Panel Tackles VDTs at Overflow Meeting

Growing concern about the effects of video display terminals on office employees was dramatically illustrated at an AVR overflow all-day conference in New York City in January, co-sponsored by Local 153 and four other unions with the New York Committee on Occupational Safety and Health. OPEIU's Research Director Gwen Wells chaired the Opening Session.

Pointing out that most employees using as many as five million VDT's now installed in the U.S. are women, Ms. Wells encouraged the more than 350 attendees to utilize the conference as a Speak Out to bring up the problems they personally experienced. Complaints ranged from eye strain, fatigue, sleeplessness, to seeing green spots, to feeling isolated, hostile and bored, to a fear of radiation.

Mike Smith, of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, said that the agency is not concerned about possible radiation, having tested the VDT's at the New York Times and elsewhere and finding no problems at the levels tested. He said that NIOSH is still continuing to measure for radiation, but that it is placing heavy emphasis on worker stress.

"Stress causes sleeplessness, hostility, lack of appetite and problems affecting the employee's life after working hours," he indicated. "How to set up a proper VDT environment should be put into labor-management contracts."

Union Requests

Crediting union requests, especially OPEIU's Local 3, for getting NIOSH to conduct studies in San Francisco, Mr. Smith pointed out that within three months of the request, they were in the field. "It is extremely important to hear from people. Sometimes, it is the only way to get the agency to research a new area."

He said that since they are doing ergonomic medical and physiological research in S.F., Suggestions and the fact that workers must be told results of the tests. They have provided locals with kits as an aid to bargaining. Management tends to counter negotiating with the phrase "nothing has been proved," he said. "Operating VDT's has become an extension of clerical work which has not been negotiated," stated Robert Dulnick of the Guild. "Some management believe that the stress about which user complaints is a female problem. They also tend to downgrade the work."

The Office Environment

Suggestions for a proper VDT set-up were offered by Nancy Ellish of the Women's Occupational Health Resource Center. Correct testing is important; there should be a back-rest on the chair which slants back. Overhead fluorescent lighting causes difficulty; it should be darker. Contrasting the glare of a VDT looks up at bright lights, then at VDT screen which is dark. Reflections on the screen are distracting and should be eliminated. Detached keyboards can cause problems. User may have to...
Save OSHA! Stop $2153!

Workers are entitled to a safe and healthy work environment—so said our nation's elected representatives ten years ago when Congress passed the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) in 1970. Have they changed their minds? It seems so. As reported in the last edition of White Collar, an inappropriately named bill—"The OSHA Improvements Act of 1980"—has been proposed in the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee.

This new bill (S 2153), written by the Business Roundtable, would not improve but would destroy the Act. The measure would exalt 30 percent of the workplaces in the country from OSHA safety inspections and significantly weaken OSHA enforcement. Not only are the predictable conservative Senators, Richard S. Schweiker and Orrin Hatch, sponsoring this legislation, but it has received unexpected support from Senators Harrison A. Williams, Jr. (D-N.J.) and Alan Cranston (D-Cal.), and Frank Church (D-IIda.). Williams, chairman of the Senate Labor Committee, was co-author of the 1970 job safety law.

Employed Exempted

The proposed bill would rely on records of state workers' compensation agencies to identify employers with "good safety records." Those employers would then be exempt from OSHA inspections. Eighty percent of all workplaces would be exempt under this provision.

Another 10% would be exempted by employers declaring in affidavits that they had no employee deaths and few lost workdays due to injuries in the preceding year.

George Taylor, Director of the AFL-CIO Dept. of Occupational Safety and Health, warned that OSHA could be flooded with millions of affidavits, requiring the agency to shift emphasis from enforcement to processing employer statements.

In addition, the workers' compensation data reporting requirements vary greatly from state to state. Many companies already allegedly falsify data to keep their premiums low. The bill would provide even greater incentive for employers to falsify injury records, possibly forcing injured workers back to work.

OSHA also would be prohibited from proposing a fine for safety violations if a firm employed no more than 10 workers at any time during the preceding year.

The bill would reduce maximum penalties for firms that do not qualify for inspection exemptions as long as they maintained safety committees with worker representatives and participate in consultation programs. Penalties for such companies would be limited to $700 for serious violations—not even enough to stung the price of a large company.

And, these so-called safety committees would only be advisory bodies with no real legal standing. For example, a company that fails to correct a hazard pointed out by the committee is not thereby subject to penalty for willful violation of the act.

Getting the Act

In Senator Schweiker's words the bill seeks to limit OSHA's "policeman role" and to replace it with "employer and employee self-initiative to improve workplace safety and health." We interpret that to mean that the bill would make OSHA safety compliance voluntary. Furthermore, the bill

- makes inspection so easy to avoid and penalties so inconsequential that employers have no incentive to improve conditions;
- increases an employer's incentive to under-report injuries to workers' compensation agencies;
- increases OSHA paperwork; and
- indirectly affects health inspections because such inspections are often initiated when inspectors called in on a safety inspection also turn up health hazards.

Call to Action

OPEIU members must oppose this bill now. If it reaches the Senate floor, the entire OSHA Act will be subject to amendment. During this election year, Members of Congress are sensitive about issues related to their constituencies. We need to warn our representatives of the resulting political consequences.

VOTE COORDINATORS

The following are Vote Coordinators from the listed regions:

Region I—Gerald Insheowitz
 IV—J. B. Moos
 V—Gwen Newton
 VI—Gary Kirkland
 VII—Bill Adams

Canadian Companies Try To Keep Women in Their Places

Local 378 made the not-so-unusual discovery that 90 percent of the women employees at British Columbia Hydro and the Insurance Corporation of B.C. were concentrated in Grades 1 to 6, while the vast majority of male employees were in the higher-paying 7 to 13 grade levels.

To correct the problem, the Committee recommended contract clauses providing for more educational leave and on-the-job training to allow women to obtain the necessary skills for the higher job categories.

The Committee also proposed upgrading maternity clauses to ensure women no loss of seniority.

Another recommendation was for the union to push for affirmative action programs within the companies. But, as the Committee readily admits, "None of this will happen unless women become more active in their union.'
Automation: The Need for Union and Government Responses

The last installment of the four-part series on technological change from "Interface" (a magazine published by the AFL-CIO's Department of Professional Employees), provides detail on four contract provisions that union leaders consider important to include in their agreements: (1) union-management cooperation, including advance notice, special joint committee and consultation; (2) training and retraining of workers and layoffs; (3) use of layoff notices to protect workers' rights; and (4) use of layoff notices to protect workers' rights.

Union-Management Cooperation

An "advance notice" provision in the contract simply requires the employer to notify the union of an impending change at the earliest possible date. Given the need for management decisions on major technological changes far in advance of their introduction, considerable emphasis can be placed on the advisability of an adequate "lead time" to enable the parties to make appropriate arrangements. In all probability, however, it will require more than the four contract provisions to fully cope with the necessary adjustments. For this reason, the union should seek to establish a Special Joint Committee, consisting of equal representatives of management and labor, to study all available data on the effects of technological changes on the utilization of manpower. The goal of the committee would be to ensure that the interests of both the employer and the employees are fairly and effectively protected.

Consultation rights of the union should include a firm obligation that such matters as seniority, transfers, early retirement, retraining and wages, hours and working conditions be settled to the mutual satisfaction of the parties. A time limit provision for resolving these issues may be vital.

In some instances, the introduction of new machines and processes may so change work activities or materials handled that the union's jurisdiction over the resulting jobs may change. Thus the parties should fully explore and recognize the value of proper assignment of people. The union would be wise to include strong jurisdictional language in its contract even before the changes occur.

Other matters of concern are: attrition; reduction in hours and extended vacations; preferential employment rights; broadened seniority and transfer rights; training and retraining and reemployment rights.

Counselling the Impact

Despite the existence of job guarantees and internal transfer arrangements, changes in technology may lead to termination of employment, either permanently or temporarily. Attention immediately focuses on the regular income of affected workers who may also incur other expenses in undertaking training courses to qualify for new employment. The risk of an abrupt loss of all income is comparatively slight, since unemployment insurance usually covers the jobless worker for a limited time. But, as an additional matter of concern, other forms of income support, i.e., lump-sum severance payments or periodic supplements, should be made available under the contract.

Some agreements protect the present wage rate when an employee is forced to take a lower-paying job. Whether such wage protection is temporary or permanent is subject to negotiation.

Sharing in Productivity Gains

Since the main reason for introducing new technology is to improve productivity with the same or less amount of human effort, employees have a legitimate expectation of sharing in the progress that results. In exchange for a cooperative attitude, despite retraining needs and job transfers, the standard of living of employees can be maintained, and indeed enhanced, by automation. An annual improvement factor provided in the contract is one method of assuring that employees benefit from the changes. Year-end dividends, or profit-sharing is another approach. Regardless of the method provided, every effort should be made to reward the employees—not just the employers—new technology results in increased productivity.

Need for Governmental Regulation

While collective bargaining holds a visibly important role in meeting the challenges created by new technology, there is no doubt that government will have to monitor these developments and respond to the needs of employers and employees alike.

Much of the foreign competition experienced by American enterprise has reached a high level of automation. In many cases, particularly in Japan and Western Europe, governments have already recognized the need to become involved. Tax laws, both for business and workers, have taken into account the impact of technological change.

In the United States, however, little has been done to provide a legal framework for new procedures by business, or to prevent displaced or drastically affected workers. Perhaps, a "technology adjustment" insurance similar to that paid to workers whose jobs have been lost due to the removal of their work to foreign countries should be legislated. If retraining or reeducation cannot be fully covered by a "retirement refund" provision in the contract, government should be prepared to assist with educational funds.

Governmental regulations, both federal and state, need to be examined carefully. Already, particularly in the communications field, sensitive jurisdictional problems have arisen that will require government action to resolve.

All too often, government rears too slowly, if at all, to the problems of our people. It will be a big challenge, both to business and employee representatives to secure the fair and effective participation of government as new technology changes the way we live our lives.

Union Busters Busted

For the first time the federal government is prosecuting lawyers employed by the nationally infamous union-busting firm—Pechner, Dorfman, Wolff, Rou nick and Cabot.

Two lawyers—Allan Dabrow and Julius Stein—charged with various counts of conspiracy, abduction of perjury, obstruction of NRRL proceedings and interference with an NRRL agent. If convicted, Dabrow faces maximum punishment of a $31,000 fine and 35 years in prison. Stein faces a $20,000 fine and 45 years in prison.

David Feld, president of Today's Men the retail clothing firm which hired the union busters to obstruct an organizing campaign, was also named in the indictment. Feld faces a $26,000 fine and 45 years in prison.

The indictment alleges Feld and the lawyers encouraged witnesses and sympathizers and employees of the employees at Today's Men to disguise who was entitled to vote on unionization. Three of those witnesses have already pleaded guilty to lying at NRRL proceedings last year and have agreed to testify against Feld and the lawyers.

The indictment further alleges that in some instances employees were fired and replaced with management employees and relatives of company officials who would vote against the union.

Kelly Elected to International Governing Body

President John Kelly was elected to the Executive of the Federation of Commercial, Clerical and Technical Employees (FETE), which is comprised of 25 locals and trade unions from across the globe.

Kelly was elected at the 19th FETE World Congress which took place in Caracas, Venezuela, November 26 to 30, 1979. Altogether some 650 people including 372 official delegates, attended the Congress—the first to be held in an industrializing country.

Their duties dealt with by the Congress included the challenges of economic uncertainty, of the new international economic order, of the multi- national and the new technology. All developments foreseen pointed to the 1980s truly being the decade of the white collar worker.

To give proper recognition to the growing importance of the technical and managerial staff in the trade union movement, the Federation's name was changed to "International Federation of Commercial, Clerical, Professional and Technical Employees."
It is with deepest regret that OPEIU acknowledges the death of its former President, AFL-CIO General President John F. Kelly. A letter to this effect has been sent to the family. Mr. Kelly’s family, friends and OPEIU members will remember him as a leader and a person who always believed in the principles of trade unionism.

From the desk of

PRESIDENT

JOHN F. KELLY

We will not quit

As long as people work for a living, there will be unions. And as long as workers are subject to employers whose sole motivation is profit or personal aggrandizement, workers will continue to build stronger and more effective trade unions to protect and advance their collective interests.

And as long as there are such trade unionists, labor will be opposed by those who seek to portray workers and their unions as separate entities — referring to unions as an unnamed “third force,” just as the splinter segregationists falsely labeled civil rights organizations as “outside agitators.”

This is not so. Nor do those basic facts change much — not now, on the dawn of the 1980s, or in the foreseeable future. Labor’s methods may change; allies and enemies will shift occasionally, the jobs and needs of our members may change. But the basic fact that we are who we are and what we do will remain: American unions have been and will remain the only major private U.S. organization whose sole purpose is advancing the basic interests of the working American. That covers the hours per day people must work, but also the other hours they must live as citizens, consumers, taxpayers and users of a wide variety of services.

That is why labor’s interests are so broad and why the AFL-CIO is so deeply involved in virtually every legislative battle. It is a fact of life that everything that concerns people concerns workers and their unions.

From workers’ needs and concerns, we have derived a trade union body of principles which become the “labor response” and reflect our best instincts as citizens and as trade unionists.

It is those myths and privileges to have served as president of the AFL-CIO for 24 years, as a federation officer for 40 years and an active trade unionist for more than 60 years. Yet when I was elected to my first office, I was as much an inheritor of a trade union body of thought as any one is today, or will be tomorrow. And the same was true of Samuel Gompers, William Green, Philip Murray or anyone before me.

That body of thought has grown and changed, just as the labor force has changed incredibly. But the more we move to new job descriptions and new colors for our collars, the more we return to our roots — with the college professors of today seeking the same collective strength we won long ago by the very first trade unionists.

Our “trade union response” will always be steeped in truths we believe are self-evident. From them, it is easy to predict that the labor movement of the future:

- Will continue to put the defense of the nation and the Constitution first, whether the test be from a foreign foe or from those who would destroy the Constitution for the sake of their own narrow single issue.

- Will continue to mold responses born of our own democratic processes through which workers are quite adept at letting their leaders know what they do or don’t want. A major milestone in this process was the merger of the AFL and CIO. We have retained and expanded the strength symbolized by that payday when we put in our name when we united into a single trade union center.

- Will not hesitate to cooperate with the business community when the goal is good and the cause worthy. But it will not hesitate to disagree and fight, for we know that the united strength of labor is greater than all the wealth of the employers and that the common good is not always found on the bottom of a ledger sheet.

- Will stick closely to our credo of watching what elected officials do, not what they say. Our requests for legislative change VDT’s continued from page 1

of National Safety and Health.

“The VDT is the symbol of the vast changes taking place in the office environment,” he said. “The worker should be influencing the changes. We can’t wait until the research results are in; we know that job stress contributes to heart disease. We also know that there is no safe level of radiation,” he stressed.

“It is management’s responsibility to inform workers of the possible hazards in their work place. We need to take action now or clerical work will become more and more industrialized and employees will have little influence over the conditions under which they work.”

Research Director Gwen Wells speaks to OPEIU members during a breakfast meeting. Pictured left to right are: Wells, Len Nupen and Representative Paul Greenspan of U.S. Local 32 members Patrick Tulley and Frank Esposito; Member Lucius Lumpkins and Representative Gladys Lee, both of U.S. 3.

will not be couched as either begging or demanding, but will be made with a clear perception of whom we represent and how they, through COPE, participate in the legislative process. Chief among our legislative goals will be jobs, education, health care and housing — the central concerns of every worker’s family. And labor will protect and defend, in every forum and court in the land, our rights to assemble freely, to bargain collectively and to withhold our labor. These are rights absolutely essential for all free men and women and we will no longer surrender our rights nor let anyone take them away.

- Will never forget our responsibilities as an integral part of the richest and freest nation in the history of mankind to our brother and sister workers around the world. We will support all free and democratic trade unions anywhere against any-where oppression. We will aid in every legal and legitimate way all workers now bound by the chains of totalitarianism and who year to be free.

We will proclaim in every possible manner our sure and certain knowledge that trade union rights and human rights are as inter-changeable as they are indispensable. We will not stand by for the export of our jobs by those whose motivation is the exploitation of some far-away fellow workers far less equipped than we to protect themselves.

In sum, these are the principles that have always guided us, but they form a living, changing testament. Many of the goals we set today are to be fought for generations, one of the responsibilities of the President, has been a rich and rewarding experience. It has given me a new appreciation of the importance of labor press as a method of getting labor’s opinion — truthfully and factually — to a nation whose public press all too often has given labor’s position meagerly, if at all, and misinterprets its goals and motives much more often than not.

So I particularly add labor editors to the million of trade unionists whom I both thank and exhort with this final message:

Yours is a good labor movement. Now go out and make it better.