Counterfeiting by PC foiled by central banks

To lighten the load on a long road

Unions seeking growth despite U.S. jobs drain

Employment crisis has become national disaster; AFL-CIO president says

BY LEIGH STROPE

BAL HARBOUR, Fla. — U.S. organized labour, facing setbacks in bargaining, membership and politics, is in the fight of its life to remain relevant to workers.

Labour leaders meeting at a luxury seaside resort here said they must do a better job of organizing new members to overcome steep losses in membership and the movement of those members back to union membership.

"The fact is that union membership hasn't kept up with job losses," AFL-CIO president John Sweeney said.

"The jobs drain and the steady assault by the Bush administration have made a hard challenge harder. Manufacturing job losses in particular have socked not only our members but our industrial union," Sweeney said.

About 400,000 new members were organized last year, he said. But American union membership is at a record low, with 12.5 percent of the workforce belonging to unions last year, that's down from 13.2 percent in 2002, according to the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In the private sector, only 8.2 percent of U.S. workers were union members last year.

American factories have lost 2.3 million jobs since President George W. Bush took office in January 2001. Over all, after job losses in the first three months of 2003, 3.2 million jobs have been lost since the start of the Bush administration, according to government data.

CRIME

Leading hardware and software makers voluntarily adopt banks' deterrence system

BY ALEXANDER HIGGINS

GENEVA — The world's major central banks have collaborated with leading hardware and software companies to keep personal computers from being used to make counterfeit money. Work began nearly four years ago by the Swiss-based Group of Ten central banks resulted in the "counterfeit deterrence system," according to the statement from the Bank for International Settlements in Basel.

Several leading personal computer hardware and software manufacturers have voluntarily adopted the system in recognition of the harm that counterfeit currency can cause to their customers and the public," said BIS, known as "the central banks' central bank.

The BIS movement became a source of public debate earlier this year when software maker Adobe admitted altering its Photoshop program to discourage counterfeiters. The issue has angered computer users who worry it will lead to censorship and future restrictions on other types of images, such as copyrighted or adult material.

An official familiar with the development of the technology said the system is based on special coding on bank notes that can be read by the software program, allowing the user to verify the authenticity of a bill. That driver is included in almost 90 percent of the printers available today, said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Adobe, maker of the widely used graphics program Photoshop, acknowledged in January that it quietly added the technology to the software at the request of government regulators and international banks.

Photoshop now refuses to display images of cabled currency and advises the user to consult rules against copying bank notes, the official added.

A third step that will be added later this year is software that will make scanners refuse to see images of currency, the official said.

The Bankers' Statement said no one could use the technology to track the use of a personal computer or digital imaging tool.

"Consumers will not notice any difference in the performance or effectiveness of products equipped with this technology," it said.

The Group of 10 banks represent the world's largest economies. There are actually 31 countries in the group: the United States, Japan, Germany, Britain, France, Canada and Italy plus Switzerland, Sweden, Belgium and the Netherlands.

Altogether 27 central banks and 30 other major banks are involved in the initiative.
For Fast Results

Homayoon Kazerooni, director of USC Berkeley's Robotics and Human Engineering Laboratory, designed the Lower Extremity Exoskeleton to assist soldiers or firefighters bearing heavy loads over long distances. 'The design of this exoskeleton really benefits from human intellect and the strength of the machine,' Kazerooni says. The exoskeleton consists of mechanical metal leg braces that include a power unit and a backpack-like frame. The braces are attached to a modified pair of army boots and to the user's legs.

According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, the movement of white-collar jobs overseas is a major issue. "The movement of union membership has not kept up with job loss," AFL-CIO President John Sweeney said.

The drug and the steady assault by the Bush administration have made a hard challenge harder. Manufacturing job losses in particular have sunk not only our members but our industrial union.

About 400,000 new members were organized last year, he said, but American union membership is at a record low with 20.9 per cent of the workforce belonging to unions this year. That's down from 21.2 per cent in 2002, according to the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In the private sector, only 8.2 per cent of U.S. workers were union members last year.

VSociety has lost 1,800 factories have lost 2,500 million jobs since President George W. Bush took office in January 2001. Over all, after job gains in other fields are added in, net job losses in the U.S. economy have reached 2.5 million.

Meanwhile, labor is recovering from a brutal primary election that pitted unions against each other in support of Dick Gephardt and Howard Dean, both of whom finished.

A dispute that union leaders called their most important campaign for the future. This month's produce contract pays for grocery workers in California. The contract requires employers to pay for health benefits for the first time and contains no raises. It also creates a better system that provides better benefits to workers.

At this week's meeting, "the top of our list is the jobs crisis that has become a national disaster," Sweeney said.

Overseas outsourcing is becoming a hot issue in government.

As many as 14 million white-collar jobs could be affected, either by being outsourced to other countries or by lower-wage pressures, according to a study by the University of California, Berkeley.