

## New Initiatives

# Bottom-Up Organizing in the Trades

■ *An Interview with Mike Lucas,  
IBEW Director of Organizing*

The decline in strength and influence of the building trades unions is evident and painful for every union construction worker. The challenge of the growing nonunion sector—which now controls well over half of all construction jobs in the United States—stings every union tradesperson with the threat of wage cuts, the erosion of working conditions, and unemployment.

Union membership in all but a few of the 15 affiliates of the AFL-CIO's Building and Construction Trades (B&CT) Department has fallen precipitously. For many years B&CT unions have relied primarily on internal apprenticeship training programs to increase their numbers, and as a result, they have not established an enduring tradition of organizing the unorganized. Without such a tradition, most B&CT unionists have been at a loss to explain their continued decline or to project creative new paths for renewal.

Michael D. Lucas, Director of Organizing for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), is an exception to that rule. Lucas offers a provocative analysis of the problem, including

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• This LRR interview was prepared and conducted by Jeffrey Grabelsky, a rank-and-file member of IBEW Local 43 in Syracuse, currently working as a traveller out of Local 3 in New York City.

a biting critique of the trades' past practice, and has initiated an ambitious organizing effort to reverse the decline.

While B&CT unions have recently been experimenting with various efforts to combat their situation—including project agreements, concessionary bargaining, public relations programs, legislative action, improved productivity schemes and market recovery plans—Lucas is convinced that these are insufficient to the task. "There is only one solution," he insists. "Trades unions must admit their mistakes and return in force to 'bottom-up' organizing."

In the early days, Lucas explains, leaders of building trades unions sought to organize every person employed in the construction industry. By approaching craftsmen directly—"bottom-up organizing," as Lucas calls it—unions succeeded in enlisting a working monopoly of construction workers engaged in the diverse crafts of the industry. As a consequence, the B&CT unions enjoyed a relative control of the skilled labor market, and construction contractors were compelled to sign collective bargaining agreements with the unions in order to gain access to the limited supply of skilled tradespersons. It was upon this monopoly of skilled labor that the strength and influence of B&CT unions was built.

While this working labor monopoly was achieved through bottom-up organizing, it afforded the unions a measure of security that led to the abandonment of the bottom-up approach and the adoption of "top-down organizing." Rather than seeking out new members among unorganized workers employed in the construction trades, unions dealt directly with employers who were willing to sign contracts to gain access to the skilled labor supply controlled by the unions. Eventually, B&CT unions began to behave like other professional associations, jealously protecting the exclusivity of their membership—something Lucas calls "country club unionism." The rationale was that by limiting the supply of skilled workers available through the union referral hall, the union could enhance those workers' wages, benefits and job security. So long as unions maintained their relative monopoly of the labor market, the top-down strategy continued to serve them well.

To counteract the growing bargaining strength of the B&CT unions, employers formed associations to negotiate collective agreements between their members and the unions. Association bargaining insulated contractors from being whipsawed by the unions, facilitated negotiations in a largely decentralized and local industry, and took wages out of competition for employers and

unions alike.

But, according to Lucas, the exclusive relationship between the B&CT unions and the contractors' associations set in motion forces that led to the growth of the nonunion sector. At the urging of union contractors, unions limited access to their hiring halls to association members only. Contractors who were not accepted into the relevant association were thus denied access to the union's supply of skilled labor and were forced to find such labor elsewhere.

At the same time, potential union members—some of whom learned their trades as "white ticket" or "permit" workers on union jobs—were denied union membership and joined a growing supply of qualified craftspersons outside the union. The seeds for a viable nonunion sector were thus sown, fertilized by the competitive advantages of nonunion contractors paying substandard wages.

In these circumstances, Lucas argues, top-down organizing designed to sign up contractors without organizing their employees cannot sustain itself. The fact that construction companies can often meet their labor demands without calling a union hiring hall can no longer be ignored. In a sharp challenge to building trades unionists who "dream the dreams of old men and recall their faded glories," Lucas writes:

[We] must again measure a tradesman's qualifications for membership by his ability to secure and retain employment in the industry. [We] must go out and talk to nonunion tradesmen and invite and encourage them to join. [We] must place [our] members on nonunion jobs for the purpose of selling the union idea, the union spirit, the union principle. [We] must make every effort to rebuild and regain the monopoly of manpower in the industry. . . . Then [we] must insure that never again will [we] allow the numbers of qualified nonunion tradesmen to exceed or surpass the numbers of [our] members.

Organizing workers in the construction industry, however, poses many problems. As a site-specific industry, the size and duration of projects vary widely; the composition of the workforce, even on a single project, changes dramatically as the work proceeds; and the legal framework for union organizing offers little help.

Perhaps the toughest obstacle is the perishable nature of the potential bargaining unit, composed as it is of both workers who may be employed for years by the same contractor and workers who will be laid off at the conclusion of the project. NLRB delays,

endemic in most industries, can be deadly to organizing in construction. Testifying before Congress in 1983, J.C. Turner, General President of the Operating Engineers, explained: "It's a game; we recognize that. It's a game played under NLRB rules stacked against workers in all industries, but in our industry we don't have time to play because, by the time the game is over, the work is also over and our people are unemployed."

Some observers may conclude that "bottom-up" organizing in the construction industry is a game that cannot be won. Mike Lucas is convinced that it must be played and that, with determination and creativity, it can be won.

Like the bottom-up organizers who built the IBEW 100 years ago by traveling from city to city, working at their trade and preaching the union creed, Lucas has been around the block. From Florida to Oklahoma, Indiana to Tennessee, he worked from 1954 through 1959 as a member of the Laborers and Teamsters unions. He began his organizing career in the utility construction industry, and first volunteered his talents to the IBEW in 1960 by organizing the manufacturing workers at a new Studebaker plant in Bloomington, Indiana, which he had recently helped build as a union electrician. He served as a shop steward, local officer and international rep, before becoming IBEW Director of Organizing in 1971. He still holds his union card out of IBEW Local 429 in Nashville, Tennessee.

*Labor Research Review* interviewed Lucas in June 1988 to see how his organizing program works and how it is progressing.

—Jeffrey Grabelsky

**LRR: How does a bottom-up organizing drive work? Do you approach the workers on a particular job site or target a particular contractor? Walk through for us the basic steps of a typical organizing drive.**

**Lucas:** One of the things that I've learned in the last 30 years is that there is no such thing as a typical bottom-up organizing drive. First, you have to understand that bottom-up organizing only takes place in situations where top-down organizing has been unsuccessful. The building trades are reluctant to undertake a bottom-up effort, so these are often last resort situations.

If there is sufficient work in a jurisdiction, then the bottom-up organizing drive may center around recruiting skilled tradesmen independently of their employers. This is the kind of bottom-up organizing which is most effective and which I most enjoy doing.

However, if unemployment is prevalent, it necessarily concentrates on organizing employers so that when new craftsmen are taken into membership, they bring their work with them and, hopefully, bring additional jobs to relieve the unemployment situation.

**LRR: The National Labor Relations Act, even with its later construction-specific amendments, is not really relevant to bottom-up organizing in construction, is it? How do you relate to the NLRB representation process?**



Courtesy of IBEW

Mike Lucas

**Lucas:** One object of a bottom-up organizing campaign is to be able to effectively strike the employer. This doesn't mean that you are always going to strike or that you will always need to strike in order to obtain recognition. But it is imperative that the union organizer recognize this truth and begin preparing for it from the very beginning of the organizing campaign.

In regard to NLRA election provisions, what good does it do for a construction union to win an NLRB election only to find that the job has been completed or the employer is engaging in surface bargaining once negotiations start? The union, after having wasted its valuable time utilizing NLRB processes, is then faced with the same proposition—striking for a collective bargaining agreement. A great deal of time, effort and money could have been saved by proceeding directly to the picket lines.

This does not mean, of course, that the NLRB processes are totally irrelevant in construction. One of the basic organizing tools used by the successful union organizer in the construction industry is the unfair labor practice (ULP) strike.

A basic strike for recognition is an economic strike and, as we all have learned much to our consternation, economic strikers may be permanently replaced by their employers. On the other hand, the ULP strike is one based upon commission by the employer of unfair labor practices. ULP strikers have a guaranteed right to return to their jobs upon unconditional offer, even if the employer must fire their replacements in order to make room for them.

The typical construction employer is small, and does not have and cannot afford a full-time industrial relations manager. They are primarily capitalistic craftsmen who know the business, but who do not know or understand our labor laws. Being used to operating in the rough-and-tumble world of the construction industry, they are quick to violate our laws by voicing their intent to discriminate because of union activity.

Commission of ULPs are common in construction organizing campaigns, and thus the ingredients for ULP strikes are almost always present. Using the ULP strike, you may picket a job with just a few workers with the assurance that these employees will be able to return to work based on the organizer's timetable and will thus have demonstrated the union's ability to affect the work and/or the employer with impunity. So you can see that, while the NLRB election processes are not relevant to construction organizing, parts of the Act are useful to the skilled organizer.

**LRR: Many nonunion construction workers are skeptical about union organizers' motives, aren't they? Don't you hear a lot of: "You're not interested in me. You just want the work." What's the pitch you make to nonunion workers about why they should join the union?**

**Lucas:** Nonunion construction workers are often skeptical about organizers' motives for good reasons. In the past, there have been many instances of unfulfilled promises. Employers were organized, yet the employees were not given an opportunity to obtain membership in the union. Many workers who applied for membership were not able to pass the tests they were given, and when they failed, they were not offered the necessary skill improvement training. In some instances, they were laid off only to be replaced by workers from the referral hall.

Most nonunion construction workers understand very clearly why they should join the union. They understand that as union members they have access to employment by a multitude of contractors and that if work is slack in their home areas, they will have access to a formal system of travelling to other jurisdictions. They understand that their wages will be higher, their conditions of work better, their jobs safer, and their fringe benefits more comprehensive. They understand that if they are laid off, their fringe benefits will continue for a period of time while they seek reemployment. They understand why they should be and they want to be union members. What they are skeptical of is the processes for obtaining union membership.

It basically boils down to integrity. You've got to build trust. But

that's true in any kind of organizing. An employer, for example, intimidates and coerces workers. The organizer meets them and explains to them their rights, and how to bargain and the law. The employer has the purse strings and can fire them and cut off their money. All the organizer can do is excite their aspirations to the point where they're willing to trust him more than they fear the employer.

Where there's integrity, word gets on the street, as we say in Mississippi, in a "New York minute"—that's fast. The minute you start taking a few, word spreads like wildfire, and your credibility increases to the point where nonunion workers begin calling the union to see if they can join.

**LRR: What happens to nonunion workers once they join? Does the new member take tests to determine his/her job classification and pay rate?**

**Lucas:** Successful bottom-up organizing depends upon two things: The union must offer classifications which are employable under the collective bargaining agreement and the opportunity for union membership. If these two things cannot be guaranteed, then bottom-up organizing becomes as impossible as top-down organizing. Why should an unorganized worker support the union if the union cannot offer a job classification which will result in his referral for employment? Why should an unorganized worker support the union if union membership is unobtainable?

I solve these problems very easily. First, I tell unorganized workers that upon conclusion of the campaign, each and every one will be given a "no-fail test." In reality, a no-fail test is simply a placement examination. It cannot be failed even if a worker does not answer a single question correctly because some credit is granted for experience in the industry. It can place an unorganized worker in the apprentice program—anywhere from the beginning level with 90 days credit to the final level with 90 days left to journeyman certification. It can grant journeyman status immediately. It can place an applicant in skill improvement and training classes.

The nonunion industry uses many classifications which do not neatly fit the union's system of journeyman and apprentices. Somehow the successful bottom-up organizer must take these varied classifications and convert them to the journeyman and apprentice classifications recognized and employable under our collective bargaining agreements. The no-fail placement examination accomplishes this purpose.



**LRR:** Based on your experience thus far, how qualified are the nonunion workers as craftsmen? Many people say that nonunion work has been thoroughly deskilled and "industrialized," that a lot of nonunion workers are proficient at only one or two aspects of the trade. Isn't there a danger of diluting the craft by bringing in too many of these narrowly trained workers?

**Lucas:** Nonunion work has been deskilled and industrialized to the greatest extent possible on large jobs, where it is possible to do so. On smaller jobs the work is often too varied to allow these types of repetitive, assembly-line-like operations. Deskilling on smaller jobs has been limited to using a few skilled journeymen to oversee a large semi-skilled crew. Many nonunion workers are skilled craftsmen. In fact, you will find that many of the supervisory and higher level employees of the large nonunion contractors are former union members.

The no-fail placement examination concept which I advocate is the answer to separating the skilled from the semi-skilled and unskilled and placing these people at appropriate levels. There is no danger of diluting the craft by bringing in too many of these narrowly trained workers because they must be willing and able to upgrade themselves in order to obtain a journeyman ticket. In effect, rather than recruiting inexperienced and sometimes uninterested high school students, preference for our training programs should be given to those who already have experience in the trade and who are unlikely to leave it.

**LRR:** Bottom-up organizing involves a radical redefinition of trades union membership, doesn't it—from "someone who has been through or is in the apprenticeship program" to "every person employed in the trade"? What kind of response have you had from local IBEW leaders and members?

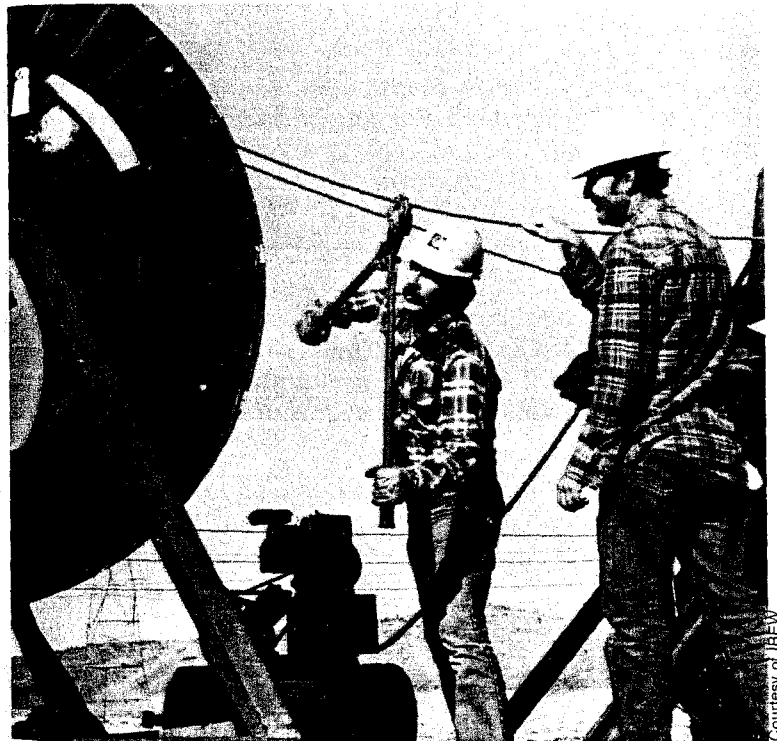
**Lucas:** Bottom-up organizing appears to some to involve a redefinition of union membership while, in fact, it simply recalls the original definition. When our unions were born, there were no formal apprenticeship programs and all training was done on the job. The test for membership in the union was twofold: first, a craftsman had to get a job in the industry, and second, a craftsman had to keep that job. If a craftsman was not working in the industry, he did not belong in the union, and/or if a craftsman could not make money for a contractor, he could not long remain employed. If a man was able to earn his living at the trade, then

he belonged in the union.

This kind of bottom-up organizing is how our unions were born, and this is how we became successful. The prima donna concept of a union membership made up solely of persons who are either in an apprenticeship program or who have completed it is a new and modern day concept that has contributed much to the destruction of our organizations. It has encouraged training people for our trade through use of the permit system and then refusing to extend them union membership.

If you take two identical high school graduates and place one on a service truck in a nonunion shop while placing the other in an apprenticeship program and assigning him to a power house, four years later the kid who has never been in the apprenticeship program will be a better journeyman than the one who graduated from the program and whose work experience has been all large industrial.

The thing that is killing us is the large hiring hall that we have allowed and helped to develop on the street by ignoring those who have the skills necessary to put us out of business. Our leaders



Courtesy of IBEW

and members recognize and accept this when it is pointed out and explained to them, and they agree with the concept.

**LRR: Many trades unionists still favor the exclusive approach to membership, keeping the union membership limited. They fear that taking in too many new members will simply fill the hiring halls with unemployed workers and make it more difficult for current members to be referred out to jobs when times are tough. How do you answer those concerns?**

**Lucas:** While it is true that some members have been taught to fear for their position on the referral-for-employment listing, this is groundless fear. The way things operate today, qualified non-union craftsmen are employed first in many markets. Only after the nonunion manpower pool is fully employed do the owners and users utilize the unionized work force. More and more we see unemployment in the union sector unless and until the unorganized contractors are fully utilized. Likewise, when a slack in employment comes, union members are the first ones to become unemployed. In this situation, stealing qualified craftsmen from the nonunion sector enhances the current members' opportunity for employment because it reduces the supply of craftsmen who are available off the street.

Instead of bringing these new members into the union to share our unemployment, the real effect is that we share their employment. Both parties benefit: Our members benefit by increased employment opportunities. The newly organized member benefits by increased wages, improved fringe benefits, and better working conditions when employed.

**LRR: Good results are probably the best way to win support for the bottom-up approach. What's the track record so far? From 1985 to 1987, the IBEW lost another 26,000 members. Has your organizing program begun to reverse our decline yet?**

**Lucas:** The IBEW is a large and diverse international union of which our construction division is just one part. The loss of 26,000 members over a several year period may seem like a large number, but not if you compare it to the decline in membership of other unions.

All of our membership loss has not come in our construction branch. If you look at our manufacturing operations, for example, you will see that within the AT&T Technologies company alone we lost over 20,000 members with the closing of the Hawthorne

Works, approximately 13,000 with the closing of the Kearny Works, etc. I am not saying that we have not lost members in the construction branch. I am simply saying that the full decline in the membership of the IBEW cannot be assigned to this one branch. The first problem is to halt the decline. Once the losses have been stopped, then and only then, can we begin to address the rebuilding phase.

One way to examine the success within the IBEW of this program is to look at the 2nd Vice Presidential District which includes all of the New England states. Several years ago IBEW International Vice President John Flynn began a bottom-up organizing program among all of the building trades in the New England states. Since that time, the IBEW 2nd District is the only one in our union which has not declined in its construction membership. During a period when other districts were declining, the 2nd District was actually posting membership gains.

I don't believe that this can be ascribed to any other reason except the bottom-up organizing program. Some might say that the New England economy was good. I would say, so what? When the economy was good in Atlanta, Georgia, for example, all of our members, many travellers and hundreds of permit hands worked, but our membership did not grow.

**LRR: What is the best example of a successful bottom-up campaign?**

**Lucas:** IBEW Local 103 in Boston has taken over 700 wiremen into various stages of its apprentice program or as journeymen through bottom-up organizing. Another good example of the effects of construction organizing would be IBEW Local 613 in Atlanta which, with the initiation of over 500 new members into its construction division, regained its work and experienced full employment.

**LRR: Tell us about one of those. How did it happen specifically, say in Atlanta?**

**Lucas:** In Atlanta the bottom-up organizing program started out of desperation, like most bottom-up organizing programs do. There was unemployment. The members were scattered to the four winds. Every local in the U.S. seemed to have a couple of 613 hands. And this was a situation where those 613 hands had been prima donnas for years because work boomed for 10 or 12 years prior to the recession of 1974. And, of course, when Atlanta was overbuilt, they were scattered to the winds with no work.

After the economy picked up again, Atlanta went into another



building boom, which is continuing to a great extent to this day and which was even greater than the first one. However, the union employment was much less than it had been in the first one—and not just in the IBEW. The work was being done, but it was being done nonunion.

**LRR: Where did these nonunion mechanics come from?**

**Lucas:** A lot of the large employers came into Atlanta from out of town, and they brought them with them. But there were a great number who were there and who had worked as permit hands. In the case of the IBEW, we had over 500 non-member, non-traveller permit hands working. Most of them weren't qualified to do construction work when they started. They were maintenance hands. But they went into our small shops. You couldn't get a craftsman to take a short call or go to a small shop or work a 40-hour week because the big jobs were there with the overtime and the continual employment without having to come back through the hall. So these permit hands took our short calls. And then over a period of years, they became qualified, if they were not fully qualified when they started.

So when the lay off came, there were hundreds and hundreds of qualified wiremen on the street. There was a nonunion referral hall on the street. Not only that. All of our bread-and-butter

employers, the small employers that you count on when the big jobs aren't booming, knew all these guys and where to find them. So, suddenly, employers began cancelling their agreements with the local union, and the regular members of 613 found themselves out on the road or working in something besides the electrical industry.

**LRR: So the answer to that problem was to initiate a bottom-up organizing campaign?**

**Lucas:** Yes, that's exactly what we did. I went to Atlanta under the banner of the Building & Construction Trades Department of the AFL-CIO, and put on a training school for all the trades in Atlanta on bottom-up organizing. Like anything else, people are converted in stages—some immediately and completely, while others don't kneel at the cross until they've suffered some more. We were able to convince the UA, the Sheet Metal Workers and, of course, the IBEW that they should start an immediate campaign and that it should be based primarily on recruiting and initiating skilled tradesmen so as to form a working monopoly again—the working monopoly that had been destroyed by training all these permit hands and turning them loose on the street.

The IBEW and UA locals agreed to kick in a 1/2% of earnings as a working assessment to a special organizing fund—this was voted on by the membership. The Sheet Metal Workers local voted to kick in 5 cents an hour. We used that to revitalize a bankrupt building trades council. We used the money for leafletting, for paying pickets, for anything we needed it for. We had rallies of all the building trades at the Farmer's Market in Atlanta. We got some publicity. We got the membership excited. We started doing some rank-and-file organizing, and we started recruiting and initiating these permit hands, most of whom had made repeated applications for membership in years past and had been denied.

Surprisingly enough, they were willing, or at least most of them were, to come into the local. They said, "Look, I had it better when I was working in the local than I ever had it before." Some of these employers, after they were able to cancel their agreement and no longer had to bargain, began to act like all other employers. They began to "cheap off" wherever they could. So these guys, even the ones working for the same employers that they'd worked for under union contracts, didn't have it quite so good. And they were willing to join.

At first, we didn't have work for them. So we would initiate them and leave them with the employer, with that nonunion employer, right where they were—as "salts" for purposes of organizing. They

knew it would pay off eventually because they knew what working union was. So they were willing to go ahead and join and pay their dues and work nonunion as "salts" to help us organize.

In cases where we would then pick up some work and we needed extra men, we'd pull all of the qualified people from a particular contractor on a particular day—all at once, just absolutely strip it.

We developed a reputation around town that we weren't going to walk off and leave anybody, that everybody really was going to get a ticket. We did some NLRB elections, simply because we were adding very expensive, non-productive "journeymen" in the form of lawyers to the nonunion contractor's payroll and, therefore, improving our employers' competitive ability. We did a lot of unfair labor practice charges because ULPs are common in the construction industry. I believe the NLRB told us that the average ULP charge costs the employer \$12,000. We did a lot of those, and in the course of doing those, we educated folks as to what the union was all about.

**LRR: And, in this process, you brought in about 500 new members?**

**Lucas:** Now, understand, this organizing campaign is continuing. But, yes, we've initiated over 500 wiremen in Atlanta. By doing so, the local regained its work, full employment for all its members and all the travellers who were scattered to the winds. So, they're not only working all of their members, they're working all of their new members and they're working travellers from other local unions.

**LRR: And you think that's explained not just by a change in the market conditions in Atlanta, but as a consequence of effective bottom-up organizing?**

**Lucas:** Yes I do, because, you see, those employers who cancelled their agreements in Atlanta have re-signed. Market conditions might be such that the union employers are busy enough to work these new people. But that wouldn't bring those escaped employers back into the fold. They only came back for one reason: The union had something that they needed and they couldn't get it off the street like they could before.

**LRR: What are the biggest obstacles to organizing in the construction industry?**

**Lucas:** The single largest obstacle to organizing in the construction industry is ignorance. I don't mean "ignorance" in the sense that

someone might not be able to read or write or may have a low IQ. I mean ignorance of the concepts and the techniques of bottom-up organizing. This ignorance leads to apathy and lack of direction among the trade union leadership on the international, national and local levels. The facilities are there, the ability is there, the assets are there. The only missing ingredient is education.

This is why the IBEW, in February of 1987, began an organizing project which will affect the construction industry in the entire United States and Canada. It began as a primary educational effort among our international staff and has continued as mandatory schooling on the local union level in its Phase I. In its Phase II it will require the adoption of organizing goals and hard timetables by every construction local union in the entire IBEW, and it will require each and every local to progress in accordance with those goals and timetables.

## The Building Trades

### Membership Profile, 1955-1987

UNION	1955	1975	1987
Electrical Workers (IBEW)	460,000	856,000	765,000
Carpenters	750,000	700,000	609,000
Laborers	372,000	475,000	371,000
Operating Engineers	200,000	300,000	330,000
Plumbers, Pipefitters (UA)	200,000	228,000	220,000
Painters	182,000	160,000	128,000
Iron Workers	133,000	160,000	122,000
Sheet Metal Workers	50,000	120,000	108,000
Boilermakers	151,000	123,000	90,000
Bricklayers	120,000	143,000	84,000
Plasterers, Cement Masons	60,000	55,000	43,000
Roofers	18,000	(NA)	25,000
Elevator Constructors	10,000	13,000	21,000
Asbestos Workers	9,000	13,000	12,000
Tile, Marble Workers	(NA)	(NA)	8,000



**LRR:** You've been pretty critical of "market recovery" efforts, "project agreements," "corporate campaigns," and the investment of union pension funds in union-built construction as strategies to renew the strength of building trades unions. Why? Couldn't we use these strategies to complement bottom-up organizing?

**Lucas:** I haven't been critical of market recovery efforts per se. I am critical of organizing efforts which revolve around these so-called market recovery efforts and nothing else. Corporate campaigns cost a great deal of money, which unions don't have. The investment of union pension funds in union-built construction is limited in its application. Project agreements are concessionary, although often not as apparently concessionary as across-the-board wage and fringe benefit freezes or reductions, the sacrifice of working conditions, the subsidizing of particular jobs through special funds, etc.

It does little good to make concessions in a market recovery program unless something is done to organize the craftsmen who are competing against their union brothers. Unions were organized for the purpose of eliminating competition based on substandard wages, fringes and working conditions for all workers. The union's purpose is not to lower its members' standard of living to that of the nonunion worker. The union's purpose is to organize all craftsmen so as to raise their standard of living to the union level. This cannot be done by sacrificing what we have already achieved.

Nonunion workers do not have an opportunity to vote on concessions. Therefore, nonunion employers can lower their wages and fringes in response to union concessions at a much more rapid pace than union employers can. Certainly, we will never be willing to lower our wages and conditions below those of the nonunion worker, and therefore, we will never be able to drive the nonunion employer out of the trade through concessionary market recovery efforts.

Employers first signed agreements with our unions because we had something that was necessary to their continued operation—i.e., skilled manpower. When we regain control of that manpower, when we rebuild a working monopoly, we will be able to raise wages and regain those concessions that we have already made, and not until.

We use all of these market recovery efforts to complement bottom-up organizing, but let me say to you that using these top-down market recovery efforts without bottom-up organizing is not only ignorance, it is suicide. ■

## Warningsigns

*Harsh tongues*

*soften; gentler tempers  
ignite on contact. Rumors  
reproduce on the hour—  
Bobby swears seven/ Dave heard four/  
Steve is definite: three today  
five next Friday.*

*At coffee*

*John swallows his hot and  
jumps back to work;  
Kenny whines about why a  
just-married guy needs a job most;  
Curt lectures on 'what he  
never liked about this wormshop.'*

*Much as a farmer smells an approaching storm  
an experienced mechanic can  
taste it in the morning coffee break:*

*layoff today.*

**Susan Eisenberg ©**

- Susan Eisenberg is a member of IBEW Local 103 in Boston. A collection of her poems, *It's a Good Thing I'm Not Macho*, is available from Whetstone Press, 94 Green Street, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130.