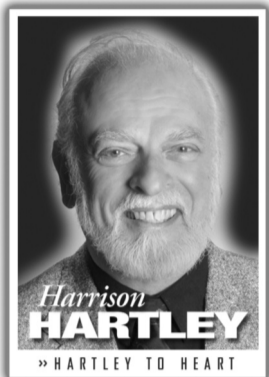


Must Heads ALWAYS Roll?

The horrible events of 11 September 2001 should have served to alert Americans to a fundamental truth understood clearly almost everywhere else, but there remains a disheartening degree of denial here regarding the fact that we really are connected to the rest of the world and exposed to all the same "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" that threaten every human being on the planet. Yet each time some delusional dimwit tries to do us harm, we act as if it were possible to achieve perfect safety, pretending that we once had it (we never did), and that blame can be laid clearly on some distinct person or persons so that "heads will roll" when "we" find out who "failed to protect us."

In the first place, America has always been something of a fool's paradise where matters of terrorism are concerned. We haven't had any consistent internal threats since the late Nineteenth Century and the end of the "Indian Wars" (unless, of course, you count little skirmishes with the Mafia, the KKK, the occasional serial killer, the Oklahoma City Bomber, the drug cartels, Ted Kozinzky, or the delightful person who managed to mail the anthrax-loaded letters to congress a couple of years ago). And of course we



have always faced internal threats so wisely and fairly (as when we interned Japanese-American citizens during World War II "just in case," established the McCarthy "Witch Hunts" in the 1950's, or suspended habeas corpus and nearly every commitment to humane ethics, the

rule of law, and our own Bill of Rights during the Bush-Cheney misadministration). In a word, we are operating completely in the dark if we assume that we had been doing something right that enabled us to avoid terrorism. We were lucky enough not to have an Irish Republican Army to deal with, and we were

fortunate to avoid an internal conflict like that facing the Palestinians and Jews in our time (although, as noted above, First Americans might have something to say about that). But the idea that America was once an insulated paradise is balderdash. We were lucky; that's all.

In the second place, this business of trying to find scapegoats for every threat and failure is both childish and counterproductive. Among the earliest and most consistent responses to the systemic lapse that recently allowed a young man from Africa to board a plane and fly to the U.S. with potentially explosive underpants (!) was "heads must roll; somebody has to be fired!"

However, the most measured, "grown-up" response to this debacle came (thank heaven) from the White House. For a change (in stark contrast to the Bush/Cheney model where kidnapping and torture would have been immediately employed) President Obama clearly acknowledged the failure, clearly identified it as systemic (i.e. not to be laid at some poor sacrificial peon's door), and quite rigorously declared his administration's determination to fix it as well as it can possibly be fixed. (It is also worth noting that he explained this to the American people as mature adults who understand that perfect protection is not possible and not as frightened children needing to be comforted from fears of the boogeyman. This is also a stark contrast from the last administration, and a most welcome one.) The difference between the Obama response and a Bush/Cheney type response should have occasioned support from all Democrats and any reasonable Republicans, but there occurred, instead, a kind of "feeding frenzy" going nowhere fast both in Congress and in the media as well.

Why this should be so predictably the case is harder to discern, but it may be that Americans generally have become used to operating in "crisis mode" or not at all. For example, consider the dismal history of warnings about our failing infrastructure. We have been aware for decades that our roads and

bridges, our electric power grid, our port facilities, and many aspects of our water and sewage systems are in serious decline and in need of work, but we have done (and are doing) little or nothing to head off disasters like the bridge collapse in Minneapolis or problems like the seasonal "rolling brownouts" and blackouts caused by electrical overloads during periods of peak-plus demand. And the worst aspect of it all may be that, instead of accepting responsibility in a general way and doing something socially and politically to correct the situation, we look for a scapegoat or two and yell in unison: "heads must roll!"

There's something pitiable and a little despicable about having to admit that one of the few things that still unites Americans in a national cause is looking for scapegoats to blame for problems we all ought to have seen coming in the first place. Granted some offenses require serious consequences, and some people do things that ought to get them fired, but it is not automatically the case that "heads must roll" and it certainly is not the case that every time heads have rolled it has been the right ones rolling. At this juncture, we ought to thank our lucky stars that we have an administration that understands this and is willing to act in a reasonable, considered, responsible way. Almost the entire rest of the world seems to recognize and applaud this fact; why can't we?

Weathering the Recession Through Community

R.Thomas Buffenbarger | Guest Writer
INTERNATIONAL ASSN. OF MACHINISTS

More than 31 million Americans have been idled to some degree by this Grave Recession. That number is shockingly high. But when you're out of work, it's easy to feel alone. And it's easy to lose sight of the fact that millions of Americans share the strains of unemployment: the sleepless nights worrying about the bills, the dreary days surfing job listings and countless weekends shopping for cheap eats.

Realizing that you're not alone, though, is the first step in getting back to work. There is strength in numbers. And the more jobless Americans work together, the quicker they can end this devastating downturn.

This is the idea behind Ur Union of Unemployed, or UCubed. Spearheaded by the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, this organization seeks to unify the unemployed in a unique and useful way.

UCubed connects the unemployed in a particular zip code into cubes of six people. Those cubes are then organized into neighborhoods of nine cubes, and then assembled into blocks. In this way, unemployed individuals in a specific area -- or UCubed "activists" -- can find each other and harness their

power in ways that local politicians and merchants can't ignore.

At the same time, UCubed offers the unemployed a way to use their skills and talents to help others through these hard times even as they help themselves. How?

First, each UCubed activist has a unique set of skills, talents and experiences that can be shared. Just like good old fashioned barn raisings, activists can help each other polish resumes, practice interview techniques, apply for programs meant to help the jobless and explore possible job openings. Working together, they can build a network of mutual support.

Second, UCubed activists can pressure the federal and state governments to respond faster and more effectively to the current jobs crisis. The UCubed website will have links to our JOBS Now! campaign. And it will enable participants to email members of Congress on urgent issues.

These include the new jobs bill, the expansion of unemployment compensation, the extension of the COBRA subsidy, increased food stamp appropriations, and tax relief. In order for these reforms to become a reality, both Congress and the White House need to hear from the community of unemployed Americans. State officials will also need forceful reminders that the

jobless cannot wait for ever; they need jobs now! UCubed activists will make sure that they do.

As the UCubed blocks multiply, we hope to add a searchable skills and talents library. There, both activists and potential employers can find possible barter partners or potential new-hires.

Why is the Machinists Union doing this?

Over 35,000 members of our union have been laid off. Others are working fewer hours each week because their employers simply do not have orders to fill. And the real recovery, not the false one on Wall Street, still seems years away.

UCubed is a way to help our members, but it is also a way to empower all Americans who are currently unemployed. To become a UCubed activist, simply go to www.unionofunemployed.com. There, you will instantly gain access to a community of Americans who are facing the same hardships of unemployment.

Together, we will not only weather this recession, but emerge from it stronger than ever before.

R. Thomas Buffenbarger is president of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers.

Think Positive When Everything is Negative

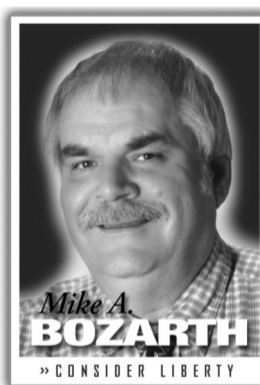
It is so easy to get discouraged and even feel depressed in the winter.

We're stuck inside more. We get the winter "blahs." The dark side of life freezes our optimism and hopefulness.

Rev. Don Kuehle, a retired Methodist minister from Jackson, Mo., reminds us this week to "look for the rainbow after the storm." He said God sends us signs and they're all around us, if we just look.

I didn't print his column this week, but his words are wise.

I'm going to focus my positive thoughts on looking for signs of spring.



VERSE of the WEEK

Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.

—LUKE 18:15-30