

Given that the Internet has, as is contended below, created a "new shop floor in cyber space," strike leaders have major new concerns. They must confront for the first time the specter of "cyber scabbing," and the possibility of self-centered members crossing the picket line to access their (company-maintained) computer, along with a host of similarly novel threats to solidarity. Contrariwise, a striking local may find the need to finally gather as many home-based e-mail addresses as possible an overdue gain of lasting worth.

All of this, and far more, gets a helpful airing in the advice-packed essay below. Answers are offered to such questions as how can you finesse the possibility of losing e-mail contact with your members? What might a flood of e-mail during a strike suggest about morale? How much does it matter that management is reading all of your strike e-mail to members? Is it possible for disloyal members to circumvent the strike electronically, and, so what? Above all, what might a striking local focus on as a major cyber step forward?

### *Picketing Cyber Space*

William Puette

They say strikes aren't what they used to be, but more to the point, strikes can't be what they used to be in simpler times. The work-a-day world for more and more people has changed radically with the IT revolution. Half of the U.S. work force regularly used a desktop or laptop computer at work as early as 1997, and the Internet is still recasting labor-management relations in fundamental ways.

Increasingly, the Internet is creating a new shop floor in cyber space. So, naturally, labor's rights to organize, bargain, and engage in concerted activity are seeking new definition. When it does become necessary for IT-based workers to strike or engage in concerted activity, the rules of engagement must take this new arena into account.

In April of 2001 UHPA, the union representing the 3,000 faculty at the University of Hawaii's ten-campus system, struck the State of Hawai'i for 13 days. In an unprecedented expression of solidarity, ninety percent of the faculty went out. By all measures, the strike was as effective in shutting down the University as could have been imagined.

Traditional picketing, though necessary, was not alone enough to make

the strike effective.

During the weeks prior to the strike, an important fact was realized: Members are heavily dependent on their work-based e-mail system. Like many schools and universities, at UH all faculty and all students are provided with e-mail accounts by the University.

More and more, traditional campus-based classroom instruction is being supplemented by Internet-based "distance education." When the keyboard is a podium and the monitor is a chalkboard, the professor can theoretically be teaching entirely from home or any other off-campus location with a computer and a modem. Universities may be at the leading edge of this new-age homework, but many other work sites are moving just as deeply into cyber space as academia.

Not all of the impacts of distance education and work-based e-mail were negative to strike participation. It is an old joke that organizing faculty is like herding cats. And yet, the flood of e-mail and list-serve debates in the weeks before the strike authorization vote actually galvanized the membership in ways that had never been possible before. They could see that decisions were being made with grass-roots involvement by colleagues.

The old whine of paranoia and conspiracy-theories about staff domination and hidden agendas was neutralized and over-powered by strong, clear, and articulate membership voices in support of the bargaining team and strike support.

The downside, however, was that this open-forum of debate was completely open to the employer. Nothing was confidential; nothing private. The university and the state administration were painfully aware of every position we took, and every argument, pro and con, was on the table, laid bare for all to see.

To read the rest of the article, buy the book, *CyberUnion Handbook*. Look for it at [www.cyberunions.net](http://www.cyberunions.net)