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## "If All the People Are Banded Together": The Naugatuck Valley project

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## "If All the People Are Banded Together": The Naugatuck Valley project

### Abstract

[Excerpt] The Naugatuck Valley in western Connecticut was once the center of the American brass industry and one of the most intensely industrialized areas on earth. From its center in Waterbury, the region's major city, with a population of 100,000, the Valley runs north through the towns of Thomaston and Torrington and south through Naugatuck, Seymour, Derby and Ansonia. Like so many industrial areas of the Northeast and Midwest, its workers are primarily the descendants of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, with more recent additions of Blacks from the South and Puerto Ricans. During the 1960s and '70s it could have been renamed "deindustrial valley," as dozens of plants were sold or closed.

Like those in similar areas elsewhere, the people of the Naugatuck Valley have found that their established approaches have given them little leverage over deindustrialization. Conventional union tactics have exerted little influence over companies prepared to close up or sell the shop. Legislation to affect plant closings has been difficult to pass, and when passed has had limited impact. Local communities have felt powerless in the face of decisions made in distant board rooms; until recently, few efforts have been made to affect those decisions, even when they threatened the lifblood of Naugatuck Valley communities.

Over the past three years, the Valley has developed a regional organization of more than 50 religious, labor, community and small business organizations. Called the Naugatuck Valley Project, its purpose is to give workers and communities more influence over their economic destiny.

### Keywords

Naugatuck Valley, Connecticut, industry, plant closings



## Labor-Community Coalitions

# “If All the People Are Banded Together”

## The Naugatuck Valley Project

■ *Jeremy Brecher*

The Naugatuck Valley in western Connecticut was once the center of the American brass industry and one of the most intensely industrialized areas on earth. From its center in Waterbury, the region's major city, with a population of 100,000, the Valley runs north through the towns of Thomaston and Torrington and south through Naugatuck, Seymour, Derby and Ansonia. Like so many industrial areas of the Northeast and Midwest, its workers are primarily the descendants of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, with more recent additions of Blacks from the South and Puerto Ricans. During the 1960s and '70s it could have been renamed "deindustrial valley," as dozens of plants were sold or closed.

Like those in similar areas elsewhere, the people of the Naugatuck Valley have found that their established approaches have given them little leverage over deindustrialization. Conventional union tactics have exerted little influence over companies prepared to close up or sell the shop. Legislation to affect plant closings has been difficult to pass, and when passed has had limited impact. Local communities have felt powerless in the face of decisions made in distant board rooms; until recently, few efforts have been made to affect those decisions, even when they threatened the lifeblood of Naugatuck Valley communities.

Over the past three years, the Valley has developed a regional organization of more than 50 religious, labor, community and small business organizations. Called the Naugatuck Valley Project, its purpose is to give workers and communities more influence over their economic destiny.

The Project's strategy grows out of its analysis of what has happened to the Valley's economy. While most Valley companies were once locally-owned, today they are mostly controlled by multinational conglomerates for whom local plants are mere specks on a balance sheet. Project leaders trace much of the Valley's economic distress to corporations which, instead of nurturing local companies, run them for a quick profit and then "disinvest" by closing them, scaling them down, or selling them off to owners who eliminate jobs.

Project leaders often characterize the NVP's preferred solution to this problem as "broad-based local ownership." As NVP president Rev. Tim Benson put it, "When somebody in London or Los Angeles owns a mill in the Valley, you feel helpless and out of control. When you are in charge of your life by being a member of a democratically-owned company, you're going to feel less anxiety than you would if somebody in Los Angeles is pulling the strings."

The Project draws on the experience and tactics of community organizing, but attempts to project those approaches into the economic sphere. It tries to mobilize concern about deindustrialization in unions, churches and other organizations that see the people of the Valley as their constituency. And it tries to serve as a vehicle through which those groups can bargain with corporations, government, and other powerful institutions over the economic fate of the Valley. While its strongest emphasis so far has been on employee buyouts, it has also explored such other approaches as eminent domain, starting new enterprises, and requiring that urban development be linked to job preservation.

With chapters in six towns, hundreds of active supporters, and meetings almost daily in one or another part of the Valley, the Project has become a vital force in the life of the region. This is a report on its experience so far.

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- *Jeremy Brecher is a labor historian, author of the modern classic, Strike! With Jerry Lombardi and Jan Stackhouse, he compiled and edited the oral history, Brass Valley: The Story of Working People's Lives and Struggles in an American Industrial Region. This article was prepared with the help of many people involved with the Naugatuck Valley Project and with the Seymour Specialty Wire Co. The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of all those who gave time to be interviewed or to comment on the manuscript.*



*"All workers have to realize that we're responsible for our own condition. If we don't devote some time to our unions, our political party, our church organization, and the laws being enacted, we'll wake up and find ourselves with empty pension funds, bankrupt companies, disproportionate sacrifices and a run-down community.*

*"If all the people in the city are banded together to make it a better place to live, then it will be a better place to live. That's what Naugatuck Valley Project is all about."*

—**Theresa Francis**, chairperson of UAW Local 1604's Century Brass Steering Committee.

## Origins of the Project

The Naugatuck Valley Project grew out of meetings of statewide leaders of Catholic and Protestant denominations; the United Autoworkers; the Connecticut Citizens Action Group; and Ken Galdston, an organizer experienced with similar coalition efforts in Chicago, Buffalo and elsewhere. Deeply concerned about the economic distress of their constituents in the Valley, these groups decided to initiate an alliance that could assert worker and community interests in response to threats of plant closings.

With financial and in-kind support from these statewide institutions, Galdston began early in 1983 to call on community leaders in the Valley. He focused particularly on informing local trade unionists of the early warning signs of impending plant closings or sales. Almost immediately a local union leader identified such signs at General Time Controls (GTC), a 140-employee subsidiary of Talley Industries in Thomaston. The Project alerted Thomaston union and church people, who met together and asked for a meeting with the president of GTC. After a story in the local paper and a call from a local minister, the GTC president agreed to meet with the NVP.

Having received this first degree of recognition in the form of the company's agreement to meet with them, the coalition had to decide what it wanted to negotiate for. Talley had announced that the plant was for sale. The workers at GTC, mostly over 50, discussed, but did not support, a worker buyout. So the coalition decided to ask Talley to give preference to buyers who would keep

the jobs in the Valley. Talley said yes, and in fact ended up selling two of its product lines to a company which moved the jobs to a nearby location.

Several lessons from this early experience have guided much of the subsequent work of the Project. First, it established that a local coalition of diverse groups can be pulled together around the threat of a plant closing or sale if preliminary preparations have taken place and participants have some sense of what to do. Second, even a large absentee owner can be forced to recognize and bargain with a community coalition if enough pressure is brought to bear. Third, the union, as the representative of the majority of the employees, must be involved from the start. Finally, a certain degree of creativity is necessary to define a program which meets the needs of the community in a realistic way. All in all, the experience showed that the community and workers united were no longer powerless to influence corporate decisions.

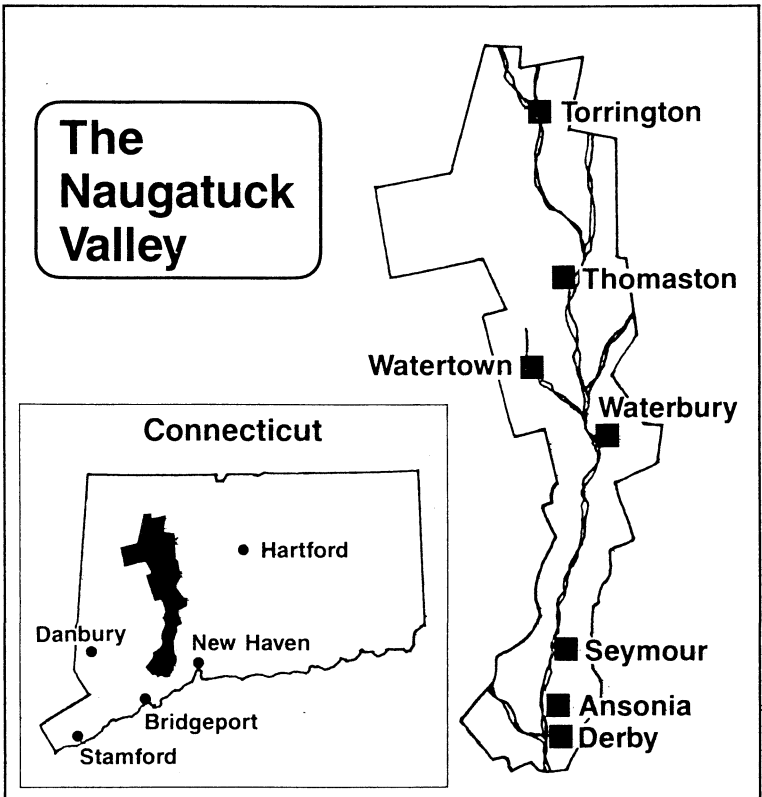
A similar course was followed when a union leader at the Torin Company, which had recently been bought by the conglomerate Clevepak, reported warning signs at the company plant in Torrington. Local management denied anything was in the wind; corporate management refused to meet with the union. The Project thereupon went to the press with its analysis of the threat; Waterbury's Auxiliary Bishop Peter Rosazza called corporate headquarters to ask for a meeting. Workers in the plant, who were interested in exploring a buyout, did a homemade feasibility study. The mayor and the Torrington Chamber of Commerce joined the coalition.

Enough pressure having thus been generated, the president of Clevepak finally agreed to meet with the coalition. He conceded that Clevepak had been considering selling Torin, but said they had now decided not to sell it. And he agreed to come to the employees first if Torin was to be sold in the future.

Next, Emhart, another conglomerate, closed the casting shop at its subsidiary in Ansonia, apparently signaling the liquidation of the company. Emhart, too, refused to meet with the union to discuss the closing. A community meeting with union officials, clergy, the head of the Chamber of Commerce, and both candidates for mayor decided to ask for a meeting with Emhart. Over the weekend, the Project gathered 1,500 signatures on a petition to Emhart, primarily through two local parishes and the Steelworkers local. Thereupon Emhart agreed to meet. It promised to give the Project notice if it decided to sell any parts of the company. Whether or not in response to Project pressure, the one building it has sold went to a company which has increased the jobs there.

## Seymour Specialty Wire

Early in 1984, workers at the Bridgeport Brass wire mill in Seymour, a subsidiary of National Distillers, heard rumors that their plant might be sold. A UAW staff rep immediately steered the local leadership to the Project and urged them to look into buying the plant. The Project presented various options to the local, including employee ownership. Workers responded with a spirit of skepticism, but also with a sense that they wanted to pursue every angle that might help save the company's 250 jobs. The local voted to pursue the possibility of a buyout. To prepare a feasibility study, the Project pulled together a team which included prestigious Connecticut law and accounting firms and the Industrial Cooperative Association (ICA), a consulting organization specializing in worker-owned companies. A Seymour chapter of the Project was formed to support the workers' efforts; it persuaded the town and the state to kick in funds for the





feasibility study. Personal contacts were made to win the cooperation of white-collar employees.

A steering committee of blue- and white-collar workers was elected. It hashed out by-laws, vesting procedures, and other plans for the proposed new employee-owned company. It proposed to limit ownership to those who actually worked in the company and to elect the Board of Directors on a one-person-one-vote basis—an approach that was confirmed after a subcommittee travelled to Hyatt-Clark Industries in New Jersey and Atlas Chain in Eastern Pennsylvania, and learned about their difficulties with less democratic forms of employee ownership.

The feasibility study indicated the company had strong production capabilities and a desirable market niche. A market plan, drawn up with the cooperation of local managers, indicated the company could be quite viable.

Initially National Distillers declined to take the workers seriously as purchasers. It later indicated that the community support effort, which included letters from two bishops and many political figures, gave the employee plan credibility. Eventually the company donated \$25,000 for the feasibility study and let its offices be used for its preparation.

The employees decided to make a bid for the company, based on an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP). After a last-minute bid was made and withdrawn by a competing company, National Distillers accepted the ESOP offer. A bank provided the financing. The union agreed to accept a 10% wage cut to ease servicing of the debt. In April 1985, Bridgeport Brass was reborn as "Seymour Specialty Wire: An Employee-Owned Company."

Seymore Specialty Wire is run by a Board of Directors of nine.



George Mackey

*"The Naugatuck Valley Project is a coalition, it's cooperation, it's a way to bring some new players onto the scene. I hope the Project has given business a better name, just as I certainly gained a great deal more respect for organized labor and some of the constituent groups that are involved in the Project than I had before."*

— **Vance Taylor**, president of the Chamber of Commerce of Northwest Connecticut and co-chair of the Torrington Chapter of the Naugatuck Valley Project.

There are two outside directors selected by the Board, and the union and company presidents are automatically members. The other five are elected by all employees on a one-person-one-vote basis. Committees on personnel, operations, planning, education, and new business development assist the Board's decisions. A management search committee, after reviewing 170 resumes, decided to hire the former manager of the local plant as president of the new company.

Economically, the first year of Seymour Specialty Wire has been a remarkable success. Sales have risen despite price increases. The handful of workers initially laid off have been rehired, and over a dozen new workers have been hired. A major new casting unit has been purchased to ensure the company an independent supply of brass. After six months workers received a bonus, and the 10% wage cut has been restored.

Seymour remains a UAW firm. Only minor changes have been made in the union contract, such as a streamlining of job bidding procedures. There has been little change in production quotas, though by all accounts peer pressure has led to tightening up of work practices. Some common work rules designed to protect bargaining unit jobs, such as prohibitions on foremen working or workers voluntarily helping others with their jobs, are left unenforced.

The transition to an employee-owned company has involved role changes which have been challenging for both workers and management. For the workers, employee-ownership implied a much more active role not only in the production process but also in the governance of the company. An attitude of "I'll go in and do my job and let someone else worry about the company" became less appropriate, especially when the consequences were company policies that workers didn't like.

For management, traditional managerial authority was suddenly transformed into something like democratic government. Management was initially concerned to protect its authority, but gradually came to believe that an employee-owned company must be run differently than a conventional company, with employees making decisions that management used to make.

While the union and the blue-collar workforce apparently accepted the necessity of managers making day-to-day decisions, they expected major decisions to be made by a process of discussion and consent. They wanted managers to be accountable for their actions. And they wanted personnel policies and procedures to be consistent for blue- and white-collar employees. Seymour's first year has been marked by a process of redefinition

of roles that can be compared to that of a country which has suddenly been transformed from a monarchy to a constitutional republic, where rules and processes for decision-making must be re-invented almost from scratch.

Initially, day-to-day practices in the workplace changed little—leading to an accumulation of conflicts and divergent expectations. Near the end of the first year, as tensions mounted, this situation was addressed by a goal-setting process created with the help of ICA. Employees were divided at random into groups of 15 to 20, who met to express their concerns, identify goals for the company, and elect delegates to an ad hoc committee. This committee defined five goals for the company and developed a plan for meeting each of them.

The most crucial is a plan, dubbed "Workers Solving Problems," under which all the workers on each shift in each department will meet every two weeks to discuss all issues concerning the department and the company. An elected convener will chair; the foreman will take minutes, which will be posted in the shop. A company-wide council of shop representatives and foremen will pool reports from the departments and pass information back to the shop floor. Top management is responsible to the Board for implementing the plan; ICA will provide training for participants.

The most obvious lesson of Seymour Specialty Wire is that, under favorable circumstances, employee buyouts can be an effective solution to the threat of a plant sale or closing. But a buyout is only the starting point for a process of transformation that cannot be expected to proceed without false starts and conflicts. The structures and practices of the workplace, evolved over generations, aren't overcome simply by having workers elect the Board of Directors. Seymour's forthcoming attempt to develop new ways of running the company may be the most significant part of the entire effort.

### **Other Buyout Efforts**

As the Seymour Specialty Wire buyout hit the headlines, workers at four other companies turned to the NVP for help.

Faced with threats of closing or sale, employees at the AMF Alcort sailboat company in Waterbury formed a steering committee, conducted a feasibility study, and attempted to buy the company. After prolonged negotiations, the owners sold to another bidder, whose asserted intent to keep the company running locally has met with considerable skepticism. Workers at Judd Hardware Company, a plant outside the Valley, also turned to the Project



*"The first task of the banking committee was to trace the amount of money banks had from depositors in the Valley. We found out that one of the banks reinvested less than 5% of its assets in the Valley. It awakened people's vision: what are the banks doing for us?"*

—**Muriel Moore**, director of the Head Start program in Waterbury and head of the Naugatuck Valley Project's banking committee.

to aid a buyout, only to find their plant sold to another buyer.

A few months after its meeting with the Project, Clevepak decided to get rid of its Torin Machinery Division and, as it had previously promised, informed the workers of its intent. Workers in the machine division formed a steering committee, conducted a feasibility study, and made an offer for the plant. Clevepak agreed to sell but, despite the mobilization of U.S. senators and representatives, state and federal agencies, and many other supporters, repeated efforts to put together a financing package ended in failure. Torrington's mayor even raised the possibility of using eminent domain to prevent the shutdown of the plant, based in part on research and support provided by the Project.

Clevepak eventually liquidated the company. The NVP has assisted a businessman who has purchased some of its equipment and has hired 25 former Torin workers. Although the new company will start non-union, Torin union leaders who led the buyout effort are actively helping the new company in the hope of restoring jobs.

### **The Fight for Century Brass**

The number of hourly employees at Century Brass, once Waterbury's largest industrial employer, has gone from 1,721 in 1976 to 438 in 1986. After a long series of union concessions and a classic milking of the company, Century filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. The bankruptcy court allowed the company to abrogate its union contract and renege on pension commitments.

Looking for a handle on the situation, the UAW local at Century asked the Project to become involved, created a buyout committee,

and sponsored a feasibility study. Century Brass refused even to discuss selling to the workers; white-collar employees, perhaps fearing company reprisals, did not join the buyout effort. While Century workers received a good deal of local sympathy, the kind of supportive mobilization that developed in the smaller towns did not materialize in the larger city of Waterbury.

In April 1986 the bankruptcy court allowed Century's hundreds of acres of valuable property running through the center of the city to be sold to the highest bidder, a real estate company from California. While the purchaser initially plans to lease the working plants back to Century, there is deep concern locally that this is only a step on the way to liquidation.

The state has allocated \$250,000 to study the future use of Century properties. The UAW buyout committee and the NVP have responded by demanding that the mayor and other officials hold up the study until commitments are made to save the remaining jobs at Century. This required massive research and a series of community meetings to convey to the public that Century is not just another company but rather an unconscionable exploiter of the Waterbury community.

After a recent community meeting publicized Century's behavior, Century officials offered to talk with the minister who chaired the meeting and to other clergymen—but refused to talk with the NVP or the union. When the minister responded that the Project, not the company, would decide who would represent it in any meetings, Century Brass changed course and has now held two meetings with Project representatives and city officials.

Century Brass has raised a new series of questions to the Project. It has demanded a search for alternatives where buyouts are not the answer. It has shown that the process of community mobilization in a city of 100,000 is considerably different from that in a city of 10,000 or 20,000. And it has posed the problem of how to proceed when a company initially refuses to make even a token response to community demands. But whatever else, it has meant that Century workers are no longer simply passive pawns but have become an extremely active and vocal force in trying to shape their own future.

### **Financing Buyouts**

The Torin experience led the Project to conclude that having sources of financing in place before buyouts begin can make a crucial difference in their success. Out of this awareness came the Project's first major legislative effort.

In 1984, the Connecticut legislature had established a trust fund to subsidize interest on bank loans to Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs). In 1985 the NVP drafted legislation to make money from the fund available for loans to employee groups seeking to buy their own companies. Several large community meetings were held; legislators from the Valley and the state party leaderships were lobbied. The bill passed both houses unanimously.

The Project is now exploring two additional possibilities for financing future buyouts. One is a revolving fund which would put money from credit unions, churches, unions, and other institutions into a mix of employee-owned companies and other socially useful local investments such as housing. The other possibility is establishment of a banking consortium to invest in employee buyouts. This should help spread the risk among different banks and at the same time alleviate banks' concern about the public relations effects of having to foreclose on an employee-owned company.

While the Project's banking committee hopes that local banks will voluntarily support such an effort, they point out that most are not controlled in the Valley, and that at present most do limited commercial lending there. At one Project meeting a local pastor won loud applause for the proposal that "we say we are willing to deposit our money only in banks willing to help this Valley."

### **The Organization**

Each of its campaigns has brought together an NVP coalition in the community where it was conducted, plus a growing core of people and groups committed to the Project as a whole. The Project as a whole was run by a steering committee which started with representatives of the initiating statewide organizations and gradually brought in more and more people from organizations in the Valley itself. Staff worked hard to encourage a transfer of responsibility to participants from the Valley. In October 1985, 250 delegates representing 50 churches, unions, community and business groups came to a convention in Waterbury to formalize the Project as a permanent, self-governing organization with its own by-laws and elected officers.

The Naugatuck Valley Project is essentially a citizens' organization in the general tradition pioneered by Saul Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation. The mixed character of the participating institutions is particularly important. Catholic and Protestant denominations, the UAW, and the Connecticut Citizen's Action Group have remained its most important constituents; but

*"It was a shame what happened to this community. The big brass companies took everything out. Any business that's doing business in the city of Waterbury or the state of Connecticut should have to put something back into the city or state. The big brass just took and then left us high and dry.*

*"I keep saying that we're making history right in the Valley. There was a manufacturing revolution back in the early days. Now we're in a buyout revolution."*

—**Mike Colucci**, an electric meter man at Connecticut Light & Power for 38 years, member of IBEW Local 420, head of a neighborhood organization called the Brooklyn Committee of New Opportunities for Waterbury, and a member of the legislative and banking committees of the Naugatuck Valley Project.



Seymour Specialty Wire, The Chamber of Commerce of Northwestern Connecticut, and a variety of other organizations have also joined.

The broadest coalition was formed in the small factory town of Torrington. There, despite a long history of local industrial conflict, the Project chapter includes the Chamber of Commerce as well as local union and religious leaders. The Chamber's small-business constituency is badly hurt by plant closings, and appears more than willing to accept employee buyouts if they preserve local jobs and payrolls. Local unions and the Chamber successfully lobbied together under Project auspices for protection of the region's machine tool industry. Each welcomes this opportunity to combine forces where they share overriding local interests; neither expects the other to support it on issues, such as unemployment compensation reform, where they disagree. (Perhaps there is a parallel here to the many nineteenth and early twentieth century occasions in which local small businessmen supported local strikes against what were perceived as the encroachments of "outside" corporations. A strike in 1903 against a Waterbury trolley company that had been taken over by an out-of-town corporation, for example, won extensive sympathy from local businessmen.)

The only divided votes at the Project's founding convention were on resolutions to support voter registration and to oppose utility rate increases. Both resolutions, presented by the Connecticut

Citizen's Action Group, passed with slight rewording. What tensions would arise within the Project coalition if it resorted to more militant tactics—for example, picketing unresponsive companies or their officers, boycotting banks, or attempting to buy companies through eminent domain—remain to be seen.

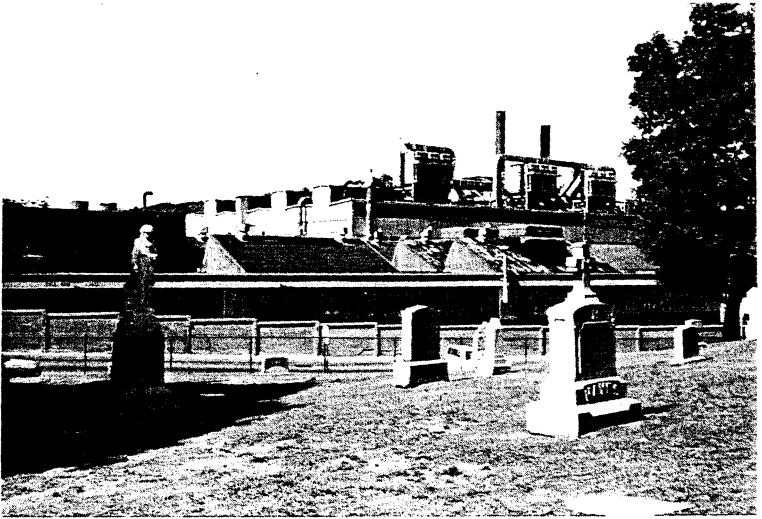
While its efforts at worker buyouts have received the most attention, the Naugatuck Valley Project is really focused more broadly on the issue of preserving and creating good jobs, especially industrial jobs. It is essentially a means by which workers and communities can influence economic decisions that affect the Valley. Its focus on jobs makes its goals central to the lives of many people in the Valley, and much of its energy has come from workers and communities directly threatened by plant closings. At the same time it has been able to show cumulative growth, perhaps because it is not limited to a single focus, such as saving one local plant. Those active in efforts around one plant often comment that they would remain active in the NVP even if their particular issue were resolved.

There appears to be a consensus among those active in the Project that its central focus should continue to be jobs. How this should be interpreted, and what other issues should be dealt with as well, remains to be clarified. The Project has already been involved in a successful effort to save a local branch of the state university; it is currently exploring the possibility of helping start a supermarket and organize a land trust. Visions of the future range from an organization focused on employee buyouts to one which will represent the full range of people's needs in the Valley. What seems to be agreed is that new spheres of action should emerge organically out of previous ones and out of needs perceived strongly by the Project's constituency in the Valley.

One future task that Project staff identify as crucial is deepening the relationship between the Project and its member groups. They have started providing leadership training programs to help member groups draw their own members more deeply into their own and Project activities. They also see a need for the Project to move toward financial independence, perhaps in part by providing services to member groups and employee-owned enterprises.

The Project makes no effort to define itself in ideological terms. When pressed, some of its leaders portray worker buyouts as a form of capitalism; others see it as a democratization of the workplace. For most, it seems primarily a means for meeting the needs of local communities and workers, rather than an expression of a political or economic philosophy. If any single sentiment ties





*Shutdown mills at Century Brass in Waterbury. . .*

Project activists together, it is a strong sense of community responsibility, coupled with a belief that Naugatuck Valley communities will be vulnerable to disruption as long as they do not in some way control their economic future.

While Project leaders seem reluctant to state a vision beyond encouraging broad-based ownership of the Valley's economy, Bishop Rosazza does say, "It would be great to make of the Valley a little Mondragon." (Mondragon is a region in the Basque country of Spain with a series of worker-owned enterprises tied together with their own credit institutions, social security plans and educational programs.)

In addition to its concrete successes, there can be little question that the Naugatuck Valley Project has transformed the issue of jobs and plant closings not only in the Valley but throughout the state of Connecticut. Where two years ago closings were almost universally blamed on high wages and uncooperative unions, there is now a widespread awareness of the milking of the area's economy by outside corporations. Where corporate decisions were regarded as something the public simply had to accept, it is now acknowledged as legitimate for groups like NVP to challenge business decisions and their human impact. And where the idea of workers buying and running their own companies was regarded as the height of absurdity, there is today a tremendous interest in the idea among politicians, community leaders, and especially among workers who feel threatened by plant closings.



Mary E. Allen.

*...Seymour Specialty Wire, An Employee-Owned Company.*

### **Some Lessons**

Project leaders and staff point out a number of lessons their experience might hold for those concerned with jobs and plant closings elsewhere.

- A project of this kind needs a clear focus, such as jobs and plant closings, but it also needs a multi-focus framework that allows small victories and cumulative drawing in of additional people.
- Much of the energy and legitimacy for the Project comes from the involvement of those most directly affected. NVP efforts have almost always started with discussions with the leadership of the local union as the representatives of the largest group of employees, then gone directly to the membership of the local, and then reached out to white-collar workers and the wider community.
- It takes a certain creativity to bargain with companies over local jobs. Buyouts cannot always be the primary goal or focus because in most cases they are not feasible or appropriate and because defining a buyout as the only alternative puts all the bargaining chips in the hands of the company. It is crucial to develop bargaining goals that are appropriate to the situation and that allow partial victories: an agreement to give notice of any plans to sell, to give preference to a purchaser who will

keep jobs in the community, to give workers the right of first refusal if a company is sold, and the like.

- A "carrot-and-stick" relationship is necessary toward the companies with which you are bargaining. It is often necessary to publicize a company's acts and even attempt to embarrass it.

Says Rev. Benson:

"A lot of people like to keep everything quiet and peaceful, but my experience is that the quieter you keep it, the more likelihood there is of the whole deal being pulled out from under you. The more you're in the public eye, the more you're likely to get cooperation."

But a successful outcome may also require working with a company constructively and projecting an approach with which it can cooperate. At Seymour, for instance, the company at first had to be pressured into taking the employee buyout effort seriously; but thereafter it provided cooperation that was extremely helpful in making the buyout a success.

- Much more sophistication about the business world is needed than a community organization usually possesses. This means a necessity for the services of lawyers, accountants, and business consultants, and for ways that ordinary participants



*"Before, under National Distillers, it was like puppets or like a number in a computer. The only way we had any kind of control over National, where we could fight back, was the grievance procedure.*

*"Now you don't have big daddy looking over your shoulder. You don't have to worry about National coming in and saying, 'we're going to eliminate this; Carl, cut this out,' and there goes 20 jobs.*

*"We're having a few problems now, but that's the way it should be. Anything that's happened in the company since we bought it, I've been called upstairs, asked my opinion. Once all the employees are involved in one step or another of that decision-making process, controlling their future—that should be the ultimate. Besides making money."*

—Mike Kearney, president of UAW Local 1827 at Seymour Specialty Wire and vice president of the Naugatuck Valley Project.

can learn to understand and research business issues.

- Some of the Project's strength has come from its independence. While many Project leaders are active in politics, all seem agreed that the Project itself should be independent of political parties—functioning in the political arena as a nonpartisan citizens' organization. In a recent contest for the Democratic nomination for governor, one Project leader ran as a delegate on the slate of Governor William O'Neil while another apparently swung his town to O'Neil's opponent, Toby Moffett, with a charge that O'Neil had provided inadequate support for the Torin buyout effort. Says Rev. Benson:

"In the by-laws, we tried to delineate that we need to keep a distance from the political process. We can't be in any political party's pocket, or any politician's pocket, because as soon as we are, we lose our effectiveness as an organization."

## Conclusion

In many ways the Naugatuck Valley would seem an unpromising place for an effort of this kind. It is neither an unusually homogeneous area nor one with a strong progressive tradition. Before the Project, there were hardly even modest responses to the threat of deindustrialization. While the region has some geographical unity and shared historical identity, there were few organizational or governmental structures tying together the Valley as a whole. (In some ways this may have been an advantage, since before the Project, the Valley as a whole was not defined as anybody's "turf.")

Organizer Ken Galdston regards the existence of local and state organizations with a strong concern for the jobs issue and a prior history of cooperation as the biggest asset the region brought to the initiation of such an effort. And Rev. Benson points out that Naugatuck Valley towns are proud of their "milltown" identity and are therefore more willing than some communities to fight to keep their local factories.

Because the Naugatuck Valley is so typical of deindustrializing American communities, it is hard to see why efforts similar to the Naugatuck Valley Project might not be equally successful elsewhere. Of course, there are many aspects of the American and world economies that cannot be addressed from a purely local basis. But a proliferation of such experiments might not only help local communities solve immediate problems, but might also help transform the context in which national economic issues are debated. ■