



# THE DISPATCHER

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ILWU Local 14 supports their "Toys for Tots" program with a \$500 check.

News & Notes will return in the February issue. Please send your items to [editor@ilwu.org](mailto:editor@ilwu.org).



photo by Sean Hiller, Daily Breeze

Volunteers Donald McFee (right) and Ken Wolcott (left) hoisted food baskets onto a truck at the ILWU's annual "Feed the Community Day," in Wilmington, CA, one of many holiday-time events organized by ILWU locals up and down the coast to helping working families in difficult times.

## ILWU locals help during holidays and hard times

Every holiday season, ILWU members, pensioners, and Auxiliary volunteers make a special effort to help families who are facing a crisis. With the recession and rising unemployment, the demand this season for contributions and volunteers was higher than previous years. Many locals continued traditions of giving, while others stepped-up in new ways.

For the 11th consecutive year, members from **Locals 13, 63, 94**, the **Southern California Pensioners Club** and **Auxiliary #8** organized their "Feed the Community Day" (formerly known as "Yes We Can") on November 24th. The monumental undertaking required months of planning and involved hundreds of volunteers who assembled more than 1,500 food baskets at the ILWU Memorial Hall in Wilmington. The baskets were then distributed to families needing help in Long Beach and surrounding areas. The 70-pound

baskets, which can feed as many as 10 people, included a whole 12-pound turkey, cornbread, fresh fruit, vegetables and other food items. The event gets bigger every year, thanks in part to help from other organizations that now participate, including the Los Angeles-Long Beach Port Police and Los Angeles Police Department. As in past years, elected officials came out to help, including Los Angeles City Councilwoman Janice Hahn, U.S. Representatives Loretta Sanchez, Laura Richardson and Maxine Waters, and State Assemblywoman Bonnie Lowenthal.

The Southern California locals also held their annual Children's Christmas Party on December 15th at the ILWU Memorial Hall in Long Beach. The toy giveaway helped nearly 1,000 children who were identified by the Holiday Events Committee with help from local community-based organizations and schools. The community partners for both charity events included the Carson Stroke Center, Peace and Joy Domestic Violence Center, San

Pedro Service Center, Harbor Interfaith Agency, Toberman Settlement House, Joint Effort, Don Hotel Senior Citizen Center, and many schools and churches in the Southland.

In San Diego, **Local 29** Vice President Alfonso Torres took charge of the local's annual Thanksgiving food drive. Members donated canned goods that were distributed to families living in nearby Logan Heights. Members also donated to Local 29's annual Toy Drive. Donated toys were placed under a tree at the dispatch hall, then given to children at the National City Boys & Girls Club. Local 29 President Brian Whatley estimates that more than \$10,000 worth of toys and bicycles were contributed by local members.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, **Local 10** President Melvin Mackay worked on a project with Clarence Thomas and other members that aimed to help residents in the impoverished island nation of Haiti. The islanders have been devastated by a series of hurricanes

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# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

## President's Report: Thoughts about the New Year

Like most of us, the New Year has me thinking about the challenges that we'll be facing ahead in 2009, and reflecting back on the ILWU's accomplishments during the past year.

Everybody's worried about the economy as we enter 2009, and for good reason. Things are bad and getting worse. As I write this in mid-December, more than one million workers have lost their jobs in the past three months. With so many people out of work, most of us know someone who's recently lost a job or can't find one. In the ILWU, we're hearing about plants and warehouses that are closing. The ports have fewer ships and less work than a few months ago. Everyday there's more news about cutbacks, closures, and consolidations. Most working families are either hurting or scared about the future.

When somebody loses a job, it hits a family hard, but the damage goes much deeper. With fewer people working, less revenue in company coffers, and the stock market at record lows, our health and retirement funds are under pressure. Everyone with a 401(k) knows what it's like to see half your nest egg disappear. And while the

defined benefit pensions that many of us have are a lot better than a 401(k), nobody's pension and welfare plan is immune from a volatile stock market.

The economic damage caused by George W. Bush and his free-market followers – in both political parties – has been staggering. The war in Iraq alone will cost us three trillion dollars. And when you include all the losses from unemployment, home foreclosures, personal and business bankruptcies, and a falling stock market, the total is mind-boggling.

With all this doom and gloom, most of us cannot wait for President Obama and his family to move into the White House, so we can start putting people back to work, providing health care to all Americans, getting out of Iraq, and passing the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA). It's a very tough economic time to accomplish all these goals, and President Obama will need our support.

I wonder if there isn't more we could do to ease the pain of this recession in our ILWU family, especially among workers who have dispatch halls. I think part of the answer comes from studying the situation Harry Bridges faced in 1934. The stock market had crashed in 1929 and the United States was trying to recover from a depression.

The unemployment rate was 25 percent and workers were literally fighting each other over jobs. On the waterfront, employers used the "shape-up" system to pick who they wanted for each shift, often with pay-offs and favors.

But a man named Harry Bridges won support from his co-workers with a simple, but remarkably powerful idea: organize the men, form a union, and demand a dispatch hall that would allocate the jobs fairly and equally. Think about it. The hall is a place to go when your job is completed. Most people report to their state unemployment office when they're laid-off and no longer needed by their employer. Being released to the dispatch hall is not a penalty, but a hard-fought privilege. This year on July 5th, we'll celebrate 75 years of ILWU history. We honor the men who fought and died for the right to dispatch themselves fairly and equally, regardless of who you were, who you knew, the color of your skin, or the country you came from. The system allowed every man a day's work. These principles became the foundation of our ILWU union.

Today these principles are more important than ever. Our economy is in a tailspin, and we all must take a long hard look at what's happening in our own house. For example, is it fair



**Robert McEllrath**  
International President

for an individual to have two jobs in one day, when others cannot get even one? It's easy to make a political issue out of the situation, to sit back and endlessly argue the problem. However, the work opportunities are likely to get worse before they get better. We all like to say that we're "good union people" in good times. Well, these are the times when we will be tested. This recession may be the deepest our present union members have ever experienced. It's time to ask yourself, "Is it fair for me to have two jobs in one day when others don't get even one?" Our union must be prepared to re-affirm the principles established by Harry Bridges. I urge each local and individual to adhere to the spirit of fairness that founded our union, put personal gain aside, and take care of each other

*An injury to one is an injury to all.*

## Informe del Presidente: Reflexiones acerca del Año Nuevo

Como a la mayoría de nosotros, la proximidad del año nuevo me ha puesto a pensar en los retos que enfrentaremos en el 2009, y a meditar en los logros del ILWU durante este año.

Todos estamos preocupados por la economía a medida que entramos en el 2009, y con justa razón. Las cosas andan mal y se van a empeorar. En este momento en que escribo esto a mediados de diciembre, más de un millón de trabajadores han perdido sus empleos en los últimos tres meses. Con tantas personas desempleadas, la mayoría de nosotros conocemos a alguien que recientemente ha perdido o no puede encontrar un empleo. En el ILWU, sabemos de plantas y almacenes que se están cerrando. Los puertos tienen menos barcos y menos trabajo que hace unos meses atrás. Todos los días, se oyen noticias de recortes, cierres y consolidaciones de empresas. La mayoría de los trabajadores y sus familias

están pasándola mal o están preocupados por el futuro.

Cuando alguien pierde su empleo, es un golpe duro para la familia, pero el daño va más allá de eso. Cuando hay menos personas empleadas, bajan los ingresos de las empresas, y al encontrarse el mercado de valores a un nivel tan bajo, nuestros fondos de asistencia médica y de jubilación corren peligro. Todos los que tienen una cuenta 401(k) saben lo que es perder la mitad de sus ahorritos. Y mientras los planes de pensiones con prestaciones definidas que muchos tenemos son mejores que las cuentas 401(k), ningún plan de pensiones y bienestar está a salvo de las altibajos violentos del mercado de valores.

Los daños económicos causados por George W. Bush y sus amigos que defienden el mercado libre – de ambos partidos políticos – han sido asombrosos. Sólo la guerra en Iraq nos costará tres mil billones de dólares. Y cuando uno suma todas las pérdidas por el desempleo, hipotecas perdidas por impago, las

quiebras personales y comerciales, y la caída del mercado de valores, el total no le cabe a uno en la cabeza.

Con tantas malas noticias, estamos ansiosos de que el Presidente Obama y su familia se mude a la Casa Blanca, para que podamos empezar a crear empleos para la gente, proveer cuidado médico a todos los residentes de los Estados Unidos, nos retiremos de Iraq, y se promulgue la Ley de Libre Elección de los Empleados (EFCA). Son momentos en que económicamente es difícil lograr todas estas metas, y el Presidente Obama necesitará nuestro apoyo.

Yo me pregunto si no hay más que podemos hacer para aliviar el dolor de nuestros compañeros del ILWU por esta recesión, especialmente entre los trabajadores que tienen centros de colocaciones. Creo que parte de la respuesta se encuentra al analizar la situación que Harry Bridges enfrentó en 1934. El mercado de valores se había desplomado en 1929 y el país estaba tratando de salir de la depresión económica. Un 25% de los trabajadores estaban desem-

pleados e incluso se peleaban por los empleos. En los muelles, los empleadores usaban el sistema de "shape-up" para seleccionar los que iban a trabajar en cada turno, muchas veces pagando mordidas y favores.

Pero un hombre llamado Harry Bridges logró el apoyo de sus compañeros de trabajo con una idea sencilla pero muy poderosa: organizar a los trabajadores, formar un sindicato, y exigir un centro de colocaciones para asignar los trabajos de manera justa y equitativa. Piénselo. El centro de colocaciones es el lugar al que uno vuelve cuando se le termina el trabajo. La mayoría de las personas se presentan en la oficina de desempleo cuando están cesados por falta de trabajo y el empleador ya no los necesita. El volver al centro de colocaciones no es un castigo, sino un privilegio ganado con mucho esfuerzo. Este año, el 5 de julio, celebraremos 75 años de existencia del ILWU. Rendimos homenaje a los que lucharon y murieron por el derecho de colo-

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## DISPATCHER

Craig Merrilees  
Editor and Communications Director

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# ILWU locals help during holidays and hard times

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and natural disasters that left many hungry and homeless last year.

In Eureka Bay, **Local 14** members contributed \$500 to their local firefighters' union toy drive for less fortunate children. As they did last year, longshore employers matched the donation from local members.

**Locals 8** and **92** continued their two-decade tradition of collecting money and gifts year-round to support the Firefighters' Toys for Tots program. Last year, they gave more than \$13,000 in bikes, toys and books to local underprivileged children through the program. An annual Christmas Party organized by **Auxiliary** members and supported with contributions from **Locals 5, 8, 28, 40** and **92** resulted in donations to several area union food banks. Longshore workers also collected holiday gifts for young patients in the Shriner's Hospital.

In Vancouver, Washington, **Local 4** members participated again this year in the Longshoreman's **Local 4** Credit Union "Giving Tree," which provided toys to disadvantaged children. Members who belong to the credit union selected a paper ornament off the tree with the name of a toy inside, which members purchased and delivered to the needy family. Portland's **Local 40** members also contributed to the Credit Union's Giving Tree. Minnehaha Elementary School students received presents from the Giving Tree in December. **Local 40** raised \$1,000 for the effort.

**Local 4** also challenged all members to contribute to their annual holiday bicycle drive, which donated well over 100 bikes to local kids through the Children's Justice Center and the Children's Home Society. The Vancouver Fire Department provided a helmet to go along with every bike.

On the first Saturday in December, **Local 4** and **Auxiliary** members got together with the Fort Vancouver Lions, Kiwanis, Rotarians, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and other groups that participated in the annual Clark County-wide Inter-Service Club Walk & Knock Food Drive. Participants went door-to-

door asking neighbors to leave bags of perishable and non-perishable food on their porches. Later that day, volunteers collected the bags and delivered them to a warehouse where longshore workers processed the donations. A few days later, the food was delivered to Share House and other area food banks for distribution to needy families. In 2007, the effort collected 141 tons of food and \$16,000 in donations which was used to purchase additional food.

On Wednesday, November 26th, a group of **Local 23** members helped prepare and serve Thanksgiving dinner to about 400 people at St. Leo's Hospitality Kitchen in Tacoma. For many years, **Local 23** members have volunteered each month at the kitchen. Member Geri Baydo organized the fundraising for the Emergency Food Network of Pierce County, which supplies community food pantries, kitchens and shelters. **Local 23** also invited advocates for hundreds of area children to come and "shop" for free gifts and toys at the dispatch hall on December 13th. A local women's shelter once again received items on their "wish list," including baby formula, gift cards and other items needed in transitional housing. More than 100 local students, chosen based on need from more than 100 local schools, received \$200 gift cards. The local's holiday party for members and families on December 1st featured lively appearances from Santa and local children's celebrity J.P. Patches.

**Local 19** members and **Auxiliary 3** volunteers joined forces to organize the "Christmas for Kids" project. Members raised more than \$10,000 this year and were able to help children get a special gift. Last year, **Local 19** member Revlon McKinnon took over the holiday charity program, which has been going on in one way or another for several decades. Revlon is one of more than 20 volunteers from **Local 19** who helped provide gifts to children in foster homes, union families facing tough times, and children in the Seattle Boys & Girls Club. After collecting the cash donations from union members, volunteers used the



**Local 23 member Mike Neff** wanted to do something special to encourage contributors to the local's annual Toy Drive, so he applied his talents to produce this beautiful longshore hook with a crinkled maple handle. The gift was destined for the person who gave the most to the Toy Drive. He also produced a series of smaller "Christmas tree ornament longshore hooks" that went to the first 20 donors who gave at least \$100.

proceeds to purchase new clothes, books, toys, food vouchers, and diapers for those who are struggling. The items were then wrapped by volunteers from the Boys & Girls Club and **Local 19** members, and finally delivered the week before Christmas.

The big drop in work this year at the Port of Seattle means that **Local 19** casuals are earning less, and like many Americans, they were struggling this holiday season. **Local 19** members donated turkeys to help some of these families over Thanksgiving.

**Local 500** members in Vancouver, B.C., continued their tradition of donating funds to help local charities, including the Quest Outreach Society, Union Gospel Mission, Helping Spirit Lodge Society, WISH Drop-in Centre Society, and the Women Survival Sex Workers in Vancouver's Eastside. They also participated for the 13th year in the B.C. Federation of Labor Christmas dinner, which provided a free dinner to more than 3,000 indigent people at the Maritime Labor Center on Christmas Eve.

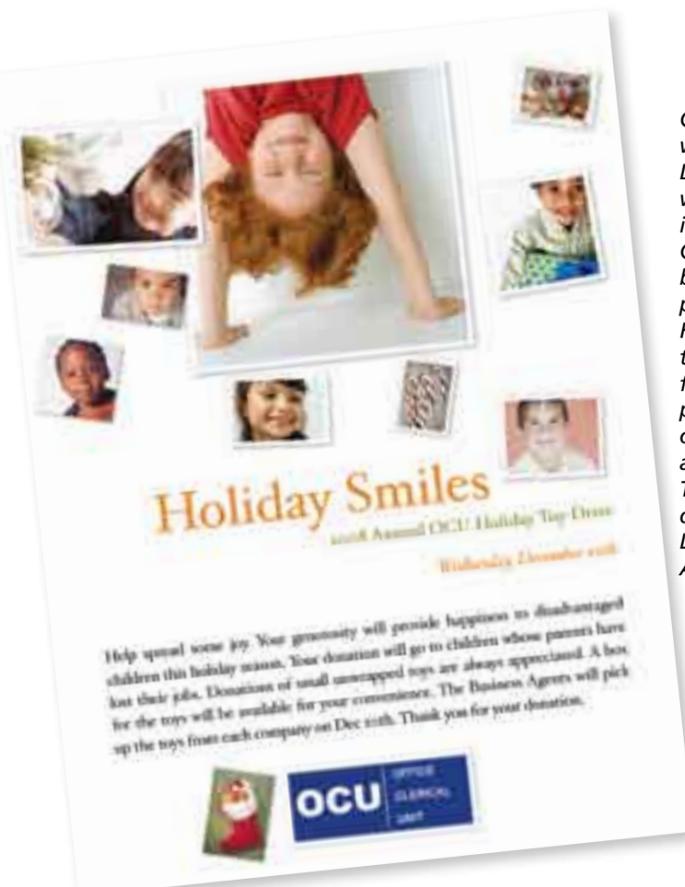


**Harbor area political leaders support our cause** Congressmembers Loretta Sanchez and Laura Richardson pose with State Assemblymember Bonnie Lowenthal and LA City Councilmember Janice Hahn at the 11th Annual "Feed the Community Day."



photo by Sean Hillier, Daily Breeze

Volunteers **Sandra Fabela** and **Eric Mitchell** shared a 'high-five' while assembling Thanksgiving food baskets for harborside families who are hurting.



**Gregory Tribelhorn** who belongs to **Local 63 OCU** and works at COSCO in Long Beach, CA, produced this beautiful poster to promote the local's Holiday Toy Drive that gathered toys for children whose parents were out of work. Members also supported a Thanksgiving food drive with the LA Labor Federation, AFL-CIO.



## Ray Panter: Desert activist and Local 30 President



Ray Panter of Local 30

### ILWU Oral History Project

Introduction by Harvey Schwartz

This month's oral history features Ray Panter, who retired in 2007 as president of Local 30 located in the Mojave Desert at Boron, California, 80 miles east of Bakersfield. Local 30 represents the workers at the largest mine in California and one of the richest deposits of borate ore in the world. In 1968, the giant multinational corporation Rio Tinto bought US Borax, which owned Boron's mile-wide, mile-and-a-half long borax open pit mine and nearby processing plant. Today, despite a recent name change by Rio Tinto, the desert facility is still popularly known as Borax.

After it is crushed and processed, much of the borax is sent to Wilmington in bulk to be made into various products. ILWU Local 20 members work at the company's port refinery. The mineral is used as a cleaning solvent, water softener, preservative, and fireproofing agent. It goes into glass and space shuttle tiles. It can strengthen steel, neutralize acid, and function as a gasoline additive.

Borax "is quite a product," as Panter noted when I interviewed him at Boron in June, 2008. The powerful conglomerate Rio Tinto is quite a company, too. Yet Rio Tinto also has a long tradition of opposing worker organization. Local 30 was successful in resisting job consolidation during a 56 day strike in 1968, but lost a bitter 142 day confrontation with the company in 1974. Here Panter eloquently describes the latter strike and the union's struggle to regain its strength.

#### RAY PANTER

Edited by Harvey Schwartz, Curator, ILWU Oral History Collection

I was born in 1947 at a little hospital in the desert town of Mojave, 30 miles west of Boron. I grew up here in Boron in a union household. My dad, Ben H. Panter, was a strong union man his whole life. He worked in the coal mines back in Alabama. The year I was born, he came to Boron to work in the Borax plant. He worked there until he passed away forty years later.

In 1964 my dad became a charter member of Local 30. I was in high school when Local 30 took over from a union that had been in Boron for years. My dad did a lot to help bring Local 30 in. He told me how under the old union we didn't have local autonomy. They would come in and negotiate for you, and that's all you got. With the ILWU, we had autonomy and could negotiate our own agreements, although we always got all the backin' we needed when we asked for it. In '64 we had to

start over from square one and built up from there, because the old union ran off with our treasury and our records.

Boron was a small, one-horse town when I was growing up. There wasn't a lot to do. My mom, Silvia Anita Panter, ran a teen club sponsored by the Veterans of Foreign Wars. They held dances once a week. When she was younger, my mom worked in the cafeteria at an old mine they had here.

In 1965, when I got out of high school, I went to Idaho where I had an uncle. I hauled hay and worked in the potato plants. Work was seven days a week for a \$ 1.63 an hour. I'd tried to get on at the Borax plant in Boron, but famous as my dad was, they wouldn't hire me. Then my dad called. He said, "They're hiring at the plant. Get on back down here." I got on a bus and came home.

I was at the gate every day for months trying to get on. Finally they gave me a written test. They said I passed, but that evening I got a phone call from Ed Ward, the human relations guy. They'd decided I flunked. My mom called Dean Lemon, the resident plant manager, and started chewing on him. So they gave me the test again. "Oh," they said, "you passed with flying colors." It was the same test I took the day before! The whole thing was a farce to keep me out. Now they had to put me to work. Then they couldn't get rid of me. I started in 1966. Forty-one years later I retired from Borax.

My first day on the job I was put in the labor pool doing clean up. I shoveled borax off a bridge belt 60 feet off the ground. It was terrible dusty, but I kept shoveling. Soon they sent me to the dissolving plant, where they dissolve the borax. I worked there as a laborer for a couple of months. Then they put me on temporary transfer as a tunnel operator. The company then had underground tunnels where ore was dumped onto conveyor belts and fed into hoppers.



President Panter spoke to members at a 1994 union rally at Boron.



ILWU members operate heavy equipment in Boron's open-pit mine.

In 1967 I got drafted. I'd been at Borax for eight months. Since I was in the military, I missed Local 30's 1968 strike. I served with the Army's 82nd Airborne Division and spent a year in Vietnam. We got sent over there in December 1967, just in time for the Tet Offensive of early 1968. Tet was when the North Vietnamese Army overran the whole country. You had fire fights and jungle stuff. You got kind of messed up in the head by the time you got home. It took you a while to get squared away.

Borax had to hold my job while I was in the military. When I came back, they had to give me the bids I would have gotten if I'd been there. So I took a job in the mine pit driving a dump truck. Then I bid into maintenance and stayed there until I retired. I bid as a pipe fitter and did that until they made us all millwrights around the time of the 1974 strike.

Safety was a major issue in 1974. Actually, in an effort to reduce the workforce, the company created worse safety hazards when it combined dif-

ferent crafts during the strike. Before, we had five different crafts--pipefitters, welders, mechanics, riggers and a blacksmith. The company put all those together under the classification "millwright." Previously, everyone was good at one craft. When they combined the crafts, you had to learn all the other stuff, but there was no training. The result was unsafe conditions and some tragic accidents.

During the '74 strike, I got into trouble like everybody else. More than 900 of us went out. They arrested us on the picket line and did a lot of other things and created a war. The company even started a fire and blamed us. They brought in scabs, too. They'd bus 'em in, and between every bus was a cop car. You had the California Highway Patrol, the Kern County Sheriff--everybody and his brother was out there.

One morning we fell out at three o'clock in the morning when they was going to bus scabs in. We dragged a big piece of cement slab into the middle of the road and set up a gauntlet. We stopped the first bus and the rest of 'em

got rocked. Only one bus made it. The rest of 'em got wrecked out there along with one of the cop cars.

Another time a guy from Channel Seven News in LA was interviewing me. Right in the middle, the cops arrested me and threw me into the paddy wagon. Me and four other guys were in there raisin' hell. The reporter started hollering, "What did he do?" at the cops. Then a cop came to the back of the wagon and said, "Panter, get out." I refused. So they pulled me out.

Afterwards, all my buddies kidded me about being a "reject" who wasn't good enough to go to jail.

During the strike, the cops kept us from taking pictures. They confiscated our cameras. But that reporter filmed everything they did. He was going to tell on 'em. So they pulled me out of the paddy wagon and let me go.

I survived during the strike partly because the LA longshoremen offered us a little dock work. Mostly this was traditional break bulk cargo handling. I humped bananas and hides. Hides was a stinky job with maggots running everywhere. I also drove cars off ships.

When the strike was over, the company called a lot of us back. They made us take the "I support Local 30" stickers off our hard hats though. About 300 scabs got to keep their jobs, too. They were in maintenance and in the mine pit. The production people got hit harder than anybody. But we worked every day at getting the scabs out because we still had people left out on the street.

Once the company sent nine of us down to the old fusing plant. There were 12 or 14 scabs in there. We told 'em to get out of our lockers and we threw their stuff on the floor. We got into trouble over that. We kicked 'em out of our lunch room, too. Then the company hired a boss named Cliff Miller. He'd ask us if some scab was worth a darn, we'd tell him no, and he'd fire him. That way we got rid of most of the scabs at Plant Five in our department before the company made Miller stop.

All the while we had guys who were still out on recall. They'd all be at the hall, and we'd send the scabs

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Rand Mining Company manager Steve Stellar had a confrontation with Ray Panter in 1993 during a difficult organizing campaign.

## INFORME DEL PRESIDENTE:

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carse en un trabajo de manera justa y equitativa sin importar quiénes eran, a quiénes conocían, el color de la piel, o el país del que provenían. El sistema permitió que todos tuvieran empleo. Fueron estos los principios que se convirtieron en las bases de nuestro sindicato ILWU.

Ahora, más que nunca, estos principios son importantes. Nuestra economía está cayendo en picada y todos debemos examinar a fondo lo que esta pasando en nuestra propia organización. Por ejemplo, ¿es justo que una persona tenga dos trabajos en un día, cuando otros no tienen siquiera uno? Es fácil buscarle el lado político a la situación, de sentarse a debatir interminablemente el problema. Sin embargo, es probable que las oportunidades de trabajo escaseen antes de que aumenten. Todos queremos decir que somos “buenos sindicalistas” en los buenos tiempos. Pues, ahora es cuando se nos pondrá a prueba. Esta recesión quizás sea la más grave que nuestros actuales miembros jamás hayan experimentado. Es tiempo de preguntarnos, “¿es justo que yo tenga dos trabajos en un día cuando otros no tienen siquiera uno?” Nuestro sindicato debe prepararse para reafirmar los principios establecidos por Harry Bridges. Les animo a todas las secciones locales y a todas las personas que actúen con el espíritu de igualdad con el que se fundó nuestro sindicato, que dejemos a un lado el egoísmo, y nos ayudemos mutuamente.

*El daño a uno es un daño a todos.*



*Ah Quon McElrath was a popular advocate for working families in Hawaii who frequently appeared on television, radio, and newspapers, and spoke at many ILWU events, including Local 142's Convention in September, 2003.*

## Longtime ILWU advocate Ah Quon McElrath dies in Hawaii

As the *Dispatcher* goes to press, we were saddened to learn that Ah Quon McElrath, the uncompromising advocate for social justice and voice of Hawaii's progressive labor movement, died on Thursday night, December 11th, just four days before her 93rd birthday. A memorial will be held in February to honor this remarkable woman. The *Dispatcher* will provide a retrospective on her life in a future issue.



*Photo: Jim Paulin*

**Baby, it's cold up here!** Longshore worker Raymond Hinkle poured rock salt on the Unalaska Marine Center dock to melt ice for safer footing when the container ship *Horizon Kodiak* made an early-winter call to Dutch Harbor, Alaska.

### ATTENTION NEW & CURRENT PENSIONERS:

The strength of our Union is its rank-and-file. And whether active or retired, we all have a role to play. Everyone needs to participate.

Unfortunately, in the last several years, many newer retirees have not been joining their local Pension Clubs. They are thus depriving themselves of the camaraderie and sense of purpose that the rest of us feel when we attend Pensioners Club meetings and events.

Our Union has been extremely supportive of the Pacific Coast Pensioners Association over the years. We are invited to partake in a wide range of ILWU programs, and we have a voice when issues affecting us, our Union, and the entire working class are discussed.

“Riding off into the sunset” might be an option for corporate CEOs, but not for us. We understand that there is, and always has been, a tension between capital and labor. We realize that a strong and viable labor movement is the only thing that protects workers.

Make joining your local Pensioners Club your #1 New Year's Resolution. You'll be glad you did, and so will your fellow retirees.

“We may have retired from the job, but we'll never retire from the union!”

**In solidarity,**

**Rich Austin – President  
Pacific Coast Pensioners Association - ILWU**

# Ray Panter: Desert activist and Local 30 President

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over there. Coming down to the hall is the worst thing those scabs could have done. They got run out of town, needless to say. It took over a year, but eventually we got most of our people back in.

In 1975, the scabs petitioned the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to get rid of the ILWU, but we outnumbered them good by then. They got voted down big time. After the strike, too, we elected Bill Pope president of the local. He was mild-mannered and could talk to the company better than most of us, 'cause most of us didn't even want to talk to 'em. So he did us a good job.

From this point on, we began working in-house. We were more effective inside the plant than we'd been outside. Consider safety. Between 1975 and 1982, seven millwrights died in accidents following the company's consolidation of the maintenance crafts. One time two guys who'd been welders got killed trying to be pipefitters. So we started working harder on safety.

We brought the regulatory agencies in. They forced the company to do something different. That told 'em they had to work with us and put safety rules in place. We got help from Joe Ibarra, our Southern California Regional Director who later became the International Secretary-Treasurer, and Russ Bargmann, the International Safety staffer. Soon we got more of our members involved and we became strong safety advocates. You always got the factor of the bosses wanting to slide safety aside, but when it was unsafe, we'd say, "No, we won't do that."

I became a steward in 1975, chief steward in 1984, and vice-president of the local in 1986. I was elected president in 1992. There were a couple of breaks in there, but I served six terms as president before I retired. I was on the negotiating committee for the first time in 1983 and many times after that. I always wanted to go back to negotiating, because what you don't get accomplished you want to finish up next time. One guy who helped us with negotiating in the 1970s and 1980s was Barry Silverman, then the International Research Director.

There were always lots of issues to deal with in negotiating, like opposing the contracting out of jobs and two-tier hiring, where they pay new hires less. One thing the company used to do was shut the plant down, move us all out on what they called "vacation," and bring contractors in. We stopped that, but contracting out and two-tier are issues the local is still concerned with.

In 1989, we negotiated for a 401(k) beyond our defined pension plan. Management had a 401(k), but they didn't want us to have one. They wanted to keep that benefit for bosses only. I was our main 401(k) spokesman and I pointed out that the company would get a tax break if we got the thrift plan, too. I had to argue with them for three days before they finally came across.

There was one short period when the local had to deal with six different resident managers. The company was

changing them constantly. You'd negotiate some language into a contract and they'd bring in another resident manager who didn't have a clue. It's been an ongoing process educating this company's new managers how to deal properly with union people. We had a couple who came out of right-to-work states, where the union shop is banned. They just wanted to dictate to you. We had to stop that.

Twenty years ago the company even tried to get rid of the contract language that says they must have just cause to fire somebody. We've been successful in not lettin' 'em change that language, although they keep pluggin' away at it. But that's a strike issue. Around 2001, the company negotiated for the right to implement 12 hour shifts in the mine. Then, they didn't allow proper breaks. We had to struggle with them over that one, too.

In 1993 Local 30 organized some out-of-town workers. This guy came to see me who was from Rand Mining, a new gold mine at Red Mountain, 25 miles north of Boron. The guy said the workers needed a union. George Richardson, our Vice-President, and I met with the Rand people and seen some interest. I put a committee together of our members. Mike Diller from Local 20A, which covered the Borax refinery at Wilmington, and Joe Ibarra helped us. We set up some meetings and got enough cards signed to get an NLRB election.

Rand had an arrogant, anti-union company manager named Steve Stellar. He held captive meetings where he tried to intimidate the workers. One time I was on this dirt road with an organizing sign and he slid his vehicle close and almost ran over me. Then he said, "Be safe down here, be careful." I can't tell you what I said back, but it wasn't nice. We got to where we carried pistols.

We won the NLRB election and Rand got rid of Stellar. Joe Ibarra and I negotiated the first agreement with the new manager. We got the workers higher wages, a grievance procedure, and a lot of things they didn't have. I handled the first arbitration up there when Rand fired the guys' representative. We won that case and they had to put the man back to work. The Rand campaign was a positive experience, although the company got into environmental trouble a few years later and closed the mine down.

In the mid-1990s, Borax started pushing a "re-engineering" idea. It was supposed to be a worker participation program, but it was really a front to get rid of people. Basically, they wanted you to participate in cutting your own job out. You were supposed to think, "I can do his job, and mine too." We had to convince our people that that's not the way to go. I wrote an article in *The Dispatcher* (September 26, 1994, p. 3) to fight "re-engineering."

The union also got involved in community issues. Once Borax ran Boron like a company town. But things switched when the union started getting its people onto local agencies like

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## MEMBERS SPEAK OUT

### What are your hopes and fears for the New Year?



"I never voted until 2008, when I volunteered for the ILWU campaign in Alaska. I liked that Barack Obama wasn't born with a silver spoon in his mouth like a Rockefeller; he's more like one of us and that was cool with me. We need someone to lead this world who knows about the real America and the workers who made the billionaires rich. I think about the millions of workers who've lost their jobs whenever we send out a lot of empty containers or unload auto parts for American cars that are made in China or Japan. I believe there's enough money to go around. America can become a better place, where people get along and aren't divided along racial lines, and foreign countries don't hate us. We need to stay in a leadership position for the rest of the world because we're such a melting pot. I hope that President Obama will do enough in his first year so we'll know that he's on the right path, and by 2010 and 2011, we'll be able to say, 'Wow, things are really going good.'"

**Todd Weeks, Local 19  
Seattle, WA**

"My hope is that the nation gets some financial stability, but I'm worried that we'll plunge deeper into this recession. I've never seen anything like this before. Not having enough money to make ends meet is just foreign to me. The drastic changes to my cost-of-living have just hit me like a ton of rocks, and now my wages are frozen. Not being able to get loans just makes things worse. I'm hoping there will be a stimulus package to help the disappearing middle class, and not just a little \$600 check like the government sent us this year. That money went straight to pay my bills and into my gas tank. We're fighting for a fair contract here at the Mission Council, and we do a lot of work for the little that we make. We're the working poor, and we've been without a contract for almost four years."

**Velma Smith, Local 6  
San Francisco, CA**



"I'm hoping that everyone has more work opportunities in a cleaner, safer and fairer workplace. We all look forward to swift passage of the Employee Free Choice Act, so more workers can choose to join a union. I have a vision that one day all ILWU members, especially the younger ones, will learn and treasure the proud and exceptional history of our unique union -- because when we know our history, we are stronger. I trust President Obama (it feels good to write those two words) will be able to hear those who speak truth to power through all the static. I anticipate that the changes headed our way will make the world a healthier place. Finally, I hope for good times spent with loved ones, family, friends and co-workers. I dream of an end to war, poverty, injustice, hunger, disease and intolerance."

**Steve Noe, Local 52  
Seattle, WA**

"I'm worried about the economic threat to the continuity of our community. It's the logical conclusion to the Republican, supply-side economic theory that has prevailed over the past three decades. Now there's less work on the docks because of the economy. We're seeing a breakdown of the community, and I think there might even be a depression. If it keeps going this way, people are going to leave the community and not come back, as once happened with the death of the fishing industry here in San Pedro. Obama is confronting the problem and has the right team in place to turn things around, but the burden is very heavy."

**Tony Pomella, Local 63  
San Pedro, CA**



"First of all, good health, happiness and safety for my family. For all...stability in our jobs, working safe, and a strong economy. Last but not least, for our world to live in peace."

**Mary Mausisa, Local 63-OCU  
Long Beach, CA**

## Ray Panter: Desert activist and Local 30 President

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the water board. Boron might still be considered a company town, but it's not. It's run more by the local people now than by Borax. The company used to give a little bit to the town to make it look like they were community-minded, but you had to be careful. They were also trying to split the town-union unity by hiring only out-of-town people instead of Boron residents.

There were times when new members wondered why we were in the ILWU, which is associated with dock workers. We are culturally a little different. We're out here in a mine in the middle of the desert away from the coast and the docks. But once we explained about the ILWU and its benefits—including how we're affiliated and separate but still part of the whole—they'd be satisfied.

We've also always felt we had a lot better clout with the longshoremen behind us, 'cause most of what leaves here goes through the docks. Some of it is shipped by train, but most of it travels through the waterfront. We've long had good rapport with Local 20

at Wilmington, too, although we've never recovered the unified contract termination date we had with them that was lost in 1974. (The "A" in Local 20A was dropped nearly a decade ago.) Actually, I think we're a big plus to the ILWU just being out here. We support every aspect of the ILWU program and always have.

When I look back over the years, I'd say it's all been about gaining anything you can for the working people. You have to remember that I grew up in a union home and seen how people supported each other collectively to fight a big corporation. I never minded a fight with a big corporation myself, although I didn't like arguing with our membership when it was necessary. But that's what the ILWU is about. The members have a say in a union that's run from the bottom up, and that's good.

As for me, I've got a good pension. I'm not even old enough to draw Social Security, but I'm making it OK. And I'm still and always will be a main supporter of the union. That's never gonna go away.



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