

# Fasten Your Seat Belts

BY J. J. BARRY, INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT

The years that begin with the numeral "1" have now faded into history. Our great cosmic odometer has made a momentous turn, and we naturally lift our eyes to, and focus our minds on, the future.

None can deny that the year 2000 is a good time to try to gain perspective on our lives and our position as trade union members.

In the year 1000, the great civilizations of the world, centers of learning, commerce, art and military might, were in Asia and parts of Africa. Advanced civilizations also existed in Central and South America. In Europe, the Roman empire had long since succumbed to barbarian invasion, and life was described by one historian as "nasty, brutish and short." The very concept of "rights" for anyone below the rank of nobility was laughable.

Fast forward to the end of the 20th century. Diseases that once eradicated large segments of the population have been controlled. Men have walked on the moon, and, despite recent setbacks, are pushing toward Mars. Anyone in any corner of the world who can get his or her hands on a computer and a phone line can be part of the light-speed modern world of communication and commerce. Democracy, threatened in the 20th century by totalitarianism of the left and right, is the way of life for some 40 percent of the world's population and a cherished goal for many of the rest.

What lies ahead? Will the 20th century be an aberration where democracy, and labor and human rights had a brief heyday? Or will our progress continue?

There's an old saying: If you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans. Those words struck me as I read the many articles by some of the world's great (and decidedly less-than-great) minds on the "millennium." Those who speak with an air of importance and self-bestowed authority about the next ten days, let alone the next one hundred or one thousand years, aren't packing a full sea bag.

So does that mean we blindly let ourselves be carried forward by forces beyond our control? Not at all.



The philosopher George Santayana once said: "Those who fail to learn the lessons of history are condemned to repeat it." Do we really want to repeat two world wars, unspeakable human slaughter, the struggle for basic human rights and dignity, the use of nuclear weapons and other horrors of the 20th century? The smug European elites of 1900 probably never foresaw those events, yet all of that and more happened in the last 100 years. We must examine the past, take a realistic look at the trends of the present and do our best to prepare ourselves for the future, knowing full well that our ability to improvise, adapt and roll with the punches will be as important as any quality.

Standing here at a century's cusp, we do know some things. We know that the struggle for the rights of working men and women knows no end. We know firsthand that if we fail to make organizing an ongoing priority, we risk losing everything. We know that greed and avarice are powerful forces in the world. We know that battles won and justice obtained are but fragile triumphs that must be preserved with great vigilance and courage. We know that our satisfaction in the spread of democracy is tempered by the disturbing growth in power and influence of multinational corporations.

These mega-companies know allegiance to no nation or ideology. They scour the world for cheap labor, exploit anyone, anywhere, and justify it all in the name of free trade. Perhaps the events in Seattle last November are but a harbinger of the social unrest to come, as working people demand a stronger voice in the decisions that affect their lives.

We also know that the technological genie is out of the bottle. The last decade of the 20th century saw incredible changes that have had an impact on almost everything we do in our

*(Continued on page 44)*



## The IBEW The F

*For the arrival of 2000, the IBEW Journal looks to the future. This year's issues will examine the industries in which IBEW members work, exploring where they have been, the effect of technology, and where they may be headed. The*

### WHAT DO YOU

**The Journal invites its readers to express their opinions of the future. Tell us in 100 words or less what you think may happen in the world of work or in society at large. Send your com-**



# W Enters Future

*Journal will also examine social and political trends that may affect the lives of our members. In this issue, we start our yearlong examination of the future with the thoughts of President Barry and Secretary-Treasurer Hill.*

## DO YOU THINK?

Comments via e-mail to [journal@ibew.org](mailto:journal@ibew.org) or write to us at: IBEW Journal, 1125 15th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20005. Selected entries will be published in future issues.

# Wire to Wire

BY EDWIN D. HILL, INTERNATIONAL SECRETARY-TREASURER

The best way to approach the future is to do it in the way IBEW members approach their craft—with precision and intelligence. We are not so full of ourselves that we think we can map out the future like an electricity grid. We do however, understand the need to set goals and put ourselves in a position to achieve them.

Our goals are not difficult to articulate. The Objects of the IBEW, set forth a century ago in our Constitution, remain the best road map, especially the first and eleventh of them. The first object is “To organize all workers in the entire electrical industry in the United States and Canada, including all those in public utilities and electrical manufacturing, into local unions.” The final object is “By legal and proper means to elevate the moral, intellectual and social conditions of our members, their families and dependents, in the interest of a higher standard of citizenship.” There is no need to reinvent such sturdy wheels on which we have ridden through 109 years of history.

Presently, we find ourselves in a time of mixed blessings. Economic growth has fueled construction, stabilized employment in many of the industries we represent, and helped our benefit funds prosper. Yet good times cannot mask problems that lurk beneath the surface. Mergers and restructuring continue to threaten jobs, and an economic downturn could dry up alternate opportunities for those thrown into the job market. Health care remains a burning question in the United States that must be addressed on the national level. The effects of unfair trade continue to devastate communities. The political climate, while friendlier to working peoples’ issues than in years past, continues to pose a challenge to us.

Our immediate goal in 2000 is to play a major role in the U.S. elections in which we will choose a president and fill a host of offices from Congress to dogcatcher. We will do our utmost to elect labor friendly candidates, including those who come from our own ranks. More important, we must continue our long-term efforts to build a grass roots force of working people that will be impossible for officials of



any party to ignore. Only then will we see the concerns of working families get the same attention that corporate priorities do today.

As we look on the horizon, the factor most likely to continue influencing our lives is technology. The IBEW has already begun mapping a strategy to ensure that we are the workers who manufacture, install, connect and maintain the wires and wireless equipment that power the ongoing information age. Every trend points to sustained growth of communications technology and a tremendous need for the skilled hands to meet the demand. We will pursue this market, which touches every branch of the Brotherhood and the job of every member, with determination and perseverance.

I also want the IBEW to be strong at the other end of the wire—the computer screens and other communications devices that send and receive more information than at any time in human history. It is one thing to want to power the information age, but we must also use the benefits it provides to strengthen our Brotherhood. We have it within our power now—a power that will only grow—to expedite and improve communication between the International and the locals, between members and their locals and the International, between locals, and among members themselves. The process has already begun and will grow as we announce new initiatives to foster the spread of our communications. Where this will all take us, we can only dream. But we would do current and future members of the IBEW a disservice if we do not reap the benefits and build a stronger union.

The IBEW is prepared for the future and poised to take advantage of its opportunities. If we stay focused on basic goals and true to our principles, IBEW in the 21st century will be a grand story indeed.