

this past March, the 500,000-member carpenters union pulled out of the AFL-CIO.

Moberg, a senior editor of *In These Times*, isn't inclined to blame Sweeney for all these woes. Since Sweeney deposed the lackluster Lane Kirkland, organized labor has become "noticeably more effective in giving workers a voice in American life." For example, union households cast 26 percent of the votes in the 2000 elections, up from 19 percent in 1992. The big problem, according to Moberg, is "a lack of consensus within the labor movement, especially on organizing." Organized labor is not well organized. The problems begin with the AFL-CIO itself, a relatively weak federation of 64 independent unions, many with their own powerful state and local organizations.

The big challenge for labor is signing up new recruits. In 2000 it enlisted only 400,000, down by a third from the year before. Kirkland always insisted that the federation had no role in organizing and that it was up to each union to enlist new members. Sweeney disagrees. What kind of role AFL-CIO should play, however, remains unclear. Should it help particular unions? Act as labor's grand strategist? Or focus on creating a political climate friendlier to unions? The federation's strategic efforts to coordinate multiple-union campaigns in various cities have produced mixed results. Getting commitments to any kind of organizing is not easy. Sweeney is forced to cajole union presidents to follow his lead, and they themselves are often dependent on the union locals, which control half of the labor movement's resources. Many



The AFL-CIO hoped this poster would help recruit Latinos.

are cool to costly organizing campaigns. Meanwhile, some unions eagerly seek out members wherever they can find them, ignoring Sweeney's argument that each union should build membership strength (and therefore bargaining power) in its core industries.

Moberg sides with those who argue that organizing has to be linked with political activism. He thinks, for example, that the AFL-CIO didn't show sufficient enthusiasm in joining protests against the World Trade Organization. He wants to put more pressure on politicians. Some labor activists even favor seeking out opponents to run against labor-backed officeholders who fail to deliver the goods.

Unions must engage "their members as active organizers and campaigners," Moberg argues. They must project "a broad vision of social justice, democracy, economic fairness, and worker rights . . . that inspires members, allies, and the public." With "energy from below" and a grand vision, organized labor may be able "to resolve many of the internal conflicts that seem so intractable now."

Good-bye Glass Ceiling?

"The Gender Gap in Top Corporate Jobs" by Marianne Bertrand and Kevin F. Hallock, in *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* (Oct. 2001), 201 ILR Research Bldg., Cornell Univ., Ithaca, N.Y. 14853-3901.

There are more cracks in the corporate glass ceiling than most social commentators have noticed, and pay equity is now pretty well established in the executive suites, the authors of this statistical study of 1,500 companies conclude. That's the good news. The bad news is that women occupy less than four percent of the top

jobs in corporate America—though that percentage tripled in a recent five-year period.

In what they describe as "the first detailed description of the relative position of female top executives in the 1990s," the authors found a lot of change. Only 5.4 percent of the firms studied had a woman among their top five exec-

utives in 1992; five years later, 15 percent did. The pay gap shrank: Women earned 52 percent as much as men in 1993, but 73 percent in 1997.

Pay gap? Yes, there is one—the women in this study earned \$900,000 on average in 1997, while the men pocketed \$1.3 million. But the gap is not quite what it appears to be, according to the authors. (Both are economists, Bertrand at the Graduate School of Business at the University of Chicago, Hallock at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.) It's explained by several different factors. Most notably, women were most underrepresented in the biggest corporations, which also offer the biggest pay packages. The women in the study

were also five years younger than the men, on average, and were less likely to occupy one of the top four positions.

Accounting for those differences, the authors find that “the unexplained gender compensation gap for top executives was less than five percent.” There's no evidence of a “taste for discrimination against women,” which is still not the same as saying there's perfect equality.

The most salient questions now, say Bertrand and Hallock, are these: what distinguishes companies that do promote women to top jobs from those that don't? And why do women fare relatively well in smaller corporations while they're “virtually absent from the ‘very top’ of the U.S. corporate world”?

Re-engineering: Act II

“The Superefficient Company” by Michael Hammer, in *Harvard Business Review* (Sept. 2001), 60 Harvard Way, Boston, Mass. 02163.

The man who gave us corporate re-engineering has a new idea. Call it the mating of the giant corporations.

The aptly named Hammer, head of the Hammer and Company consulting firm, was an early advocate of breaking down the walls between units of the corporation, “getting people to work together and share information,” thereby achieving new efficiencies—and costing many people their jobs. Now, he says, the time has come to break down walls that divide corporations from one another.

One company that has shown the way is IBM. In 1998, the company determined that it cost \$233 to handle each order it received from its corporate customers, in large part because an IBM sales representative handled each transaction. So IBM set up a new computer system that let customers place orders directly and track their progress through IBM. In effect, it collapsed the wall between its sales division and its customers' procurement offices. Both sides won, says Hammer. Companies that resell IBM products to others, for example, have been able to cut their own costly inventories of IBM products by 30 percent.

The Internet and other information technologies may enable the process Hammer describes, but “the more important innovation is the change in the way people think and

work. Rather than seeing business processes as ending at the edges of their companies, [they] now see them—and manage them—as they truly are: chains of activities that are performed by different organizations.”

It's not just a matter of streamlining. For example, when General Mills realized it was spending a lot of money sending partly empty refrigerated trucks carrying Yoplait yogurt and other products to many different stops, it looked around for a partner. It found one in butter and margarine maker Land O'Lakes. A sophisticated system of coordination now allows the dairy products to ride in General Mills trucks, which thus carry more goods on shorter routes. The savings have been so large that the two companies are now planning to integrate their order-taking and billing processes too. Hammer thinks that the entire balkanized U.S. trucking fleet is ripe for such collaborative efforts: At any given moment, 20 percent of the trucks on the road are traveling empty.

“It's natural for a company to get nervous about tearing down the walls that enclose its organization. . . ,” Hammer concludes. “But most companies were nervous about breaking down the walls between their internal departments and business units, too.” Workers, recalling the old saying about what happens when two elephants mate, may be nervous too.