

# WORKERS

# SOLIDARITY

Published by Workers Solidarity Alliance / International Workers Association

Issue Number 3 September/October 1992 \$1.00

## The North American Slave Trade Agreement

As the U.S. economy drifts in recession, working people must brace themselves to receive the next blow: the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). NAFTA, if ratified, will add to the process of capital flight to Mexico and Central America which began in earnest in the 1980s. The result for U.S. workers will be depression living conditions while the capitalists continue to comfortably reap high profits.

Massive unemployment is the only logical result of the scheme, while the already low wages of Mexican and Central American workers will be forced even lower to make their nations "more attractive" to the capitalists. Less than subsistence wages will be accompanied by increased environmental degradation and destruction. The area along the U.S./ Mexican border is already called by environmentalists a "2000 mile Love Canal".

The capitalist policy of economic terrorism has had its desired effect in many communities. Large sec-

tions of the U.S. working class are now willing to accept virtually any wages and conditions to keep their jobs. Humiliation and fear are the order of the day in many areas. And anger. The anger is building even as the terror of destitution builds. Everyone seems to know that something has gotta happen soon. As more communities are raped and gutted by capitalist greed, the root cause of the problem becomes harder to ignore. Equality and freedom cannot exist in a society where the means of production are in the hands of private owners. If we accept the illogic of private ownership, then we accept watching our communities destroyed. It is the illogic of the strong many enslaved by the weak few that we must confront. The promises of liberal politicians for increased subsidies and support are empty lies told to gain

power. Capitalism is no longer capable of providing those subsidies. The liberal promise of a "peace dividend" collapses in the reality of shutting down the war economy. The cynicism of the New Right is as remarkable as the mendacity of the liberals. One right wing proponent of NAFTA, when confronted with the fact that most Mexican workers were unable to purchase the automobiles they are producing, responded that Mexican workers were unable to purchase cars because of the horrible trade restrictions currently in place!

The solution for U.S., Mexican and Canadian workers is in seizing the economic means now controlled by the capitalist elite, converting those means to useful ends, and abolishing the system of wage slavery that keeps us down. The first step in achieving this goal is the building of revolutionary unions capable of providing the democratic structure for transferring power from the hands of the few to the hands of all working people.

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## Nigerian Education Workers and Students Under Attack

In an effort to shed its image as a military dictatorship, the government of General Ibrahim Babangida has called for civilian elections in December 1992. The government has set up two military-sponsored political parties, the Social Democratic Party and the National Republican Convention.

According to the libertarian socialist Awareness League, the transition from military to civilian rule has been characterized by postponements, arbitrary detention of political activists and a ban on political activities. Despite these obstructions the transition has advanced.

The growing repression leading up to the national elections is further compounded by mounting external debt (about \$40 million US), soaring inflation (320%) with the attendant social problems.

Increased desperation on the part of the government in the past six months has been manifested in the closure of all federally funded universities, and the prosecution on felony charges of treason of members of the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities and the National Association of Nigerian Students. Cases of increasing harassment of journalists abound. Three Nigerian newspapers have been shut down by the government without explanation.

Among the victims of this repression are four members of the Awareness League, Udemba Chuks, Garba Audu, Kingsley Etioni and the General Secretary James Ndubuisi. They were arrested following a wave of worker and student protests across the country in the past three months. They have been held in prison under extremely inhumane conditions ever since.

The Awareness League has launched a campaign to have them freed along with other detained activists. This campaign has resulted in legal action in addition to civil protests.

"It is apparent", writes the Awareness League in the international appeal, "that we cannot sustain this campaign without substantial support and help ... We are therefore appealing for financial aid or any

other form of aid or assistance in kind. This will enable us to:

- Pay for legal services to secure the release and freedom of the detained activists.
- Care for the families and dependents of the detained activists for the period of their detention.
- Publicize and bring to light the plight of those detained.
- Handle other related logistical problems.

Any amount of money or other form of assistance will be highly appreciated as this will go a long way in further advancing the struggle for freedom and liberty in this part of the world."

PLEASE HEED THIS CALL FOR ASSISTANCE! Donations should be sent to:

Awareness League  
c/o Samuel Mbah  
P.O. Box 28  
Agbani, Enugu State  
Nigeria

Or they may be sent to:

WSA International Secretary, 339  
Lafayette St. Rm. 202, New York,  
New York, 10012 (212) 979-8353

## Government Expands Control Over Teamsters

Part of the old Eastern European vampire legend says that a vampire must be willingly invited into the house of its victim, and once invited in has its victim in its power. Members of the Teamsters Union might well ponder this legend as an August 20th Federal Court ruling takes effect.

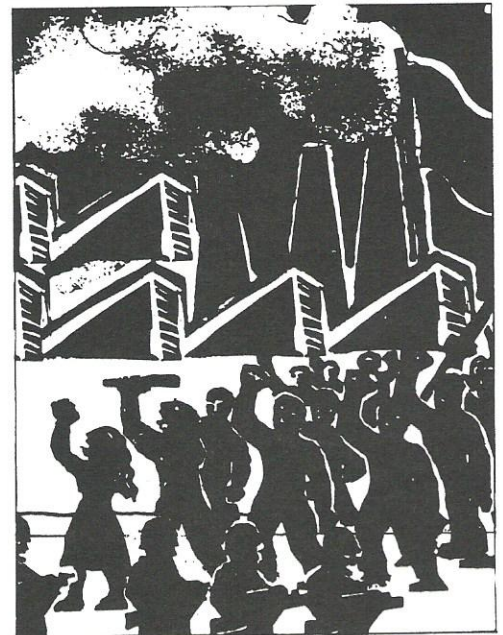
The Teamsters, if you remember, invited Federal intervention in the 1980s to help insure free elections in the union and to help oust corrupt officials who had held power for decades. In 1989 a "mutual consent decree" was put in place creating an Independent Review Board (IRB) to facilitate the Teamsters democratization process. The board was to be made up of one union representative, one government representative and one impartial, outside participant approved by both sides. The board was to be disbanded once the Teamsters established free elections. But on August 20th Federal Judge David Edelstein ruled in favor of a government request to expand the power of the board to make decisions that "shall

be final and binding" and ordered the acceptance of William Webster, former director of the FBI and the CIA, as the "impartial" third member of the board. This after the ousting of the "old Guard" corrupt officials by reform candidates and, significantly, after a string of successful strikes and contract negotiations by the reinvigorated Teamsters.

Webster, besides being the former head of the state's secret police agencies, also sits on the Board of Directors of the anti-union Pinkerton Security agency and Anheuser Busch, with whom the Teamsters have a contract.

To add insult to overt attack, Edelstein also ordered the union to pay all expenses of the IRB, including unlimited compensation to Webster, who will receive \$385 per hour. Union members, who sought reform to stop corrupt officials from stealing union funds and abusing members, have already been forced to pay over \$30 million for the services of the IRB.

This is further evidence of what happens when workers trade one set of private gangsters for the gangsters of the state. We get fucked over, humiliated and robbed either way. It also points to the need for a militant democratic labor confederation which can offer strength and assistance to the membership of unions such as the Teamsters, to help them help themselves without seeking the illusionary assistance of the state.



## Stop Repression of Moldavian Anarcho- Syndicalists

Two recent victims of the authoritarian and nationalist Moldavian regime are anarcho-syndicalists Tamara Burdenko and Igor Hergenreorder.

On April 29, 1992 Tamara Burdenko was fired from her job for "systematic violations of labor discipline". Tamara had been employed by the magazine "Kodry" for 14 years. The reasons for her firing were actually the ideological beliefs held by Tamara and her husband Igor. Igor, we should note, is handicapped and unable to work.

Recently Igor published articles in the Moldavian oppositional press bitterly criticizing the policies of the authoritarian regime and especially the government's war effort in Pridnestrovye. Soon after the publication of these articles Igor was summoned for an interview with the Moldavian state police (KGB). At this interview a KGB officer told Igor: "Today there are more and more people who become invalids. Do you think anybody will care if there is one less?"

The editor-in-chief of the magazine "Kodry" is ardently pro-government. He tried to portray the firing of Tamara as a "non-political act". In turn Tamara appealed to the state court against the violations of her labor rights at her trial of June 17th.

At the time of her trial, the administration of the magazine "Kodry" gave Moldavian authorities another reason to prosecute Tamara and to be "dissatisfied" with Igor. During this time the far-right National Christian Party began a campaign to rehabilitate a former dictator of Rumania, Ion Antonescu, who ruled Rumania in the 1930s and 40s as an ally of Adolf Hitler. This campaign is faithfully supported by many government officials. Igor and Tamara, together with other writers, actively protested against the rise of fascist ideology and published a declaration against fascism on July 8th.

On July 21 Tamara and Igor got the official response from the Association of Moldavian Writers, which owns and operates "Kodry". In their letter to Tamara the Association dismissed Tamara's charge that she

had been fired because of her ideological beliefs. The Association also informed Tamara that they were going to take her to court for "slander".

Late in the night of July 22 someone tried to break into Tamara and Igor's apartment. One of their neighbors called the police, but the attacker was never located. They discovered that their phone had been disconnected and service was not resumed until 11AM the next day. Since that night their phone service has been regularly cut.

On July 24th an unknown person rang their doorbell and gave Igor a sack which contained the severed head of a dog. Tamara and Igor were informed by their neighbors that somebody had told them about their conflict with the ruling Popular Front, and nationalists in general. Tamara and Igor have now been led to believe that, in the case of future break-ins or attacks, no one will call the police.

On July 25th the Moldavian TV news reported that "Transnistrian separatists are organizing in Kishinev [the Moldavian capital] and are creating anarcho-syndicalist

groups. The State Prosecutor has asked the legal authorities to carry out an investigation."

Soon after this Tamara and Igor's lawyer informed them that he would no longer defend them.

Anarcho-syndicalists in the Commonwealth of Independent States (former USSR) have called for a support campaign for Tamara and Igor. They are asking that telegrams and letters of protest be sent to the local court, the parliamentary human rights commission, the ministry of justice and the president of Moldavia. Their addresses are:

The People's Court for Buykan Sector  
Moldavia, Kishinev-1  
ul. M. Vistyazul, d.2  
Attn: President of the Court  
Ministry of Justice  
Moldavia, Kishinev-12  
ul. Stefan cheu Mare, d.73  
Parliament  
Moldavia, Kishinev-1  
ul. Stefan cheu Mare, d.105  
Attn: Secretariat of the Moldavian  
Parliament Human Rights Commission  
President  
Moldavia, Kishniev-1  
pl. Velikogo Nacionalnogo Sobraniya,  
d.1  
Mircha Ion Snegur

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Subscriptions: 6 issues of WS plus one issue of **Ideas & Action**-\$7.50. Checks should be made payable to Workers Solidarity Alliance. Bundles of 10 copies of **Workers Solidarity** are available for \$6.50. Distributors and retailers should contact us for details.

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## Working More and Getting Less

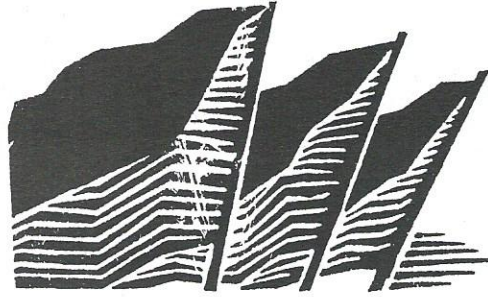
The average U.S. worker puts in almost 140 more hours on the job every year than two decades ago, according to a study that also found that paid days off have dwindled. This, combined with a continuing decline in real wages since 1973 adds up to a major decline in living standards for U.S. workers.

The study, conducted by Juliet Schor of Harvard and Laura Leete-Guy of Case Western University, pointed out that the obvious squeeze on leisure time has caused a dramatic shift in public attitudes. For the first time since surveys on time/income trade-offs have been taken, U.S. workers are signalling a willingness to give up money if it means time away from their job.

The study found that full-time workers put in, on average, 138 hours more a year in 1989 than they did in 1969. The economists then looked at commuting time and found that people were spending more time getting and back and forth to work. Figuring in the rise in work hours, commuting time and the decline in days off, the economists said workers are working 158 hours more each year to make their bosses rich, roughly one extra month.

Paid time off (vacations, holidays, sick leave and personal days) fell roughly 15 percent in the 1980s. U.S. workers had an average of 16.1 days off a year in 1989, down from 19.8 in 1981. In most European countries, workers get at least five weeks of paid vacation.

The decline in real wages, coupled with increasing health care and housing costs, are the major factors behind workers needing to put in more hours. In the face of these ever-increasing costs, the desire to work less, even if it means less money, will remain unfulfilled. The only remedy for a society based on wage slavery is the creation of a new society based on equal distribution and self-management, where everyone has access to both the necessities and the luxuries life has to offer and all useless work is eliminated. It's time to demand the 20 hour week for 40 hours pay!



## Zimbabwean Government Tries to Oust Unions

In the one-party state of Zimbabwe, the ruling government is doing all it can to dismantle and suppress independent unions. It is also in the process of imposing a harsh International Monetary Fund suggested "Structural Adjustment Program".

Right before May Day 1992, the government introduced an amendment to the Labor Relations Act which reverses the policy of one industry, one union (opening up key industries now controlled by independent unions to raids from state-sponsored unions); gives the state the power to set maximum wage levels despite any existing agreements won in negotiations; prevents unions from directly collecting dues from their members (imposing a mandatory dues check-off) and promotes works councils over directly elected unions. Last year, the government tried to deregister the Zimbabwean Council of Trade Unions as the umbrella organization of the Zimbabwean union movement.

MH

## Wake Up and Smell The Coffee

That's apparently what many members of the United Steel Workers have done. With the loss of over half their membership (down from over a million members 10 years ago to about 500,000 today), as well as better than a decade of deteriorating wage scales and working conditions, the membership has had enough.

At the recently concluded USW convention, resolutions put forth called for the end of union-sanctioned "Labor/Management Participation Teams"; a ban on forced overtime; restoration of industry-wide bargaining; banning further contracting out of work; streamlining the grievance procedure and the right to strike over local shop issues. Another resolution put forward called for a nationwide general strike against the proposed North American Free Trade Agreement.

Despite massive unemployment and growing poverty among the working class, let's hope that few will decide to run for cover and hide, and instead that many will begin the fight against those who have forced us into such sorry working and living conditions.

MH

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### How Bad is Bad?

As we walk the streets it's not hard to see that things are a mess. More and more people have their hands out, more and more people stand in the unemployment line, and more kids are on the streets with hungry eyes. Or maybe we feel the effects of this crisis ourselves, being unemployed or biting our nails with fear of becoming unemployed. Or maybe you're working some lousy part-time job that pays so little you have to collect food stamps to boot. Either way it's no picnic these days.

As the economists and politicians debate whether this is a depression or a recession, it doesn't much matter. Things are bad and not getting better.

This writer doesn't much dabble in statistics. Statistics don't have a human face and can't reflect the depth of our struggles. But I recently became interested in statis-

tics when I saw in a local New Jersey paper that close to 15% of all residents in this state live below the federal government's poverty line (which is an income of less than \$13,924 for a family of four, or less than \$6,932 for a single person---almost nothing in this day and age).

Knowing that things are bad in the New York/New Jersey area, it's simply sickening to learn that the number of Americans living in poverty is now **35.7 million**, a 2.1 million jump since 1991! And, according to official government statistics, 14.2% of all Americans live in poverty, the highest number since 1964.

Other interesting statistics include:

- 10 million Americans out of work.
- 5.8 million workers involuntarily working part-time.
- 1 million workers who have given up looking for work.

- 14 million workers now earning poverty-level wages or below--up 50% in a decade.
- Average real wages down 7.3% since 1979.
- 37 million Americans without health insurance.
- 20% of all children lack routine preventive health care (a recent study by Boston City Hospital revealed that most poor families must make a basic choice: heat or food).
- 25 million Americans on food stamps, an all-time record.
- The richest 1% of the population increased their share of the national wealth to **37%**; the bottom 90% saw their share drop to 31%.

There can only be one conclusion drawn from these statistics: the time to organize and fight is now, before it gets any worse. And how much worse can it get!?!

Mike Harris



# What is Anarcho-Syndicalism?

## Part Two

### The Methods of Anarcho-Syndicalism

The building of strong mass workers organizations based on the principles of direct democracy and direct action is seen by Anarcho-Syndicalists as the most practical way to prepare the majority of working people to overthrow the minority of exploiters (the capitalist class). This is based on the idea that the means will shape the ends. Anarcho-Syndicalists believe that minority movements, such as revolutionary parties made up of the "advanced minority" of the working class, are inevitably authoritarian in nature and unable to meet the needs and desires of the majority. Such movements which pit the revolutionary elite against the reactionary elite in a contest to see who can best manipulate the working class, can only reproduce the authoritarian, hierarchical relations which already exist (perhaps under a new name), and can never produce, encourage or allow to exist true liberation.

Mass workers organizations, organized based on economic sector, are the means by which working people can counter the economic power of the ruling class. If at present we have no control over the results of our labor, we still have control over the hands and minds which do the work. What we make we can stop making. What we build we can also destroy. This is the power all working people possess, but only through collective action can it be realized.

In the daily economic battle within capitalism, syndicalist workers organizations are ideally suited to the task of defending and expanding workers rights. It is the expansion of workers rights, both in the work place and in the community, that will build the confidence necessary for working people to create a free, self-managed society. Top-down, bureaucratic unions, on the other hand, seek to confine workers into a limited, subservient role in society. The bureaucratic unions are a perfect example of the "means and ends" idea mentioned above: their means are usually conservative and hierarchical, and the end result is the maintenance of the status quo (or

slightly less). Anarcho-Syndicalist unions cannot tolerate the status quo. Based as they are on direct democracy and full member participation, the basic desire for self-emancipation and liberation will constantly push for ever greater and more comprehensive demands. In modern terms this unleashing of creativity and courage is called "empowerment", the process whereby individuals take control of their own lives. This process can be said to be the ultimate method of Anarcho-Syndicalism: the complete empowerment of the working class through direct control of workers organizations.

Workers organizations free of bureaucratic mill stones are capable of bringing the combined creative might of their memberships against the petty power of the bosses. Linked confederally, such organizations can (and have) applied that strength on an industry-wide or society-wide scale.

### Differences Between Business Unions and Syndicalist Unions

The main differences between syndicalist unions and bureaucratic business unions are both structural and strategic.

Structurally business unions are based on the principles of **representative democracy** and **surrendered authority**. In America business union structure closely resembles the organizational structure of the state (with considerably **less** democracy in many cases!). Representatives are either elected by the membership or appointed by the top executives. In either case the authority of the membership is surrendered (or stolen). The representatives then conduct the business of the union with little or no input from the membership, reporting instead to the executives above them. Decisions are made and either submitted for approval to the members or enacted over the heads of the membership. In either case the membership has virtually no input into the formulation of deci-

sions. This is left in the hands of representatives, paid experts and top executives.

In a syndicalist organization the membership is fully involved in all levels of the decision-making process. Discussion and debate are encouraged. The authority of the members is never surrendered, but instead guides the daily functioning of the union. Regular mass meetings (general assemblies) are held to both discuss issues and make decisions. If necessary, delegates are chosen to deliver the substance of these decisions to larger confederal bodies or conduct negotiations with the bosses. These delegates, and all union officers, are subject to the will of the membership which has the power to revoke their delegated authority at any time.

Strategically the business union is hamstrung by its dependence on the largess of the capitalist class. This acceptance of an inferior, wage slave status has always been a feature of business unionism (as typified in the old AFL slogan "a fair days work for a fair days pay"), but it was only fully developed as a strategic goal in the period of capitalist expansion after WWII. In that expanding economy the business unions opted for a bigger slice of what appeared to be an ever growing pie. Minor social democratic reforms were half-heartedly called for, but there was never any question that working people would always live as wage slaves. It was only asked that we be better fed and tended.

Anarcho-Syndicalism recognizes the importance of defending and expanding workers rights in the current system, and by its democratic and combative nature is better able than the business unions to do so, yet it also sees today's struggles as part of a larger war between the employing class and the working class, the only just end of which will be the abolition of all classes and the creation of a free society. Each current struggle is seen in terms of moving toward that goal. For example, in negotiations with an employer a business union might demand a 15% wage increase for its members. In the process of wheeling and dealing that increase is reduced to 10%, which is still considered a victory. Their mem-

bers get a 10% raise. Prices go up 6%. Make that a 4% raise.

A syndicalist union might also begin with the demand for a 15% increase, and in the process of negotiations **might** also agree to reduce it to 10%, but in return for knocking off the 5% would demand some "minor" changes in the work rules ... such as direct participation in the hiring and firing process, elimination of floor supervisors in favor of a workers council, flexibility in start and stop times, etc.. In short, greater control over the work place and expanded power for workers. The business unions accept a subordinate position for working people, Anarcho-Syndicalists accept no such inferior position and seek to build and expand workers power on the job and in society.

Mike Kolhoff

Next Issue: The Goals of Anarcho-Syndicalism



## Principles of Revolutionary Unionism

1: The goal of revolutionary unionism is the reorganization of social life on the basis of libertarian communism, which can only be achieved by the revolutionary action of the working class itself. Only the economic organizations of the working class, and not political parties, are capable of reaching this objective.

2: Revolutionary unionism aims at the abolition of class privilege. We seek to do this by establishing communities and administrative organisms run by workers, forming a system of free councils without subordination to any State or political party. The goal of revolutionary unionism is not the conquest of political power but the abolition of all statism in the life of society.

3: Revolutionary unionism combines the daily struggle for the economic, social and intellectual advancement of the working class within the limits of present-day society with the revolutionary goal of common action by all manual and intellectual workers, in all sectors of the economy, to create self-management of all production and distribution processes for the benefit of the community.

4: Revolutionary unionism is opposed to centralist organization in which the needs of society are sub-

ordinated to the interests of a few, variety is replaced by uniformity and personal responsibility is replaced by unanimous discipline. It is for this reason that revolutionary unionism is based on federalism, a free organization which works from the base to the top by uniting all forces in the defense of common ideas and interests.

5: Revolutionary unionism rejects all parliamentary activity and all delegation of power to legislative bodies. It holds that even the freest voting system cannot bring about the disappearance of the clear contradictions at the heart of present-day society.

6: Revolutionary unionism is internationalist, it rejects all arbitrarily created political and national frontiers and declares that what is called nationalism is the religion of the modern state, behind which is revealed the material interests of the ruling classes. Revolutionary unionism recognizes only the self-determination and free federation of all regions.

7: Revolutionary unionism opposes militarism and war. We call for strikes and boycotts as the means of preventing war. During the revolution, workers militias, controlled

by the workers unions, must be substituted for standing armies.

8: We call for direct action as the primary means of revolutionary struggle. By this we mean strikes, occupations, boycotts, sabotage, etc.

9: While revolutionary unionism is opposed to all organized violence of the State, we realize that there will be violent clashes during the decisive struggles between the capitalism of today and the free communism of tomorrow. We recognize as valid that violence which can be used as a means of defense against the violence used by the ruling classes during the social revolution. Since expropriation of the land and the means of production can only be achieved by the direct intervention of the workers revolutionary economic organizations, defense of the revolution must be in the hands of the workers own organizations and cannot be the task of military or quasi-military bodies developing independently.

10: Revolutionary unionism is the only social force that can bring about the self-emancipation of workers from capitalism and the State.

**Adopted at the first conference of the International Workers Association, Berlin, Germany, 1922.**

## Workers Solidarity Alliance

WSA is an Anarcho-Syndicalist organization with groups and contacts in all regions of the United States. We seek to build working class organizations based on the principles of direct democracy and direct action, both in the workplace and in the community. We place ourselves in opposition to the bureaucratic, authoritarian structures which have come to dominate our society and our daily lives. We seek to build living organizational forms

which are completely under the control of working people. WSA activists are involved in a wide variety of projects (see contact list below) involving work-place organizing, international solidarity, and addressing specific social concerns that affect us all as working people. If you are interested in joining with us in these efforts or would like more information, contact this newsletter or the WSA group nearest you.

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New York, NY 10012

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San Antonio, TX 78294

### WSA Workplace

#### Contacts:

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San Francisco, CA 94140

#### Office Workers United

c/o Bay Area WSA  
PO Box 40400  
San Francisco, CA 94140

#### Public Sector Network

c/o WSA New York Area  
339 Lafayette St. Rm 202  
New York, NY 10012

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