

Opinion

Large labor strikes a thing of the past

There was a time during the 1970s, you might remember, when the automotive and some other industries acquiesced to wage demands, believing they could recapture the extra costs by raising prices.

It worked, for a while, and the consensus of economic thinking is that it contributed in some degree to the tremendous inflation that raged during that decade and eventually brought American producers to their knees.

From their new position of weakness, the producers were able to persuade unions that further wage increases would be mutually destructive, since the economy was in trouble and Japanese imports were cutting deep into sales.

The attitude spread to other industries, too, and soon it was common to see labor and management agreeing to work toward a common goal, that of lowering costs and raising productivity, and thereby making America more competitive.

Now a dramatic legacy can be witnessed, one that might best be expressed in the question: What ever became of those big old-fashioned strikes?

"Major strikes — those involving a thousand or more workers — have fallen off drastically in the past five years," said Merrill Lynch economist Donald Straszheim as he displayed a jagged Labor Department chart.

From 1950 to 1980, the chart showed, such strikes fell to fewer than 200 only in the early 1960s, a period of relatively low inflation and rising economic expectations. Twice in the 1950s the line on the chart rose beyond 450. And twice between 1965 and 1975 it stabbed 400 or more.

Since then the line has collapsed like a

John Cunniff
AP analyst

string. Last year there were only about 50 strikes involving more than 1,000 workers. In 1979, 20 million worker days were lost to strikes; last year, the figure was down to 7 million.

There seems no question at all that attempts by labor and management to understand each other, to end mutually destructive practices and to work toward common goals, deserves some recognition for the improvement.

Improved economic times must be credited, too.

When inflation raged, workers felt compelled to catch up. But during the past few years, inflation has abated and workers can see real gains in their disposable income.

Moreover, millions of new jobs have been created each year for the past three years, a fact often disguised by a jobless rate that has remained naggingly high at about 7 percent because of an increase in the labor force.

While much of the increase represents primary breadwinners, many of the new entrants are secondary earners — family members attracted to the labor force by the opportunity for additional income. They are less likely to strike.

Straszheim adds these reasons:

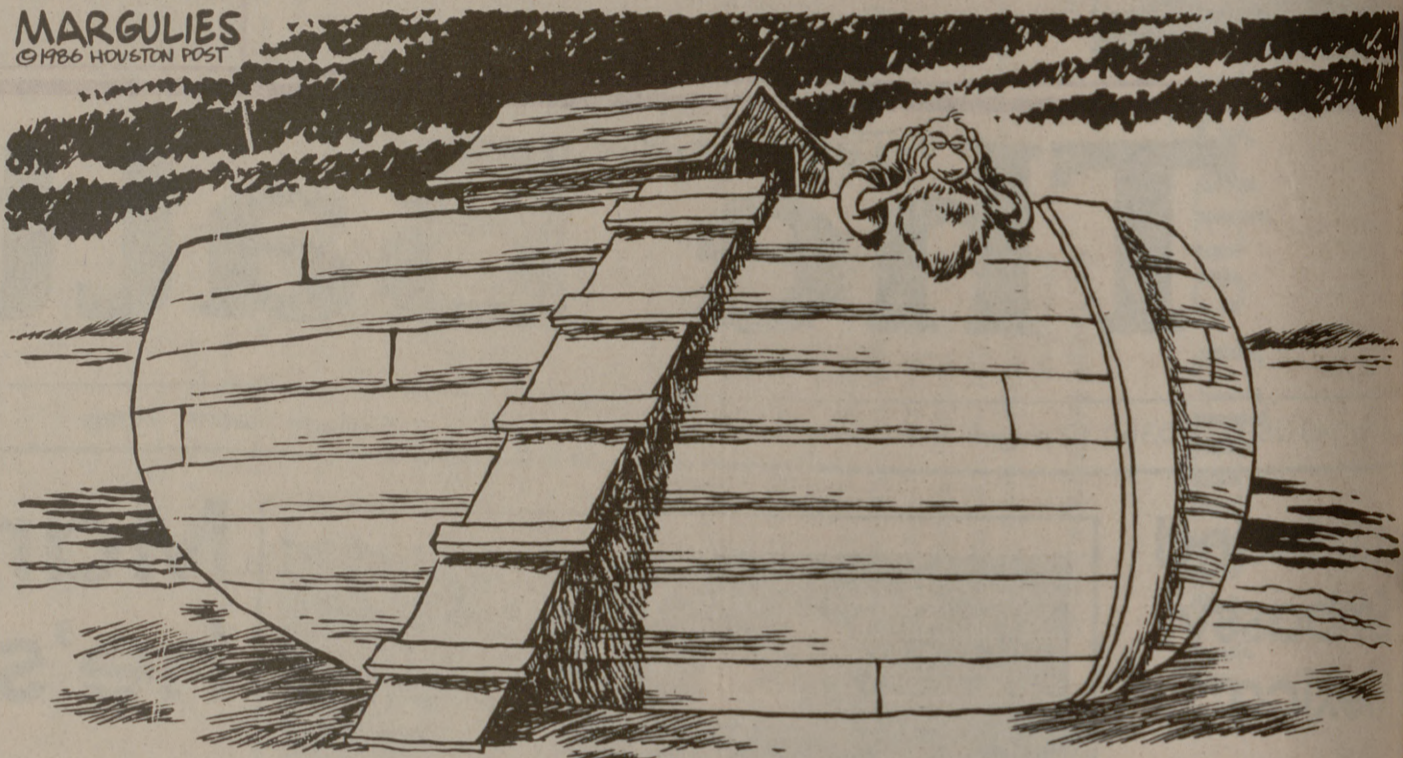
- Corporations have continued to operate more often during strikes. Increased automation has helped, and strike breakers are frequently hired.

- Sharp employment losses in unionized industries have reduced workers' expectations, making wage demands more modest.

- Union membership has declined, thus the potential for strikes involving 1,000 or more workers has been reduced.

John Cunniff is a business analyst for The Associated Press.

United Feature Syndicate
MARGULIES
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"THE HIPPOS SWITCHED TO YOSEMITE, THE GIRAFFES TO MIAMI BEACH, AND THE GOATS, PIGS, AND ELEPHANTS CANCELLED... SO MUCH FOR THE MIDEAST TRAVEL BUSINESS..."

Europe saves protests for U.S.

On July 10, 1985, the Greenpeace ship, Rainbow Warrior, threatened to sail into the South Pacific to thwart a French nuclear test. While the ship was in New Zealand waters, France responded. Government agents blew up the ship, killing one person aboard.



Richard Cohen

For this act of murder, the requisite French officials have been reprimanded and those without high rank or political protection prosecuted. For a more cynical use of state power you would have to look pretty hard. But the Champs Elysee did not swell with roaring chants of indignation and nowhere else in Europe did people take to the streets. No, Europe saves that for the United States.

Now Europe is in a snit about the U.S. bombing of Libya. President Reagan is once again being caricatured as a shoot-from-the-hip cowboy who has, in true Western fashion, reached for his six-shooter when the time had come to parley. You would think that Reagan has chosen his target by throwing a dart at a map. Bingo! Hit Libya.

The Europeans have their concerns. One of them is economic. Italy, the former colonial power in Libya, does a fair amount of business with it. All the major European countries have citizens who work in Libya and some of them have substantial construction projects under way. President Reagan made sure to warn the Americans months ago to get out of Libya; the European countries

have issued no such warning to their own citizens.

But the major European concern is terrorism itself. Many Europeans are afraid that retaliating against Moammar Khadafy is like poking a snake with a stick. This is hardly an irrational fear. In the last year alone, there has been two terrorist incidents in Spain, six in France, three in Greece, four in Germany, three in Italy and one in Austria. Whatever the eventual result of the U.S. bombing might be, in the short term there will be an upsurge in terrorism. Many Americans, quick to condemn European timidity, have themselves canceled plans to travel abroad this summer. For Europeans, things are not so simple; they are already abroad.

Still, Europeans who are so quick to demonstrate against the United States ought to ask themselves why they did not do the same when the Rome and Vienna airports were littered with the bodies of 16 persons killed by terrorists. Where were they when three members of one American family were blown out of a plane over Greece? Why no widespread European indignation when 18 Spaniards were killed in the Madrid bombing of a restaurant frequented by U.S. servicemen?

Where was the march for the bombing last month that killed two persons in Paris; the one on Feb. 5 in a Parisian shopping mall; the bomb that exploded in a crowded Latin Quarter bookstore the day before; or the one that exploded Feb. 3 on the Champs Elysee, wounding eight persons? Who marched for the Achille Lauro and Leon Klinghoffer, for the TWA hijacking and Navy diver Robert D. Stedham or for the 57 who

died when commandos botched an attempt to free the passengers on an Egyptian plane forced to land in Malta. No one — that's who.

It's true that not all these terrorist incidents can be traced to Libya, not even most of them, and it's true that in France and Italy there were public protests against terrorism directed against Jewish targets. But by and large, those Europeans who are inclined to exhibit their political opinions by marching, did not hit the road until U.S. bombs hit Tripoli. Then, as if the event took place in a vacuum, a roar came up from the pavement.

You can argue over the wisdom of the bombing. You can argue over the manner of its execution. You can fear for American standing in the Middle East for whether the lessons of Libya will be misapplied to Nicaragua. But you cannot treat the bombing as if it were an unprovoked, irrational act — as if it had not been preceded by many bombings, years of carnage and a constant plea from the United States to the European nations to punish Libya economically. The response was a cynical shrug of the shoulders by those same European nations.

There are a thousand concerns to be voiced. But you can not voice an outrage that does not take into account all that went before: terrorist acts all over the world and, finally, the one that took the life of an American soldier April 5 in West Berlin. European anti-Americanism is plain to the ear. The sound of silence has been replaced by the roar of hypocrisy.

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The Battalion

(USPS 045 360)
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The Battalion also serves as a laboratory newspaper for students in reporting, editing and photography classes within the Department of Journalism.
The Battalion is published Monday through Friday during Texas A&M regular semesters, except for holiday and examination periods. Mail subscriptions are \$16.75 per semester, \$33.25 per school year and \$55 per full year. Advertising rates furnished on request.
Our address: The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald Building, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843.
Second class postage paid at College Station, TX 77843.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station TX 77843.

Mail Call

Flag-waving on both sides

EDITOR:

I was impressed with Wednesday's well-written column by Marco Roberts, president of Gay Student Services. However, despite the patriotic tone, his message is not as benevolent as it appears.

He says, "... we are not infallible ... we may find need to change ... we must be wise enough to let go" of certain obsolete values in light of truly American ones, and "we should show respect for reason ..."

The "we", of course, is intended for people holding a specific moral position, and such statements are far from confessing that the GSS may need an attitude adjustment. To the contrary, the implication is that a community that protests the practice of homosexuality in its midst is fallible, needs to change, ought to let go of useless values and is being unreasonable, if not un-American.

So now we have flag-waving on both sides. I should think the Founding Fathers would weep.

Paul R. Koch

Act human

EDITOR:

Col. Moammar Khadafy has been behind the deliberate murder of not one but many innocent people. Yet Derek Bercher in his letter in the April 21 *Battalion* condemns the U.S. attack on Libya because Khadafy's "15-month-old adopted daughter is dead at the hands of an American bomb."

What about the women and baby that were blown out of a commercial airliner and killed after a terrorist bomb exploded? That was an international attack on innocent people. The American attack was on carefully chosen military targets. Any civilian casualties were accidental.

While two wrongs don't make a right, someone must stop the breach of international law (i.e. terrorism) because laws are the

basis for civilized society. If laws were broken by everyone, there would be chaos and the human race would be reduced to animals. Therefore the United States cannot, in good conscience, simply ignore Libyan terrorist activity against Americans. The United States attacked Libya only after exhausting other non-violent avenues of reprisal.

If Khadafy is to be thought of as a human being, he will have to act like a human being.

Tracy E. Ward

Apartheid explained

EDITOR:

I would like to offer a response to Michael Roth's statements concerning his criticisms of divestment in South Africa. He questions the logic in columnist Karl Pallmeyer's statement that "A&M's money is being used to oppress a kill people." The fact that someone could complete four years at our "world class" University and still fail to see the logic there is a disturbing thought. Let me try and explain it.

In South Africa, the system of government is not so keen as ours. It's called apartheid. The apartheid system relies on violent oppression by the white minority to keep the blacks under control and virtually without any rights. The government silences black opposition with brutal force. Hundreds of innocent people have died. Numerous accounts of children being tortured in jail have just been exposed. Recently, a South African soldier fled his country. He spoke of being haunted by the screams and sounds of crushing bones beneath the tanks. These examples are a fraction of the horrible truth.

Texas A&M has nearly three million dollars invested in companies which do business in South Africa. These companies provide vital economic support. Without a major mental leap, one should be able to see that if A&M monetarily endorses these companies that support South Africa with its brutal apartheid system, we are ourselves supporting the system. We are, in fact, allowing A&M's money to be spent to oppress and kill.

Roth asked Pallmeyer "how he can bear to associate with a University which supports the perpetration of such acts." This is indeed a question of great concern. Roth encouraged Pallmeyer to "disenroll." I suggest he opens his eyes and deal with the problem, instead of running from it. Highway 6 doesn't always run two ways.

Joe Bryant

Not a typical student

EDITOR:

I'd love to direct my letter at all of those immature, closed-minded people I've been running into lately. I'm not your typical A&M student. I don't wear those Hawaiian-reject shorts and a t-shirt that says what I did on my spring break. And I don't go to the Chicken to drink beer and gawk at others who walk by.

I choose to be different and I like it. I have both my ears pierced and I wear clothes most people sell at garage sales or give to the Salvation Army. But I'm just a person, not a conversation piece.

When I first came to Texas A&M, I was told it was a pretty liberal school. I've since changed my mind. But the people who I am friends with are not associated with a certain clique or group. I have preppy friends, frat daddy friends, cadet friends, and I also have friends with mohawks, fluorescent hair or no hair at all. But I don't associate myself with any group of them. I'm just me!

They've gotten to know me and they found out, "Hey! He's a cool guy." I wish I could go to the Chicken or to parties without catching so much flak. So to you people who think I'm gay (which I'm not. I have a very pretty girlfriend), weird, rebelling society, or whatever, give me a break. I put my pants on one leg at a time just like everybody else. Thanks.

Carey "Spike" Dominguez

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