessary to maintain a high level of discipline among the workforce. Regular and, sometimes, regimented acts of resistance to company actions are necessary.

Under the in-plant strategy, workers protect their rights on the job by engaging in concerted activities involving issues of hours, wages and other terms and conditions of employment. When employees work under an expired contract or a company-implemented proposal, grievance and arbitration procedures and no-strike clauses are no longer in force. Without a contract, these provisions do not exist, as they are legally defined as creations of the contract, and as such these procedures cannot be unilaterally implemented. Employers like to have definite rules for handling grievances because such rules minimize disruption of the production process. This is one of the benefits that employers receive by having a contract with their employees.

When working under employer-implemented proposals—what cement workers have come to call “imposals”—workers have to rely on their rights under the National Labor Relations Act. Section 8(d) of the NLRA states that an employer must meet at reasonable times and reasonable places and “confer in good faith with respect to hours, wages and other terms and other conditions of employment.” The law does not set specific procedures for handling disputes other than that employers must meet at reasonable times and reasonable places. The union can demand to meet at any time of the day or night with a grievance committee defined by the union. The union can demand that the company meet with a twenty-person committee; if the employer objected, then they and the union can negotiate a “reasonable” size committee.

The Union also has to rely on the provisions of the NLRA to resolve many disputes. Section 7 of the Act states “Employees shall have the right...to engage in other concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid and protection.” This means that under certain circumstances it is a legal and protected activity for a group of workers to leave their jobs in an orderly manner and to demand that their employer meet and resolve disputes. Depending on the dispute, this group of workers could expand to include an entire plant.

When engaging in concerted activities, a common concern is that if a dispute is not resolved, employers will demand that employees either return to work or leave the plant. If the employees leave the plant, the question is then raised of whether their activity protects them from replacement. If their dispute involved a unilateral change to terms and conditions by the employer (even if it conditions) it would or employees could not involved an economic an economic strike a replaced.

Generally, when un they are required to p orderly shutdown of advance notice other they are leaving the jc disputes about terms circumstances, conce night shift or in the customer.

The lesson that emp
employer (even if it is off of the company's implemented conditions) it would constitute an unfair labor practice. Striking employees could not be replaced. If the employees' dispute involved an economic issue (as defined by the law), it would be an economic strike and the employees could be permanently replaced.

Generally, when unions strike at the expiration of a contract, they are required to provide advance notice that there will be an orderly shutdown of work. Concerted activities involve no advance notice other than workers informing their foreman that they are leaving the job to meet and confer with management on disputes about terms and conditions of employment. Given the circumstances, concerted activities can occur in the middle of a night shift or in the middle of filling a rush order from a prime customer.

The lesson that employers are taught is that they have an interest

NEW VERSES FOR SOLIDARITY

Solidarity Forever is a familiar song in cement plants around the country now. One cement family—Paul and Elizabeth Vance and their 14-year-old daughter Lisa, of Bernalillo, New Mexico—composed some new verses to the old song to reflect their struggle.

We have asked for nothing more than that to us is fair.
Our safety is of no concern, only of production do they care.
They refuse to meet with us and this is quite unfair.
Yes the company is unfair.

(Chorus)

They want to take away all the rights we have gained.
They seem to think that we are playing some stupid game.
We will keep our course until our dignity we have gained.
For the families we do fight.

Solidarity forever!
Solidarity forever!
Solidarity forever!
For the union makes us strong.
in having a contract. Through a contract, employers can have regular and orderly procedures for handling disputes; without a contract, unions have to rely on every legal means available to protect and promote the interests of their members.

Another in-plant activity involves the increased utilization of federal and state agencies to police conditions in the plant. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (or the Mine Safety and Health Administration, as the case may be), the Environmental Protection Agency and many state agencies regulate safety and health conditions in plants. Workers must be educated about their rights under the law and taught to recognize hazards in the workplace. The union's safety and health activities must be expanded from the safety committee to include every worker in the plant. Workers must constantly police their workplaces and raise all safety and health hazards and violations with management. If management fails to correct the problems, the union should immediately contact the appropriate federal or state agency. Furthermore, workers should question the contents of all materials they work with and demand from the company documentation that they are not toxic.

The in-plant strategy over the long haul has a definite impact on the psychology of both workers and managers. A successful in-plant campaign should build a sense of "movement" and "cause" among workers. Managers, however, tend to develop a sense of insecurity and impotence in dealing with the in-plant activities. This sense is often aggravated by demands from higher level management to plant foremen to "take control of the situation."

To implement a successful in-plant campaign requires a dramatic restructuring of local unions and the way they function in the plant. It is critical to understand that an in-plant strategy will require a protracted effort. One or two months of in-plant activities will probably not convince an employer that it is in his best interest to reach an equitable agreement with his employees. Unions must be able to sustain the in-plant program for an extended period of time until employers are convinced that the union is neither fleeing from nor submitting to their unfair treatment.

One of the most successful in-plant campaigns was conducted by the United Autoworkers at Moog Automotive in St. Louis. It took six months before the employer realized it could not overcome the in-plant strategy. In that case, the UAW was able to turn a concession bargaining situation into an agreement that contained major wage and benefit improvements. The Moog case demonstrates that the in-plant strategy can be successful, at least
The International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, building on the experience of the Moog workers, introduced the in-plant strategy on July 1, 1984, in over 50 cement manufacturing plants throughout the country. To my knowledge this is the first effort to apply this strategy on a multi-plant, multi-company basis. The following details the experience of the cement workers in applying the in-plant strategy, known in the union as the Solidarity and Unity Program.

THE CEMENT WORKERS' EXPERIENCE

The Union and the Industry

On April 1, 1984, the United Cement, Lime, Gypsum and Allied Workers International Union (CLGAW) merged with the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers & Helpers, becoming a division of the Brotherhood. The CLGAW was born in the great campaigns to organize industrial workers in the 1930's. An industrial union organized by the AFL, the CLGAW's jurisdiction rested primarily on organizing workers involved in the production of building materials. The major group of organized workers in the CLGAW were, and remain, cement manufacturing workers. For most of its history, the CLGAW functioned well as a small but strong international union, based primarily on the fact that they represented 90% of the workers in a basic industry—cement manufacturing.

The union was able to achieve contracts that could be ranked among the best for industrial workers. Wages and COLA on a single plant basis. The International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, building on the experience of the Moog workers, introduced the in-plant strategy on July 1, 1984, in over 50 cement manufacturing plants throughout the country. To my knowledge this is the first effort to apply this strategy on a multi-plant, multi-company basis. The following details the experience of the cement workers in applying the in-plant strategy, known in the union as the Solidarity and Unity Program.

THE CEMENT WORKERS' EXPERIENCE

The Union and the Industry

On April 1, 1984, the United Cement, Lime, Gypsum and Allied Workers International Union (CLGAW) merged with the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers & Helpers, becoming a division of the Brotherhood. The CLGAW was born in the great campaigns to organize industrial workers in the 1930's. An industrial union organized by the AFL, the CLGAW’s jurisdiction rested primarily on organizing workers involved in the production of building materials. The major group of organized workers in the CLGAW were, and remain, cement manufacturing workers. For most of its history, the CLGAW functioned well as a small but strong international union, based primarily on the fact that they represented 90% of the workers in a basic industry—cement manufacturing.

The merger between CLGAW and the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers was the result of a realization by both unions that combining resources would yield better services to both unions’ membership. A major factor prompting this merger as in most union mergers was a recognition of the impact that adverse economic and political conditions have had upon the labor movement in recent years. The CLGAW steadily lost membership over the last twenty years as a result of automation in the 1960s and early 1970s and plant closures in the late 1970s. The recession of 1981/82 took a heavy toll on CLGAW membership; some cement plants did not survive, and few have completely recovered from the effect the recession had on the building material industries.

The collective bargaining history of the Cement Workers is very similar to that of many unions in basic industries. Through pattern bargaining, similar to bargaining in the auto and rubber industries, cement workers were able to achieve contracts that could be ranked among the best for industrial workers. Wages and COLA
provisions have historically kept cement workers' earnings at levels comparable to the Autoworkers and Steelworkers. They enjoyed such long-term fringe benefits as "30-and-out" pension provisions and supplemental unemployment benefits. Cement contracts have also contained strong language to protect workplace rights. For example, cement contracts have for years contained provisions that allowed workers to refuse work they believe to be dangerous.

The CLGAW was different from other industrial unions in that many of the contract gains came about with relatively little industrial strife. The last nationwide strike in the cement industry was in 1958, when the CLGAW put its basic program of pattern bargaining into place. Since that time, there have been a few company and regional strikes when companies tried to break from the pattern, but the cement workers have never had the number or severity of strikes endured by other unions in basic industries.

While pattern bargaining and an historically small number of strikes have benefited the cement worker, they have also benefited the cement industry. Standardization of wages freed individual cement companies from the threat of other cement companies gaining a competitive advantage on labor costs. The rarity of strikes also contributed to a cooperative relationship between labor and management, which facilitated the resolution of problems of mutual concern within the industry.

The cement industry is one of the few industries which underwent major automation changes without major confrontations with its labor force. Cement employment declined from 37,100 in 1956 to 20,400 in 1983. The impact that automation had on the labor force was minimized by strong contract language protecting jobs and wage rates. Most of the labor force reductions due to the automation were the result of attrition.

The cement industry is not a labor intensive industry. Depending upon the scale of operation, 100 to 150 workers can operate a cement plant on a 24-hour continuous basis. Historically productivity levels have steadily increased, and thus unit labor costs have declined. In 1983, the year before the cement industry began its assault on the cement workers union, cement workers recorded their highest level of productivity.

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s a number of factors had an adverse impact on the cement industry. With 40 to 45% of production costs attributable to energy, skyrocketing energy costs during the 1970's caused fiscal problems for many cement companies. Furthermore, as cement is also a capital-intensive industry, the persistently high interest rates of the last 10 years placed many cement companies in a difficult financial position. Since the late 1970's cement consumption has tripled since 1982 and the cost of cement has increased significantly.

To address problems of cost containment, cement companies began to restructure their businesses. A number of companies merged with larger companies, while others sold off their cement manufacturing operations. This resulted in the loss of millions of dollars in cement manufacturing capacity and the loss of thousands of jobs. Despite such efforts, changes in the competitive environment continue to pose a threat to the cement industry. Cement companies must continue to find ways to reduce costs and increase productivity in order to remain competitive.
Cement Workers' Experience

Dr. Bechtholdt's earnings at workers. They end-out" pension pro-
hibit. Cement con-
formability or years contained to
rial unions in that the cement industry program of pattern
have been a few tried to break from er had the number in basic industries.
y small number of have also benefited is freed individual cement companies. The rarity of strikes between labor and in of problems of industries which without major ployment declined set that automation contract language or force reductions ition. industry. Depending ers can operate a basis. Historically ad thus unit labor e cement industry s, cement workers
ber of factors had Vith 40 to 45% of setting energy costs or many cement s capital-intensive f the last 10 years placed many cement companies under additional financial pressure. Since the late 1970s, these developments were coupled with an expanding market of imported cement. Imports have tripled since 1982 and now represent 10% of U.S. cement consumption.

To address problems such as these, the CLGAW entered into a number of cooperative efforts with the cement industry. The union worked with cement companies on alternative energy programs; utilized extensive resources in seeking a legislative remedy to the cement import problem; and initiated a program of cost containment to address the rising cost of medical care.

Despite such efforts, mounting economic pressures forced major changes in the composition of the industry's ownership. Over the last ten years, cement has been transformed from an industry predominantly owned by companies whose primary business was cement manufacturing to an industry controlled by multinational (often European) cement companies and large conglomerates with diverse business interests. This transformation occurred as the capital needs of the industry increased. Most cement companies lost millions of dollars in the depressed cement markets of 1982, 1983 and 1984. Only companies with substantial capital reserves could weather the financial pressures of the last few years.
The 1984 Negotiations

On May 1, 1984—just a month after the union merger—all of the CLGAW contracts in the domestic cement industry expired. The cement workers approached the 1984 cement negotiations with the understanding that management would be demanding substantial concessions. The union was committed to resisting concessions, but in the initial stage of negotiations it became evident that the cement industry had higher priorities on their agenda than mere contract concessions.

While demanding major wage and benefit concessions and contract language revisions, cement companies throughout the country made it clear that they intended to negotiate agreements suited to their individual operations. No longer would they follow a pattern. The presence of known union busting consultants and attorneys gave a clear indication that at least some companies intended not just to break pattern bargaining, but also to break the union.

The union selected Lone Star Cement as the company with which they would try to reach a pattern settlement. Lone Star, the largest producer, participated in most cement markets in the country, and it had set the pattern for the previous two contracts. Furthermore, while Lone Star had indicated they needed labor cost relief, they had not assumed the strong anti-union posture adopted by other cement companies.

The union was able to negotiate a settlement covering 12 Lone Star Cement plants. The contract contained wage and COLA increases that protected cement workers' earning power, major improvements in pensions, and minor improvements in SUB benefits. Major concessions were given in insurance and worker transfer provisions, and minor concessions were given in holidays and vacations. From the union's standpoint, the Lone Star settlement provided some relief to the company while maintaining workers' earnings, basic benefits and most work practices.

In early May 1984, shortly after the Lone Star settlement, the cement workers concentrated their efforts on Lehigh Cement, the third largest producer. Lehigh, which is owned by a West German company, resisted the union's effort to negotiate to the Lone Star pattern. They insisted that they needed a two-tier wage scale and complete control to subcontract any work they deemed necessary.

The union relied on its traditional strategy and struck Lehigh Cement, shutting down 10 plants across the nation. The union had hoped that striking Lehigh Cement while its competitors continued to work would bring pressure on the company to settle on the pattern. In the few more months the union was able to negotiate agreements, covering companies, covenants.

At the end of the negotiations Lehigh was ready to settle at Lehigh to work. This model of fair deals could not be sustained. The employer's impulsive proceeding confirmed our expectations.

By early July a position where there were no more companies without contracts proposals. The strike continued, but the union's efforts to bust the union's alternativered the union being destitute of continual pressure.

Thus, the cement industry's behavior logically sound, in the context of cement workers' efforts to bust the union, is called "the Solid Rock". The union's alternativereplaced the union being destitute of continual pressure.

In implementing the union's alternativestringers to the company to settle

1. The membership is a key factor.
2. The company's position is divided.
3. The company's proposals are divided.
4. Workers have a strong bargaining position.
the union merger—all of cement industry expired. 1984 cement negotiations would be demanding as committed to resisting if negotiations it became higher priorities on their benefit concessions and companies throughout the d to negotiate agreements longer would they follow in brainstorming consultants and at least some companies gaining, but also to break nt as the company with the settlement. Lone Star, the cement markets in the previous two contracts. licated they needed labor strong anti-union posture tement covering 12 Lone stained wage and COLA rs' earning power, major improvements in SUB in insurance and worker sm were given in holidays joint, the Lone Star settle- omen while maintaining most work practices. Lone Star settlement, the ots on Lehigh Cement, the owned by a West German negotiate to the Lone Star a two-tier wage scale and the they deemed necessary. ategy and struck Lehigh the nation. The union int while its competitors e on the company to settle on the pattern.

In the few months that followed the Lone Star settlement, the union was able to reach a pattern settlement with 10 other cement companies, covering a total of 25 plants (Lone Star included).

At the end of the fourth week of the Lehigh strike, fearing that Lehigh was ready to hire permanent replacements, the ten local lodges at Lehigh cement made an unconditional offer to return to work. This meant they were returning to work under the employer’s implemented proposal. Later testimony in an NLRB proceeding confirmed the union’s fear, as Lehigh Cement had in fact secretly placed newspaper ads to hire permanent replacements.

By early July 1984, the cement workers found themselves in a position where 70% of their cement lodges were working without contracts, in several cases under company implemented proposals. The strike had become a weapon of employers anxious to have their employees strike so they could be replaced. The union’s alternatives were to strike and risk the possibility of the union being destroyed, or to remain in the plants and apply continual pressure until the employers agreed to an equitable settlement.

Thus, the cement workers adopted the slightly tested, but logically sound, in-plant strategy of the International Brotherhood of boilermakers. The goal of the cement in-plant strategy, which is called “the Solidarity and Unity Program,” is to resist companies’ efforts to bust the union, to hold the line on concessions, and most importantly, maintain pattern bargaining and standardization of labor costs.

**Solidarity and Unity Program**

In implementing the Solidarity and Unity Program, the union leadership recognized that major educational efforts were necessary to gain membership acceptance. Through a combination of group and total membership meetings, representatives conducted education programs emphasizing the following points:

1. The member’s job (and its terms and conditions) is a key factor in all aspects of his or her life.
2. The company is unjustly attacking that job and is trying to provoke a strike to accomplish this end.
3. The company feels its attack will be successful because the union and its members are weak and divided.
4. Workers have the power through concerted activity to protect the terms and conditions of their jobs. The
union is what gives them this power and they are the union.

5. Nothing has been given to workers. Our history shows us that we've had to fight for whatever gains we've made.

This program redirected the membership's perspectives on their struggle and built commitment to the Solidarity and Unity Program. Building commitment to fighting the companies' efforts was relatively easy in light of the extensive contract concessions most companies were proposing. Building commitment to the union was also not difficult, as the companies' actions added strength to an already strong union membership. Building commitment for the in-plant strategy was not as easy for two reasons. First, workers' natural instincts when attacked by their employer is to strike. An in-plant strategy requires that workers not make emotional decisions, but try rather to out-think the employer. The second problem is in convincing workers that they do have power in the plant. Involvement in their first protected concerted activity helped workers overcome feelings of powerlessness many initially had about the strategy.

The cement workers recognized that applying the in-plant strategy at the local level required certain departures from normal procedure. Lodges were encouraged to expand their traditional bargaining committees to include broader representation from the plant. The cement workers, as did the autoworkers at Moog, refer to these committees as Solidarity Committees. The Solidarity Committees are useful in creating a good communication system throughout the plant. More importantly, they are a way to build and expand local leadership by involving more people in the functions of the local and in addressing disputes with the employer. The Solidarity Committee is also useful in insulating local lodge leaders from employer discrimination.

As the Solidarity Program becomes effective in a plant, management often counters with discharge and discipline of members and local leaders. Union representatives made local lodge members aware of this possibility right from the start. Thus, when employers did discharge people, the intimidation value was limited. Most cement lodges set up "Solidarity Funds" to assist discharged members, paying them "victimization benefits." Weekly contributions to these funds generally have run between $5 and $10 per worker per week. These contributions are voluntary, but few cement lodges have less than 100% participation.

Cement lodges were also encouraged to set up local lodge newsletters as a means of increasing communication to the membership. Since the number of local lodge issuing a two to three page local lodge level can be employer in an effort by the local. Newsletters be an effective means

_Buildin_

In attempting to organize concerts, group discipline activities that helped demonstrated to the the local. Newsletters to the union.

When the Solidarity cement lodges held a a shift began, all workers of inspiration from the march into the plant er rallie were held in the the workers singing a short rally in the wa masse singing Solidar.

The song became a Program. As many g proven, song can provi
Making Believe

One cement lodge designated a couple of days to play "Let's make believe we have a contract." On those days cement workers cooperate 100%, work the overtime requested and very graciously greet the supervisors. By this action the local can show the company how nice it would be to have a contract and at the same time let the company know the Solidarity and Unity program is in effect and working.

Building Local Lodge Discipline

In attempting to organize any group of individuals to act in concert, group discipline is key. The union promoted various activities that helped build discipline and at the same time demonstrated to the employer workers' unity and commitment to the union.

When the Solidarity and Unity Program was first initiated, many cement lodges held a series of daily rallies. Thirty minutes before a shift began, all workers on that shift would meet for a few words of inspiration from the Solidarity Committee and would then march into the plant en masse singing Solidarity Forever. At lunch, rallies were held in the plant and again would be concluded with the workers singing Solidarity Forever. The day would end with a short rally in the washhouse and workers leaving the plant en masse singing Solidarity Forever.

The song became an integral part of the Solidarity and Unity Program. As many great social and political movements have proven, song can provide real inspiration. The words to Solidarity...
Forever definitely brought inspiration to cement workers—so much so that one union family wrote four new verses specific to the cement workers’ struggle. A hundred seasoned industrial workers singing any song constitutes an impressive display of determination. It is not uncommon for cement workers to spontaneously begin singing or whistling Solidarity Forever on the job. Once while workers at a California plant were singing Solidarity Forever in the lunch room, customers in an adjoining room complimented the employer for promoting an employees’ choir.

Resistance to management’s efforts to destroy their contract was also expressed through workers’ attire. Some local lodges had Solidarity T-shirts designed which their members would wear regularly in the plant; often the entire membership wore their T-shirts on the same day. The International also supplied buttons and stickers to be worn on hard hats. Slogans on the stickers included “We Are Here to Stay,” “Lone Star or Better” and an X through “Union-Free Environment.”

Local lodges have regularly conducted roadside rallies outside the plant gate, frequently followed by informational picketing. When the rallies and picketing began before the shift started, the employers often believed the workers were striking. Under implemented proposals, no-strike provisions do not exist and workers can strike at any time.

Informational picketing proved an excellent means of involving the workers’ families in the Solidarity and Unity Program. It is not uncommon for the spouses and children of cement workers to picket the plant while their family members are inside working. The informational picket also effectively lets all those who do business with the employer (truck drivers, salespeople, and customers) know what the company is attempting to do to its employees. Many retirees have also joined in informational picketing.

Besides involving families and retirees in their struggle, the cement workers have used marches and rallies to involve other unions and the local community. Since most cement plants are located in rural communities and small towns, a union march often constitutes a major event and may be the only such activity many of these communities have ever experienced.

The cement workers have expressed their resistance in other non-work situations as well. Company Christmas parties, safety-award banquets, retirement dinners and other social functions have been cancelled because workers routinely boycott them. In some instances, local lodges have run counter-parties.
ment workers—so verses specific to seasoned industrial resive display of ment workers to icy Forever on the ant were singing ers in an adjoining ing an employees'

their contract was lodges had ers would wear ership wore their so supplied buttons ns on the stickers Better and an X

side rallies outside national picketing. e shift started, the striking. Under do not exist and

means of involving ity Program. It is cement workers are inside working. all those who do salespeople, and npting to do to its in informational

their struggle, the es to involve other cement plants are union march often such activity many

resistance in other Christmas parties, and other social s routinely boycott un counter-parties.

One local lodge collected all of the Christmas cards the president of the company sent employees and returned them, stating they would have a "Merry Christmas" when they had a just and equitable contract. At another plant, not a single worker attended a fully catered Christmas party set up in the plant and on company time.

Employers have attempted to hold captive audience meetings in the plants to "explain their side" to the employees. These meetings have been met with resistance. In one cement plant in the Southwest, top management personnel from corporate headquarters held a meeting to explain the company's implemented insurance plan; workers sat through the entire meeting but never removed their ear plugs. In another situation, workers sat in complete silence, refraining from asking questions or making comments. Some local lodges have used these meetings to demand resolution of disputes over the implemented agreements; management promptly adjourned the meetings.

There are other acts of resistance to employer implemented agreements.

One company implemented a $90-a-year allowance for safety shoes, replacing the contract provision that required the employer to provide two pair of safety shoes per year. When the employer issued checks to the workers, they were all collected and returned...
to the plant manager by the local Solidarity Committee.

In one local lodge not a single member bid on jobs when they were posted by the company.

In several plants the workers took home whatever tools they had brought into the plant that were not necessarily required for their job. When the tool was needed the company had to provide it.

On many occasions the repairmen and other skilled tradesmen took all their tools with them when they left the plant at the end of their shift. Employers typically assumed the workers were going to strike.

These are a few examples of resistance to employers' implemented provisions. As the Solidarity and Unity Program began to grow in the local lodges, workers became very imaginative in developing legal tactics to resist employers' actions. Sometimes these union tactics were in response to managers' reactions to the Solidarity and Unity Program.

Grievance Procedures and Concerted Activity

When implementing final offers, employers often attempt to implement grievance procedures. The union has taken the position that grievance procedures are "creatures of the contract" and that, in the absence of a contract, no set procedures exist for handling grievances. Most local lodges have replaced all reference to grievances with the term "disputes." Without set procedures, the union relies on the NLRA, which provides that employers must meet at reasonable times in reasonable places to confer on disputes regarding hours, wages and other terms and conditions of employment.

Given the scope of changes in the employers' implemented proposals and the union's commitment to protect its members' rights, the cement workers found it necessary to make basic changes in the manner in which they addressed disputes in the plant. These changes pertained to the manner in which disputes are processed and the level of union representation.

Members were trained to recognize disputes and were encouraged to put all disputes into writing. Through this procedure, the union hoped to document company abuses while at the same time forcing the company to address complaints. This process resulted in massive numbers of disputes filed. At one plant, over 4,000 disputes were filed in two months. At another, there were so many disputes filed that the local union set up a desk outside the plant manager's office to accommodate members' complaints.

The size and makeup of the grievance committee—or Solidarity Committee, Dispute Committee, as common on the nature of the task: the pack house, the cor workers from that dep shift work the commit on the second shift. For a group of six workers manager requesting a department. The plant r represented a breakag readily agreed to meet fifteen different groups Through this approach every worker in the pl three days to conduct

In another case at "traditional grievance demand that all quarr given safety inspection problem because no the quarry had comp drivers and operators plant manager's office of meetings, the comp out, one truck had br metal fatigue on the.

The union has take committee should be If management objects do, the union negotiat times the union has sq issue of committee su and conditions.

In a cement plant i the company meet wit disputes. The compan to take further action on coffee break who agreed to meet. After meet with a commit to work.

Employees at a Mi company meet with :
Committee. In jobs when they.

ever tools they
arily required for
had to provide it.
led tradesmen
plant at the end
ers were going

e to employers’
Unity Program
became very
ployers’ actions.
e to managers’
ct to the position
act and that,
exist for handling
reference to
; procedures, the
onfer on disputes
of disputes in the
osition of disputes
union set up a
ee—or Solidarity

Committee, Dispute Committee and/or Representation Committee, as commonly referred to in cement plants—depends on the nature of the dispute. If the dispute involved an issue in the pack house, the committee would be composed primarily of workers from that department. However, if the dispute involved shift work the committee might be made up of all the workers on the second shift. For example, at one midwestern cement plant, a group of six workers from shipping approached the plant manager requesting a meeting to address problems in their department. The plant manager, believing that this new committee represented a breakdown in the union’s approach to disputes, readily agreed to meet. Over the course of the next two hours, fifteen different groups of employees requested similar meetings. Through this approach, the local lodge was able to involve almost every worker in the plant in the dispute procedure. It took over three days to conduct all 15 meetings.

In another case at a cement plant on the west coast, the “traditional grievance committee” met with management to demand that all quarry trucks and earth-moving equipment be given safety inspections. Management stated its belief that it wasn’t a problem because no truck drivers or equipment operators from the quarry had complained. The committee then had all nine drivers and operators on shift leave their jobs and come to the plant manager’s office to register their complaints. After two hours of meetings, the company agreed to the inspections. (As it turned out, one truck had brake damage and another had considerable metal fatigue on the spindles.)

The union has taken the position that the size of the dispute committee should be based on the circumstances of the dispute. If management objects to the size of a committee, and they usually do, the union negotiates over the issue of committee size. Many times the union has spent several hours attempting to resolve the issue of committee size before ever discussing disputes on terms and conditions.

In a cement plant in the Southwest, the union demanded that the company meet with its committee of thirteen people to discuss disputes. The company refused to meet at all, prompting the union to take further action. At the time, there were 40 to 50 workers on coffee break who refused to return to work until the company agreed to meet. After almost two hours, the company agreed to meet with a committee of six people and the workers returned to work.

Employees at a Midwestern cement plant demanded that the company meet with a committee of the entire plant. The reason
for this meeting was the company's refusal to supply the union with information they had requested and which the company had promised to provide. After the entire plant (90 people) waited outside the administration building (chanting and singing Solidarity Forever), the company agreed to meet with a representative committee. The union agreed, but demanded that their International representative be in attendance at the meeting. When the representative arrived at the plant an hour later, the workers returned to their jobs.

At another cement plant in the West, a solidarity committee of 20 workers (10 on duty and 10 off) demanded that the company meet to discuss disputes. The company refused to meet with a committee of that size. The union explained that given the nature of the dispute this size committee was reasonable and requested a time and place that the company consider reasonable to meet with this committee. The company refused to meet, so the committee sat in the plant conference room for the entire eight hour shift waiting for the company. The next day they sat in the conference room again for the entire shift. At the end of the second day the incoming shift walked off the job and did not return to work until the next morning.

At another plant the "traditional grievance committee" met with management to discuss safety matters. After several hours, the employer refused to resolve any of the issues raised by the union. Because a number of the safety issues were serious in nature, the committee asked all employees to come to the administration building to demand the company protect their safety and health. After spending one half-hour on the telephone (presumably talking to his attorneys), the plant manager agreed to meet with the committee provided workers returned to their jobs. As they had met for several hours, the union stated that the safety issues had already been discussed and that they now wanted resolution. After another 30 minutes, the company finally agreed to resolve the safety problems and the workers returned to their jobs.

One cement company had refused to deliver emergency calls to employees in the plant. The next morning all the employees punched in and went directly to the plant manager's office. The workers sat outside the office for the entire shift until management finally agreed to institute a procedure for employees to be immediately informed of emergency calls.

At a cement plant in California, the company introduced a black plastic substance to be burned in the cement kilns. Fearing the substance might be toxic, workers demanded to know the composition of the substance. When the plant manager stated that
Cement Workers' Experience

The company had several employees waiting and singing at the meeting, demanding that they be met with a representative of the company. A solidarity committee met with the company, which refused to meet with a representative of the union. The committee then demanded that the company provide them with a list of safety hazards. When the company refused, the employees once again left their jobs and gathered at the administration building, demanding to know about the safety hazards in the plant. After workers sat and waited through four shifts of work, the company finally produced a list of safety hazards and a plan to remedy these hazards. The workers then returned to their jobs.

Most of the concerted activities have not necessitated the employees leaving the plant in order to resolve disputes. In a number of cases, however, the activities have led to strikes. These situations have generally arisen when the employer has presented an ultimatum to the effect that workers should return to their jobs or punch out. If, in such situations, the union felt that the dispute involved an unfair labor practice on the part of the employer, workers punched out and set up picket lines. Since ULP strikers
are protected from replacement, these disputes were usually resolved in a short period of time.

When employees work with the protection of a contract, traditional grievance committees adequately allow the union to fairly represent the workers’ interest. When conditions that greatly reduce workers’ rights and benefits are unilaterally implemented by employers, it is necessary for the union to expand worker participation in resolving disputes. It is equally necessary for workers to act in concert in seeking equitable resolutions of disputes.

**Protecting Health and Safety**

In efforts to protect workers’ safety and health, the union has relied heavily on the protection provided by the Mine Safety and Health Act. Cement workers are defined as “stone miners” under the law and as such are covered under MSHA rather than OSHA. Although the union has always taken a strong position with respect to safety and health, under the Solidarity and Unity Program the union has been even more vigilant.

Cement workers were given extensive training in the basic provisions of MSHA and their rights under the law. Consequently, workers regularly insisted on basic MSHA requirements. This included making employers provide workers with training on all new jobs and perform regular inspections of all vehicles. Both of these actions are requirements of the Law.

Local leaders and members were also trained extensively in hazard recognition and MSHA safety and health standards. Cement workers have vigilantly policed their workplaces and have overlooked no violations, even those of a minor nature. Some workers became more adept at recognizing hazards and violations of MSHA standards than some MSHA inspectors.

At one cement plant in the South, an MSHA inspector arrived to perform a mandatory inspection. [MSHA requires that work places be inspected twice a year.] A local union representative accompanied the inspector [allowed under the law] and began pointing out violations of MSHA standards. After inspecting about one tenth of the plant, the union representative had pointed out 25 violations, but the inspector was failing to cite the violations. The union representative confronted the inspector and demanded to know why he was not issuing citations. The inspector stated that since the violations were not serious in nature, he did not feel it was necessary to cite all of them. The local union representative informed the inspector that the law required that all violations, nonserious as well as serious, be cited. The inspector

---

**The Legal Right**

An important aspect of in-plant strategies is the legal protection guaranteed to all employees (NLRA) and by safety and health is dependent on a number of provisions and agreements. The Reagan-appointed NLRB may have reached an impasse and the employer may have differed with the union. One of the most important changes without again bargaining for the concerted activity falls within the law. In addition to being also be “protected,” which union’s legal department.

Section 8(d) of the NLRA the representative of his or her conditions of employment. A representative of his or her conditions of employment. The employer may formerly have been had are limitations on the time, with legal counsel on the matter in specific situations.

The NLRA also proscribes unfair labor practices (ULP) as employees’ exercise of right to concerted activities for the benefit of the employer. However, the employer may not engage in any of these practices. Employees can also take action that protects their right to concerted activities.

Reliance on legal rights requires employees to consult with your union’s legal department. 

Elai
The Legal Right To Concerted Activity

An important aspect of in-plant strategies is the use of legal rights guaranteed to all employees by the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) and by safety and health legislation. Exercise of these rights is dependent on a number of factors, however, and the extent of legal protection afforded is subject to interpretation—eventually by the Reagan-appointed NLRB.

One of the most important legal protections is provided by Section 7 of the NLRA, which grants employees the right to engage in concerted activities for their mutual aid and protection. Not all concerted activity falls within the rights guaranteed by Section 7, however. In addition to being "concerted," employees' acts must also be "protected," which generally means that they must have both a legal objective and a legal means of achieving it. For more information on "protected concerted activities," consult with your union's legal department.

Section 8(d) of the NLRA requires the employer to bargain with the representative of his employees over wages, hours, terms and conditions of employment. Although bargaining over a new contract may have reached impasse and the employer may have implemented his final offer, the employer cannot make subsequent unilateral changes without again bargaining to impasse with the employees' representative. The employer has a duty to bargain over issues that may formerly have been handled in a grievance process, but there are limitations on the time, place and subjects of bargaining. Check with legal counsel on the extent of the employer's duty to bargain in specific situations.

The NLRA also proscribes certain types of employer behavior as unfair labor practices (ULPs). ULPs include any interference with employees' exercise of rights under the Act, surveillance, intimidation, discrimination against employees because of their union activities, bad faith bargaining, surface bargaining. If an employer engages in any of these practices, workers can call an unfair labor practice strike. Unlike employees who strike over economic issues, ULP strikers cannot be permanently replaced.

Employees can also take advantage of safety and health legislation that protects their right to refuse unsafe work. The amount of protection available varies greatly with the type of workplace, the legislation covering that workplace, and the particular circumstances involved. It is important to know the full extent of your protections before refusing work.

Reliance on legal rights requires consultation with attorneys. Talk with your union's legal counsel before engaging in any of these activities.

Elaine Charpentier, MCLR staff attorney
said he would have to confer with his Area Director. The union representative also called the Area Director and demanded that the MSHA inspector perform his job as specified under the Law.

The next morning the Area Director and the inspector arrived at the plant and began the inspection anew. At the completion of the inspection, the 25 violations raised by the union representative were cited as well as approximately 100 additional violations, some of a serious nature. It should be noted that under MSHA, as opposed to OSHA, all violations (serious and nonserious) carry monetary penalties.

As the Solidarity and Unity Program has grown, it has taken a greater toll on the mental health of managers than it has on workers. The need to act in concert built a strong unity among workers and brought a sense of cause to their struggle, but the Solidarity and Unity Program tends to create divisiveness among managers. The protracted and unpredictable nature of the Solidarity and Unity Program resulted in insecurity and general uneasiness for managers, particularly front-line foremen. Sometimes this insecurity bordered on paranoia, and foremen would react to imaginary problems.

At one Midwestern plant, a supervisor accused a bulldozer operator of engaging in a slowdown on the job because he kept shifting to a lower gear as he moved stone in the quarry. The operator explained that he kept slowing down because there was a slight incline in a section of the quarry floor. The supervisor ordered the operator to keep the dozer at a steady speed. The operator further explained that to do so might possibly result in damage to the bulldozer's undercarriage. The supervisor reiterated his charge that the worker was merely engaging in a slowdown, and again ordered him to keep the dozer in high gear. After bracing himself, the worker drove the bulldozer over the incline in high gear. As a result of the higher speed, four bearings were knocked out of the bulldozer. At $1,500 per bearing, it was an expensive lesson for the supervisor to learn: that the operator knew what he was talking about.

Unfair Labor Practice Strikes

Part of the Solidarity and Unity Program involves conducting unfair labor practice (ULP) strikes. Because workers are protected from replacement when conducting an ULP strike, the employers cannot use the strike to bust the union. There have been several ULP strikes over the issue of employers' refusal to meet on disputes involving hours, wages and other terms and conditions of employment. Generally, these ULP strikes have been of short duration and have 1 agreeing to meet. Q employer for more tl employer supply thc 1 of workers had been

Probably the most Portland Cement Cor in the country. Before instituted, the union number of General Re the union made an ust to apply the in-plant return to work, the alleged picketline viol filed unfair labor prai issued a complaint ag maintained its refusal down seven plants tl demand of this strik an unfair labor practi was resolved weeks I the strikers.

The union has not Reagan NLRB has re obvious unfair labor f blatantly violate the then many charges ar union from filing chs committed to tryin contradictions betwe the intent of the law

With respect to the must engage in a poli reform and proper ac have been active in l and demanding that current NLRB, Hope and the inadequate 1 their rights as Ameri to reform the NLRB.
duration and have usually been resolved with the employer agreeing to meet. One local union in the Midwest struck its employer for more than three weeks over the demand that the employer supply the union with a list of plant rules which a group of workers had been disciplined for allegedly violating.

Probably the most notable ULP strike involved the General Portland Cement Company, the second largest cement producer in the country. Before the Solidarity and Unity Program was instituted, the union conducted an economic strike at a select number of General Portland plants. After several weeks on strike, the union made an unconditional offer to return to work, opting to apply the in-plant strategy. At the time of the unconditional return to work, the employer discharged eight employees for alleged picketline violence at one of its Southern plants. The union filed unfair labor practice charges with the NLRB, which in turn issued a complaint against the employer. When General Portland maintained its refusal to reinstate the eight strikers, the union shut down seven plants throughout the General Portland chain. The demand of this strike was that the employer cease engaging in unfair labor practice by reinstating the eight strikers. The issue was resolved weeks later when the company agreed to reinstate the strikers.

The union has not conducted more ULP strikes because the Reagan NLRB has refused to issue complaints on even the most obvious unfair labor practices. In most situations, companies must blatantly violate the NLRA before a complaint is issued, and even then many charges are denied. This situation has not deterred the union from filing charges with the NLRB. The Boilermakers are committed to trying to force the NLRB to deal with the contradictions between their administrative interpretations and the intent of the law.

With respect to the NLRB, the Boilermakers recognize that they must engage in a political battle in order to secure much needed reform and proper administration of the law. Boilermaker lodges have been active in lobbying their senators and representatives and demanding that they address the abuses of the law by the current NLRB. Hopefully, the experience of the cement workers, and the inadequate response of the NLRB to the attack against their rights as American workers, will help fuel ongoing efforts to reform the NLRB.
The Solidarity and Unity Program has a year. More than 8,000 complaints throughout the county since May 1, 1984. During victories attributable to the August of 1984, the Blue Chip contract almost identical to the Giant Cement. This settlement cam threat to initiate the Solidarity and Unity Program settl and Unity Program was in other cement companies, air fast with their implemented been equally unrelenting in the union. As the Solidarity and Unity Program provides a tangible commitment that cement would than ever. The protracted nature of the union has eroded worker discipline and the Solidarity and Unity Program has stiffened the cement workers' history of bargaining—has become the cement industry. First of all, the tactics and the battlecraft anticipated the union strike: use the strike to bust the consultants and union-busting activities of the Solidarity Program running. The unpredictability of a definite effect on the psyche of the plants, first-line foremen se foremen realize that if the workers' contract, their own vulnerability.

Company report card in Lehigh Valley.
CONCLUSION

The Solidarity and Unity Program has been in effect for over a year. More than 8,000 cement workers in more than 50 cement plants throughout the country have worked without a contract since May 1, 1984. During that period, there have been a few victories attributable to the Solidarity and Unity Program. In August of 1984, the Blue Circle Cement Company settled on a contract almost identical to the pattern settlement with Lone Star Cement. This settlement came about in part because of the union's threat to initiate the Solidarity and Unity Program. In 1985, the Giant Cement Company settled with the union after the Solidarity and Unity Program was in effect at the plant for six months. The other cement companies, almost 70% of the industry, have stood fast with their implemented final offers. Cement workers have been equally unrelenting in their resistance to those final offers.

The union is winning in its struggle if only because the Solidarity Program provides a tangible way to continue fighting. The commitment that cement workers have to their struggle is stronger than ever. The protracted nature of the struggle has benefited the union. As the Solidarity Program has grown, so has the level of organization in the local lodges. Unlike protracted strikes which tend to erode worker discipline and organization, the Solidarity and Unity Program has strengthened these critical elements. Workers using an in-plant strategy do not feel the same financial pressures as strikers. The cement membership has made it very clear that their struggle will not be over until they have all cement companies under a standardized agreement. The preservation of the cement workers' historical bargaining strength—pattern bargaining—has become the fundamental issue in this struggle.

The Solidarity and Unity Program has taken its toll on the cement industry. First of all, it enabled the union to define both the tactics and the battleground for struggle. The companies had anticipated the union striking and had developed a program to use the strike to bust the union. The companies' high-priced consultants and union-busting attorneys never anticipated that the workers would stay in the plants and resist. The concerted activities of the Solidarity Program have kept the attorneys' meters running. The unpredictability of the in-plant tactics have also had a definite effect on the psychology of cement managers. In many plants, first-line foremen secretly side with the workers. Most foremen realize that if the employer is successful in gutting the workers' contract, their own wages and benefits will also be vulnerable.
The long-term effects of the Solidarity and Unity Program will be beneficial to the union and detrimental to the companies. The program has greatly strengthened local unions. An aware, organized and committed membership will be increasingly vigilant about protecting their interests in the future. The heightened level of awareness and organization undoubtedly benefits the union's broader agenda, most notably in the political arena.

The Solidarity and Unity Program is an answer to the growing failure of the strike strategy. It is a strategy that recognizes the importance of bringing economic pressure on the employer. The in-plant strategy does not preclude other pressure strategies the labor movement has developed. As a matter of fact, in conjunction with the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO, the Boilermakers have been conducting a corporate campaign against Ideal Cement, the fourth largest producer. Also with the assistance of the Industrial Union Department the International has held meetings with European Cement Workers' Unions to solicit support for the struggle.

The difference between the in-plant strategy and other alternative strategies is that it relies on the labor movement's traditional principles and strengths. The basic trade union principles of unity, solidarity and collective action are the cornerstones of the Solidarity and Unity Program. These are the same principles that unions have applied for years in waging strikes. The in-plant strategy can be applied in almost every work situation. The key elements to the strategy's success are that all levels of the union be committed to the struggle, know their legal rights, and not fear confronting the employer. When the cement workers were shown a concrete and viable strategy to combat management's attacks, they embraced it with solidarity and determination.

As other local lodges have drawn inspiration from the struggle of their brothers and sisters in the cement industry, the commitment to the in-plant strategy has grown throughout the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers. The leadership of the Brotherhood has realized that bold action must be taken to combat the harsh political and economic conditions faced by today's workers. They have begun initiating Solidarity and Unity Programs in plants and industries throughout the union. The cement workers' struggle has convinced the Brotherhood that an in-plant strategy is a viable method for building strong local unions and combating concession bargaining and union busting.
Cement Workers' Experience

UE 610 Finds Another Way to Beat WABCO

UE Local 610 attracted a lot of attention in 1982 when in the teeth of the worst recession since the 1930s and as the first wave of concessions contracts was reaching its crest, it endured a six-month strike to beat concessions at Westinghouse Airbrake Co. (WABCO) in the Pittsburgh area.

Three years after the strike, however, the local was still scarred by its ordeal. With savings accounts depleted and with fresh memories of the strains involved in a long strike, members were in no mood to go at it again. WABCO and its companion plant, Union Switch & Signal, are among the few manufacturing facilities providing steady work in the area, and there are plenty of skilled and unskilled workers around who haven't had much work in the past few years.

The company came at the union with a full array of concessions demands—including a $1.70-an-hour wage cut—and then at the last minute dropped off most of those demands and went for a straight wage freeze and the elimination of COLA. The company knew the membership was divided and weak, and was banking on its “final offer” seeming moderate against the background of its initial demands.

Local leadership recommended rejection of the contract and in one Sunday afternoon membership meeting explained the basic concept of “in-plant strategies.” The idea caught on among the membership and spread spontaneously beginning with the Monday morning shift. The ban on overtime was complete, and management was thrown off guard. By the third week, production had been cut “by at least half,” and the company agreed to a no-concessions contract with a modest boost in wages.

According to union leaders, the local is “more together” now than at any time since the 1982 strike. Unfortunately, in July WABCO announced it is shutting down part of one plant, eliminating 1,200 of the local’s 2,300 members—a subject which never came up in negotiations. The fight has now moved to different terrain, as the local mobilizes to contest the shutdown, looking for another way to “stay in.”