The Revolution Will Not Be Televised

by Anna Wells, Editor, IMPO

My parents and their friends came of age in the 1960s, so growing up we were privy to stories about that turbulent decade. I learned what a protest was at a young age as my parents described to me the active response people took to events like The Vietnam War and The French Student Revolution of 1968.

I grew up in the 80s—a decade that will be far less glamorized in the history books. I remember mostly Reagan and Big League Chew. Perhaps it's the fact that we were insulated from many evocative historical events. Maybe that's a good thing.

It's strange that lately I've been reading a lot of articles about folks in manufacturing facilities across the world taking rather desperate measures to respond to job cuts. Last week, French workers held hostage four managers [1] in their factory. The plant's closure, says the AP, was at the root of the dispute, and the accused eventually released their hostages in order for them to attend negotiations at the local mayor's office. I was struck by one line in particular: "Hostage-taking has become a popular negotiating tactic among frustrated French workers in recent weeks… The tactic of holding managers has long been used in France, though sporadically, and has drawn new attention amid the economic downturn."

In other global news—Chinese textile workers blocked roads [2] this week in hopes of gaining government attention in relation to their state-owned factory being shut down. The workers allege they are owed back wages up to three months.

It's scary that labor relations have spiraled so far out of our control—especially since we all seem to have the same ultimate goals: to keep factories running, people employed, and global trade humming along as before. Have desperate

people come to this point because they have no faith in their governments to adequately address their employment situations?

It’s frustrating when we have so many not-for-profit organizations dedicated to manufacturing issues—many who strive to serve as liaisons between government and the private sector—and their memberships are declining year over year. I’d like to know when the loss of faith came. My fear is that Americans, in their increasing desperation, will take inappropriate measures to address similar types of labor issues.

Revolutions don’t have to come in the form of aggression, scare tactics, or extortion. I think our first step, however basic, is knowing what our resources are and how best to utilize them. Global manufacturing has a lot of supporters. I know, because I speak with the champions of these groups on a daily basis. Can’t we tie some hands with policy, rather than rope? Perhaps this is cheap idealism… conversely, perhaps we’ve given up on the right way far too quickly. Hostage situations are inexcusable, but I don’t think there is anything wrong with a good old-fashioned protest. That said, it should be a last-ditch effort. There are plenty of methods between here and there that ought to be utilized. Bold tactics come in many forms, so think about all of the positive, actionable responses you might employ.

What's your take? Email anna.wells@advantagemedia.com [3]

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