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Why Not A General Strike

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WHY NOT A GENERAL STRIKE?

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When you got nothing, you got nothing to lose
You're invisible now . . . .

—Bob Dylan

INTRODUCTION

Why not a general strike? Why not?

This essay deliberately goes outside, indeed, shatters, the proverbial box. On the face of things, a general strike seems hopelessly and stupidly naive, idealistic, utopian, romantic, nihilistic, impossible—insane. Of course, there are a plethora of prudential reasons to never call for, let alone engage in, a general strike. Most immediately, most workers, unionized or not, in the private and public sectors, who engaged in a general strike, would be vulnerable to discharge. In an era of record personal bankruptcies virtually every year, most workers struggle to live paycheck to paycheck and save nothing. In the daily reality of most workers, labor militancy has been most ruthlessly sup-


2. A general strike would likely be unprotected activity beyond the protections of the National Labor Relations Act. For employees in the private sector subject to collective bargaining agreements, a general strike would likely be enjoinable. See generally James Gray Pope, How American Workers Lost the Right to Strike, and Other Tales, 103 MICH. L. REV. 518 (2004).
pressed by personal debt,\textsuperscript{5} as much as, if not more so, than by, and under, the boot heel of global capitalism.\textsuperscript{6} Fatalistically, supine workers live “lives of quiet desperation.”\textsuperscript{7} Easy, seductive credit cards are the most nefarious enemies of the working class. Meanwhile, the specter of ubiquitous Walmartization looms, and, unlike Henry Ford tripling the wages of his auto workers, Walmartization dictates the race to little more than bare economic subsistence.\textsuperscript{8}

Yet, as we teeter on the verge of structural collapse of job,\textsuperscript{9} health,\textsuperscript{10} and retirement security,\textsuperscript{11} especially in the auto\textsuperscript{12} and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{6} I do not underestimate the power of global capitalism. \textit{Thomas Friedman, The World is Flat} (2005).
\item \textsuperscript{7} \textit{Henry David Thoreau, Walden} (Houghton Mifflin Co. 1897) (1854).
\item \textsuperscript{9} See Peter Cappelli, \textit{The New Deal at Work}, 76 CHI.-KENT. L. REV. 1169, 1181-83 (2000); Katherine Van Wezel Stone, \textit{Dispute Resolution in the Boundaryless Workplace}, 16 OHIO ST. J. ON DISP. RESOL. 467, 472 (2001) (“E]mployers have dismantled their internal labor market job structures and abandoned the implicit promises of job security that went along with them.”).
\item \textsuperscript{11} President Bush maintains that a social security crisis is imminent. See Michael A. Fletcher & Peter Baker, \textit{Bush Makes Case for Social Security Plan; Changes Needed to Save Program, He Tells Nation}, WASH. POST, Feb. 3, 2005, at A1;
airline\textsuperscript{13} industries, more workers are coming to realize that they have little left to lose.\textsuperscript{14} Upon this centenary\textsuperscript{15} of the founding of the Industrial Workers of the World, the one big union of the "Wobblies," perhaps a general strike is not as far-fetched, or as impractical, as it initially seems.

President Bush warns of the collapse of the social security system.\textsuperscript{16} The Chairmen of General Motors and Ford Motor Company have pled for relief from crushing legacy health care costs and pension obligations, driving their firms into noncom-


15. The IWW was formed in Chicago in June, 1905. Paul Buhle, A Comic Celebration: The 100th Anniversary of the IWW, NEW LAB. F., Spring 2005, at 121.

16. "By the year 2042, the entire [social security] system would be exhausted and bankrupt. If steps are not taken to avert that outcome, the only solutions would be dramatically higher taxes, massive new borrowing, or sudden and severe cuts in Social Security benefits or other government programs." President George W. Bush, State of the Union Address (Feb. 2, 2005).
petitive positions and their bonds down to junk status. With no aid in sight from our President, GM has planned to decrease executive pay and freeze its defined benefit plans. Additionally, Ford announced it will cut thirty-thousand jobs. Thus, it is ironic to see the rhetorical seeds for a general strike catalyzed, if not led, by the President and the beleaguered executives of major multinational corporations.

I propose a general strike called primarily, but not exclusively, by organized labor, with the exception of essential services, over the course of the Labor Day weekend, 2006. I see the general strike as also involving the leadership of the political parties and the many employer constituencies, designed to proactively deliberate and discuss the pressing issues of precarious job, health, and retirement security. Might this be bedlam and babel at best? Maybe. The alternative, however, is more grim to contemplate—silence, masking festering collapse. We the People deserve better; we need to take time to think, deliberate, and dialogue.

A general strike would be important for US workers today because labor needs a voice unlike any other point in US history. Desperation seems to be setting in as unions continue to decrease and divide. As President Bush warns of a social security collapse and employees begin to rely more heavily on employer provided pension plans that may not be honored, a voice for workers is needed for both short-term and long-term planning.

A labor day weekend used to reflect on the current state of affairs would provide workers with this voice. Currently, communications with government, management, and the general public seem to be failing. For example, within the public sector, local police and teachers struggle with limited opportunity to collectively bargain, and within the private sector, airlines have failed

21. Bruce Ackerman and James Fishkin propose a national day of reflection for national elections. Their point is readily adapted to the employment context here. BRUCE ACKERMAN & JAMES S. FISHKIN, DELIBERATION DAY (2004).
to take employees into account as they are on the brink of bankruptcy. As the economy continues to improve and labor shortages increase, now is the time to make a move rather than strike in a poor economic context, as is usually the case.

After surveys of the history and practice of the general strike, both in the United States and internationally, with some illustrative recent manifestations, the proactive general strike seems a viable nonpartisan national policy instrument. We can learn much from our own labor history and from the general strike incidents and purposes in other nations.

I. A SYNOPTIC HISTORY OF THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF THE GENERAL STRIKE

Broadly speaking, a general strike is a “strike by a large number of workers in different industries, which aims to paralyze a nation’s or region’s economy and government for political or economic purposes.” It is the embodiment of dissatisfaction with the status quo. General strikes can take many forms. In the United States, our tradition of business unionism in the capitalist political economy dictates a largely economic perspective. In other countries, however, the general strike has also been utilized more broadly as a political instrument to lead public and labor coalitions against, for example, the racist apartheid regime in South Africa and against communism in Poland during the Solidarity era a quarter century ago.

Historically, the general strike has been closely associated in the United States with syndicalism, “a revolutionary political movement that aims by the general strike and direct action of labor unions to overthrow parliamentary democracy and established a corporate society with general control in the hands of trade unions and workers’ cooperatives.” General strikes can generally be categorized as either revolutionary attempts at radical change in society, or as reformist initiatives for more incremental political or economic change. The latter is the only workable, viable conceptual and practical architecture possible in the United States.

24. The Solidarity labor movement was instrumental in the successful struggle against the communist government in Poland more than a quarter century ago. See generally GEORGE WEIGEL, WITNESS TO HOPE: THE BIOGRAPHY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II (1999).
25. WEBSTER’S THIRD NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY 2319 (3d ed. 1986)
The major catalyst for the success of any strike is broad and deep public sympathy and support for the particular labor union’s predicament. Ultimately, the success of a general strike depends largely on the degree of organization. In the past, most general strikes failed because they were not well organized.26

The modern general strike first originated in France in 1887. The Montlucon Congress of the National Federation of Syndicats considered it as a labor weapon, with antecedent roots in the French and Industrial Revolutions.27 The French government offers a simple rule for distinguishing general strikes from conventional labor strikes: concerted labor action against several enterprises simultaneously is considered a general strike.28

A. The United States

The first general strike in the United States took place in 1919 in Seattle. During a year where the Boston police and New England telephone employees separately struck, the Seattle strike was remarkable because sixty thousand workers participated. The strike was initially called by metal trade workers in local shipyards, as the workers were bitterly disappointed after expecting a post-war wage increase following two prior years of federally imposed wage controls. The local and national press denounced the strike as Bolshevism. The general strike ended unsuccessfully after one week.29

While strike activity was minimal in the early 1930s due to the Great Depression and the virtual collapse of business activity,30 in 1934, militant strike activity in Toledo, San Francisco, and Minneapolis affected most major industries.31 Toledo, Ohio witnessed the strike against Auto-Lite, a spark plug manufacturer that was one of the largest regional employers at the time. The strike began as a conventional economic labor dispute, with fears of layoffs due to industrial changes. Initially, the strike was not significant beyond the interests of the workers and Auto-Lite. A

26. See Goodstein, supra note 22, at 1-4, 14, 53, 263-64.
27. The Luddites were Yorkshire English agrarian cottage workers displaced by the mills. Their violent protests were crushed by the British army, 1811-1814. Kirkpatrick Sale, Rebels Against the Future: The Luddites and Their War on the Industrial Revolution (1996).
30. See Peterson, supra note 28, at 41.
judicial injunction, however, provoked violence between strikers and the police. It captured public attention on the eve of the enactment of the National Labor Relations Act in 1935. The strike resulted in the establishment of a conventional collective bargaining relationship with Auto-Lite.32

Meanwhile, a general strike occurred in 1934 in San Francisco.33 It began on the shipping docks and was led by Harry Bridges, a labor organizer from Australia. The strike by the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) concerned wages, working conditions, coast-wide bargaining rights, and the establishment of union-controlled hiring halls. Initially, it began as a conventional labor strike. On May 9, twelve thousand longshoremen went on strike; thirty-five thousand more workers from eight additional maritime unions joined the strike by May 23.34 When two strikers were killed during pitched street battles with police on July 5, 1934—"Bloody Thursday"—it was transformed into a general strike. Throughout San Francisco and Oakland, virtually every union joined in support of the dockworkers. Many of the economic labor demands of the longshoremen ultimately were met, and the parameters of the ILA labor contracts on the West Coast were effectively set for several decades. Harry Bridges was repeatedly prosecuted for alleged communism.35

Meanwhile, on the East Coast, the textile industry encountered the general strike of 1934. Due to deteriorating working conditions and widespread elimination of jobs, a strike that commenced in New England eventually affected the textile industry from Maine to Alabama.36 Over 170,000 workers struck in the South, with most strikers concentrated in North Carolina. Despite the large population of workers involved, the organizers did not organize adequately or direct the strike. Rather than

striking simultaneously, they struck Southern mills after having first struck the Northern textile mills, allowing Southern management, police, and authorities precious time to better prepare to withstand the strike. Due to poor organization, the east coast strike ceased after three weeks. Many strikers were subsequently blacklisted in the industry.

Nevertheless, there were some positive ramifications. President Roosevelt and the Democratic Party recognized the political influence of the South for the first time since Reconstruction. The strike offered lessons in solidarity for seemingly culturally disparate Northern and Southern workers.\footnote{37. See \textit{Janet Irons, Testing the New Deal: The General Textile Strike of 1934 in the American South} 4-10 (2000).}

From 1936 to 1937, the successful sit-down strike by the United Auto Workers Union (UAW) against General Motors Corporation (GM) in Flint, Michigan captured world attention. It remains the single most critically important labor conflict in the history of the United States. The sheer numerical and economic enormity of the strike was like no other before it.\footnote{38. See \textit{Sidney Fine, Sit-Down: The General Motors Strike of 1936-1937}, at 121, 338 (1969).} Flint, Michigan was a vital center for auto manufacturing, with ten GM factories. The workers demanded better wages and conditions, and GM recognition of the UAW. The sit-down strike began in December, 1936; the workers remained at their posts in the workplace after their shift, making further production impossible. The sit-down strike had numerous advantages over conventional picketing outside the workplace. Since the workers were indoors together, this increased morale and deterred potential strike-breakers from taking their jobs.\footnote{39. See \textit{Kraus}, supra note 32, at 172-75.}

Settlement talks began in Detroit in January 1937. In mid-February, a settlement was reached; GM recognized the UAW, and hourly wages were increased. More than 136,000 workers were idled during the sit-down strike, costing GM an estimated $175 million in lost revenues.\footnote{40. See \textit{Fine}, supra note 38, at 233, 280-85.} Yet like the West Coast dockworkers in 1934, the Flint autoworkers in 1937 achieved employer recognition of their union and set the broad terms for their collective bargaining and labor management relationship for the balance of the century.
B. Ireland

The Belfast dockworkers' strike of 1907 was organized by James Larkin, an English trade-union organizer. The labor unrest was influenced by cultural nationalism and exacerbated by low wages. The strike was unsuccessful as a conventional labor tactic, but it was a precursor to the general strike of 1912–1913 in Dublin, which Larkin organized with James Connolly.

The Dublin general strike centered around better hours and wages. Larkin's strategy was to organize four distinct industries: shipbuilding and engineering; construction; transport; and, distribution. Although initial strikes took place in late 1912, the official start date of the general strike was January 30, 1913, when the Transport Union, employed by the City of Dublin Steampacket Company, walked off their jobs. Although the strike did not succeed in conventional terms, it was a crucible for heightening political consciousness, with a political legacy in the Easter rising in April 1916, also led by James Connolly.

C. Great Britain

The British general strike in 1927 was triggered by conflicts over wages and working conditions in the coal industry, festering since the 1911 coal strike. On May 4, 1927, while coal miners were locked out, over 1.5 million workers went on strike in several industries, including transport, printing, chemical engineering, shipbuilding, and textiles. The general strike lasted nine days. In 1979, labor's "winter of discontent" infuriated the public and led to the Tory ascendancy of the Thatcher government.

D. Continental Europe

French railroads have a history of general strikes dating back to 1898. The metalworking industry staged general strikes in

42. See John Gray, City in Revolt: James Larkin & the Belfast Dock Strike of 1907, at 177 (1985); see also R.F. Foster, Modern Ireland: 1600–1972, at 438, 441 (1989).
44. See Worker's Union of Ireland, 1913: Jim Larkin and the Dublin Lock-Out 7 (1964).
1919 and 1947. The largest mobilization of French workers occurred in 1968, when students and factory workers staged a one-day general strike in response to a police attack, and paralyzed the government.

In Italy, the first general strike occurred in 1904. General strikes have perhaps been most frequent in Italy, spurring or accompanying frequent changes in the national government after World War II. Sweden, in 1909, had a peaceful, unsuccessful textile general strike. In 1913, Belgium had a failed general strike.

II. A Survey of Some Contemporary General Strike Incidents

Since 2000, most of the significant strikes in Europe have been triggered by startling and deep reductions in retirement security. Strikes have occurred in the transportation, banking, and automobile industries. Mass rallies have occurred over dramatic reductions in social benefits for the unemployed in Germany. German autoworkers have granted major concessions to keep auto manufacturing jobs in the country during national unemployment levels unseen since the Great Depression.

Contemporary tectonic demographic shifts in aging Western European countries highlight increasingly severe generational tensions. Due to strong socialist historical and cultural influences, strikes in Europe often cut across labor and political lines and can be especially contentious.

48. See Goodstein, supra note 22, at 261-62.
49. Id. at 95-98, 178-79, 200, 204.
A. Italy

Since 2001, Italy has experienced five general strikes. Some sociologists assert that they are attributable to socialist ideals synergizing with deep and understandable psychological insecurity about seemingly intractable high levels of joblessness. The Italian government fears general strikes will undermine foreign investment and business confidence in the reliability of the Italian market.

In early 2002, Prime Minister Berlusconi planned to overhaul labor laws to reduce workers’ rights and to ease burdens on employers in an attempt to become more competitive with France and Germany. The proposed labor law reforms would allow more flexibility in terminations, making it easier to fire workers. This government initiative understandably met strong labor resistance. Threats of a general strike did not translate into immediate action. However, the academic labor law expert who was the government’s lead reform strategist was assassinated by a leftist terrorist group. When the mercurial deputy prime minister suggested that union leaders were linked to the terrorists, union leaders were enraged; labor demonstrations erupted throughout Italy. The one-day general strike took place two weeks later; millions of Italian workers struck to show their displeasure with the proposed labor reform that would allow companies with fewer than fifteen workers to dismiss employees without just cause. Large private employers, including Fiat, Pirelli, and Alitalia were struck, as well as banks, schools, and post offices. This was the first of two strikes Fiat endured in 2002; employees walked out again in December 2002 over these same issues.

Italy saw another burst of strike activity from 2003 to 2004. In late 2003, the government’s plans for pension reforms led to a four-hour general strike that included schools, trains, post offices, Fiat, and the airline, Alitalia. Specifically, the reform proposal would increase the number of years an employee must contribute in order to qualify for a pension from thirty-five to forty

54. See Worried Fiat Workers in Italy Rally to Preserve Their Jobs, N.Y. Times, Dec. 2, 2002, at A10 [hereinafter Fiat Workers Rally].
55. See John Tagliabue, Italy’s Unions Seem Ready for Battle, N.Y. Times, Mar. 29, 2002, at A16.
57. See Fiat Workers Rally, supra note 54.
years. In early 2004, Italian transport workers went on strike over demands for higher wages. Separately, Alitalia employees struck in resistance to a restructuring plan that would reduce the airline’s workforce by twelve percent. Alitalia has operated with financial loss in eleven of the last twelve years; the Italian government’s ownership interest is sixty-two percent. In April 2004, employees returned to work, while Alitalia planned to cut sixteen percent of its workforce. In December 2004, three unions united for a general strike over a government tax package that affected planes, trains, buses, banks, and government offices.

B. France

On Monday, May 16, 2005, France experienced a one-day national strike, as workers remained home from work to protest the government’s retraction of the long-recognized national holiday, and paid day off work, Pentecost Monday. More than half of all workers stayed home.

In December 1995, the government did not proceed with its plans to increase the minimum age necessary to qualify for public retirement plan benefits, after rail workers went on a three week strike, with broad popular support, and nearly brought down the government. Rail workers struck again in 2001, for one day, to support wage increase demands and to resist government plans to privatize the railway system. Pension coverage issues resurfaced in 2002, when government employees, with the

63. Jocelyn Gecker, Much of France Takes ‘Day of Solidarity’ Off, USA TODAY, May 17, 2005, at 6A.
support of private sector employees, staged a one-day strike.\textsuperscript{66} Threats of a subsequent general strike did not come to fruition.\textsuperscript{67}

C. Germany, Greece & Switzerland

In Germany, the first public sector strike in fourteen years occurred in response to the country's proposal to increase the work week from 38.5 hours to 40 hours without any additional pay. This strike affected garbage collection, hospital services, schools, and municipal offices.\textsuperscript{68} Additionally, Volkswagen faced ad hoc walkouts and short strikes in response to management proposals to implement a two-year wage freeze. Although these strikes were fierce, neither has yet resulted in a general strike. Unlike Italy and France, German unions are required to perform a more formalized notification process prior to calling a full-scale strike.\textsuperscript{69} Greece had a one-day strike in December 2000 over work time and terminations. The strike was a successor to Greece's largest general strike in seven years, in October 2000. The strike affected several industries within the public and private sectors.\textsuperscript{70} Lastly, Switzerland had its first strike in fifty-five years when construction workers stopped working over employers' plans for retirement reform.\textsuperscript{71}

D. Asia

Thailand's public sector employees planned a general strike in 2004, in response to Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's plans to privatize the electric utility. The Prime Minister claimed that privatization would raise much-needed funds to pay for

\textsuperscript{66} See John Tagliabue, Protest Strike in France Interrupts Travel, N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 4, 2003, at A6.
\textsuperscript{71} See Swiss Workers, Out of Practice, Go on Strike, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 5, 2002, at A6.
future power plants. Union leaders disagreed and staged rallies, but to date, have only threatened a general strike.\textsuperscript{72}

In Nepal, a women’s coalition in March 2004 staged a one-day general strike, protesting violations of women's rights.\textsuperscript{73} Bangladesh experienced a two-day general strike in August 2004, in response to a grenade attack allegedly linked to the government.\textsuperscript{74}

E. Africa

Zimbabwe experienced two general strikes in the last five years. First, in 2000, a general strike occurred in protest of the occupation of white-owned farms.\textsuperscript{75} In June 2005, a poorly organized strike was arranged against the government’s demolition of urban homes allegedly involved in possessing contraband.\textsuperscript{76}

The most recent general strike occurred in South Africa, with a surprisingly positive organization and settlement. In early August 2005, the National Union of Mineworkers, Solidarity, and United Association of South Africa unions joined forces to protest low wages and horrific working conditions of South African gold producers.\textsuperscript{77} The unionizing effort was a success in that historically white and black dominated unions combined efforts.\textsuperscript{78} Gold producers’ management offered to raise pay between 4.5% and 5%, but the unions demanded raises between 8% and 12%.\textsuperscript{79} Over 70% of mine workers, nearly one-hundred thousand individuals, stopped working for over four days.\textsuperscript{80} The two


\textsuperscript{78} See \textit{New Pay Offer Ends SA Gold Strike}, supra note 77 (“The strike has produced a rare example of white and black dominated unions working together during an industrial dispute.”)

\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Id.}
sides reached a compromise by raising pay between 6% and 7%.81

F. United States

The United States has not experienced a general strike in its recent history. The dire straights of the airline industry seem the most likely crucible for galvanizing possible general strike militancy, as workers face seemingly endless steep wage reductions, concessions, and pension plan collapse. In January 2005, the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers Union, representing more than one hundred thousand mechanics, baggage handlers, and ramp workers at the major airlines, called upon the Transportation Department to coordinate a summit meeting with management, labor, and consumer groups to discuss ways to help the ailing airline industry, which has witnessed five major carriers in bankruptcy, and thirty billion dollars and one hundred and ten thousand jobs lost since 2000.82 With the bankruptcy court's approval of the termination of the United pension plans for pilots, machinists, baggage handlers, and flight attendants in May 2005, the union leadership threatened chaotic, wildcat strikes; meanwhile, United threatened to fire any strikers.83

A second area of concern is the auto industry. Recently, Ford announced it will cut thirty thousand jobs as part of a restructuring due to tremendous losses last year.84 Moreover, Delphi, a GM parts supplier, has been operating under bankruptcy protection for several months. UAW leaders are considering the possibility of a strike due to Delphi's plans to cut wages.85 Employees from these companies are particularly apprehensive considering President Bush's public statement that he would not intervene in any way to assist GM.86

81. Id.
84. See Ford Slashes Jobs, Shuts Plants, supra note 20 and accompanying text.
86. See supra note 18 and accompanying text.
CONCLUSION

The Machinists have called upon the government to convene a summit meeting to discuss the future of the airline industry. The government should take the union up on the proposal. Continued erosion in workers’ wages, health care, and retirement security may transmogrify fatalism into desperate militancy. If that regrettably occurs, the current call for a pragmatic non-partisan general strike, effectively a proactive summit, will have fallen on deaf ears. A general strike may then be a desperate last gasp of fragmented labor militancy.87

Lacking the socialist political culture and context of European general strike history, a general strike in the United States would most probably be spasmodic, nihilistic, politically pointless, and incapable of galvanizing a broader proactive politics. Therefore, I propose a much more carefully focused, proactive general strike—a national teaching and reflection moment—for the Labor Day weekend of 2006.

87. Organized labor continues to lose its membership. In 2004, 7.9% of private sector employees were members of labor unions, down from 8.2% in 2003. In 2004, 36.4% of government workers were unionized, compared to 37.2% in 2003. With 12.5% of the entire workforce unionized in 2004, down from 12.9% in 2003, union membership has continued its decline for more than twenty years. Membership Rate in 2004 Dipped to 12.5 Percent, BLS Data Show, 176 Lab. Rel. Rep. (BNA) 197 (Feb. 7, 2005); AFL-CIO Membership Falls Below 13 Million, Showing Net Decrease of 167,775 Members, 43 Gov’t Empl. Rel. Rep. (BNA) 257 (Mar. 15, 2005).

The experiences of general strikes historically in the United States and in other countries are relevant and pertinent to the United States today. As history has shown, particularly in Europe, only a minority of general strikes are successful, with this success attributed to two things: organization and public sympathy. Under my proposal, there is sufficient time to plan an organizing effort for a day of reflection. As the recent, successful South Africa gold mines general strike proved, a cohesive, internal effort is a major step in execution. For this weekend of reflection, although unions do not have to integrate physically, why not integrate in theory, just for three days? To show a unified, passionate front demonstrates to the public that unions have staying power.

We have a lot to learn from United States and foreign attempts in executing general strikes. For example, as the recent Italian general strikes have demonstrated, closing cities by shutting down major industries, including essential services, is not a proper approach. A weekend strike, where labor is already at rest, with no interruption of services, might elicit favor from the public. In addition, a public relations campaign describing the healing effects of this weekend of reflection will make the public aware of the event for preparation purposes as well as raise the public consciousness—something missing in several of the historical general strikes.

I am not so colossally naïve as to believe that all computer screens would, or should, go dark for the proposed general strike day of national deliberation. The computers and assembly lines in our major trading partner and competitor nations will certainly continue to hum uninterrupted. Of course, essential services must continue uninterrupted, and the police powers providing for the safety and general welfare must not be impeded.

We live in an era when major television networks actually consider their prime time shows more compelling than broadcasting presidential addresses and press conferences. Marshalling a broad coalition for a general strike national summit is a formidable, perhaps impossible, challenge in Tom Friedman’s flat world. But, if organized labor and the Democratic Party presume to have a viable future, and, more broadly, if the air and


89. See supra note 6.
auto industries are to reclaim economic viability, the compelling ingredients are already substantially in place for the clarion call toward building national consensus.

The vehicle for seizing the nation's attention is the general strike, carefully configured to serve as a platform for a Labor Day weekend of dialogue, teaching, listening, and deliberation. Thus, the general strike I propose would not be a strike necessarily against anyone or anything, but, rather, a vehicle for national reflection—unprecedented in the history of this country.

The United States has much to learn from the general strike experiences and histories of many other nations. We can adapt their models to our current deep need for national deliberation about our collective, working future.

So, why not a general strike?! Why not?