

UAW Rallies Against Bush Energy Prices

On Aug. 31, in St. Louis and other cities in the Midwest, the United Auto Workers held protest rallies against soaring energy prices. On Sept. 9, Glenn Kage, Legislative Chairman, UAW Local 136, in Trenton, Missouri, was interviewed about the UAW actions, by Marcia Merry Baker.



EIR: You just held a demonstration in St. Louis, focusing on the wild energy prices, as well as other things?

Kage: Well, it was mainly about the energy prices being out of control in St. Louis. We're with United Auto Workers, and we staged a protest at the Thomas Eagleton Building in downtown St. Louis, Aug. 31—a protest to let Sen. Jim Talent know that we're tired of the high fuel prices and the price gouging that we believe is going on by big oil companies.

EIR: And you had a big turnout?

Kage: Yes ma'am, we had 350-400 people—in that vicinity. And another thing we were protesting, is the President's wanting to privatize Social Security.

EIR: Right. And there are a lot of other cuts. When you mentioned privatizing Social Security, it kind of fits in with wanting to cut Medicaid, not provide for veterans' care, and so on.

Kage: Yes, without a doubt. This President ran as a "compassionate conservative," and he has not lived up to his billing. And it's been horrible for organized labor. It's been horrible for the country. And we want them to know that we're tired of it, and that we're not going to take it any more.

EIR: Everyone is interested in St. Louis as well, because you're up river from the New Orleans disaster area. You're right in the middle of the great Mississippi Basin. The Army Corps of Engineers has not had what it needs for the locks, dams, levees, and all the water management.

Kage: No, ma'am. And you can see it, up and down the river.

I'll say one thing: In 1993, we had recording-breaking floods, throughout the Mississippi Valley. Missouri was struck especially hard, as was Illinois. And the Federal Emergency Management protection under the watch of Bill Clinton, was there and did their job, and we were able to actually save towns. And they knew it was coming—the flood waters, they knew it was rising, just like we knew the hurricane was coming.

And Bill Clinton didn't hide, and say, "Well, we didn't know the water was going to get over the levees." Bill Clinton had the FEMA out here—they were out here in force. And they made it as successful as you possibly could make it, when you battle Mother Nature, protecting the Mississippi Valley towns.

EIR: St. Louis was also a gateway to the West, in the past, for railroads. This is another area where the Administration proposed zero funding for Amtrak this year, and right now, of course, we could be using the railroads with so much of the waterways hurt, down in the Gulf ports. What do you see about that in your area?

Kage: Well, I think you're exactly right. Not only the fact with what's happened down in the South with the flooding and the hurricane, but also, when it comes to the high fuel prices: Bi-State, which is the St. Louis area bus company—and also we have our own Metro-Link, which is a rail system throughout the St. Louis area—those have all been affected by the President's budget cuts, and every one of those is a mass commute form of transportation. They enable a lot of people to travel. It cuts way down on consumption of fuel—that's one thing that would actually be helping the Midwest, and also keep the fuel prices down.

But—I think it's actually a very good time, if you're a big oil man, [like] this President that we have right now.

EIR: And, are you planning more actions, or was this something done during Congress's recess, when you knew they'd be there?

Kage: Well, actually it's both. We did do a petition drive—we've turned in thousands of signatures. It was a multi-city demonstration that was organized by the United Auto Workers. In St. Louis we had help with Pro-Vote, which is Progressive Voters of Missouri, as far as organizing the rally. And we had a petition drive in St. Louis; they did one in Kansas City—I don't have any numbers on how many signatures we collected, but the petition drive was to wake them up, and ask for them to investigate and invest in alternative fuels, alternative sources of fuel.

It was also to ask them to reinstate the price gouging tax that was on there in the '70s, when Jimmy Carter was the President. And that would prevent them—ExxonMobil made \$25 billion in 2004—that's \$25 *billion*. And they're making money hand over fist! Their profits this year are 44% up from last year, and last year broke every record

imaginable. They're making money hand over fist, at the expense of middle-class Americans.

And, as bad as it is for us, imagine the people that are out there that don't have collective bargaining, like unions do. You know, the buses, the school districts are having to narrow their bus routes, creating hazardous situations where our children are having to walk further and further to catch the bus. You know, that's dangerous! That's creating more dangers for our kids. Is this what we want? Is this what we voted for, when Bush became President? I don't think so.

EIR: You're located in a big part of the farm belt of the continent, and these prices already escalated, well before the Katrina disaster for the farmers, for natural gas, propane, diesel, and everything else. Through the UAW or otherwise, do you have any special reading on that?

Kage: Honestly, I don't have a special reading on that, but I don't see how it can be any easier for the farmers versus anyone else. It costs them more to plant their crops, when they have to plow their fields; it costs them more to seed their fields; it costs them more to fertilize it; it costs them more to bring the crops in. Eventually, all those additional costs are going to bring a trickle-down effect, and it's going to increase the price that we're paying at the grocery store for everything from our bread and eggs, to our milk and cheese.

EIR: Otherwise, in terms of the auto workers, you represent the heart of the machine-tool capability of our country, especially in the General Motors, Ford, Chrysler, and all the auto plants, that currently are at stake, as far as our capability, the skills and the machinery that we could be deploying for rebuilding now after Katrina. But also, for building nuclear plants, and upgrading the locks and dams.

You have several auto plants in Missouri: Do you represent any one of those and the workers there?

Kage: I'm a legislative chairman for UAW Local 136 in Trenton, Mo. We build the Dodge Ram pickup trucks. St. Louis has four different auto-manufacturing plants, not counting the seat factories and other various associated factories, related to the auto industry. But we build the Chevrolet vans, the big vans; we build the Ford Explorers; Dodge mini-vans, and then the Dodge trucks, in St. Louis.

EIR: That's a tremendous capability there, for vehicle assembly, but it could also be more widely applied. You know, back here, they're talking, if you think in terms of a Marshall Plan, or a new "Mississippi Valley Authority" like the old TVA, or what Mr. Lyndon LaRouche has been calling for, a "Super-TVA" approach to rebuilding things. Would you say, from your experience there, you have a lot of skills that, if we diversify things and added a lot more production, Missouri could be part of this?

Kage: Oh, sure! Missouri's been the heartland of manufacturing for many years, and along with manufacturing has

come industrial construction, commercial construction. We have the capability and the technologies in Missouri, like many other states would have; plus we have a workforce in Missouri that's willing to get out and do the work.

You know, they keep talking about having to bring in immigrants, illegal immigrants, or immigrants under work visas, because they say that Americans won't do the work that the immigrants will do. Well, when you're paying a guy \$50-75,000 to do a job, but you can bring somebody in to do it for \$20,000, you can't expect that guy to take that kind of a cut in pay. So, yeah, we'll do the work, but we can't do it for the poverty wages that these big corporations would like us to do it for.

Would we be interested welcoming Mr. LaRouche's plan for a Super-Tennessee Valley Authority, like what they had in the past? You bet we would! There'd be nothing better than to see us rebuild the infrastructure of the United States, whether it's the pipelines from Canada, or the electric grid, or anything that—the highway systems! Our highway systems are crumbling, right underneath our tires. So, would we welcome that? Absolutely!

EIR: St. Louis, I know from the Army Corps of Engineers has been an engineering center, for training at the high end, of designers and civil engineers. And you would have a lot of training capabilities, too, right? If you could have the kind of civil works, a youth corps or something, the UAW would probably be key in training and giving people skills, too, if we were really going on a mass mobilization. Is that something that could be done?

Kage: I think it's something that could be done. I don't know if the UAW is perfectly situated to do that. But there are other organized labor organizations around the St. Louis area that are in a position to help out with something like that.

Our base is manufacturing: that is the core base of the United Auto Workers. But when you talk about manufacturing, let's not forget that manufacturing—currently through outsourcing, and these unfair trade practices that have been pushed on us for so many years—manufacturing in the United States is at the lowest level than at any time since 1960. And it continues to drop every year. As our trade deficit goes up, manufacturing goes down. We're taking the brunt of the trade deficit. And that hurts everybody, because manufacturing is the backbone—the financial backbone of this country comes from manufacturing.

EIR: Absolutely. Well, I think this says a great deal. Do you want to add anything more?

Kage: One thing I would like to add, and this is to all the people in New Orleans: Stay strong, do everything that you can. You may not have got the help from the Bush Administration that you would have liked, but we're all Americans, and if you need places in Missouri, we've got 'em: Come on up.