Workers win in Boron

Breaking Rio Tinto’s Lockout:
We’re going back to work with our heads held high!

With help from their neighbors and supporters around the world, 570 working families in Boron, CA successfully faced down global goliath Rio Tinto. The ILWU Local 30 members who work at Rio Tinto’s massive mine in Boron approved a new contract on May 15, breaking the company’s 15-week lockout. The agreement provides guaranteed raises and a $5,000 per worker bonus, protects full-time jobs and seniority rights, and removes scabs from the workplace.”

"Most of us are happy to be going back to work, earning our paychecks, and doing the jobs that we love,” said Terri Judd, Desert Storm veteran and heavy equipment operator who served as an official spokesperson for Local 30 members during the lockout. “We’re going back with our heads held high, but we’re also guarded about dealing with a company that locked us out.”

The tentative agreement with Rio Tinto was reached in the early morning hours of May 14th with help from ILWU International President Bob McEllrath, Vice President Ray Familathe, and Secretary Treasurer Willie Adams. Local 30 President Dave Liebengood and the rank and file Negotiating Committee asked the ILWU International officers to assist them during the final week of intensive negotiations.

The settlement met members’ key goals of securing good jobs and stopping Rio Tinto’s assault on their union contract. Rio Tinto had been pushing a package of 81 “take-away” demands, part of the company’s ultimatum that was rejected by workers one day before the January 31 lockout. Those ultimatum demands included:

• Converting full-time jobs into part-time positions with skimpy benefits.
• Authority to cut employee pay at any time for any reason – or no reason at all.
• Eliminating seniority and allowing discrimination, favoritism, and nepotism.
• Allowing management to pick and choose who would or wouldn’t get raises.
• Giving management unlimited power to outsource and subcontract work.
• Declaring parts of the plant to be “non-union” where workers had no union rights.
• Limit outsourcing by requiring full utilization of all workers and machines before any work goes outside.
• Retain seniority protection for shifts, layoffs, and vacations.

The new six-year agreement protects workers from the worst of the company’s attacks and includes guaranteed annual wage increases of 2.5 percent. The new agreement will also:

1. Protect workers from the worst of the company’s attacks.
2. Include guaranteed annual wage increases of 2.5 percent.
3. Protect seniority protection for shifts, layoffs, and vacations.
4. Limit outsourcing by requiring full utilization of all workers and machines before any work goes outside.
5. Retain seniority protection for workers with relatively equal qualifications.
6. Expand opportunities for overtime while reducing coercive, mandatory overtime.

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Following the January 31st lockout of Local 30 in Boron, I called for an officer’s meeting with attorneys and staff. The Boron lockout would be our number one priority. Our efforts were to support our Local 30 members and help them win the lockout against Rio Tinto, one of the largest mining companies in the world.

It was no surprise Local 30 had been negotiating since September 2009. The contract ended on November 4th. Rio Tinto states on their website that their strategy is to consistently find the competitive advantage wherever possible. It was clear that the fight was on. With unemployment in double digits, it is unsurprising that workers are afraid of losing their jobs and may be less willing to take risks. This fact was not lost on Rio Tinto, and the timing of their lockout – in the middle of our Great Recession – was no accident. Some companies demand cuts because they are under real economic pressure. Some companies that are making billions, like Rio Tinto, will try to take advantage just because they can. By any measure, Rio Tinto was a powerful adversary with a global reputation for playing hardball. It was David vs. Goliath.

As President, my job is to work with the Local, their President and negotiating committee. If I were to answer or do what every individual suggests, the International and the Local would have no direction. Working with Local President Dave Liebengood is part of the process. Even though there may be differences in strategy, Dave led his committee.

All assets were directed to the fight. Working with the President of Local 30 and his committee, we moved to support the families along the way they lost their paychecks and benefits. We set up an emergency fund, food banks and support groups. The Los Angeles County Federation of Labor organized a caravan to collect donations from thousands of working families and delivered $50,000 worth of groceries.

Our contacts and allies in the labor movement gave us important support and resources. The AFL-CIO headquarters contributed staff and money to generate pressure. Rio Tinto International Vice President Hawaii Wesley Furtado and I addressed the AFL-CIO Executive Council on the lockout 1 person at a time spoke with Vice President Joe Biden about the situation. From there, International Secretary-Treasurer Willie Adams and Sister Terri Judd from Local 30 went to Australia to rally in front of Rio Tinto’s Australian Headquarters. Vice President Mainland Ray Familathe went to London with Brother Dave Irish from Local 30 and attended the Rio Tinto Shareholder’s meeting, with a rally from supporting unions outside the building. All this was occurring while Local 6 went down the Coast, Canada, Alaska and Hawaii were supporting and donating to the campaign.

Lindsay McLaughlin in Washington D.C. who worked for years in Sacramento were already speaking with political allies to stand up for working families before Rio Tinto attempted the same strategy in support of their profits. Rio Tinto, a foreign owned corporation, added to the US and California recession by putting more people out of work in the name of maximizing profit to invite their investors. This added pressure to the already stressed budget of California by requiring extra police, Food Stamps, and Medicaid to all companies.

The support from our network around the world was tremendous. The International Transportation Federation (ITEF), Matring and Maritime, the International Dockers Council (IDC), the AFL-CIO, and Change to Win put Local 30 in calling for Rio Tinto to end the lockout. Local restaurant owners donated food at the picket line or offered discounts to locked out families to help ILWU Local 30 in their fight to achieve a contract. The contract was ultimately accepted by a 75% affirmative vote and sets the standard higher for other mining contracts. Beating back Rio Tinto was a huge undertaking and a victory for the labor movement.

I spent a lot of time explaining to people where Boron is located. Not anymore. People in the labor movement are talking about the victory at Boron, not only in the United States, but around the world.

Boron will be the only struggle we face. Currently the Canadian Longshore Division is in the middle of negotiating with the shipping companies. Local 6 is negotiating a master agreement for 900 people and we have been negotiating for two years to get a first contract for 600 Rite-Aid workers in Lancaster, California. Boron has tested our resolve and shows us what to expect when a powerful employer challenges our members and our union. I believe we passed the test, thanks to the courage and effort by the members and leaders of Local 30, and to the solidarity within our ranks and from those around the world who still believe: An injury to one is an injury to all.

DISPATCHER
Craig Merrill
Communications Director and Managing Editor

Breaking Rio Tinto’s Lockout in Boron continued from page 1

The agreement also includes several compromises that were negotiated before the final bargaining sessions, including the replacement of guaranteed pension benefits with a $501(k) savings plan for all new hires. At the ratification meeting, some members noted that this “two-tier” retirement plan could undermine unity between new-hires and veteran employees, erode the pension funding base for current employees, and will eventually eliminate the defined benefits pensions for the next generation of workers. Another compromise that was made requires that any wage and hour violations be arbitrated, instead of allowing employers to stand up for working families before Rio Tinto attempted the same strategy in support of their profits. Rio Tinto, a foreign owned corporation, added to the US and California recession by putting more people out of work in the name of maximizing profit to invite their investors. This added pressure to the already stressed budget of California by requiring extra police, Food Stamps, and Medicaid to all companies.

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DISPATCHER
Boron Solidarity: National & Global

Lessons of the lockout:

Unity is everything: the families in Boron stood strong and didn’t fold under pressure. No group ever broke ranks and wanted to take the company’s concessionary ultimatum. There were disagreements, but the differences were over strategy and tactics – not the fundamental point that we’re strongest when we stick together.

Support for families was the top priority. Within days of the lockout, contributions from the ILWU International, Locals and individuals were flowing to help families. Funds were distributed by an Emergency Committee that met weekly with families in crisis. ILWU locals 500 and 502 in Canada passed monthly assessments that provided an impressive funding stream, and other locals plus the Longshore Division made monthly pledges that helped families survive.

The broader labor movement provided important support and resources. The state and national AFL-CIO contributed help that generated leverage against Rio Tinto and supported Local 30 families. The Los Angeles County Federation of Labor responded quickly by gathering donations from hundreds of thousands of working families, organizing a “Docks to the Desert Caravan” that delivered $30,000 worth of groceries, and coordinating an action at the British Consulate in Los Angeles that involved 1,000 supporters and generated positive media to end the lockout. Other unions played key roles, including the United Food & Commercial Workers Union, the California State School Employees Association, the Teamsters Union, SEIU, and dozens of others.

International solidarity was critical. Because Rio Tinto is a global goliath with operations on every continent, the ILWU’s connections with unions around the world proved important. Secretary-Treasurer Willie Adams helped the Mining and Maritime Conference convene a meeting near Boron after the lockout. Vice President Ray Familathe met with union leaders around the world and kept them informed as the lockout developed. When it came time for us to attend Rio Tinto shareholder meetings in London and Melbourne, we were able to count on our allies in Europe and Australia to increase pressure on the company.

Involving rank and file leaders. Before the lockout, Local 30 leaders formed a “Contract Action Team,” composed of dozens of active members who took responsibility for keeping co-workers informed with newsletters and flyers that provided facts and cut down on rumors. When the contract expired, those CAT members made sure members understood their rights, and helped lead actions on the shop floor when it was necessary to protect those rights.

Working with new allies and winning public support. The High Desert isn’t an easy place for unions, but Local 30 members won strong support in their communities by networking with local churches and community groups like the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars. They won support from dozens of business owners who called on Rio Tinto to end the lockout. Local restaurants owners donated food for the picket lines. Members even won support from some of the local sheriff’s deputies who became friends with many on the line. Children and spouses were also encouraged to attend rallies, marches, and spend time on the line. The approach generated widespread public and media support and made Rio Tinto’s expensive advertising campaign a dud with High Desert residents.

Positive media matters. From the beginning, Local 30 members worked to get positive media coverage for their families – and avoided mistakes in the past that encouraged media to focus on picket line violence that alienated local residents. Rank and file members served as official spokespeople, emphasizing that the lockout was about good jobs for their community and that the struggle in Boron was being fought by greedy corporations. Members also generated positive media attention by organizing marches and rallies that emphasized family involvement and put children in the picture to make the point. Volunteers wrote “letters to the editor” that were published. Positive events like the “Docks to the Desert Caravan” and using “human chains” to unload food deliveries made good media coverage – and public support - much easier to get.

Having friends in Washington and Sacramento is important. Rio Tinto executives know that politicians have power to make or break a lockout. They immediately flew to Sacramento after the lockout and their lobbyists were working the halls in Washington. But the ILWU was able to beat Rio Tinto in both Sacramento and in Washington because of relationships with politicians who are willing to stand up for working families and put pressure on Rio Tinto to settle.
NORTHERN CALIFORNIA DISTRICT COUNCIL
Endorsements for June 8 statewide primary

U.S. Senate: Barbara Boxer

STATE OFFICES:
Governor: Jerry Brown
Lieutenant Governor: Gavin Newsom
Attorney General: Kamala Harris
Insurance Commissioner: Dave Jones
Secretary of State: Debra Bowen (D)
Treasurer: Bill Lockyer (D)

Superintendent of Public Instruction: Tom Torlakson (D)

State Board of Equalization:
District 1 Betty Yee (D)
District 2 Chris Parker (D)
District 3 No Endorsement
District 4 Jerome Horton (D)

STATE BALLOT MEASURES:
Proposition 13- Tax Assessment for Seismic Retrofit: YES
Proposition 14- Top Two Primary: NO
Proposition 15- California Fair Elections: YES
Proposition 16- Two-Thirds Approval for Local Public Power: NO
Proposition 17- Alter Auto Insurance Company Regulations: NO

CALIFORNIA STATE ASSEMBLY:
AD 1- Wes Chesbro (D)
AD 2- No Endorsement
AD 3- Mickey Harrington (D)
AD 4- Dennis Campanale (D)
AD 6- Jared Huffman (D)
AD 7- Michael Allen (D)
AD 8- Mariko Yamada (D)
AD 9- Roger Dickinson (D)
AD 10- Alyson Huber (D)
AD 11- Susan Bonilla (D)
AD 12- Fiona Ma (D)
AD 13- Tom Ammiano (D)
AD 14- Nancy Skinner (D)
AD 15- Joan Buchanan (D)
AD 16- Sandre Swanson (D)
AD 17- Cathleen Galgiani (D)
AD 18- No Endorsement
AD 19- Jerry Hill (D)
AD 20- Bob Wieckowski (D)
AD 21- Rich Gordon (D)
AD 22- Paul Fong (D)

State Senate:
SD 2- Noreen Evans (D)
SD 4- No Endorsement
SD 6- Darrell Steinberg (D)
SD 8- Leland Yee (D)
SD 10- Ellen Corbett (D)
SD 12- Anna Caballero (D)
SD 14- No Endorsement
SD 17- Sam Farr (D)
SD 19- Les Madsen (D)
SD 20- Jim Costa (D)
SD 21- No Endorsement
SD 22- No Endorsement

Contra Costa County Supervisor, District 4:
Alameda County Supervisor:
District 2- Nadia Lockyer
District 3- Wilma Chan

San Francisco Democratic County Central Committee: Eric Mar

U.S. Congress:
CD 1- Mike Thompson (D)
CD 2- No Endorsement
CD 3- Ami Bera (D)
CD 4- Clint Curtis (D)
CD 5- Doris Matsui (D)
CD 6- Lynn Woolsey (D)
CD 7- George Miller (D)
CD 8- Nancy Pelosi (D)
CD 9- Barbara Lee (D)
CD 10- John Garamendi (D)
CD 11- Jerry McNerney (D)
CD 12- Jack Sieper (D)
CD 13- Fortney “Pete” Stark (D)
CD 14- Anna Eshoo (D)
CD 15- Mike Honda (D)
CD 16- Zoe Lofgren (D)
CD 17- Sam Farr (D)
CD 19- Les Madsen (D)
CD 20- Jim Costa (D)
CD 21- No Endorsement
CD 22- No Endorsement

Puget Sound District Council, ILWU-IBU

No election issues at present
Local 23’s Todd Iverson runs for County Council

Iwu Local 23 member Todd Iverson declared his candidacy for Pierce County Council last December, and has been running hard ever since.

“I want to see more people in office who have lived our issues,” Iverson said. “It’s important to get more union members elected. Just because people say they support us doesn’t mean they really get it—look at what happened with the Employee Free Choice Act in the Senate, for example.”

Iverson has been working on the waterfront since he was 16. He worked weekends and summers while he was studying political science at the University of Redlands. Then he went to work full-time on the docks when he graduated.

During the hard-fought 2002 Longshore Division contract battle and lockout, IUWU members got a new look at the importance of having political allies. Once that fight was over, Iverson and a few other brothers and sisters from Local 23 started “America In Solidarity,” a non-profit education and advocacy group for working people.

“We were doing town halls and forums on health reform a few years ahead of most other groups,” Iverson said. “We were doing town halls and forums on health reform a few years ahead of most other groups.”

Iverson runs for office just about full-time, and has been running since December, and has been running since December, and has been running since December, and has been running since December.

“Running for office is almost a full-time job,” Iverson said. “He’s been busy raising money, answering endorsement questionnaires, speaking to groups and doorbelling voters. In his conversations he’s already getting a feel for the sort of nuts-and-bolts issues that demand commissioners’ attention. Voters want to know what he’ll do to help urban homeowners on aging septic systems, or whether he would help keep a forest from being leveled to build a home for foster children.

“Finally, Iverson has picked up a fistful of endorsements. Local 23 got on board early, of course, as did the Pierce County Central Labor Council, the Pierce County Building and Construction Trades Council, the Pierce County Democrats, the 27th LD Democrats, IBEW Local 483, UFCW Local 367, AFSCME Local 120 and the Laborers Union. The campaign has a Facebook page, Todd-Iverson-for-Pierce-COUNTY.Council, and will soon have a Web site up at www.toddiverson.org.

Iverson is running as a longshoreman gives him the ability to run a campaign, Iverson said. “I’ve always had a yearning to do a little something extra, and this is a good opportunity.”

Local 54’s David Griffen runs for School Board

Local 54 member David Griffen (#20880) said his IUWU experience gave him the confidence to run in the June 8 election for a spot as a Trustee of the Stockton Unified School District.

“The biggest thing I learned on the docks is that you can push back on anything,” Griffen said. “Running for office is almost a full-time job.”

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Battle of Ballantyne: The lost strike that built a union

Canadian longshore workers will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Ballantyne this June, a little less than a year after ILWU members in the U.S. marked the 75th anniversary of Bloody Thursday. Just as the U.S. dockers’ victory in 1934 built on decades of organizing, repression, and rebuilding, the Battle of Ballantyne marked a watershed event for Canadian dockworkers that came after years of struggle.

June 18, 1935, tensions between the Vancouver and District Waterfront Workers Association (VdDWWA) and the Shipping Federation had been building for months, and it was only a matter of time before a showdown would take place. The union, led by Ivan Emery, was determined to take over the dispatching system, improve wage rates and to change the method of distribution of surplus work. The Shipping Federation adamantly opposed these changes. It had determined that the time had come to break the union once and for all. The employer's group, led by Vancouver Port Authority Chief W.F. Foster, a former director of the Shipping Federation, had hired a private detective agency to attack the unionized workforce, said Foster.

At 10:00 a.m. on June 18, 1935, around 5,000 longshoremen and unemployed workers marched to Vancouver’s Ballantyne Pier to protest the employment of strikebreakers, led by honored war hero Mickey O’Rourke. They were met by a massed police force headed by Vancouver Police Chief W.F. Foster, a former director of the Shipping Federation. Police fired tear gas and charged into the ranks of the peaceful marchers. Mounted police rode their horses through the marchers’ ranks, pursuing them through the streets and down back lanes. They rode up the steps of houses in the neighborhood where women and children were gathered, and swung their clubs indiscriminately. At least 100 people were injured by the police in what the Vancouver Daily Province described as “the bloodiest hours in waterfront history.”

The Longshoremen’s Women’s Auxiliary established a first aid post in the Longshoremen’s Hall to treat the injured. The police smashed the windows and hurled tear gas bombs inside. The union hung on for six months, but officially called off the strike on Dec. 9, realizing it was a losing battle. It appeared the Shipping Federation had won a complete victory, but change—though stalled—could not be halted. Soon the company unions, the CWWA and the Vancouver Longshoremen’s Association (VLA), were lobbying for equalization of earnings and rotation dispatch.

The CWWA and the VLA amalgamated in 1941 so they could present a unified body to the employer. In 1943, the BC Council of Longshoremen (BCL) brought together six independent unions, including the CWWA, the VLA, the North Vancouver Longshoremen’s Association (Nylas), the ILWU Vancouver, the ILWU New Westminster and the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA) Vancouver. ILWU jurisdiction was established in British Columbia in 1944, with Vancouver getting chartered as ILWU Local 501 in March, and New Westminster becoming ILWU Local 502 in July.

In 1945, the BCCL became the BC District Council (BCDC) and included Vancouver, Port Alberni, Prince Rupert and New Westminster.

The Battle of Ballantyne dealt a harsh setback to the Vancouver and district longshoremen—but they resiliently managed to build a militant, representative union out of a lost strike.

The Shipping Federation failed to realize that the intermittent nature of longshore work, the injustice of the dispatch and the threat of capricious dismissal, combined with the skill needed to perform the job, left the longshoremen no choice but to look to each other in militant solidarity.

— by Gary Serafini, ILWU Local 500
(With thanks to Roy Smith and “The Man Along the Shore.”)

Longshore talks shadow ILWU Canada convention

The troubled longshore negotiations between the ILWU Canada and the British Columbia Maritime Employers Association (BCMEA) dominated the union’s 31st Convention, held March 23-26 in Vancouver, BC.

“All around the world, employers are using the bad economic situation to attack the unionized workforce,” said ILWU Canada President Tom Dufresne. “The BCMEA wants total flexibility, reduced costs and control of the dispatch,“ he said. The employers also want to be able to bypass seniority.

Bargaining began January 2, 2010. Two federal delegations have been appointed to facilitate. They have helped the parties make some progress, despite the employers’ group conducting an aggressive campaign away from the negotiating table. The BCMEA has brought complaints against the ILWU to the Canadian Parliament’s Committee on Labor Relations and the Subcommittee on Women in Non-Traditional Work of the Committee on the Status of Women.

The employers charged the union with discriminating against women, “but it’s a joint hiring process and the matter of accountability on their part has not been addressed,” said new elected ILWU Canada Vice President AtLarge, Mandy Webster.

The ILWU went to Parliament with some members of the B.C. Human Rights Coalition to speak to the Subcommittee. Dufresne called the charges “involuntary and vexatious,” part of the employer’s plan to drain the union’s resources and cause as much aggravation and grief as possible for its officers. “They’ve said publicly that they’re doing this,” he said, likening the BCMEA’s tactics to those used by the U.S. employers in 1948. “They’re attacking members’ work ethic, our wages, our reputation, trying to create a public backlash,” he said.

“No one has claimed things were perfect in regards to employment equity,” Webster said, “but we are seeing a traditionally male-dominated industry evolving into a more balanced workplace and the improvements will show over time. The BCMEA is shamefully taking advantage of an issue that hits many people emotionally as part of their campaign to publicly destroy the image of the Union,” she said. “I would be the last person to minimize the value of seeking employment equity at any workplace, but in this case, the employer has used this issue as a red herring to attack the very core foundations of equality that this union stands for.”

Delegates to the ILWU Canada Convention also heard that the union had carried its fight against repressive security legislation as far as it could. The Court of Appeals ruled that the government is within its rights to require dock workers to submit to security searches, and on March 11 the Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal.

The Convention elected several officers by acclamation. In addition to new elected Dufresne and Webster (Local 517), the delegates chose Tim Farrell (Local 502, New Westminster) as 2nd Vice President, Al Le Monnier (Local 500) as 3rd Vice President, and Mark Gondienko (Local 500, Vancouver) as Longshore Trustee. Members will vote for 1st Vice President and Secretary-Treasurer.

“The new officers will have to continue to build unity amongst the membership, if nothing else,” Webster said. “We’re coming off a few good years when there was a lot of work and money to be made. Now that the economy has suffered, you see many employers — not just within the longshore industry — bullying their workers. The only way we can fight is to continue to stay strong and cohesive,” she said.

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Bargaining began January 2, 2010. Two federal delegations have been appointed to facilitate. They have helped the parties make some progress, despite the employers’ group conducting an aggressive campaign away from the negotiating table. The BCMEA has brought complaints against the ILWU to the Canadian Parliament’s Committee on Labor Relations and the Subcommittee on Women in Non-Traditional Work of the Committee on the Status of Women.

The employers charged the union with discriminating against women, “but it’s a joint hiring process and the matter of accountability on their part has not been addressed,” said new elected ILWU Canada Vice President AtLarge, Mandy Webster.

The ILWU went to Parliament with some members of the B.C. Human Rights Coalition to speak to the Subcommittee. Dufresne called the charges “involuntary and vexatious,” part of the employer’s plan to drain the union’s resources and cause as much aggravation and grief as possible for its officers. “They’ve said publicly that they’re doing this,” he said, likening the BCMEA’s tactics to those used by the U.S. employers in 1948. “They’re attacking members’ work ethic, our wages, our reputation, trying to create a public backlash,” he said.

“No one has claimed things were perfect in regards to employment equity,” Webster said, “but we are seeing a traditionally male-dominated industry evolving into a more balanced workplace and the improvements will show over time. The BCMEA is shamefully taking advantage of an issue that hits many people emotionally as part of their campaign to publicly destroy the image of the Union,” she said. “I would be the last person to minimize the value of seeking employment equity at any workplace, but in this case, the employer has used this issue as a red herring to attack the very core foundations of equality that this union stands for.”

Delegates to the ILWU Canada Convention also heard that the union had carried its fight against repressive security legislation as far as it could. The Court of Appeals ruled that the government is within its rights to require dock workers to submit to security searches, and on March 11 the Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal.

The Convention elected several officers by acclamation. In addition to new elected Dufresne and Webster (Local 517), the delegates chose Tim Farrell (Local 502, New Westminster) as 2nd Vice President, Al Le Monnier (Local 500) as 3rd Vice President, and Mark Gondienko (Local 500, Vancouver) as Longshore Trustee. Members will vote for 1st Vice President and Secretary-Treasurer.

“The new officers will have to continue to build unity amongst the membership, if nothing else,” Webster said. “We’re coming off a few good years when there was a lot of work and money to be made. Now that the economy has suffered, you see many employers — not just within the longshore industry — bullying their workers. The only way we can fight is to continue to stay strong and cohesive,” she said.

Canadian longshore workers will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Ballantyne this June, a little less than a year after ILWU members in the U.S. marked the 75th anniversary of Bloody Thursday. Just as the U.S. dockers’ victory in 1934 built on decades of organizing, repression, and rebuilding, the Battle of Ballantyne marked a watershed event for Canadian dockworkers that came after years of struggle.

June 18, 1935, tensions between the Vancouver and District Waterfront Workers Association (VdDWWA) and the Shipping Federation had been building for months, and it was only a matter of time before a showdown would take place.

The union, led by Ivan Emery, was determined to take over the dispatching system, improve wage rates and to change the method of distribution of surplus work. The Shipping Federation adamantly opposed these changes. It had determined that the time had come to break the union once and for all.

The Shipping Federation had already established a new company union, the Canadian Waterfront Workers Association (CWWA). According to the union’s daily strike bulletin of July 18, the employers had announced their intention to break all the maritime unions in B.C. and replace them with company unions.

When non-union workers loaded newsprint in Powell River, bypassing the newly organized longshoremen, the new federation united the waterfront unions placed the ships from Powell River on the unfair list. When the newsprint arrived in Vancouver, longshoremen refused to unload it.

The Shipping Federation responded by declaring the October 1934 contract agreement at an end. The lockout and strike began on June 4, 1935. It gained support in provinces along the West Coast, including Victoria, Prince Rupert and several in the United States.

On June 18, 1935, around 5,000 longshoremen and unemployed worker marched to Vancouver’s Ballantyne Pier to protest the employment of strikebreakers, led by hon-
ILWU mobilizes support for Costa Rican dockworkers

A s union members throughout Costa Rica mobilized against government attacks on public services and basic labor rights, the ILWU’s Coast Longshore Division was building political support for the Costa Rican dockworkers union SINTRAJAP at the highest levels of the U.S. government. The protests in Costa Rica came to a head April 29, the same day 25 members of the U.S. Congress sent a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to “express great concern about the current labor right situation in Costa Rica” and to say that “Costa Rica needs to comply with its obligations to the U.S. and the International Labor Organization.”

Dockworkers in Costa Rica’s Caribbean ports of Limón and Moin have been the standard-bearers in the country’s recent struggle against privatization and political attacks on unions. Two years ago, the Costa Rican government took out a $72.5 million loan from the World Bank to “modernize” these ports, which meant turning them over to private owners. The dock workers union, SINTRAJAP, has resisted every step of the way. At their March 4 meeting, SINTRAJAP members voted unanimously to reject a government buyout that would pave the way to privatization.

The Costa Rican government has responded by replacing the union’s democratically elected leaders with a new board of government-backed directors and freezing the union’s bank accounts. The Coast Longshore Division has published letters of support for SINTRAJAP in the country’s largest daily newspaper, La Nación, and in the University of Costa Rica’s weekly publication El Semanario. ILWU International President Robert McElrath wrote to President Barack Obama, asking him “to immediately communicate to the Costa Rican government that its current course of conduct is unacceptable and contrary to Costa Rica’s stated commitment to democracy and human rights.”

On April 29, thousands of teachers, students, public employees, and dockworkers participated in a national day of protest. The teachers’ union ASPE (Asociación de Profesores de Segunda Enseñanza) called a one-day work stoppage, denouncing a proposed new law governing public employment. ASPE called the proposal “an attack on economic, social and political rights won by the working class in struggles over many years.” It will cut wages and benefits and gut collective bargaining rights.

In Limón on April 29, riot police attacked dockworkers who had blocked off streets around the port. The confrontation ended with seven trucks burned, many demonstrators beaten, 22 arrested and two police officers hurt by gunfire. SINTRAJAP issued a statement saying that it neither planned nor approved of the violence in any way, but that “it is hard to restrain people who feel they must defend themselves.”

The union also declared its determination to keep up the fight. “We will not rest until the responsible parties inside and outside of JAPDEVA (the state agency that administers the ports) pay for the damage they have caused to the workers of JAPDEVA and of the country,” SINTRAJAP leader José Luis Castillo told the newspaper El Pais. Castillo also expressed his gratitude for the solidarity shown by the ILWU, most recently the letter to Secretary of State Clinton.

This action by the North American Congress members is one more sign of the enormous support we have in the defense of the sacred right to our work, condemnation of corruption and the illegal and dictatorial action of the government,” Castillo said.

Longshore Caucus takes a reality check

D elegates to the Coast Longshore Division Caucus, held April 5 - 9 in San Francisco, confronted a record drop in work, and the challenges to jurisdiction that such a drop in work brings. The Caucus also took stock of the new federal health care legislation and took action in solidarity with working families in Boron and in Costa Rica.

“For the second year in a row, the global economic downturn resulted in reduced cargo volumes on the West Coast,” the Coast Committeemen wrote in their report to the Caucus. “In the 75 years of our existence, there has never been a drop in work as sudden and sharp as the one we have experienced in the last 18 months.”

When cargo volumes go down, the cost of paying for the benefit package is reflected in increased hourly wage costs and tonnage assessments, so the Employers have a greater incentive to avoid using ILWU labor. They use any pretext they can find.

Employers have also used “port security” as an excuse to go after the ILWU ever since Sept. 11, 2001. Many ports have taken advantage of that federal and state security grants to make changes that cut into ILWU jurisdiction. The union continues to fight security measures like dockside cameras and the Transportation Workers Identification Credential (TWIC) that are being used to target workers rather than to promote security. TWIC “has become a tool that employers and government use to selectively discipline workers and restrict union ability to organize and monitor work sites,” said ILWU International President Robert McElrath.

The spreading practice of Port Security, described by ILWU attorney Peter Saltzmann as “a tax on insurance plans that provide substantial monthly contribution from the Coast Longshore Division Caucus confronted the problems posed by hard times and corporate greed.”

The 81 elected delegates to the April 5-9 Longshore Division Caucus tackled the problems posed by hard times and corporate greed.

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Vans carrying scabs leave the Rio Tinto mine in Boron after Local 30 members won

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