

IN THE NATION

Million-dollar Stevens' boycott

Clothing workers begin campaigning against 'No. 1 Labor Law Violator,' the nation's 2d-largest textile conglomerate.

By Dan Marshall
National Staff Writer

J.P. Stevens is hardly an everyday household word to residents of Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, St. Louis or a dozen other cities. But about 40,000 shoppers in these cities heard that name last month as the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers union (AFL-CIO) kicked off the most ambitious consumer boycott in recent history.

J.P. Stevens and Co. manufactures bedsheets, towels, draperies, over-the-counter fabric goods and a wide range of textile products and is the nation's second-largest textile conglomerate with 85 domestic plants, most located in North Carolina, and subsidiaries in six foreign countries.

To the 44,000 people who work for it, the name Stevens means low wages, brown lung disease from breathing high levels of cotton dust, racial and sexual discrimination and a history of crushing labor unions by any means necessary.

►Number one labor law violator.

In 1963, the Textile Workers union set out to organize Stevens with AFL-CIO backing and a squad of organizers from other unions. The company retaliated with a barrage of not-always-legal tactics, including firing union supporters, bugging phones of union organizers and threatening to close any plant that unionized.

Stevens' conduct has won it a reputation as the nation's "No. 1 Labor Law Violator." In 13 years, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) has found it guilty of breaking the law 15 times.

Stevens' pattern of labor relations was disrupted in 1974 when 3,500 Stevens

workers in Roanoke Rapids, N.C., voted for union representation. The sides have yet to achieve a contract, however.

Observers pin this failure on Stevens' refusal to even discuss two provisions contained in 95 percent of all U.S. collective bargaining agreements: a voluntary dues check-off and the binding arbitration of grievances. Without these clauses, the union says, the Roanoke Rapids local would have little financial security and would be compelled to resolve grievances by strike.

►Making Stevens pay.

"Stevens presumably will remain an outlaw until the company's vicious antiunion campaign becomes unprofitable," the AFL-CIO's monthly magazine said last April. To put a crimp in Stevens' profits, the labor movement has initiated a nationwide boycott of Stevens' products.

The boycott was authorized last June by the convention that merged the Textile Workers union and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union into the ACTWA. The boycott has only recently been fired up, however, since the 500,000-member union placed "everything else on the back burner" until after the recent election.

The union has hired 40 staff people to work on the boycott full-time in addition to many in its regular staff for whom it will be a major commitment. A smaller staff is based in New York to coordinate boycott efforts among Catholics, Protestants, civil rights groups, students and sympathetic Stevens stockholders.

At an estimated cost of \$1 million, the boycott will involve opening offices in 27 cities, releasing a film on Stevens in

mid-January, publishing a monthly newsletter and flooding the country with educational literature.

In its early stages, the campaign will focus on institutions that use Stevens' goods.

"We'll approach hospitals, motels, hotels, jails and anyone else using linens to ask them to use discretion when placing orders," comments Stan Clair, regional director of the Amalgamated's Union Label department. They will describe Stevens' record on labor relations and civil rights, Clair explains, but avoid actions that might be interpreted as coercive when dealing with retailers.

Boycott representatives will also approach city and county governments with fair wage laws and ask them not to buy from companies that have broken the Civil Rights Act. Union charges of Stevens' discrimination against blacks and women are being investigated.

To generate publicity, the union will set up local and national citizens committees. Sources close to the boycott have told *In These Times* that Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) will be asked to become chairman of the National Citizens Committee.

Boycott supporters will leaflet department stores, apartment complexes and plant gates to inform the public of Stevens' record.

►Union moving cautiously.

Boycott representatives look to the successful 22-month boycott of Farah several years ago as an example of how a nationwide—and ultimately worldwide—boycott can put the economic screws on an antiunion employer.

Unlike Farah slacks, Stevens' products are often difficult to recognize because

they're marketed under many brand names. About half its goods are sold in an unfinished state to apparel manufacturers who turn them into clothing that can only be identified by registered numbers. Only 34 percent of Stevens products carry one of its own 22 brand names.

Union lawyers have decided to proceed cautiously with the boycott since recent Supreme Court decisions and NLRB rulings have clouded the definition of a secondary boycott. The union will not employ pickets in front of retail stores and only distribute leaflets a block away.

Meanwhile, in Roanoke Rapids, an "Employees Educational Committee" is petitioning the NLRB to decertify the union and stop the boycott completely. Observers suspect the effort is another item in the company's bag of antiunion tricks.

Federal government actions will strongly influence the boycott's progress. Proposed reforms of NLRB procedures may increase board enforcement powers. In addition, labor is expected to push President-elect Carter to issue an executive order prohibiting federal contracts with companies that violate NLRB directives.

However long it takes, the ACTWA is committed to breaking Stevens as the first step in organizing the textile industry.

U.S.-based corporations seem to treat the South as another country, unionists have pointed out; a place where they can shift production and find low wages, right to work laws, tax breaks and quick profits. Unless labor can successfully storm this open-shop fortress, the jobs and living standards of all working Americans will never be secure, they say. ■

Pentagon moves to tie Carter to fat budget

Defense submits record \$128 billion request, inflated 14 percent to cover 'cuts' by Carter.

By John Markoff

Washington. The Pentagon in mid-November submitted a defense budget request of \$128 billion, a record increase that is more than 14 percent over last year's budget. The Office of Management and Budget will review the proposed budget before sending it to the outgoing Ford White House.

Defense Department critics claim the budget has been artificially inflated in hopes of committing President-elect Carter to a defense-spending increase.

Robert Brammer, coordinator of the National Campaign to Stop the B1 Bomber, said in an interview, "It looks like the Pentagon is trying to tie Jimmy Carter's hands by increasing defense spending far above what even President Ford wants. Carter said he is going to cut \$5 to \$7 billion out of the defense budget and the military is taking out insurance by adding \$7 billion before Carter takes office."

Until several weeks ago the Pentagon budget was even larger. The individual military services submitted requests totaling \$133.5 billion, up almost 20 percent over last year's \$112 billion record defense budget.

One key reason for this year's increase is that sophisticated new weapons systems, deferred during the Vietnam war, are entering production. All three legs of

the nuclear "triad"—land and sea-based missiles and strategic bombers—are being "modernized."

The Air Force wants \$1.5 billion for the heavily criticized B1 bomber and accelerated development of a new mobile ICBM called the MX. The Navy is asking for increased funding for the giant missile-firing Trident submarine. Spending on a new main battle tank—the XM-1—expansion of the Army from 14 to 16 divisions and a new Navy shipbuilding program are also fueling the increase.

►Palace intrigue and the scramble for power.

The atmosphere in postelection Washington is one of palace intrigue as Democratic advisers, out of power for eight years, jockey for positions in the Carter administration.

On Nov. 11, the Committee on the Present Danger, composed of elite foreign and military policy advisers from business and government, held a press conference here to warn that if Carter does not increase the defense budget "we'll soon be no. 2 in defense posture." The group did not call for any specific increase, but its minimum demand corresponded closely to the amount that Ford is said to support.

Three days after the committee press conference another policy-adviser group issued a study proposing a "freeze on



In These Times cartoon by David Hereth

U.S. and Soviet military spending and non-nuclear force levels as a first step toward controlling the worldwide arms race in conventional weapons."

The study was sponsored by the U.N. Assn. and financed by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. Key members included Cyrus Vance, the former deputy defense secretary, Prof. Richard Gardner of Columbia University and lawyer Paul Warnke.

One common feature of both groups is that they are jammed with prospective Carter foreign-policy advisers. The two appear to represent the acceptable extremes of defense-spending debate in the scramble for positions in the new administration. ■

John Markoff is a writer based in Oregon, where he is an associate of the Pacific Northwest Research Center. For the last few months he has been in Washington researching defense issues.

NPA: Fighting for the neighborhoods

By Judy Maclean
National Staff Writer

"The city is where the life is. It's exciting. Everything's there," Gale Cincotta says. "There are people of all ages living together; city neighborhoods are like extended families."

Cincotta chairs National Peoples Action, a coalition of neighborhood groups across the country. In response to urban decay, coalition members don't flee to the suburbs, they stay and fight for neighborhood survival.

Their biggest victories have been local and national measures to curb redlining (see accompanying story). The coalition is also working to change law enforcement and lower utility rates.

The coalition has 60 affiliates. Many, like Chicago's Metropolitan Area Housing Alliance (MAHA), which Cincotta also heads, are coalitions of neighborhood groups, each with a core of activists representing thousands of people organized in block clubs.

So when MAHA goes to City Hall or NPA goes to Washington, those in power take notice. Last summer's NPA convention was a two-day blitz of federal bureaucrats.

►An alliance of blacks, whites and latinos.

Working on the sensitive issues of housing and neighborhood racial change, NPA has forged an impressive alliance of blacks, whites and latinos.

"They tried splitting us in the beginning," Cincotta says. "They'd say to the Spanish speaking people, we'll have a special meeting for you in Spanish. To the whites they'd say, why did you come with them, they're causing all the trouble. And to the blacks they'd say, you know they don't like you, we'll just meet with you."

"But people learn they don't win anything that way," she explains. "We're at a time in the U.S. when all neighborhoods are under the gun and nobody has a chance for any stability in their lives. People who want to preserve a black, white or mixed neighborhood have a common interest."

Marie Bryan, chair of a black group in MAHA, agrees. "Remember, we're ne-



Gale Cincotta: "Organizing brings you out. People get to know their worth."

Photo by Marc PoKempner

gotiating for something that is our lifeblood," she says.

►You've got to make noise.

Cincotta's involvement in housing began when she noticed the school her six sons attended in the blue-collar Chicago neighborhood of Austin was becoming overcrowded, with fewer books and other resources. It wasn't enough, she says, to "just get the kids up in the morning, make sure they're clean and send them to school."

"We learned if you don't organize and make some noise about these problems, you don't get any solutions." She worked in the PTA, and they won special classes, summer programs and construction of a new middle school.

"But these were just surface problems," she says. In 1965, local churches put up seed money to start an organization that could deal with all the neighborhood problems. Cincotta teamed with Shel Trapp, an organizer trained in the techniques of the late organizer Saul Alinsky. They have worked together ever since—today Trapp is coordinator of the National Training and Information Center, where community activists learn the techniques that built NPA.

►Building a broadbased organization.

Cincotta and Trapp formed block clubs that were the basis of Organization for a Better Austin. They fought slum landlords, FHA, urban renewal and worked for programs for youth and the elderly.

"With a broadbased organization, we were able to look at why the schools were having problems, what was the housing pattern. We thought we had enough power when we had 136,000 people organized." But they learned that when they kicked out a slum landlord, he would reappear in the next neighborhood. So, they formed the West Side Coalition with other groups like OBA.

Housing became the major issue for the new coalition, "because we saw that overcrowded schools and security problems depended on what was happening to the community economically," Cincotta says. "We found we were all having problems with redlining, so we worked on that."

►Going national.

The next big step was going national. "We'd pushed HUD here to the point where they said, we can't do any more for you, you'll have to go to Washington," she says.

On a shoestring, they rented a hall and invited groups and organizers from other states. "In this work, you're a pioneer. There's no one to say, that's not how it's been done. We just said, we're going to do it," she recalls. "We thought the same problems were plaguing people in all cities." Two thousand people from 38 states showed up, and NPA was born.

Becoming a full time leader has meant changes in her life. "Organizing brings you out," she says. "People get to know their worth, get involved, affect their lives, their community and their family's lives. It's exciting."

Being a woman has been a plus in dealing with the power structure. "So many of the bureaucrats are chauvinists, they don't quite know how to figure you out," she says.

With all the travel and visits to federal offices, does she ever miss the "old days" when she worked with neighbors on the PTA and block club? "I'm still in the neighborhood, but it's like it's a bigger neighborhood," she says. "When I go to a new city, I feel at home. I meet with neighborhood people, just like my own people."

Redlining strangles inner cities

It happens in every city in the country. A neighborhood, frequently with a large proportion of minority residents, begins to deteriorate. The number of homeowners goes down. Absentee landlords charge higher rents for smaller spaces and refuse to make repairs. The population becomes more transient. Services, like police protection and garbage pickup, get worse. The schools become overcrowded, understaffed. Boarded-up homes and later boarded-up stores become part of the landscape. The neighborhood slowly dies.

Community groups across the country say this is not inevitable, but is the result of policies by the government, banks and real estate industry that mean millions for speculators and misery for inner-city dwellers. A crucial link is the practice of redlining.

Ten years ago, banks and realtors denied redlining existed. Today, community groups like National Peoples Action, a coalition that has fought redlining for four years, have

forced banks and government to respond.

When banks and other lending institutions refuse to make loans for mortgages and home improvements in specific neighborhoods, they in effect draw a red line around the area. In other cases lenders continue to grant loans there, but they make them hard to get—requiring higher down payments and interest rates, granting mortgages for fewer years, stalling on appraisals, or refusing loans for houses valued under a certain amount.

People who live behind the red line can't get loans to repair their houses. They can let the houses run down or they can sell.

It's hard to sell, though, when buyers can't get loans, except through the slow process of the Federal Housing Administration's program insuring loans for low-income people. A homeowner unable to finance repairs for necessary FHA inspection must turn to contractors who extend credit. That often means poor work at goug-

ing interest. The other choice is quick sales to a speculator, at less than market value.

►A bonanza for speculators.

Speculators have a bonanza in FHA's program. Designed to help low-income families, it has meant taxpayer's subsidizing real estate fortunes.

Speculators buy homes cheap, do quick cosmetic repairs to pass inspection and sell the homes, frequently to minority families.

They make more money if the family defaults, since FHA then pays the entire loan amount, plus interest, immediately. So, they foreclose the minute the family misses a payment, which frequently happens when the family must pay the first bills to replace the repairs the speculator didn't have done properly.

The result is a family out of a home, a speculator with thousands of dollars and another boarded-up home, one of 74,000 currently owned by HUD.

Redlining takes a neighborhood's own money out of it. In Chicago, people in five redlined neighborhoods

had put \$144 million into savings and loans. Yet they got back only \$648,000 in mortgages. The rest of the their money was invested in wealthier city areas or in the suburbs.

►A tool to fight with.

Activists now have tools to fight the practice. NPA and other groups fought for a federal law, which took effect in October, requiring lenders to disclose where they make their loans. Community groups plan to use the information to pressure institutions to change their practices. So far, this has succeeded in a few places, such as Chicago's Pioneer National Bank and Trust. Groups also plan to use the information to fight for national anti-redlining legislation.

Disclosure is a step toward stopping redlining, in turn a step in stopping the decay of cities. "Few people realize it yet," Gale Cincotta, the NPA chair, says, "but disclosure represents an awfully big victory for cities across the country. It just could guarantee survival."

—Judy MacLean