The Struggle Against Enclosures in Jay, Maine

An Account of the 1987-88 Strike Against International Paper

By David Riker

Old Elihu gave them what he had to give them, and bided his time. In 1921 it came. Business was rotten. Old Elihu didn't care whether he shut down for a while or not. He tore up the agreements he had made with his men and began kicking them back into their pre-war circumstances. Of course the help yelled for help. Bill Quint was sent out from I.W.W. headquarters in Chicago to give them some action. He was against a strike, an open walk-out. He advised the old sabotage racket, staying on the job and gumming things up from the inside. But that wasn't enough for the Personville crew. They wanted to put themselves on the map, make labor history. They struck.

— Dashiell Hammett, *Red Harvest* (1929)

Introduction

In June of 1987, 1250 union paperworkers in Jay, Maine went on strike against International Paper (IP), the world's largest paper company and the largest private landowner in the United States. The strike was organized against the company's attempt to impose a new contract that would have cut jobs, reduced wages, ended the closed shop, and radically transformed existing working practices.

For sixteen months the paperworkers remained on strike. Fewer than 5% crossed the picket line. But in the end the strike was defeated. Not only did the workers lose the old contract that had provoked the long battle, but they lost their jobs as well. The entire workforce was replaced with scabs in a highly organized national strikebreaking mobilization.

The union's strategy was a defensive one, aimed at preserving a deal that already existed and was now under attack. The fact that IP launched its attack in the form of a new contract had suggested that the issue could be resolved through collective bargaining. But the contract was not negotiable. Collective bargaining was already a thing of the past.

The strike signalled the end of a relationship which had existed in Jay for nearly half a century. It had been based on a set of mutual guarantees that provided stability for both the paper-

workers and the company. IP was guaranteed reliable and industrious workers, who in turn were guaranteed secure jobs that payed the highest wages in the area. It was a privileged deal which was both envied and resented by other workers in Maine.

IP's ability to terminate the deal in Jay depended on two factors: automation inside the mill, and poverty outside. The first had been produced through more than a decade of enormous capital investment.

The second, poverty, is widespread in the state of Maine, and had become more acute as a result of the systematic wage depression which began in 1973. On a national level, average weekly real wages have been driven down more than 15% during this period. As a result, the Jay mill was not only surrounded by trees, but also by workers whose average wage had been driven to below subsistence.

In October 1989, at a meeting more than a thousand miles from Jay, union officials terminated the strike. The people in Jay were not consulted or given a vote. Many first heard the news on the radio. The local union leadership justified its action as a bid to save the Jay community, but it more clearly reflected a crisis in the union and a deliberate attempt to save itself.

Immediately, like a conditioned reflex, everyone from Wall Street analysts to various "labor experts" and "observers" began writing post-mortems. The defeat, we were told, was yet more proof that the very tactic of a strike had shown its futility and should finally be abandoned as the obsolete tool that it is. But like all obituaries, theirs had already been written before the strike had even begun.

Unlike that army of undertakers, our starting point is that there is a lot to learn from the experiences in Jay. But this requires that we understand what type of strike this was, under what conditions it developed, what its major turning points were, and how it ended.

The destruction of the deal in Jay links the paperworkers to a wider class experience in the 1980s. For unionized workers, the decade began with the mass sacking and replacement of more than 11,000 air traffic controllers. It closed with unionized coal miners ten months on strike and scab miners digging coal. The age of the guaranteed job is over. In its place, those workers who had enjoyed it are experiencing the New Enclosures.

The Paper Industry

Prior to the 1880s, rags were the principal raw material used in making paper. Most paper mills in the United States were therefore located close to the large eastern seaboard cities which were both principal markets as well as chief sources of raw material. In the 1880s, all this was changed with the ascendancy of wood pulp as the most common raw material. Trees, besides being the lungs of the earth and the source of wood for home building and heat, were accorded a new use.

The paper industry is based on the control of land and the "preservation" of forests. More than thirty percent of the entire land mass of the United States is classified as forest land, the largest single category of land use. Over two-thirds of the country's forests are commercial timberlands, of which 60 percent are industry owned.

International Paper owns 8 million acres in the United States, and twenty million worldwide. This is roughly two-thirds the size of England. Unlike the rain forest in Brazil, the amount of land used for tree farming in North America has been increased this century.

Half a million workers are employed in paper mills in the United States. More than this number work in the related lumber and wood products industry in logging camps, sawmills and planeing mills. With over a million production workers, more than 500 paper mills, and annual revenues in excess of $100 billion, paper is one of the largest industries in the country. Eighty percent of the workers work for the largest 15 companies. Ten of these companies account for almost 80 percent of total industry production.

Paper mills contain as much as $2 million of fixed capital per worker. At a newly automated paper machine today, a few hundred workers produce more paper than 3,000 workers produced ten years ago at more than a dozen machines. A single machine can require a building 700 feet long, 200 feet wide and 75 feet high. It will run paper at more than 40 miles per hour. The age of the papermaker/craftsman with a sensitive touch and a list of pulp ingredients in the back pocket is a thing of the past.

The paper industry is in a period of expansion. Annual per capita consumption of paper products in the United States is close to 400 pounds. A 1986 industry study projected that demand for paper in the United States will increase 25% in the ten years 1985 - 1995, mainly as the result of the widespread use of computers and copiers. Just as credit never replaced cash, so too the vision of a paperless office in the computer age never materialized.

Maine

Well , actually if you don't work for a big company like IP or the remaining shoeshops, you either work in the paper industry at one level or another, either cutting wood or actually making paper, or you're in the service industry — McDonalds, or hair styling.[1]

In Maine, the paper industry has dominated the economy throughout this century. It has preserved the state as one enormous timberland, a one crop economy based on the profitable extraction of pulpwood. Ninety percent of the land is forested of which all but five percent is commercial land. Seven companies own virtually all the industry's land and produce 90 percent of all pulp and paper in the state.

Water has always been important for the paper industry, first for power, then for transportation, and always in the manufacturing process. The industry has maintained control over Maine's rivers and streams, but because the manufacturing process contaminates, many of the rivers are either dead or dying. Paper companies own and operate most of the state's dams, controlling where water will flow and who will have access to it.

More than forty percent of the value of manufacturing product in the state is produced in the paper and wood products industries. The backbone of these are the state's 18 pulp and paper mills. The number of mill workers however is relatively small (18,000). This fact underlies both the relatively high wages which they are paid, and their central importance within the state's industrial landscape.

The Workers

I had a bleeding ulcer and I had to be operated on. And I think that a lot of shift work brings that on. It takes years but you know, a lot of people in this town retired but didn't live six months.

Most of the 1250 workers who went on strike were third and fourth generation paperworkers. They were mainly descendants of French Canadian workers who had emigrated to Maine at the turn of the century to work in the pulp and paper mills. Their connection to IP stretched back eighty years. Before the strike, the workers had an average of nearly thirty years working for IP; many had worked at the mill since finishing high school.

They had never been on strike, having remained industrious throughout the industrial battles in the 1940s and again in the 1960s. In fact, the last strike in Jay was in 1921 and exists only in the form of scattered memories. In 1965, when IP made the enormous capital investment in Jay to build what was then one of the world's largest papermills, it made this investment because of the reliability as well as the skills of the workers.

The work is dangerous, especially because chemicals are used throughout the production process, and illness and injury rates are high. In Maine, papermill workers file for the largest percentage of the state's workers' compensation pay.

They work long hours, the longest official average work week in Maine. Sixty hour weeks were not at all uncommon, and many tell stories of working 18, 20 and 24-hour shifts "to cover for a friend" or generally help out at the mill.

The mill was organized around the "Southern Swing", a rotating shift that effectively divided the town into three. The complexity of the shift and the fact that it is always changing means that it is very difficult to plan on anything. To an outsider, its underlying "swing" seems incomprehensible. Here a worker describes the swing after more than a year of being on strike:

Okay, let's see if I can remember now. Let's start with the day shift, 7-3. It runs seven days. You would start your day shift on a Saturday. You work Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and then Friday. Then you've got what's called a long weekend. You get Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. So that's your long weekend, once a month. So you've got five days off, you go in at 11 o'clock at night. Wednesday night you go in at 11 o'clock, you work seven days of 11-7 and then the following Tuesday morning you get out and then you get Wednesday and Thursday off. So you get off — really Wednesday's not a day off because you've worked all night long and then at 7 o'clock in the morning, "Okay - it's your day off" — that's bullshit. So you get Wednesday and Thursday off anyway. Friday you start 3-11. 3 o'clock in the afternoon until 11 o'clock at night. A lot of people like that shift. And then you work around and you get until that Thursday. Then you get Friday off. Then you start the day shift on Saturday...You live for that long weekend.

But as the wife of a striker explains, even the long weekend has its problems:

Okay, my husband, when he came off his third shift there, they had their long weekend which starts on a Friday night. He didn't feel himself until the next Tuesday, and he was going back to work that Wednesday, the next day. It would take quite a few days to come back, you know, to feel normal again more or less. So this three shifts is a killer. And on the third shift, to go to sleep in the days, it would take him at least three days to sleep normally again, and by that time you're almost ready to go back on the other shift. It's no good for your health. We had one weekend a month and that was the only time he had time off, but he was too tired to do anything. So you got the money but you ain't got the time to do anything.

Many of the workers used the term "dedication" for what would ordinarily be called overtime. They were dedicated paper workers. One explained, "I think I went fourteen years where I'd only taken two days off." Others said, "We used to call the company Mother IP." But this dedication was given in return for a secure job with a living wage in a state where the average annual family income ($ 15,000) falls below the government poverty level.

Jobs in the logging industry, the shoe plants, the small textile mills, and in the service industries generally paid less than half the wages earned at the papermill. Many people in the surrounding area had applied for work in the mill but were never hired.

In 1948, the paperworkers in Jay agreed to work Sundays, allowing the company to introduce continuous production. In return, they demanded and received double time. In the 1960s, when the new mill was built and then continually expanded, the workers demanded and received continually rising wages. In a six year period alone, the contracts negotiated at the Jay mill brought a 61 percent wage rise. Though the work was difficult and dangerous, it was part of a deal that both the company and the workers wanted to preserve.

Roots of The Strike

Elihu Willsson carefully pulled the covers up over his legs again, leaned his head back on the pillows, screwed his eyes up at the ceiling, and said, 'Hm-m-m, so that's the way it is, is it?'"
Red Harvest

In the spring of 1987, the paperworkers were anxious to avoid a strike. The summer before, workers at another papermill less than thirty miles up river had gone on strike. The Rumford mill was owned by Boise Cascade, another of the country's largest paper companies. The Jay union supported the Rumford strike financially but few workers made direct contact or gave physical support. By and large, despite its relative closeness, most Jay workers experienced the strike only on television.

Nonetheless, the events were quickly remembered when Jay was faced with a similar contract offer a year later. Despite violent confrontations at the picket line when the company first hired scabs on a so-called "permanent" basis, it ended after eleven weeks with the signing of the company's original contract offer. 342 of the 1600 workers had been replaced by scabs and several hundred union members had crossed the picket line.

The workers in Jay were so anxious to avoid a strike that they offered to extend their existing contract for two years. But International Paper had no intention of negotiating, nor had its plans been hastily assembled.

In 1976, IP initiated a corporate restructuring program aimed at doubling its return on equity to 15%. More than $8 billion was earmarked for the program which was scheduled for completion in 1988. This involved shutting down some paper machines, closing some mills, and selling-off still others. Integral to IP's plans was the complete dismantling of the nation-wide union bargaining unit to which most of the primary mills were tied. This "multiple", as it was called, gave the union a powerful means for coordinating action at mills throughout the IP system.

In 1965, the company offered to pay a higher wage rate at the newly built Jay mill if Jay's Local 14 left the multiple. Local 14 agreed and was rewarded with the highest wages in the IP system.

In 1979, most of IP's primary mills were still negotiating contracts in a multiple. IP threatened to closed down mills that remained in the multiple and promised increased investment in those that withdrew. By 1985 the multiples had been completely dismantled. Thus, in place of collective bargaining, it had substituted 'corrective bargaining', successfully dividing its primary mills by contract language, term of agreement and expiration date.

In the spring of 1987, when Local 14 was scheduled to negotiate, every primary mill in the IP system was negotiating separately. The average number of man-hours required to make a ton of paper in an IP mill had been reduced from 4.3 to 3.4 between 1981 and 1986.

David Riker

The Androscoggin Mill, Jay, Maine: 365 days a year

The Contract

The contract which IP offered Local 14 was aimed at transferring complete control over the production process to the company. Briefly, it involved four basic components:

First, intensification of work through so-called flexibility, meaning that workers must be prepared to work wherever the boss sends them. This dismantling of job classifications has paralleled the introduction of new technology as two basic strategies aimed at regaining control over the shop floor. "Flexibility" in the auto industry resulted in the record profits in 1985 and 1986.

Second, lengthening of work through the elimination of the Christmas holiday shutdown. For the past forty years, Christmas had been the only time that the Jay mill and the swing shift had come to a standstill.

Third, doing away with the closed shop through the contracting-out of maintenance work to non-union contractors.

Fourth, the reduction of pay through the elimination of premium pay for Sundays and holidays. The union claimed the contract as a whole translated into an immediate pay cut of 12% over two years. 178 jobs would be "lost" and another 320 or so would become non-union. In all, the union stood to lose nearly half its membership and dues.

Resistance to IP's plan began in February 1987 when workers at IP's primary mill in Mobile, Alabama rejected an essentially identical contract offer. The company responded with a lock-out. Faced with the same concessionary offer, local union officials from the Jay mill as well as mills in Lockhaven, Pennsylvania, and DePere, Wisconsin met at the headquarters of the United Paperworkers International Union (UPIU). They formed a "pool" and agreed to urge their respective members to strike as part of a concerted action. By the end of June 1987, 3,500 workers were on strike or locked-out at four IP locations. In Jay, the strategy of coordinated action was a major factor in the workers' decision to strike. The vote to strike was almost unanimous and on June 16, 1987, the first strike in over sixty years was begun.

Workers' Power on The Last Shift

If a girl's got something that's worth something to somebody, she's a boob if she doesn't collect.

Red Harvest

Before the strike had even begun, IP had placed ads in all the area papers offering "permanent" production jobs at the Jay mill. Immediately, workers set up picket lines to stop scabs from entering the mill during a week of interviews. Additionally, IP had brought in B,E, & K, the pulp and paper industry's largest contractor and a professional strikebreaking firm.

A power plant worker explains, *"I worked the last shift. Three o'clock in the morning each one of us had a scab with us. Or a salary help. The guy watched every move you made. If you went into the restroom, he went with you. Anything you done, he went with you."*

Under these "siege" conditions, the rank and file responded with a sabotage action that effectively shut down the mill for the first week of the strike, the only time in the sixteen month long battle that the mill would be shut down. It was achieved by action inside the mill that appears to have surprised the union officials as much as the company.

Workers on the last shift cut the screen on one of the five paper machines, damaged many of the paper rollers by tossing nuts and bolts into them, drained a total of 90,000 gallons of oil from sludge trucks, used rocks and debris to block the flumes that carry unground logs, forced a shutdown of the power plant, and removed labels which show machine adjustment and calibration levels. Over 135 feet of perimeter fence was taken down the same night by someone driving a logging skidder. The mill was shutdown the following day and it was a week before all of the paper machines could be started. The company claimed that $ 5 million worth of damage was caused.

The mill began the strike with 200 salaried personnel from the Jay mill, 225 "flying" salaried scabs from over 20 other IP mills, and 225 B,E, & K "maintenance" scabs. After two weeks the first group of locally hired scabs arrived. There were about a hundred of them who drove up to the mill gates on the morning of June 29.

When the scabs arrived, they were met by 1,000 pickets

intending to shut the mill down completely. The shift change took more than two hours and half a dozen cars had their windows broken. The day's picketing suggested anything but that it was the start of a sixteen month-long protracted battle.

In fact it precipitated a crisis, both for IP and for the union, as neither controlled the event. IP responded by seeking an injunction in court. In turn, Local 14 insisted that an injunction was not necessary because the union was quite capable of policing its own pickets.

The UPIU's area vice president went a step further, reassuring journalists that it would "pick out trouble makers": "We've been stressing it and stressing it and stressing it - no violence and no hitting the cars...We were telling people to stay back, because the greater the numbers, the worse the chance of this getting out of control. And we don't want that. We're concerned about the safety of the people, scabs and anyone else. We don't want to see anybody get hurt."

The next day, sixty Maine state riot police were brought in to supplement the local force, but within a week they were not needed. The company won an injunction limiting the picket to 12 people at each gate, but this too was hardly needed after a week. By the end of the first week of July, a local paper quoted one of the union members, a "picket line captain," as saying: "The situation is back under control. Police have nothing but good to report."

A decisive turning point had occurred in which the union succeeded in asserting control over the direction of the strike. The sabotage and the mass pickets had both broken unspoken conventions of collective bargaining. They represented two aspects of a rank and file strategy to win the strike. Both were directed at stopping production. The victory of the union was a defeat for the workers. By not physically stopping production at the mill the pickets became symbolic. The strike would now be "legal". It would be a long haul.

The Scab

It don't make any difference if they ain't making good paper. The IP has proved their point. They got their people that is making paper. Same thing is going to happen to Pittston. They got their people that are mining coal. As long as they're mining coal they've lost it. Exactly what happened to us. Eventually they're gonna make paper. It may take years - and the same thing with coal. They've got people that'll mine it. You've gotta stop these people from going across the line. Once they cross the line, you've lost it.

International Paper began hiring scabs even before the strike had begun. The scale of the operation was enormous. The mill was encircled with a security fence in the fashion of a military installation. The first scabs were B, E, & K "professional" strikebreakers who had made the 20 or 30-hour drive from states in the South. They were housed in 40 trailer homes that were set up on mill property.

Within 10 weeks IP had received 2500 applications and had hired more than a thousand scabs. Most of them were from within a 40 mile area and had left a variety of lower paying jobs including ones with logging contractors, shoe shops and wood turning mills that payed wages between $ 4.50 and $ 6.00 an hour. The average starting pay at IP was roughly double this at $ 10 an hour.

IP insisted that the scabs had been hired on a permanent basis. The union demanded that the strikers be guaranteed their jobs, and insisted that the scabs were only temporary workers. All "negotiations" subsequent to the initial contract offer began and ended on this same subject. In April 1989, ten months into the strike, the full significance of the company's position was made clear in a "new" contract which offered to relocate the strikers to other mills throughout the country.

Contract rejection, April 1988

This suggestion of forced relocation was the underlying meaning of the Jay enclosure: The non-negotiable contract, the fence surrounding the mill, and the army of scabs all signalled the end of collective bargaining. It represented the final expression of capital's demand for 'flexibility' in the 1980s. In Jay, the workers responded with a spontaneous expression of defiance that at once seemed to make the ballot box obsolete.

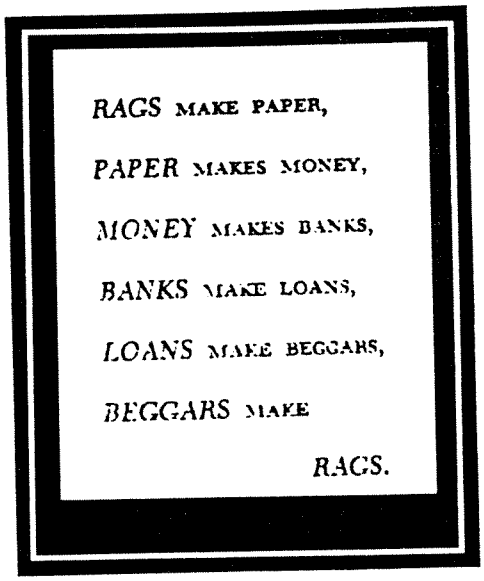
The Long Haul

'After I take this Finnish gent,' Mickey said, 'what do I do with him? I don't want to brag about how dumb I am, but this job is plain astronomy to me. I understand everything about it except what you have done and why and what you're trying to do and how.'

Red Harvest

Given the history of the decade, beginning with the massive attack against the air traffic controllers, the Jay strike was more than a fight against concessions. It was the struggle against the scabs which expanded the context of the strike outside the realms of the paper industry. And it was this struggle that linked the Jay strikers with the vast number of workers around the world who have seen themselves become expendable in the face of nationally organized strikebreaking.

In Jay there were daily confrontations between strikers and scabs. This, and the state-wide support that was received from other unions, built up considerable pressure in the state legislature. By late summer 1987, a bill was passed by the legislature that would have prevented employers from hiring scabs for the first ten weeks of a strike. But even this moderate measure was soon defeated when the state governor, John McKernan, whose brother is a well-known lobbyist for the paper industry, vetoed the bill and the legislature wasn't able to override his veto. In total, the governor vetoed similar legislation three times during the strike, earning himself the title McVeto among strikers.



At the end of the first month of the strike, IP announced that the mill was running at 60 percent of normal capacity. While this was far from the truth and intended to undermine the strike by presenting the semblance of normal production, it raised a question that was posed throughout the strike: can the 1250 paperworkers in Jay really be replaced?

In Jay, much was made of the fact that the scabs were not producing paper, or if they were, that it was of such poor quality that it could never be sold. The assumption underpinning this argument was that there was some knowledge or skill involved in papermaking that couldn't be replaced even if the paperworkers themselves could be.

That production at the mill was affected by the strike is clear. Even after fifteen months, huge piles of purchased pulp were in the mill yard, demonstrating that the scabs were still unable to consistently make a high quality pulp. But the reality of the new automation, the proliferation of professional strikebreaking firms, and the prevailing low wage rates had given IP the framework for achieving its objectives. By the spring of 1989, six months after the strike was terminated, the mill announced that the scabs, with the 100 or so strikers that had been rehired, had broken previous production records.

One of the foreseeable consequences of the union's legalistic strategy was that the strike would not shut the mill down. But a related consequence was that the strike would be a long and protracted struggle, and that events outside of Jay would become increasingly important. With scabs "running" the plant, it wasn't at all clear if the union had any strategy at all.

In August, 1987, Local 14 organized one of the largest labor rallies in the history of Maine. Close to 10,000 people from around New England travelled to Jay and marched to the mill. But while the march demonstrated enormous support for the strike, the union made no attempt to harness its potential power in shutting down the mill. As quickly as the demonstration had assembled, it disappeared.

In the fall, many people in Jay realized that the strike needed a new push. Having blocked the mass actions of the summer, the union appeared to have no strategy and turned to Corporate Campaign (CC) for help. After Ray Rogers, the founder and head of CC, came to Jay to address the membership, Local 14 urged the UPIU to hire him. However Corporate Campaign was not hired until December, six months into the strike.

The basic strategy of a corporate campaign is straightforward. It should be general knowledge for union organizers: study your enemy and mobilize your strengths against your opponent's weaknesses. The fact that there is a demand for the services of the Corporate Campaign's services demonstrates that unions, as in Jay, have little or no such organizing experience.

Roger's involvement in the strike brought a strategy to the long haul that was otherwise not present. As a result, four distinct programs were begun which together defined the union's strategy.

First, workers mobilized to put pressure on several corporations and banks with financial ties to IP including Coca-Cola, Avon, and the Bank of Boston. At one of the highpoints, a large demonstration was organized against the Bank Of Boston which brought hundreds of people from Jay to the bank's corporate headquarters in Boston. The rally was a powerful show of strength and made tangible the link between the scabs in Jay and the largest financial institution in the financial center of New England.

Second, a series of travelling caravans were organized in which people from Jay were able to speak to thousands of workers and supporters throughout New England. On the caravans the strikers circulated their struggle in the most direct way possible, while at the same time raising funds to continue the strike. In Maine, where caravans of between 10 and 20 cars travelled to every single papermill town, strikers were able to counter the lies that IP was circulating in an enormous television and newspaper campaign.

Third, workers were able to link the four separate locations against IP's efforts to keep the struggles distinct. A whole series of horizontal connections was established between the 3,500 locked-out/striking workers and workers at IP mills throughout the country. This was done outside the formal lines of communication of the UPIU.

JAY RAGE

"But I wish to god, now, that we'd been a little harder. I don't mean that we should have killed somebody. But I wish we'd shown them...That we're not gonna just stand back and let you roll over us like with a steam shovel..."

In the beginning of the strike I thought, I'm not going on that picket line. I mean the first night I went, someone gave me a picket sign and said, "Hold this." And I said I can't hold that, I can't do that. Somebody said, "Scream at that scab." I said I can't, and the first time I screamed, I cried. I thought, I'm gonna go to hell for calling this guy a dirty rotten name.

And now, I don't regret one damn thing I said and I wished I'd spent every minute up there because where I work, like any other service place you have to deal with those sons of bees. They don't give a damn about what they did to anybody in this town. They're arrogant about it! They enjoy the fact that they're standing next to you in a line and when you guys are getting strike pay, they loved it. They enjoyed the fact that here they were with their three and four hundred dollar checks and you guys were hurtin'.

The other bunch that I can't stomach is the lower management people. They're no better than we are! They think that they've got a prestigious position, but when you guys are out where the hell are they gonna be. And what did they do? Train a scab to take your job! I resent them as much as I resent the scabs. They come in and cash their double-salary paychecks and you guys were living on fifty-five dollars. I hate them. I hate what they did to everybody in this town.

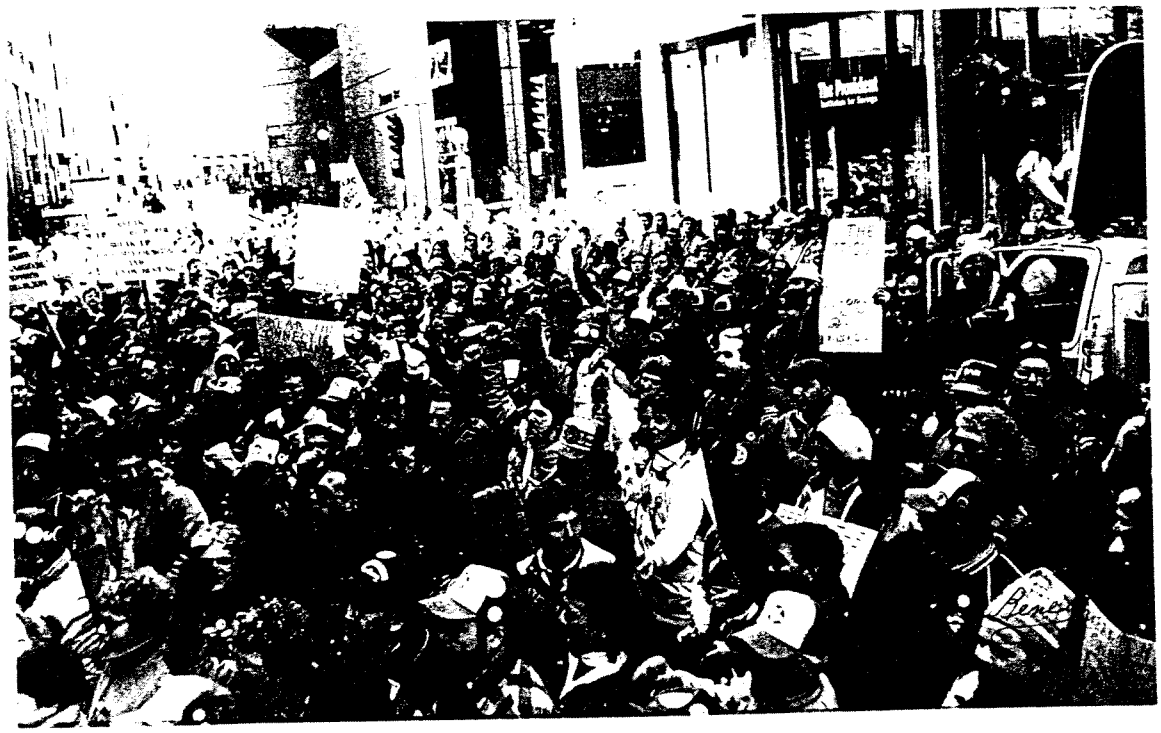
Then I used to think how, you know, I can't think bad of somebody. Well I understand why they're scabbing. Boy I learned the hard way. I don't understand why anybody would scab! There's no reason for it. But I guess at this point, what I feel like — course at work I can't say a damn thing. I can give 'em a dirty look. I can ignore 'em. I can not talk to 'em. I can give 'em their money and — I mean I do everything: I don't touch their hands, I don't do nothing. I slap the money on the counter and I'm as rotten as I can be and still do my job and not get in trouble.

But I wish to god, now, that we'd been harder. I wish — I don't mean that I think we should have killed somebody. But I wish we'd shown them, like that guy said: You don't have to blow up the damn mill but you can sure as hell blow up the little building in the back and show 'em we mean business. That we're not gonna just stand back and let you roll over us like with a steam shovel and just take what you want. I mean they're coming in here and one guy — well he's (with a strong southern accent) "Gonna buy a house." Buy your godamn house! I hope somebody burns it — isn't that a rotten thing to say. I hope sombody breaks every window in it and I hope when they're throwing the rocks it hits somebody on the head. And I hate feeling that way!

And I resent IP for turning us to that. I resent IP for making me think that my neighbour is an asshole. But as far as I'm concerned he screwed every one of you over. He deliberately stayed in there. And if they had come out with the rank and file and said, "Hey, if our guys ain't working, we're not working." But no, they chose to stay in there because they had to have their paycheck. Well what was everybody else doing. Depending on the food bank and handouts from everybody to fight for a cause. They should have come out.

I guess what it boils down to: I hope my kids have learned that they'll never scab no matter what. No matter what the company offers you or I don't care if you have to starve, you go find some way else instead of screwing your neighbour in the back. Screwing somebody that you've worked next to for twenty or thirty years for the almighty dollar.

Note: This rap is from a discussion in Jay in July, 1989, ten months after the strike was terminated. The woman speaking works as a teller at the local credit union.



Jay strikers and supporters demonstrate outside the Bank of Boston headquarters

Finally, the cumulative effect of these efforts forced IP to acknowledge that the four locations were acting jointly, and in April 1989, to open joint negotiations. IP made the termination of the Corporate Campaign a condition for these negotiations. When the UPIU agreed, it found IP still insistent that the scabs were permanent. The contracts were overwhelmingly rejected at all four sites.

The failure of the April negotiations marked the failure of the strategy of the long haul. Despite the importance of some of these experiences, this strategy directly contradicted the mass mobilizations initiated by the workers at the start of the strike. Boycotts, trips to Boston, and the building of the "pool" could not substitute for stopping production at the mill.

There's Life (and Death) After IP

I did this for 13 years, and now that I've gotten away from it, and I've been away from it a year and a half - I feel it. I've never really felt this good in a long time.

In Jay, in the midst of all these activities, the strike was having a profound effect on everyone. The experiences of a long and protracted struggle radically transformed the community. In place of three separate towns, working separate shifts, the people in Jay were creating a lively community. A number of organizations were created during the strike including a food bank, a clothes bank, and a job bank. In addition, weekly meetings organized by the union became regular social events.

People in Jay, freed from the long hours and unnerving shifts of the Southern Swing, discovered that they had a great deal more time. They had time to spend with their families, to build new relationships, and to talk about new subjects. One father was able to teach his children how to read.

People also had time to reflect on their lives prior to the strike when their dedication to IP had been so all-consuming. In the words of one striker, "it made us realize that there's life after IP." It also led many workers to realize that their dedication had often been nothing more than overtime:

"Another thing I hear a lot of people say is, 'I'm gonna work no more overtime. I'm gonna work just what I have to'... But they won't get called in the middle of the night and say, 'Yeah, I'll be right there.' No more. I don't think you'll see that anymore."

"I don't have any dedication towards the company. No matter where I work. My attitude sucks. It does, honest to god. I'm supposed to be at work in three quarters of an hour and once again I'm not going. They asked me to work mandatory overtime the first week I was there. I told them, 'I worked all the overtime IP asked me to. Anytime they asked me to work, I worked.' And I said, 'Look where it got me.' I'm all done working overtime."

In February 1988, mid-way through the strike, the town of Jay was evacuated following an enormous, and potentially fatal, chlorine dioxide leak at the mill. Chlorine dioxide is used to make pulp from ground wood and is so dangerous that it cannot legally be mixed on site. It is twice as deadly as the chemical that killed 2500 people at the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, India. In fact, the leak in Jay could have been worse than Bhopal if the weather had been warmer and allowed the chemical to turn into gas or mix with the river water to form hydrochloric acid.

The experience of the leak, and of the evacuation, brought a turning point in the strike. Women, most of whom had never worked at the mill, raised a set of demands which transformed the strike into a broader struggle. They demanded control over the mill, the environment, and the town itself.

Within two days they organized a group of women and children to march on the mill. It was a small march in comparison

with the enormous rally of the previous summer, but its impact was more powerful. In its fundamental demands, it challenged the subordination of community life to IP's production process. Traditional divisions between the mill and the home, and between factory issues and community concerns, were quickly being broken down.

At the mill gates the demand was raised to shut the mill down:

"We're not done! We want the mill down! We want our children to go to bed at night and know that they'll wake up in the morning. I don't want my kids evacuated if the mill thinks that they should tell us! We're not stupid! We know what's going on and we're sick of their whitewash and propaganda and cover-up! They don't have a forcefield around this mill. There's no way that chlorine and gas stays in this mill. We want it down!"

Their demand for the right to live in a safe environment won wide support. It led to a new level of political activity by the community which included running pro-strike candidates for all local political offices, and passing an environmental ordinance at a special town meeting. This ordinance, which IP tried unsuccessfully to repeal in 1989, gave the town of Jay authority to set and enforce environmental standards. Such authority is normally reserved for state and federal agencies like the EPA, but these had long shown themselves to be "in the pocket" of the paper industry.

The environmental ordinance posed a significant challenge to IP by attempting to control IP's production inside the mill, on the basis that it affected the health of those outside the mill. IP suggested that the ordinance would make Jay "the most anti-business town in Maine." In the Maine Business Journal, the company actually claimed that the ordinance could force it to close the mill.

Workers in the paper industry, from logging camps to millwork, have always known their work is extremely hazardous. As one striker said, *"If they made you jump into that toxic shit in there, and believe me they have it, a lot of it, and you refused to do it, you could go right out the door. You couldn't even grieve that."* And papermill communities have also known the rivers were polluted, the air smelt nauseating, and deadly waste was being buried underground. This was understood to be a part of life, the price of having "a steak on the table". That the death rate from cancer in Maine is ten percent above the national average, and is concentrated in the papermill communities, was understood without the need for statistics. One woman, who has been on medication for more than a year as a result of the chlorine leak, explained that Jay, "is a haven for widows."

The fact that a chemical leak gave rise to new demands which transformed the strike is significant in several respects. It demonstrated concretely that "green" issues can broaden the struggle of industrial workers. But it also revealed that these demands were not initiated by the union, nor directly by the union members.

Additionally, these environmental demands fundamentally challenged prevalent green politics. In place of the question of how to clean the rivers, for example, they demanded control over the mill.

The environmental movement can learn an essential lesson from Jay if it accepts some basic realities. First, that virtually all of the land in the country is owned by some sector of capital. Second, that as long as capital owns the land it will also control how the land is used. Third, that the capitalist priorities which generate pollution cannot be effectively challenged without the political power and organized support of the local working class.

LAND USE IN THE UNITED STATES

30%	Forestland (wood and paper)
25%	Grasslands (meat and dairy)
22%	Croplands (wheat and corn)
12%	Marshes, Deserts, and Swamps
10%	"Recreation and Wildlife"
1.4%	Population Areas (An area with more than 5,000 inhabitants)

Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1989

How Not To End A Strike

The thin lips curved in another smile. He didn't seem to think much of the fat chief's deadliness. 'Any time he rubs me out I deserve rubbing. What's he got against you?'

Red Harvest

By the summer of 1988, a full year into the strike, it was widely recognized that the strategy of the long haul would not be enough to win the struggle. A new strategy was needed that would expand the strike to mills throughout the IP system. The strikers needed reinforcements, and Local 14, which was the organizational center of the Corporate Campaign activities, played a key role in the new strategy.

Throughout the summer, the "horizontal" connections between paper workers in the striking locations and others still on the job were expanded. These were direct, face-to-face contacts between workers, and they were made outside the formal channels of communication of the UPIU.

Workers in many of the non-striking mills were urged to slow down production and work-to-rule, in order to hurt IP's production outside the striking mills. Some locations acted on this demand. However, judging from IP's record high revenues and production figures in 1987 and 1988, others decided not to support the strike. According to IP's 1989 Annual Report, the following statistics tell this tale.

IP'S CLAIMED SALES AND PRODUCTION

	1986	1987	1988
Net Sales (billions of $)	5.5	7.7	9.5
Production White Paper (millions of tons)	1.65	2.1	2.3
Production Coated Paper (millions of tons)	.40	.45	.53

At the UPIU national convention, in August 1988, hopes were raised when the strategy of extending the strike received wide support. The UPIU agreed that it would find money to extend the strikers' benefits and that efforts would be made to expand the "pool." Indeed, there was agreement that if (1) a location's contract with IP was not expired, the location would ask for it to be re-opened, and (2) if a location's contract was expired, no concessionary contract would be signed.

But the hope following the convention soon turned to anxiety. Despite the convention's agreements, contracts were negotiated at a number of IP locations because local leadership at those mills didn't consider them to be "concessionary." The president of the UPIU in turn signed them. A significant breakdown in the convention's agreements had arisen over something as straightforward as the definition of what was "concessionary."

By September, there was a lot of confusion in Jay. People believed that the strategy of expanding the strike held the only hope for victory, but this also meant that there was little that they themselves could do. Increasingly, the outcome of this long struggle was becoming dependent on decisions made by others in distant places.

A striking crane operator expressed what many people in Jay were talking about: *"That's what we are right now, we're hanging on. So when they call us front line soldiers, that's what we are. We gotta have the replacements to win the war. We gotta have the replacements. They've gotta come and help us."*

There was a brief moment of real excitement at the start of the month when 20 cars of roving pickets were "despatched" on an all night drive to the IP mill in Ticonderoga, New York. There, the Jay strikers set up pickets at morning shift change. The picket line was honored but many workers at the mill as well as the local union leadership were openly resentful of not having been given notice. Similar actions were not repeated, and in Jay, the rush of excitement turned again to anxiety.

At this time, everyone's expectations focused on an October 8 and 9 meeting of the IP union pension council to be held in Nashville, Tennessee, the headquarters of the UPIU and a safe distance from all four locations. At that meeting, according to Local 14's president, Bill Meserve, Jay would "once and for all" find out if the strike had the support it needed from other locations. On Monday October 10, the people in Jay learned that their strike had been ended, though they had not voted to end it. Most people first heard the news as "news" on the radio.

People were in a state of shock. Throughout the strike, they had repeatedly been told by the leadership of the local union that they themselves would decide when the strike was over. When they demanded to know what had happened, local union officials told them that there wasn't enough support for the strike. If the strike had not been terminated in this way, they argued, hundreds of strikers, learning that the meeting had gone badly, would have rushed across the picket lines to claim jobs at the mill.

The union's underlying accusation was that hundreds of strikers were planning to scab, and that it had "saved" these potential scabs from themselves. In an even more ludicrous argument, union leaders said that by terminating the strike they had "preserved" the solidarity in the town.

The anger in Jay never coalesced into a collective power. No group even raised the question of whether the local union leadership had the legal right to terminate the strike in this way. Instead, the bitterness was directed at the UPIU, and doubts began to be voiced about the whole project of the strike. No one in Jay had been given a complete explanation of what had happened at the October meeting. Even after a year had passed, most people in Jay still did not know exactly how or why the strike was ended under such circumstances.

Aftershocks

The first aftershock came quickly, within months. It confirmed that the IP strategy and the struggle against it would have ramifications throughout the industry.

At the Boise Cascade mill, 30 miles up river, the union accepted an unprecedented six-year concessionary contract. Signed a full six months before the existing contract was to expire, the Boise contract was one measure of what had been at stake in the struggle against IP.

The Boise contract was the first six-year contract to be negotiated in any manufacturing industry in Maine. It included the elimination of the Christmas shutdown holiday by 1990; the complete elimination of premium pay for work on Sundays and holidays by 1994; a wage package that will effectively reduce real wages by the rate of inflation each year (or by nearly 30 % by 1995 if the present rate does not rise); a requirement that workers begin paying a portion of their health care insurance; and a series of changes in work rules and seniority that are designed to give the company complete control over the production process.

Further aftershocks were also felt in the paper industry, but these were not always concessionary contracts. In September 1989, almost a year after the strike's termination, workers on a wildcat strike at a Boise Cascade mill over a thousand miles away, in International Falls, Minnesota, stormed a housing compound where B, E, & K scabs were living. Trailers were set on fire and vehicles were overturned before state police, using tear gas, managed to disperse the crowd of more than 400. The National Guard was put on alert. The mill is in the process of being modernized by Boise Cascade. One of the workers arrested was killed while in police custody.

Several weeks later, in West Virginia, more than 2,000 striking coal miners and supporters marched on Pittston Coal Company's main coal processing plant and shut it down. Nearly 200 occupied the plant's control room. They had brought all necessary provisions to remain inside for a week. These coal miners had been on strike against the Pittston Company since the beginning of June, 1989. Pittston had also hired scabs in its effort to break the strike. The doors to the control room were locked with cables and chains, and the plant itself was surrounded by the remaining group of miners.

The occupation of Moss Plant No. 3 near Castlewood, West Virginia was the first mass ocupation since the 1930s, but barely a word was carried by the national press. The miners left the plant after four days, signalling that their action was primarily intended as a symbolic show of strength. But it also demonstrated that the sit-down tactic had resurfaced in this period of mass strikebreaking.

In Jay, the year following the ending of the strike was quiet compared to these various aftershocks. It was quiet, but it was also a period of immense changes. It meant accepting that the strike was over, the strikers had lost their jobs, the mill was being operated by scabs. The principal social organizations built during the course of the strike were also closed during the course of the year. The weekly meetings were the first to end; the food bank closed in July; the clothes bank in August. Finally, in September, the big sign in the center of Jay that read "Scabs Go Home" was taken down.

The year involved finding work elsewhere, the last of the unemployment and displaced worker benefits having been terminated. The paperworkers of Jay were turned into migrant workers, fanning-out every morning to work all around the surrounding area. Their new jobs required travelling anywhere from 1 to 3 hours each day.

Nearly 150 strikers travelled in vans to work two different shifts at Maine's largest manufacturer, the Bath Iron Works. There, in a union shop, they worked on a Navy shipbuilding contract. Strikers also found work at papermills all over the state of Maine. In fact, there were Jay paperworkers working at mills owned by every major paper company in the state. But wherever they travelled, they circulated their experiences.

I was earning twice what the hell I'm earning here. If the new contract takes away one red cent I'll walk! I'm not going to drain my retirement because you're not paying me. I'm looking for a job. The hell with the company I work for. I'll do my job, but the first chance I get I'm gone.

Some of the strikers refused to travel and looked for work closer to home. They found work at the nearby Bass shoe plant, the Carlton Woolen mill, and as builders and bus drivers. Generally, the work paid much less than wages at IP, but by this time people had lived for over two years without that money. One striker enrolled in a university, another opened up a diner in the center of town. It's called the "End of The Line."

1. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from interviews with people in Jay during and after the strike.

Author's note: This article has grown out of my involvment in the IP strike as a videomaker, producing a documentary for use as an organizing tool by the striking locals. A twenty minute video, "Paper Strike", was taken to the October 1988 Nashville Conference but was prevented from being shown. The final version of the video, entitled "Many Faces of Paper", has been circulated to papermill communities across the country.

I thank Bryn Clark and Sande Smith, fellow video activists and members of Black Cat Collective, with whom I shared the experience of working in Jay. Thanks also to Rene Brochu for his photographs of the strike, andto the many friends in Jay who have given me an education during and since the strike.

Most of the information for this article has been assembled from interviews, but the following sources have been used:

Local and Maine Periodicals: Livermore Falls Advertiser; Kennebec Journal; The Lewiston Daily Sun; Morning Sentinel; Maine Times; Portland Press Herald; Maine Business Journal.

Trade and Financial: Paper Trade Journal, 1985-89; Pulp and Paper, 1985-89; Moody's Financial Journal, 1988-89; "World Pulp and Paper Industry," Financial Times Survey, December 13, 1989.

Government Publications: Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1989; Maine Occupational Wages in Manufacturing Industries, 1980-89; Census of Maine Manufacturers, 1949-89; Labor Relations in Maine, 1984-89; Occupational Injuries and Illnesses in Maine, 1980-89.

For the only complete account of the October 1988 Nashville Conference, see C. Caffentzis, "How Not To End A Strike", available from the author. For a general history of the Maine paper industry, see William C. Osborn, The Paper Plantation, 1973.