Reclaiming our Future

An Agenda for American Labor

Edited by

William W. Winpisinger and John Logue

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AN AGENDA FOR AMERICAN LABOR

William W. Winpisinger

edited by John Logue

with a Foreword
by Senator Edward M. Kennedy

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contents

foreword

Senator Edward M. Kennedy

From the workplace, to corporate boardrooms, to the Congress, and to the great international chambers where world leaders struggle to make peace, William Winpisinger has left his mark on every important battle of our time. He has challenged all of us to think beyond today's tasks and to confront the larger issues that will shape our nation's future. And throughout it all, he has kept his eye resolutely on the goal of a society in which each of us has an opportunity to grow, to prosper, and to leave our mark.

Wimpy became president of the International Association of Machinists at a time of extraordinary turmoil within the labor movement and the American economy. It would have been easy, and understandable, for him to lower his sights and narrow his focus, as so many did. That never happened. Whatever the battle—for safer workplaces, for a healthier environment, for corporate accountability, for equal rights for the majority who are women and civil rights for the minority who are not white, and for an end to the nuclear arms race—Wimpy was always there battling in the trenches, urging us to move forward. He reflects and extends the best and most glorious tradition of the American labor movement—a movement fully engaged in every aspect of our civic, economic and political life. Like Eugene Debs, Walter Reuther, and Jerry Wurf, he has left his mark on each of us even if we never carried a union card.

Reclaiming Our Future: An Agenda for American Labor recounts these historic struggles, and the agenda it describes is truly one for the entire nation and our common future. And it is no small agenda.

Wimpy begins, as all progressives must, with the economy, for he understands that a sound economy is America's most important social program. The economy that he describes has undergone vast changes

in recent years: Globe-girdling corporations move money and jobs around like pieces on a Monopoly board, technologies change so rapidly that industries become obsolete almost overnight, and competitors now are scattered all over the globe, not just across our country. Adapting to this transformation of the world economy is surely the most important challenge that we face in the 1990s—and the most important message of this book is that while we must adapt, we must never lose sight of our goals. Decent jobs in safe workplaces, paying fair wages—these are the priorities that have animated the American labor movement from its very inception—and Wimpy never lets us forget them.

But for me his singular contribution goes beyond these aspirations. He has always insisted, as he does again in this volume, that it is not enough to merely make products, reap profits, or earn wages; we must measure ourselves by whether or not the things we produce enrich the human condition and improve the world which we will leave to our children. I can think of no one who better represents the powerful biblical injunction that "Ye shall turn swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks." For Wimpy, this has meant a tireless campaign to eliminate the excesses in our military spending and turn our attention to meeting fundamental human needs in such areas as health care, education, housing, and the production of safe and inexpensive energy.

In the concluding chapters, Wimpy turns to another of his distinctive themes. He reminds us that wherever we work, we have another job. That job, simply put, is politics. The IAM, under Wimpy's leadership, has helped transform our political landscape. His support for grassroots organizations has helped change neighborhoods throughout our land and has infused our political system with a new generation of citizen activists from every walk of life.

As I reflect on the real message of Wimpy's support for groups like the Citizen Labor Energy Coalition, Citizen Action, and the Rainbow Coalition, I am struck by two points. First is the simple but powerful proposition that the interests of the American labor movement are not separate from or at odds with those of the broader community. His insistence on pursuing a common agenda has helped bring us together and made us stronger.

Second, Wimpy reminds us that passing political victories are worth little if they are achieved at the sacrifice of principle. As he recounts, this has sometimes made him a lonely figure, but it has never stopped him or caused him to pull his punches. In this book, he returns again and again to the issues and the concerns that have driven him throughout his career. This volume is no mere memoir. It is a guide and an

instruction manual for those of us who will, with Wimpy's help, continue to struggle to redeem the American dream.

In my campaign for president in 1980, Wimpy was at my side from the first moment and he never left. For me, he was then, he has always been, and he remains today, a pillar of strength and insight.

In these pages, Wimpy carries on the work that brought us together and that we still share. He calls on us to face our problems squarely and to remember who we are and where we are going. Above all, he reminds us that we must join hands to reach our destination.

INTRODUCTION

William Winpisinger and the American labor movement

John Logue

The first act of William W. Winpisinger's tenure as president of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) set the stage for the next dozen years: he convened his initial staff meeting at a minute past midnight, just seconds after he took office on July 1, 1977. Things were going to be different, he told the staff members. "I don't mean to be poetic," he said, "but you might liken this to a new dawn."

As a *Newsweek* writer commented laconically later (October 23, 1978), Winpisinger's dawn "came up like thunder."

Poetic, prophetic, and occasionally profane, William W. Winpisinger has been the most outspoken and most quotable American labor leader of this generation. He has variously been described in the press as everything from "a loud mouth automechanic" and "labor's last angry man" to merely being "brash" and "skilled at capturing the spotlight." No one has ever described him as mincing his words or pulling his punches.

Winpisinger is a machinist: blunt, stubborn, self-educated and proud of his trade. As a spokesman for labor, Winpisinger has articulated the belief shared by millions of Americans that something has gone terribly wrong in our country. The middle class is shrinking. The number living in poverty is growing. The country is being deindustrialized as corporations move their production overseas and engage in what Winpi-

singer calls the "corporate cannibalism" of mergers. Technological innovations that displace workers are put into place while other innovations that would benefit millions are suppressed. Social programs have been gutted while the military establishment is glutted. The numbers of homeless increase while construction workers stand in unemployment lines. The low prices caused by agricultural surpluses drive family farmers into bankruptcy while, elsewhere in the world, a billion people are hungry. Something is obviously out of sync.

Characterizing himself as a "belligerent advocate of disarmament" and "seat-of-the-pants socialist," Winpisinger has offered an alternative vision of the United States and the world that is in keeping with the traditions of the labor movement. His issues are the domestic and international economies, war and peace, technology and the workplace, labor relations, and American party politics. These are issues for American labor, but they are surely concerns for other Americans as well. Winpisinger's analysis is iconoclastic, passionate, and genuinely radical in the sense of going to the root of the problem. If you can imagine a combination of Eugene Debs, Thorstein Veblen, C. Wright Mills, and your neighborhood automechanic, you've come pretty close to Winpisinger. Although he is happy to learn from the Europeans and Japanese alike, his proposals all have their roots in American reality.

Winpisinger's radicalism combines traditional trade union militance with a gut-level conviction that something is fundamentally wrong in an economy in which corporations spend hundreds of billions buying each other but don't have the money to invest to create jobs. He mixes a hefty dose of common sense with an admiration for what the Social Democrats have achieved in some European countries, especially Scandinavia, with regard to full employment, occupational safety and health, social welfare, and designing new technology to serve employees rather than vice versa. The consequence is that his vision of the labor movement encompasses both the bread and butter issues recognizable in every union hall and a broader perspective that accords the national and global political spheres a prominence of place. His is a bare-knuckled analysis and criticism of a social and economic system that has gone off track.

The dozen years during which Winpisinger has served as president of the IAM have spanned a fundamental change in the structure of the American economy. The decline of basic manufacturing was promoted by an overvalued dollar in the early years of the Reagan administration. The rise of new, low-wage industrial countries in a globalized economy was encouraged by American multinational firms that moved manufacturing operations overseas. Deregulation of the trucking and airline industries intensified labor conflict there. At the same time, a wave of

mergers and acquisitions in the 1980s restructured the domestic economy, loading it down with debt. All of these trends created pressure on the labor movement that was exacerbated by the direct attacks by the Reagan administration on organized labor. The context within which the American trade union movement operates has been transformed. For many unions, it has been a time of retrenchment or retreat.

Under Winpisinger, the Machinists have been under pressure, too, but retreat has not been part of the union's vocabulary. Whether fighting wage concessions, energy price increases, Star Wars, or Frank Lorenzo, the IAM distinguished itself both with its militance and its innovative tactics. The IAM has been quick to demonstrate, not only on the picket line for high wages (or, as has often been the case in recent years, against wage reductions) but also for full employment, social justice, and peace. Although the union movement by its nature organizes producers, the Machinists put themselves in the forefront of the fight for consumers in opposing the deregulation of natural gas prices and the price gouging that followed. It was the Machinists who filed suit against OPEC for price fixing and demanded confiscation of OPEC governments' assets in the United States, embarrassing the Carter administration, which appeared in court as a friend of OPEC to argue that foreign policy had to override American law. It was the Machinists who threw their muscle behind the campaign to bring J. P. Stevens to the bargaining table by pressuring that firm through its banks; it was a novel strategy, and it worked. It was the Machinists, who organize more workers in the aerospace industry than any other union, who beat on the doors of Congress calling for an end to the suicidal arms race and who did the studies that established how many tens of thousands of American jobs were lost by gutting social programs for President Reagan's defense build up. It was the Machinists who have offered a well-documented program for the conversion of America's economy from what Winpisinger characterizes as the "warfare state" into a full-employment, peacetime economy that satisfy the real needs of all Americans. It was the Machinists Union that has pushed Congress to legislate economic conversion. It was Winpisinger as well who broke the AFL-CIO's long-standing prohibition on contacts between American labor leaders and their Soviet and Chinese counterparts. Doctors, lawyers, businessmen, politicians, and even presidents meet their Communist counterparts, he reasoned. Why should labor stay trapped in the Cold War timewarp? Taking office with the slogan "agitate, aggravate, educate, and organize," Winpisinger has done all four.

Convinced that labor has to reach beyond its own membership if it is to achieve its aims in American society, Winpisinger has acted as if he single-handedly could broaden labor's constituency through his own

speeches to other unions, community groups, religious groups, Democratic party meetings, farmers' organizations, congressional committees, an occasional business group, and above all else university audiences. While the bulk of his speeches to labor audiences were extemporaneous, most of those he made to other audiences had written texts. This volume is distilled from about 150 of those manuscripts and from his programmatic speeches to IAM conventions and staff meetings (those used are listed in the sources section at the end of the book). No attempt was made to water down the speeches—they are presented with their vigorous language intact.

Winpisinger took over the reins of the IAM resolved to be seen and heard. As a consequence, it often seemed that he was spending more time on the road in local halls or in the halls of Congress than in the IAM's Washington headquarters. Cornering him for an interview there took serious advance planning, even for his editor. It is easier to persuade him to come across half the country to speak to your union local, your community action group, or to a university audience. And when you finally have him seated behind his big desk with your tape recorder running, he doesn't sit still long. Within a few minutes, as he warms to his topic, he is up, pacing, cigar in hand.

THE MAKING OF A UNION PRESIDENT

William Wayne Winpisinger—more commonly addressed within his union and among his friends as "Wimpy"—was born on December 10, 1924, in Cleveland, Ohio. His father was a journeyman printer on the *Plain Dealer*, the city's principal newspaper, and a union member. "That's where my real roots came from," Wimpy told Studs Terkel at the 1988 IAM convention. "I got taught unionism around the dinner table by my father. . . . I guess it was almost a case of osmosis."

His family was one of the lucky ones during the Depression: his father kept his job. Wimpy recollects that the family "lived very decently—not lavishly, but certainly decently" through the period. His parents were Roosevelt Democrats, but rather nonpolitical. "I guess I've got a rebellious spirit, but I can't account for where it comes from. My father was a very mild mannered, even tempered guy. My mother was a lot more volatile, but not in any sense radical. She had all of the Old World values. She lived by them, preached them, and practiced them, and often beat on my head trying to get me to do the same."

But though the Winpisingers lived decently during the Depression, their neighbors fared worse. "My earliest memory of the kind of thing that always disturbed me," says Winpisinger, "was seeing a picture on the front page of the newspaper of bulldozers down in Georgia plowing

into the ground an enormous big pile of potatoes which, the commentary said, was being done because there was no market for them. The market price was so depressed that they couldn't sell them at a profit. Yet all around me there were people hungry, in some cases on the ragged edge of starvation. I asked myself why couldn't they give those potatoes away instead of plowing them under? They could take care of an identified, real need and come out just as well as if they plowed them under. Well, I rapidly found out that if you question things like that, you're automatically a socialist."

Wimpy attended Cleveland's John Marshall and West Technical High Schools, during which time he played sandlot football and baseball. He was a good enough baseball player to get a tryout as catcher with a Yankee farm team. Wimpy found school itself less exciting, and his formal education ended early. "I got smarter than the teachers so I packed it in," is the way he explains dropping out after the eleventh grade. In his "short, unsatisfactory employment history" that followed before he joined the military, Wimpy was fired out of a tool company for sassing the foreman, worked briefly in a plating factory that he quit after breaking out all over with dermatitis, and worked in a jobbing machine shop where his employment ended abruptly one day when the boss returned unexpectedly and found Wimpy eating his lunch sitting at the boss's desk with his feet up. Having now reached enlistment age, Wimpy gave up on the private sector and joined the Navy, which trained him as a diesel mechanic. During the war he served in the Mediterranean and the English Channel; he was off Normandy on D-Day.

"I suppose the military made some contribution to my views. I learned in a hurry what happens in an absolutely autocratic environment, and I didn't particularly like it." Winpisinger found himself in conflict with more than one of his superiors when he made no secret of his dissatisfaction. His tenure in the engine room on one ship ended unceremoniously after a dispute with his commanding officer who swore to give him "the first transfer that comes up that's *not* back to the United States of America." That was a blessing in disguise, however, since it landed Wimpy on a repair ship that did engine overhauls and gave him a chance to hone his skills.

His Navy service left Wimpy with the genuine fascination with engines that he still has today. He has a wood shop, auto shop, and machine shop at home, divided between the basement and the garage. He does auto and lawn mower repairs and rebuilds engines for himself and his neighbors. "I don't always build the best, but I get a bang out of working with my hands, creating things. I don't like to have somebody else do it. If I need to machine something, I'd just as soon chuck it up on my own lathe and make it."

Upon discharge, Winpisinger returned to Cleveland where he continued working as a mechanic, rather than starting the lengthy apprenticeship in the printing trades that his father had urged. His first job after he returned was in a shop with a company union. "I joined the union immediately and found out it was a company union. And I found out when I got fired that it really was a company union. . . . I was a big, raw-boned kid in those days, fresh off of a war, in pretty decent shape; and I wound up with the district manager all balled up against the wall . . . which eliminated any grievance procedure. I then went and got a legitimate job. I went into an IAM shop as an auto mechanic and began to earn a very decent living under a very, very good contract, thanks to all of those who came before me."

That debt to past generations of union members remains real to Wimpy. He sees current union leaders as trustees of those past achievements; they are a legacy for the next generation. The current generation simply doesn't have the right to relinquish what was bought by so much sacrifice.

At the time Wimpy joined it, the IAM combined the skilled tradition of the craft union with the breadth of membership of the industrial union. The IAM is one of the oldest of American unions, tracing its origins to a meeting in an engine pit by nineteen railroad machinists in Atlanta on May 5, 1888. The organization that they formed—the Order of United Machinists and Mechanical Engineers of America—had many of the characteristics of the fraternal order and much of the ritual of the Knights of Labor, to which many of its early members had belonged. It was a craft union, with all the skill, pride, and exclusiveness that that conveys. But craft unions faced bitter opposition among employers; it was after the particularly bitter strike of 1901 against the National Metal Trades Association employers that the IAM added a declaration to its constitution affirming its role in the class struggle. It expanded its membership criteria to include "specialists" (i.e., non-journeymen) in 1903, but it was not until World War I brought an influx of the unskilled into what had previously been the sacrosanct province of the skilled machinists that the IAM really opened its doors to organizing the unskilled. It remained firmly in the AFL when the split with the CIO came in 1935–36, but at the same time it embarked on industrial unionism itself in organizing Aeronautical Mechanics Lodge 751 at Boeing in 1935. The IAM grew explosively during World War II, organizing the bulk of the aircraft industry and smaller portions of other war industries. Today it is one of the broadest of American unions, organizing both the highly skilled and the unskilled in railroads, airlines, auto mechanics, machine shops, equipment manufacturing, and a variety of other industries. With 850,000 members, it is the country's

eighth largest union. It retains, however, some of the flavor of its origins in its organizational structure—the union has lodges, not locals, and the national organization is the Grand Lodge—and in its substantial decentralization of power inside the organization.

Winpisinger was quickly drawn into active union work in Cleveland IAM Automotive Lodge 1363, first as a shop steward in 1947—"I guess I was gifted with a big mouth" is the way Wimpy explains his first election—and subsequently as local lodge recording secretary in 1948. In 1949, at the age of twenty-four, he was elected president of the 1300-member local. In 1951, he was appointed to the IAM national field staff, handling organizing, negotiations, and grievance and arbitration cases in the Cleveland area.

The McCarthy period completed his political education. "If I had any lingering doubts, they were totally dispelled when I witnessed the outrage of McCarthyism. To brutalize citizens of this country not withstanding our provisions for free speech and free expression just because they wanted to listen to somebody else or speak out on what they viewed as injustice just drove me right up the wall." Wimpy is up on his feet, in motion, stabbing with his unlit cigar to make his point. "I made a solemn vow then that *never* would I shrink from the responsibility to say what was on my mind in any given situation whether I was a worker in a shop, a steward, a local union officer, or anything else. I've pretty much lived by that. I've very seldom buttoned my lip when I had something to say." Wimpy's friends and enemies alike will attest to the truth of that statement.

Wimpy's penchant for saying what he thought and his general rebelliousness fit better into the labor movement than into the military or the workplace. In 1956, he was transferred to the IAM headquarters in Washington as automotive and truck mechanic organizer and handled a number of trouble-shooting assignments in the airline industry. He became the union's automotive coordinator in 1965 and general vice president in 1967 with his responsibility extended to include airline and railroad industries. More than anything else, he owed his advancement to being a hardnosed, but realistic, negotiator who brought home the bacon for the members and to being able to handle crises and strike situations. He followed the discussions of the 1960s, arguing politics in the evenings after handling union matters. When asked about the New York construction workers who attacked an anti-war protest, his comment was "It's hard to tell where the hard hats end and the heads start with those guys." In 1972, Winpisinger became resident vice president, which made him administrative chief of staff for the union. In 1977 he succeeded Floyd E. ("Red") Smith as president of the IAM.

Coming up through the labor movement, Wimpy learned from what he saw and those around him. "John L. Lewis had an influence on me. He was aggressive, had the ability to turn a phrase to fit every situation, tough-minded, and unbounded by all of the traditional horseshit including the national guard. That's what I admired about him: stand your ground for better or worse.

"I admired Walter Reuther because of his social views. I thought the mission of the labor movement ought to be looking out for the guy who didn't have it so good. That's what we're all about. And just because you advance your membership nominally out of those ranks doesn't mean you ought to forget about them. You have to have a social conscience in terms of what you're doing and drag others along with you if you can. There's nobody else to talk for them. Reuther was also very innovative. He always figured out some way to develop some program to take care of a need that was identified among his members. I admired that in him too."

Then there was E. R. White, whom Wimpy went to work for in the IAM in Cleveland. "He was bright, a student of almost everything, and he knew where the union came from and why. He was the only one who put up a fight to keep the 'class struggle' clause in the IAM constitution when all the rest of us were cowed under the pressure of 'Commies talk like that' and 'That's a Commie expression from yesteryear and it ought to come out.' Bullshit! He was right. We're still involved in the class struggle. We're in it up to our eyeballs every day."

NEW STRATEGIES FOR LABOR

When Winpisinger tells the story about his first staff meeting, he often couples it with the old story about the guy who bought a jackass. "He bought it on the basis that it was an educated, obedient jackass. He tried and he tried and he tried giving it instructions and orders and tried to train it, but it wouldn't do a goddamn thing but plant its feet and throw its head back and look at him with its big sleepy eyes. So he finally looked up the guy he had bought it from and complained, 'You represented this jackass as trained and educated.' 'He is,' the guy said. 'I can't get him to do a goddamn thing.' 'Well, I'll be damned,' said the seller. 'I'll be right over.' So he came over, took one look at the jackass, walked over to the woodpile, picked up a four foot long two by four, walked up to the jackass, and hauled off and belted him right between the eyes. Then he told the jackass to do something, and he did it. The buyer says, 'Holy Christ! I don't understand it. What the hell's the point?' 'You want him to do something?' came the reply. 'First you got to get his attention.'"

Winpisinger relights his trademark cigar and laughs. "Well, I got their attention."

He held it at the 1978 IAM staff conference in Cincinnati in which he presented his analysis and charted the union's new course. "Build coalitions," he told them. "Reach out to the churches, students, ADA, DSOC, progressives, farmers, other unions, anybody that can agree with you and help you. Get them in tow, make friends, keep them tuned, and don't be afraid to ask for help." Support public employee unionization, cultivate the media, stop kowtowing to the corporations, demand that politicians actually vote for labor issues when in office rather than just bellying up to the labor bar during the election campaign. The truth was, he said, that corporate America had declared class war on labor. So "forget about being socially accepted . . . don't worry anymore about being mister cooperative nice guy. It won't work because they don't want it to work. It's time, it seems to me, for some good old fashioned civil disobedience and disrespect in labor relations."

Wimpy got the attention of the country at large by his willingness to innovate, even against the odds. Perhaps the most prominent example was the suit brought by the IAM against OPEC. The enormity of the effort to plunder the American consumer through monopoly pricing by dictatorial foreign regimes, aided and abetted by the big oil companies with the complicity of the American government, seemed just overwhelming. How do you fight it? Well, David *can* challenge Goliath. The IAM brought suit under American anti-trust laws against the monopolists to confiscate their American assets to compensate the victims of the OPEC price fixing conspiracy. A similar suit had been pursued successfully against the cartel of Australian, South African, and Canadian uranium producers that had fixed prices. But OPEC was a more sensitive issue diplomatically. The IAM suit brought the Carter administration into court on OPEC's behalf. The lesson? Don't let the bastards intimidate you. Fight back.

A second of Winpisinger's early initiatives involved using capital for labor's purposes: the IAM pressured Manufacturers Hanover Trust to drop the president of J. P. Stevens, perhaps the most notoriously anti-union firm in the country, from Manny Hanny's board. The Machinists had substantial pension funds under the bank's management, and, in what he calls "a fairly simple power play," Wimpy threatened to move them elsewhere. "That money wasn't born in your vaults," he told an incredulous bank executive, who was trying to explain why the IAM couldn't influence the composition of the bank's board. "It arrived in an armored truck from another bank that messed up, and it can leave the same way." He was right. The J. P. Stevens executive disappeared from the bank's board.

What in the long term may be a more significant capital strategy has been the IAM's insistence that it will not grant wage concessions without a quid pro quo, frequently in the form of stock for members. This "wage investment policy" has had mixed success in the airline industry; its flagship, Eastern, which was one-quarter owned by the employees, was captured and looted by that notorious air pirate, Frank Lorenzo. The fight between the Machinists and Lorenzo has had an epic character. But in other firms, such as Republic Airlines and North Coast Brass, the wage investment policy proved more successful.

Wimpy's most popular innovation unquestionably was the union's all-IAM Indy circuit race car program. How, in this television age, were unions to reach the public if they were blacked out of programming and couldn't afford to advertise? "Through the back door," was Wimpy's answer. Sport programming got the biggest audiences. "The most popular spectator sport had just become autoracing. Up to then, it had been horseracing, but we quickly discarded taking that up." Beginning with a small program in 1978, the IAM mounted a serious autoracing effort in subsequent years. The IAM team never won the big money, but it was a good advertisement for the union. "It exposes the union to a whole clientele otherwise prone to view unions as a bunch of Commies. They find out we're human after all. We've organized some people out of it. Race fans, young workers, see you out there and ask 'What union is that? The boss is screwing me over. I got to get ahold of them and find out what's what.'" The racecar program has ancillary positive effects inside the IAM, encouraging social gatherings, picnics, discounted tickets, and an esprit de corps. Besides, Wimpy himself is an unabashed fan of autoracing and a frequent spectator at the IAM big car circuit races.

The autoracing effort was stimulated by the IAM's media monitoring project, another of Wimpy's early initiatives. This study, which trained hundreds of union members in doing media research and the ins and outs of the communications industry, analyzed the presentation of work and workers in television coverage. Their findings confirmed Wimpy's fears. News programming displayed a systematic corporate bias on the major issues—inflation, foreign trade, energy, taxes, and health care—of concern in the monitoring project. Coverage of union activity was limited almost entirely to strikes, violence, and relations to organized crime. Even the presentation of working America was systematically skewed away from productive work. "Monitors counted 44 attorneys for every plumber; nine advertising executives for every electrician; 14 congressmen for every garbage collector; five times as many foreign spies as meat cutters; twice as many pimps as firemen; 16 times more

prostitutes than mineworkers. There were ten times more models than farmworkers; and all rabbis, ministers, monks, nuns and priests are outnumbered by burglars," the IAM and other cooperating unions reported.

"Television—the primary source of information, news and entertainment for most Americans—has become no more than an electronic vending machine, offering sweet-smelling bodies; stuffed, satisfied bellies; and great vacant gaps in our cerebral cortex," commented Winpisinger. "What a waste!"[1]

When pressed by the interviewer to cite his accomplishments in office, Wimpy dodges by alleging that accomplishments, like beauty, are in the eye of the beholder. "I am not a yesterday-oriented guy," he adds. "When I finish something, it's finished. I'm on to what we have to do tomorrow. I don't dwell on success or failure, if you can judge things that way." Wimpy prefers to talk about ideas, politics, policies, and plans for the future, not the past.

Still, Winpisinger himself gives primacy of place to two achievements. The first was the acquisition and development of the IAM's education center at Placid Harbor, which is funded by interest earned on the union's strike fund. Wimpy has long been convinced that labor needs more internal education programs, the more so today because of the rising speed of technological change. The second he cites is "playing a role in the transformation of the AFL-CIO at the top level." Wimpy was George Meany's most outspoken critic on the AFL-CIO's executive council until Meany's retirement. Since then, Winpisinger has become what he calls "a team player" in the AFL-CIO leadership in what he habitually refers to as "the marble palace." "The fact is, things did change," Wimpy says. "Kirkland undertook initiatives, and he tried to address what you heard in every union hall the length and breadth of the land while Meany was still around. So I put my load of dynamite away and saved it for another day."

Not for Wimpy the role of "labor statesman" serving as a token union representative on this government board or that foundation-sponsored blue-ribbon committee. He rejected both Carter's voluntary wage and price controls and service on Nixon's wage and price board out of hand. The plan was sure to fail, Wimpy predicted, unless it addressed the problem of "unbridled corporate power." Whether it was pressuring Manufacturers Hanover Trust to throw J. P. Stevens' president off its board, suing OPEC, organizing consumers, attacking Frank Lorenzo, or bashing "Ronnie 'Robin Hood in Reverse' Reagan," his language and views have been those of the labor movement. He has always known which side he is on.

SOCIALISM—AMERICAN STYLE

Press stories on Winpisinger not only describe him as a militant union leader and a maverick in AFL-CIO ranks, they frequently cite his self-description as "a seat of the pants socialist," a phrase he coined as a one-sentence encapsulation of his views. For a generation, he has been the country's most prominent trade union advocate of democratic socialism and of social democracy. He served as co-chair, with Michael Harrington, of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC), and in various capacities with its successor, Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).

What the media *never* describe, however, is what Winpisinger's home-grown socialism means. It goes back to when he was a kid during the Depression, to those potatoes being plowed under when people were hungry everywhere around him. "I thought to myself—there's something just basically unjust, there's an inequity somewhere in this system of ours that we call free enterprise, and that, by God, if nothing else we ought to give the potatoes to the people that need them," he told Terkel at the 1988 IAM Convention. "And everybody screamed, 'You're a Socialist.' Well, if that's a Socialist, goddamn it, I am one. It's as simple as that."

Wimpy's common-sense socialism has been reinforced over the years as a gut level reaction to what he experiences as a trade unionist. As he put it to an audience at the Boston Community Church in 1986, "in the Reagan era of federal deregulation, deunionization, and the sovereignty of capital, we really haven't had a lot of time to sit around and intellectualize our socialism. We feel it. And we know it when we see it or read about it, and that's generally in places like Scandinavia."

The moral basis of his views is simple: "I have never been able to accept the notion that there ought to be profit engendered on misery."

"Forgive me if I candidly admit that I'm biased in my philosophy," he told one Georgia group in 1982 in defining his unapologetic egalitarian democratic socialism. "To the exclusion of everything else, I am biased in favor of people—human beings—living a life of dignity in fulfillment of economic, political and social democracy. I am biased toward that system of political economy that will enhance and facilitate that fulfillment for all people, not just some or a few. . . . We are talking about people—workers, artists, and artisans—who are endowed with feeling and reason, not mere articles of commerce, assets or liabilities on a balance sheet or chattels in a corporatized caste system."

Winpisinger is still on his feet, in motion. The cigar is out again, but it still can be used to emphasize a point. "The millennium," says Winpisinger, "lies in the marrying of the best virtues of a socialist

economy and a capitalist economy, thereby trying to get away from the undesirable aspects of both. I won't live anywhere near long enough to see that, but I think it will come." From the socialist economies he takes planning to make market economies meet the needs of the vast majority; from capitalist economies, he takes the incentives that are missing in the socialist systems. Wimpy's ideal economy would mix public and private sectors. "We would have nationalized, regionalized and/or localized, publicly owned or joint taxpayer and worker-owned enterprises in those industries providing the basic necessities of life, to wit: education, energy, food, health care, housing, transportation. And we would totally nationalize the national defense function including military procurement and production, and thereby remove profiteering from Cold War considerations and foreign policy."

In all but the military and defense industries, Winpisinger would not preclude private enterprise in any industry or sector. Rather, private enterprise would compete with public enterprise. "We as employees want both public and private enterprise. It matters that we have both. From an employee and trade union standpoint, we have long since learned that a single government employer can be just as much an authoritarian and self-serving bastard as any private employer may be. . . ." This is a genuine mixed economy, and Wimpy is first, foremost, and always a trade unionist.

"Until we reach that happy day when employees and their trade unions are actually directing the enterprises in which they exchange their labor, talents, creativity and time for cash and life support benefits and, in selected cases, for a direct share of corporate profits, then we at least would like to have the option of playing off one employer against another."

What do IAM members think about their president being called a socialist?

The reason, answers Wimpy, that "I'm called a socialist—other than my own coining of that phrase—was the fact that I operate in the amphitheater of labor. When you do, you start out with two strikes on you. That's what made the labor movement for too many years so conservative. By being anything else, you ran the risk of being identified as a Commie. Well, that never bothered me. They can call me that all they want. If I'm out there carrying a hod and doing the job, I don't give a damn what they call me. And, I find out, the members don't either."

Wimpy's seat of the pants socialism has an old-fashioned ring to it. Wimpy believes in the intrinsic value of productive work and in making goods to satisfy human needs. "There is no productivity in an unemployment line" is a standard part of his indictment of the way the

American economy has been run by the big corporations. "Minimize welfare, maximize work" is part of his formula for dealing with poverty. It is the responsibility of government to make sure that there are jobs—good jobs—for everyone who wants to work.

Winpisinger also believes in the liberating power of technology. He has no nostalgia for a lost golden age, none of the "small is beautiful" syndrome. He is not a blind believer in technology—war technologies and nuclear power he considers to be innately destructive—but he is convinced of its potential for human liberation. Wimpy preaches the virtues of an expanded space program with space factories and solar power satellites beaming energy back to earth. His requirement, however, is that technology be adapted to human beings, rather than vice versa. Precisely that is the function of the IAM's proposed technology bill of rights for workers.

Wimpy's idea of socialism is a full-employment economy in which the government takes an active role in filling basic human needs, such as medical care, and in stimulating demand, providing for the worst off, and controlling the speculative abuses of capitalism. It owes more to Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, John Maynard Keynes, and the Scandinavian Social Democrats' social programs than it does to Marx. He is impatient with the academic discussion of the alienation of the worker, lack of dignity or job satisfaction. He has a simple answer to these fashionable intellectual concerns: higher pay and better working conditions. In short, precisely what the union movement has fought for for decades.

A LABOR PARTY?

Throughout his tenure as president of the IAM, Winpisinger has toyed with the possibility of organizing a genuine labor party in the United States. In Canada, where such a party has been created by the unions as the New Democratic Party, the IAM has been a major supporter of independent labor party politics. From time to time when the Democratic Party turned right in the United States, the Canadian course seemed appealing to Winpisinger in this country as well.

But though his view of the Democratic Party has varied between optimism and outrage, Winpisinger has never abandoned hope for reforming the party, returning it to what he considers its historical legacy of the reformism of Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal which he sees to have been carried on by Harry Truman and John F. Kennedy and in Lyndon Johnson's Great Society before it was hopelessly sidetracked by the war in Vietnam. Winpisinger's involvement in Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and in its predecessor, the Demo-

cratic Socialist Organizing Committee, has been an effort to strengthen that reformist position within the Democratic Party.

It was that legacy that led him to fight for the nomination of Edward Kennedy in 1980, after Jimmy Carter had crossed and recrossed the political spectrum to end up in the pocket of the oil and gas interests. Wimpy judged Carter in 1978 to be "the best Republican President since Herbert Hoover." "One thing that this country doesn't need is *two* Republican parties," Winpisinger said repeatedly. His support for Kennedy carried with it the elements of a crusade for the heart and soul of the party. "It is better," he later reflected, "to have stood and fought and lost with Ted Kennedy for Democratic principles than to have joined Carter in his Pyrrhic nomination victory." The IAM sat out the general election while Winpisinger himself ended up exposing third party candidate Barry Commoner and his views to the IAM political leadership and writing in Edward Kennedy's name on his own ballot.

In 1984, Walter Mondale commanded the loyalty of the labor movement, and the unions could support him with real enthusiasm. His disastrous loss raised the issue of how this honorable friend of labor could have done so badly. Winpisinger's own analysis, which he supports with poll data, focuses on the failure of Mondale, like Carter before him and Dukakis after him, to campaign like a Democrat until after the election was already lost.

Jesse Jackson was another matter. He could be found on the picket line outside election season. He directly addressed the issues of poverty, exploitation, and economic injustice. His message was labor's message. A year before the Iowa caucuses, as the campaign got underway, Wimpy already saw Jackson as "the only candidate who is talking in favor of labor and true union issues in clear and unmistakable terms. He is the one candidate who is putting pressure on the others to stand up for worker and trade union rights as well as for a progressive agenda in general." It was Winpisinger who delivered Jackson's nominating speech at the 1988 Democratic Party convention. He would later comment that, if it had not been for racism, Jackson would have been the party's nominee.

It is Winpisinger's firm belief that in fact a majority of Americans want to enact progressive policies on economic issues, control unbridled capitalism, end the arms race to destruction, restore eroded trade union rights, and improve the situation of those worst off in our society. That majority, however, is to be found among the non-voters, and getting them to the polls requires both a candidate who is not afraid to speak the truth and a massive effort to get the message out in spite of the corporate-controlled media.