Iron Range mining being hit hard again

Gov. Dayton may call special session to help Iron Rangers running out of unemployment benefits

Minnesota's Iron Range has once again been hit with plant closures and lay-offs like those of the 1980s as iron ore mining and taconite production are being hit by some of the same foes. Dumped foreign steel and a glut of cheaper and better iron ore from around the world are leading once again to wholesale lay-offs. Even market changes like Ford building its F-150 pickups with aluminum bodies is carving up the job market on the Iron Range.

The boom and bust cycle is not new to the Iron Range but fears for their families have now hit a new generation of miners. Like the 1980s when the Iron Range lost about 8,000 of 14,000 mining jobs, some think there may not be a rebound. The number of laid off steelworkers on the Iron Range is about 1,500 and could reach 2,000.

And many say it is not coincidence that the national downturn in the steel industry comes at the same time as new labor agreements are being negotiated for 30,000 United Steelworker members and employers like U.S. Steel and ArcelorMittal.

Last week Cliffs announced it will shutdown its Northshore Mining operations in Silver Bay and Babbitt, the only two non-union facilities on the Iron Range. That adds over 500 more workers and two more facilities to the other four shutdown earlier. Cliffs United Taconite operations in Eveleth and Forbes, US Steel's Koetka, and three of Magnetation's four iron ore recovery operations are also shutdown.

The widespread, long term lay-offs have Governor Mark Dayton preparing to call a special session of the Minnesota Legislature to help about 600 Iron Range workers who would run out of unemployment insurance benefits before the regular legislative session reconvenes March 8. Workers in the recently closed facilities would still have unemployment benefits come March.

DFL Senate Majority Leader Tom Bakk is an Iron Ranger and says he supports the special session. He would like to see the session address Real ID, a change to state driver's licenses to accommodate federal guidelines for entering the country, and why they are doing so poorly in the economy and why they are doing so poorly financially compared to white people. He also says looking at how the walleye limit on Mille Lacs Lakes is hurting businesses there. That’s quite a agenda from where Dayton hinted he wanted to go to help Iron Range miners.

Last Thursday Republican House Speaker Kurt Daudt, who had been silent on the special session, said he wants to meet with Dayton to solidify the agenda even though it is the governor’s right to call a special session.

On Nov. 18 Minnesota’s U.S. Senators Democrats Amy Klobuchar and Al Franken introduced the Trade Enforcement Improvement Act, S2299, to counter illegally dumped foreign steel and to help the U.S. steel and mining industries. The bill would allow duties to be imposed both retroactively and against future harm being done to the U.S. industry.

The United Steelworkers have brought many illegal trade cases to the U.S. government but say the damage is always done before any action is taken against foreign governments, many of which subsidize their industries giving them an unfair advantage. (Rep. Erik Simonson gives his views on long term economic redevelopment goals for the Iron Range on page 3.)
Survey seeks input on working women’s lives

In late October the AFL-CIO launched the National Survey of Working Women to ask women about their economic interests, family and work life, along with their experiences balancing their economic interests, family and work life, along with their experiences balancing their responsibilities.

“Today, with the economy in slow recovery, a new wave of attacks on collective bargaining and a presidential election on the horizon, working women’s voices are more important than ever,” said AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler, Chair of the AFL-CIO Women’s Committee.

“Working women need to stand together to let employers know what we need on the job. Our survey will reach out to working women from all different walks of life, both inside and outside the labor movement and will provide a much-needed look into the daily lives of working women and how they struggle to achieve the ever-elusive work-life balance,” said Diann Woodard, President of the American Federation of School Administrators, Vice-Chair of the AFL-CIO Women’s Committee.

The survey will be open from October 27 – December 4, 2015, and results will be available in March 2016 during Women’s History Month. The survey is at go.aflcio.org/WomensSurvey.

Central Body holiday party Dec. 10 chance to donate a gift, help food drive

People who attend the Dec. 10 Central Body Holiday Party are also asked to bring non-perishable food items to support Laborer’s Local 1091’s 4th Annual Holiday Food Drive. If you can’t make it to the meeting, you can leave items on the table in front of the Laborer’s office door, Room 119, at the end of the first floor hallway in the Labor Temple.

Register now for People Power

The University of Minnesota Labor Education Service is offering a skills course Saturday, Dec. 5 on "People Power: Building Union Strength Through Member Engagement." Deadline for registration is Nov. 27.

This session is a reprise of last year’s successful class, which drew from multiple unions, public and private employees alike, and explored organizing and growing member involvement. It traces the challenges and lessons encountered as unions have moved from a "business model" of unionism toward practices embracing member involvement and relationship building.

The class will run from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 5, on the Minneapolis campus of the University of Minnesota. Tuition is $50. To register, call 612-624-5020 or email the LES office at les@umn.edu

I.U.O.E. Local 70
Monthly Arrowhead Regional Meeting
Tuesday, Dec. 8, 2015, 5:00 P.M.
Duluth Labor Center, Hall B
Dave Monsour, Business Manager, (651) 646-4566

Sheet Metal Workers’ Local 10
Retirees’ Luncheon
Tuesday, Dec. 1, 1:00 p.m.
Field Station, 200-4th St., Proctor

Sheet Metal Workers
Duluth-Superior Area
Your Christmas Party is
Monday, Dec. 14, 5:00 p.m.,
at the Sheet Metal Workers’
Training Center & Local 10
Union Office, 6279 Industrial
Road, Saginaw, MN.

Iron Range Area
Your Christmas Party will be
Tuesday, Dec. 8, 7:00 p.m., at
the Hibbing Park Hotel.

Hors d’oeuvres and refreshments will be served at the meetings. All our Sheet Metal Retirees are also encouraged to attend.

~Doug Christy, Business Rep.
It's that thankful time of year again, which we need because we too often forget about it the rest of the months. If you’re in good health, or like me, think you are, that’s a good starting point. It makes me remember the second physician I retired, Dr. William Grohs, what a great guy. On his office wall he had a crocheted, framed quote that was something like... “Wer gesund ist, hat tausend wunschens. Wer krank ist hat nur eine.” Oh, you poor Germans are cringing at my poor German I’ll bet. It is supposed to translate to “He who is healthy has a thousand wishes. He who is sick has but one.” So true. Good health is a great place to start in being thankful. Life gets scary in a hurry if you’re not. There are a lot of things that can be listed in terms of being thankful after Item #1 is taken care of.

We’ve heard of far too many people struggling with health issues lately, and gone to too many funerals, some for young folks like Sheet Metal Worker 10’s Joe Whalen. Your heart just breaks for his great parents, Clarence and Jean.

Our labor community lost another great friend that many of you may not know. Ed Kranz, 68, of Hastings, MN was the longtime office administrator for the Sieben Carey Law Firm. Ed had been an unbelievable supporter of labor in Duluth for decades. If you golfed in the Duluth Building & Construction Trades Council’s Golf Outing in June for any of the past 25 years you got a nice Union-made in America shirt and golf towel from Ed and the firm. If you worked or volunteered at the Letter Carriers Annual Food Drive in May, you got to eat at Bernie’s BBQ thanks to Ed and the firm.

The golf outing has a 50/50 drawing and Ed’s ticket was drawn a couple years back. He gave the $500+ he won to our Community Services Program. He has been a staunch supporter of that program since the 1980’s I guess when Jackie Docauer was the Director and Jerry Alander chaired the committee. They were both great friends of Ed’s.

Last year he told me I should do an article about what a great job labor does in Duluth about keeping things local and keeping labor strong here. He said that doesn’t happen anywhere else to the degree it happens here and people should be proud of that. I told Ed in order to do it I’d have to cast aspersions a bit on folks elsewhere and I need all the friends I can get. He laughed and said “I guess so.”

From what I’ve heard Ed took his beloved Dalmatian, Daisy, out for a walk and died suddenly on Nov. 5. His obituary asked that in lieu of flowers memorials were preferred to the Ed Kranz Memorial Dog Park Fund at Vermillion State Bank in Hastings. Ed would have gotten a kick out of that. I can hear him saying, “Somebody might remember we now.” He will be remembered fondly by all who worked for labor and others in Duluth and Twin Cities I’m sure, and his name should last forever at his dog park.

Ed was always easy going as far as I know, and Dalmastrians are a very wired breed of dog that go like hell. Strange as far as I know, and Dalma-...
Supreme Court needs to look at Wisconsin before ruling on Friedrichs case

By Donald Cohen
Executive Director
In The Public Interest

Next spring, the U.S. Supreme Court will decide a case that could threaten the economy and American democracy. Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association asks the justices to consider overturning a 1977 Supreme Court unanimous ruling (Abood v. Detroit Board of Education) that protected the right of teachers, nurses, librarians, firefighters, and other public workers to form unions. The Abood case emphasized that these workers act as the middle class’s backbone by providing quality public services and ensuring healthy communities.

In Abood, the Court ruled that every public worker that benefits from collective bargaining could be required to pay their fair share for those efforts. It’s a basic democratic principle.

For a preview of what will happen if the Court upholds Friedrichs, we should look at Wisconsin.

In 2011, Governor Scott Walker stripped collective bargaining rights for most public workers. The result? Vital public functions and assets were privatized, public services were undermined, and the state economy suffered:

- While an estimated $1.1 billion will be spent by 2017 on the state’s private school voucher program since Walker first expanded it in 2011, Wisconsin classrooms have fewer and less-experienced teachers than before the program, resulting in crowded classrooms and less individualized attention for students.
- The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), a public-private agency charged with creating jobs, has repeatedly broken the law by spending federal funds without authorization and losing track of millions of taxpayer dollars.
- Wisconsin job growth has ranked at or near the bottom of the Midwest, and personal income growth has been last in the Midwest and 44th nationally.
- According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, real median household income nationally shrank by 0.09% between 2011 and 2013. In Wisconsin, during that same period, it fell by 1.39%, a much steeper rate of decline.

Despite these glaring concerns, more privatization may be on the horizon. In 2010, Wisconsin had 88 job openings for correctional officers. After Walker stripped collective bargaining from officers at state prisons in 2011, the number of job openings for that position has ballooned from 88 to over 400. Given Walker’s history of advocating for private prisons, there is serious cause for concern.

What happened in Wisconsin paints a bleak picture of what happens when the people that serve our communities every day lose their voice. Let’s hope the Supreme Court paints a different picture—one with a strong middle class, a vibrant democracy, and government that serves the common good.
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Get connected to resources in Minnesota and Wisconsin
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LABOR WORLD NEWS, MONDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2015 PAGE 5
When the U.S. Steel Plant in Morgan Park closed in the early 1970s, United Steelworkers of America Local 1028 was expected to go down with it. But those members and their families continued to hold monthly meetings until this summer when they disbanded. Time had finally caught up to the strong group of trade union families.

“We’ve had so many deaths, funerals are social occasions for us,” said John Stojevich, the last president of USW Local 1028 Retirees. “At our last two or three meetings we had 12 or 13 people and 11 of them were widows of members.” When you’ve been through as many things as John Stojevich, including 28 years at the steel plant in just about every department, and the Korean War, you can make those kind of statements with a laugh.

One of the things that remains from the retirees and their union is the Earl T. Bester Scholarship they created to honor the man most responsible for organizing their union. USW Local 1028 created the scholarship to remember Bester with the treasury that was left after their plant closed. Bester had gone on to become Director of Duluth-based USW District 33 (now 11).

“She was wonderful about making money on it but some years we’ve been without any applicants so the fund builds then too.”

When workers at the foundry in Gary/New Duluth organized with the United Steelworkers in the early 1990s after that plant was built in 1979, they asked for, and received the same 1028 number for their local union at what is now ME ElectMetal, after a number of name changes. Both the foundry and the steel plant were located in far western Duluth, and many of the foundry workers are, or were, related to former steel plant workers.

With their disbanding, USW Local 1028 Retirees have turned the Earl T. Bester Scholarship over to the new USW Local 1028.

Originally the scholarship was to be awarded to the children or grandchildren of any worker at the former steel plant or the nearby cement plant, that also was organized by USW Local 1028. Those qualifications have been loosened a bit as the years have past, but the renewal, now $1,500 scholarship is still not based on financial need.

“I didn’t know a lot about the scholarship until we met with John,” said Jayson Grozdanich, new President of USW Local 1028, who has only worked at the foundry for 4.5 years. “This is all a learning experience and we hope to put the scholarship to good use. John was great to talk to.”

Grozdanich, Stojevich, and USW Local 1028 Treasurer Lee Popovich will sit on the scholarship board and work with UMD. Popovich can get a lot of information from his aunt, Millicent O’Connell, who, along with Mary Petrich, have been very active with the USW 1028 Retirees and the Citizens Federation (see article below).

Earl Bester: One of the best

Earl Bester was one of the best known and effective labor leaders in the history of this region. Bester was born in 1900 in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, and grew up in Ontonagon, MI. His father was a copper miner.

Bester served in the Infantry in France during World War I before moving to Duluth where he began work at U.S. Steel’s Duluth Works in Morgan Park. At the steel plant in 1920 earning 32 cents an hour, working 12 hour days, 6 days a week. He later became a crane operator in the plant. Bester played a key role in organizing workers at Duluth’s steel plant in 1937 after working at it for a decade. The unit became United Steelworkers of America Local 1028.

Bester was on the constitutional draft committee in Pittsburgh in 1937 as president of USW Local 1028. He continued to work at the steel plant until he became a full time USW union staff representative in 1941.

He served as acting director of USW District 33 from 1950–53, when Henry Burkhammer was suffering with a disabling disease. Bester was elected to the position in 1953 and served three terms until his retirement in 1965. District 33 had its headquarters in downtown Duluth and later became District 11.

Later in his life Bester said one of his most vivid recollections was spending 105 days in Michigan in 1947 attempting to block a back to work movement against striking copper miners by the federal government, which was trying to impose the Taft-Hartley Act for the first time in U.S. history. The Act had just been passed that year, the first major revision of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (the Wagner Act). After much resistance from labor leaders and a veto from President Harry S. Truman, Taft Hartley was passed by Congress by overriding the veto.

USW Local 1028 Retirees group was formed quickly from the steel plant after it closed in the early 1970s. With Bester as their president, they were “the single biggest spark plug for creating our group” said Citizens’ Federation’s Buddy Robinson. Back then it was known as the Senior Coalition and Bester became the first president of that organization as well. When USW 1028 Retirees disbanded this year they gave the $2,000 left in their treasury to the Citizens’ Federation.

Bester died in Argyle, MN in 1986.
Volunteer to learn how to help others with their taxes

Investing in our community has never been easier and you could help yourself by volunteering!

Community Action Duluth is recruiting volunteers to help our union members and neighbors with low to moderate incomes file their tax returns. By volunteering at one of Community Action’s free tax site clinics, you can do your part to keep our local economy strong while helping fellow union members, neighbors and maybe yourself! An hour of your time could help an eligible family claim an average of $1,925 in tax refunds. In today’s market, that’s a great return on investment!

Last year, Community Action Duluth’s Free Tax Sites helped 1,548 families claim over 3 million dollars in tax refunds! In 2016, tax season runs from January 26 to April 18.

Volunteers will learn how to:
- Prepare tax returns
- Register clients
- Conduct intake interviews
- Assist with clerical duties

No previous tax experience is required. Training is provided.

For more information or to sign up, call the Tax Site Program Coordinator at 218-726-1665, ext. 39 or email julia@communityactionduluth.org. For online information, visit http://www.communityactionduluth.org/taxes

Since 1957, the Duluth AFL-CIO and United Way have jointly committed resources and support to serve local health and human service programs that create real and lasting change and ensure all members of our community have a voice in safety and health.

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OSHA seeks public comments

The U.S. Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration is seeking public comment on an updated version of its voluntary Safety and Health Program Management Guidelines, intended to help employers establish health and safety management plans at their workplaces.

Key principles include finding and fixing hazards before they cause injury or illness, and making sure workers have a voice in safety and health.

Updted guidelines should be helpful to small- and medium-sized businesses and also address ways for multiple employers at the same worksite to coordinate efforts to protect all workers.

For more and to review the draft guidelines and provide comment, visit OSHA’s Safety and Health Program Management webpage osha.gov/SHPMguidelines. Comments will be accepted until Feb. 15, 2016. Comments can also be posted directly to the comment docket at http://www.regulations.gov.

The guidelines are advisory only and do not create any new legal obligations or alter existing obligations created by OSHA standards or regulations.
Rob Ecklund working hard for House District 3A election on Dec. 8

Rob Ecklund hasn’t burned any daylight since he decided to run for the Minnesota House of Representatives District 3A seat that opened with Rep. David Dill’s death in August.

Ecklund still works his shifts at the Boise Cascade paper mill in his hometown of International Falls. He’s worked there for 26 years as a member of what is now USW Local 159. He was president of his local union for nine years. The plant has shut down three paper machines in the past couple years, laid off nearly 300 workers, and now only about 90 workers are left. Ecklund was on the night shift last week.

He’s also one year into his second term as a Koochiching County Commissioner.

Since he decided to run for the 3A seat he’s put on about 8,000 miles traveling the largest House district in Minnesota, an area about the size of Rhode Island.

“I think it’s going well…” he said last week of his campaign. “I’ve got a good group of volunteers and we’ve put in a lot of windshield and phone banking time. David (Dill) did the same thing but he had an advantage – he was a pilot. My son is one but I can’t afford him.”

Ecklund said he has always been active in politics, youth sports, and his church so he’s handling the grind well.

“Being a public servant was always a goal of mine,” Ecklund said of his interest in running for office. He’s worked his way up to be a strong favorite in the 3A contest after winning the September 29 DFL Primary Election with 44% of the vote out of the four candidates. He said he has received good support from those opponents.

Ecklund’s Primary win showed the continued strength of unions in northeastern Minnesota. He’s received the endorsement of every union in the district but one and he expects that shortly.

“I know all their members in my hometown so I’m not worried about it,” he said. “I’m not hearing much from my opponents but I’m running like it’s 51 to 49 and I won’t think any different hopefully until about 10 pm December 8th.”

In spite of it being a special election and the only race on the ballot Ecklund said you still expect good voter turnout in northern Minnesota.

“Cook County had 50% turnout in the Primary,” Ecklund said. “We’re always above the state average.”

District 3A covers all of Cook and Koochiching counties, all of Lake County except Two Harbors, and the eastern and northern most sections of St. Louis County.

“It’s largely a Democratic district,” Ecklund said, and he has the DFL endorsement as well.

Because it is so rural Ecklund said almost 90% of Cook County’s ballots are mailed in. Even Koochiching County with International Falls accounting for a large part of the population has about 16% mail in ballots.

(You can go to the Minnesota Secretary of State’s website, http://sos.state.mn.us to find out about voting in the 3A election early or on Dec. 8.)

While Ecklund is staying focused on his campaign many would say he’s a lock to win on Dec. 8. The legislative session is set to start on March 8 with Republicans holding a 72 to 60 majority with the 3A and 50B seats that have been held by the DFL still facing special elections.

Governor Mark Dayton has hinted he may call a Special Session yet this year to help unemployed steelworkers on the Iron Range who have lost their jobs due to foreign steel imports. That would be right in Rob Ecklund’s wheelhouse to be a public servant helping his union sisters and brothers. He knows how lost jobs hurt families and communities.

The thought of going to the legislature and serving with his good friends Rep. Tom Anzelc and Rep. Mike Sundin, a fellow 1976 International Falls High School graduate, makes Ecklund’s hope for serving the public even more enjoyable.

There are many good trade unionists serving in the Minnesota Legislature but none better than Anzelc and Sundin, and Rob Ecklund would fit right in.