

LETTERS

Hacking it up

I was appalled to see Mike Males coughing up tobacco industry PR on these pages ("Smoke and mirrors," October 16). In decrying President Clinton's "failure to address adult smoking," Males ignores the addictive nature of nicotine. Virtually all new smokers start before their 18th birthday; their average age is about 14. One million U.S. teens will be hooked as new tobacco industry customers this year, and half of them will eventually die from tobacco-related illnesses.

The real breakthrough of Clinton's proposal—and the part most likely to be gutted by a Congress bent on deregulation—is its willingness to go after the *appeal* of tobacco to youth. The parental influence that Males blames for youth smoking is, like peer pressure, a red herring brought to us by Philip Morris and RJR Nabisco—intended to obscure and deny the profound social and cultural effects of \$6 billion per year in tobacco advertising and promotion. With foes so rich and

powerful, why make enemies of 50 million adult smokers?

We look to ITT for hard-hitting coverage of big business, so conspicuously absent from the mainstream media. Transnational tobacco giants can more than afford to defend themselves.

Kathy Mulvey
Research Director, INFACT
Boston

Mike Males replies: No, parental smoking is not a "red herring." The Environmental Protection Agency, in a report tobacco giants tried to derail, found that parents' smoke caused up to 1.3 million respiratory illnesses every year in children. My study of 400 Los Angeles middle school students, published in the August Journal of School Health, found that children of smoking parents were four times more likely than children of nonsmokers to light up by age 12 and three times more likely to smoke by age 15—exactly the youthful pattern Mulvey deplors.

Teens smoke because of the widespread acceptance of smoking by

adults. That acceptance is reflected in 50 million adult smokers; in the cheap price of cigarettes; in media that profit from tobacco ads that reinforce smoking as mature; in a president who endorses the industry line that adult smoking is "a reasonable decision"; in lawmakers who subsidize tobacco growers and thrive on tobacco dollars; in health groups that condone parents' smoking even when it harms children; and in an administration policy that shrinks from tough issues like raising tobacco taxes, but insists that berating teens and fiddling with ad colors and motifs constitute a real policy.

Credit where it's due

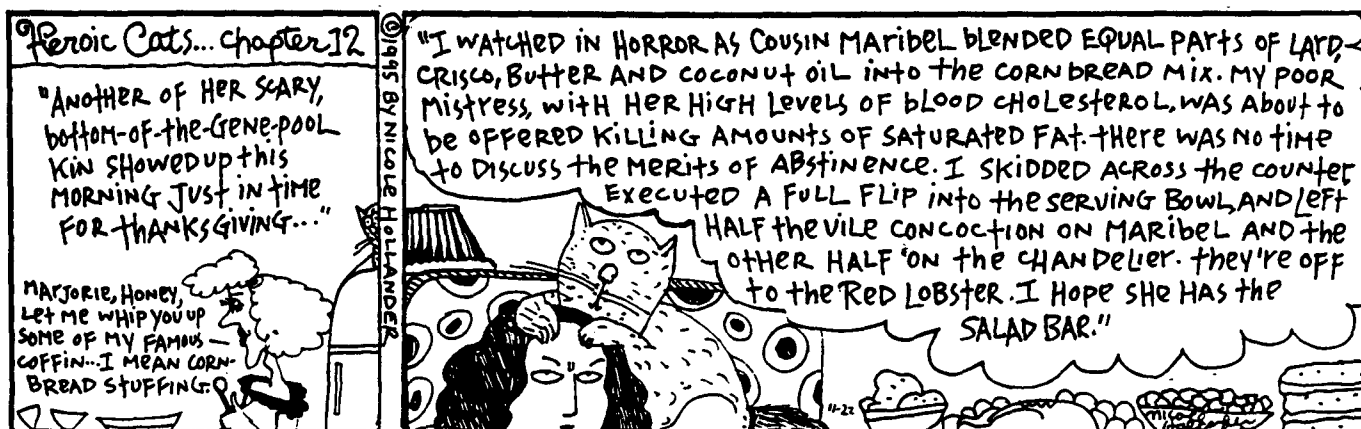
David Moberg's article on the Organizing Institute ("Getting organized," October 30) was informative, in part, because it used the real-life experiences of organizing interns. Unfortunately, Moberg failed to note that the interns were working in an organizing effort entirely funded and directed by the Wisconsin Laborers' District Council.

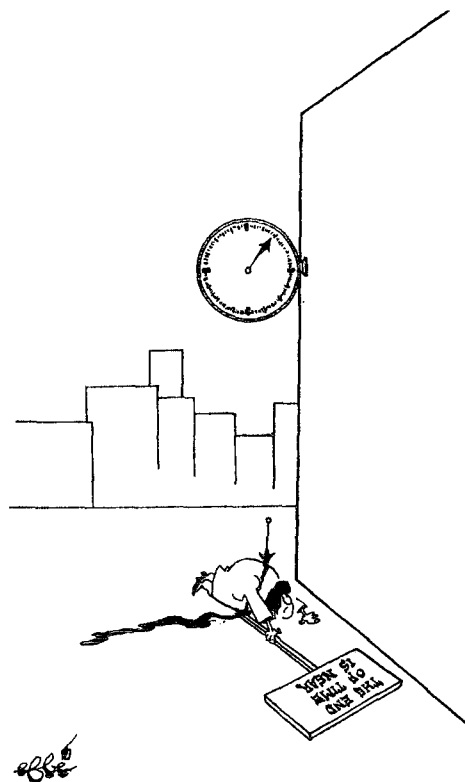
Moberg describes David Kieffer as a former ACTION organizer, a job he held a few years ago, instead of noting his current employment. Surely David Kieffer, our council organizer, Scott Lautenschlager and the organizing interns must have told Moberg of their affiliation with the Laborers.

The article also failed to mention our unique effort to organize the entire
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SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander





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