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Taking power and using it

By Robert McElrath
ILWU International! President

2/3 to 202 and 51 to 49. What do these numbers mean? They stand for the number of Democratic-versus-Republican congressional representatives and the number of Democratic-versus-Republican senators sworn into office Jan. 4, 2007. They stand for a political shift of power from the Republican-dominated Congress that was held since 2002 in the Senate and 1994 in the House. With the shift in both houses, the nature of congressional debate and the House may have had its fill of being run by corporate power, with no help coming to the organized and unorganized workers of America. We must understand that it will still be a tough road for labor, but with this shift we will have the ear of people who can help change laws to make it easier to organize the unorganized, laws such as the Employee Free Choice Act. This bill will allow a majority of workers to simply sign cards saying they want to join a union and get it without having to go through lengthy and bureaucratic hearing and fillings with the labor board. It will also require the employer to negotiate a first contract with mediation and binding arbitration process when the employer and workers cannot agree on a first contract.

Weyman sogte Congress got the issue of universal, single-payer health care a real chance, something that has been ILWU policy for several decades.

Rep. John Conyers (D-MI) has a bill (HR 676) that will come before Congress that will extend an improved Medicare-type coverage to all U.S. residents. Conyers has nearly 80 co-sponsors for the bill in the House and it has been endorsed by 17 state AFL-CIO federations, 54 central labor councils and numerous international and local unions, including the ILWU.

We may also get a chance to reverse one of the worse decisions by the Bush administration’s National Labor Relations Board. Last year the board re-interpreted language in the National Labor Relations Act, expanding the definition of who is a “supervisor” and eliminating their right to a union (the Kentucky River decision). Under this ruling millions of workers could have their union contracts torn up and their union protections eliminated. As we write, House Democrats are preparing a bill that will amend the NLRA’s language so it defines “supervisor” more precisely and in the way it was originally meant. The future will be very interesting to watch. What will happen with the war in Iraq? What will the future hold for the war against terrorism? Will issues of port security be resolved? And how will the federal government recognize the need for improved transportation infrastructure, especially for goods movement, find the will and way to fund it?

These are but a few of the enormous problems that face our government today. It will be tough to solve these problems. But with the new historical event, electing Nancy Pelosi as Speaker of the House, the first woman ever to be elected to this powerful position in our government, we will certainly make progress on them. Just so you know, Pelosi’s history goes back to the days of our second president of the ILWU, Jimmy Herman. She approached the ILWU when she was considering running for Congress, seeking our union’s endorsement. Jimmy Herman said, “Absolutely, yes!” She was elected in 1988 to the late Sala Burton’s seat representing San Francisco. Herman was considered a Northern California Regional Director. LeRoy King to work for Pelosi and he became chairman of her Congressional Campaign. The ILWU congratulates her on her new position and gives her its full support for her in the future.

All of the history-making votes didn’t just happen. It was a lot of work for District Councils and individuals getting word out to people, going door-to-door, phonebanking after work and volunteering during the day. Hard work was put forward along with a lot of money. Yes, money! It costs to elect people to represent us in these powerful positions. And we cannot sit back and rest—2008 is just around the corner. The election for a new President will be here before we know it. We must remain active to help elect people who will look out for the working class of America.

Wal-Mart, which represents global corporate interests, bragged that it donated a million dollars in the last election. Let’s beat Wal-Mart and raise one million and one dollars. An injury to one is an injury to all.

With Nancy Pelosi as Speaker of the House, we will certainly make progress.
**By Steve Stallone**

Defying the Bush administration's anti-union employers and predictions of rain, San Francisco's labor movement turned out to demand that the city's historic waterfront remain union.

More than 50 union ferry workers lost their jobs Sept. 25 when the scab outfit Hornblower Yachts received the contract from the Bush administration's National Park Service to operate the popular tourist ferries to Alcatraz. The two unions that represent workers of the Inlandboatmen's Union (the Marine Division of the ILWU) and Masters, Mates and Pilots, who had worked the ferries since the NPS began the tours of the former high security prison back in 1973, were what we accomplished, " said President Joe Prisco and many more.

"That was our focus and that's what we accomplished," said National President Alan Cote. "But the contract was standing that the IBU first organized ferry workers in 1918. He vowed that with the help of the labor movement, the ferry workers would get their jobs back.

"They have lawyers and we have lawyers, but I have other resources too—I have you," Cote said to the cheering crowd.

Cote went on to read a message of support from AFL-CIO President John Sweeney. "Hornblower was awarded the contract only because its bid disregarded prevailing wage requirements," Sweeney's letter read in part. "The life and safety of millions of people every year rests in the hands of the IBU first organized ferry workers in 1918. He vowed that with the help of the labor movement, the ferry workers would get their jobs back.

But over the last four negotiations the union has brought it up to almost completely mirroring the master Longshore Division contract. Among such gains in the current agreement was bringing the non-paid holiday, meaning those who work that day make time and a half.

Health care and pensions remain in parity with the master contract— even into the unknown changes that may occur in the 2008 contract—with the grain employers contributing 100 percent to the PMA-ILWU welfare and pension plans. But the committee was unable to achieve the one dollar per hour employer contribution to the 401(k) plan.

Still the committee was able to hold off several changes the employers wanted for their advantage, including shortening the length of the contract so it expired at the same time as the master contract with the PMA. But the union didn't want to have to negotiate two big contracts at the same time and turned that back.

The employers also wanted to change the contract's expiration date from its current Oct. 1, when the grain shipping season begins, to June or July when the grain elevators are generally shut down.

"If we went into talks when there was no work happening, that would take out our bargaining strength," Ugles said.

The employers also proposed capping their contribution to the welfare plan, making workers pay costs above that out of their wages. But the union would have none of that.

"They complained they have no control over the health care costs since they are not members of the PMA," Ugles said. "We offered a simple solution—join the PMA!"

Throughout the talks the employers argued that the grain market is unpredictable and that they have to compete with non-union operations in the Gulf as well as internationally with Australia and China.

"We always have to deal with those ghosts in the closet," Ugles said. "We're negotiating with some of the biggest companies in the world that are always trying to squeeze, squeeze, squeeze. But our advantage was our solidarity among locals and that in the short term the grain market is very strong. They're making money and we're making money."
January 2007

The first 100 hours: The Pelosi agenda

By Lindsay McLaughlin
ILWU Legislative Director

F orty years ago, California Democrats marched in lockstep with George W. Bush and shut out the Democrats from offering an alterna-
tive agenda on the floor of the House of Representatives. The 2006 election in which the Democrats took back the House and Senate was a repu-
dication of Bush’s and the Republican Congress’ leadership.

Now it is time for Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and the Democratic Congress to take the initiative and fundamentally change the direction of the country. Pelosi has vowed to pass six major legislative items in the first 100 hours that Congress is in session. These legislative initiatives include an increase in the minimum wage, ethics reform, Medicare pre-
scription drug reform, energy policy reform, higher education affordability and implementation of the 9-11 Commission Recommendations. It is important for Pelosi to succeed for two reasons: these reforms are meaningful to the American people and will provide momentum for other issues including labor law reform and health care reform.

MINIMUM WAGE

Pelosi has vowed to increase the minimum wage to $7.55 an hour to $7.25 an hour. A minimum wage increase would raise the wages of million workers ($11 percent of the workforce) would receive an increase in their pay. The proposed minimum wage was raised, according to the Economic Policy Institute. Since 1995, the minimum wage per hour has increased 42 percent since Bush took office, but median household income has fallen two percent. As a percentage of the U.S. population—with health coverage of the minimum wage has deteriorated by 20 percent. After adjusting for inflation, the value of the minimum wage is at its lowest level since 1955.

Workers need more than a raise in the minimum wage, but they also need access to affordable goods and servic-
es. Most workers employed at or near the minimum wage, for example, are not offered or cannot afford health insurance. Minimum wage workers need health insurance for themselves and their families, affordable, quality child care, and access to paid leave, along with a raise in the minimum wage.

ETHICS REFORM

Having campaigned strongly on the issue of Congressional ethics, the Democratic leadership in both the House and Senate promised to pass ethics-related legislation. Both the House and Senate proposals have included stricter controls on members of Congress’ interaction with lobbyists, such as register them, meals or gifts paid for by lobbyists, and the end to the practice of anonymous earmark-
ing. These reforms are necessary given the scandals surrounding high-priced lobbyist Jack Abramoff’s bribes to Republican members of Congress.

9-11 COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

Congressional Democrats want 100 percent of the cargo bound for the U.S. in ships and planes to be screened for radiation or nuclear devices. Additionally, Pelosi argues that police, firefighters and other emergency personnel still don’t have enough equipment to communicate with each other during disasters. The Democratic Congress-backed legislation is likely to provide additional funding for homeland security as well as more oversight of what exactly the Administration is doing to protect the country from terrorist attacks.

HEALTH CARE

In the first 100 hours, the House of Representatives will give authority to the federal government to directly negotiate drug prices with their manufacturers. Under the 2003 Medicare prescription-drug law, such direct negotiation is specifically out-
lawed—a boon to the drug companies, who feared such negotiations would cut into their huge profit margins. The pharmaceutical companies are one of the largest industries funding the Republican campaigns and these com-
panies have been rewarded handsomely during the Republican Congress’ reign.

STUDENT LOANS

In the first 100 hours, Democrats pledge to “slash interest rates in half for federal student loans, 4.25 per-
cent for students and 4.25 percent for parents, to help college students and 5,600. Students and parents are struggling to pay for college. Tuition costs are rising far faster than inflation, while real wages have been stagnant. The aver-
age cost of tuition at a public college has increased 42 percent since Bush took office, but median household income has fallen two percent. As a consequence of the high cost of education, working families are foregoing dreams of a higher education and the career of their choice.

ENERGY POLICY

The Democrats first 100 hours plan an end to America’s depen-
dence on oil. The opening move is to roll back the multi-billion dollar subsidies to Big Oil and save Americans money at the pump.

Tackling the oil companies thirst for high prices and high profits is critically important to the American people. Half of low income households could not buy emergency blankets and thermals. Gas prices have skyrocketed – the cost of regular gasoline grew by 58 percent from 2000 to 2005.

In talking about the first 100 hours, Pelosi talked of “draining the swamp.” Common sense policies such as allow-
ing the government to negotiate lower costs for prescription drugs, raising the tax on tobacco sales and rescinding tax cuts for price-gouging oil compa-
nies were not accomplished during the Republican Congress’ reign. The Republican Congress was so tied into big money lobbyists and rich business interests that it was not even willing to hear about the needs of the American people for common sense policies. They deserved to lose their jobs.

The first 100 hours is not the entire agenda of the Democratic Congress. It is just the beginning. We expect the House will overwhelmingly vote for the Employee Free Choice Act to give workers the right to orga-

ize and collectively bargain for their wages and benefits. We expect the development of a uniform, universal, affordable coverage for every American worker. And we should expect Congress to tackle long-standing ways in which the American economy can be revitalized and high paying jobs be created for the American people. We must demand that Congressional Democrats lead the way in ending the war in Iraq and concentrate instead on issues of social justice both here and abroad. The war is not going to be easy. We still have an anti-worker President in George W. Bush. We have another President who is virtually tied and it is difficult to get anything passed in that body with less than 60 votes given their rules allowing filibusters. The margin by which Pelosi has in the House is narrow and there are significant numbers of con-
servative Democrats that do not want change. But still, today we have hope. We can change America.

Unions blast Schwarzenegger health care plan

T he California Federation of Labor and the California Nurses Association are lauding the successfull drive against GOP Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger’s anti-union referen-

The governor’s plan is “little more than a fresh coat of paint on a col-
aping house,” said CNA President Deborah Lake.

Cal Fed Executive Secretary-
Treasurer Art Pulaski was even more cautionary about the bill, which he labeled one that “Wal-Mart would love and Wal-Mart workers would hate.”

There are a number of insurance companies, but a bust for most workers. This plan requires all Californians to buy health care. It is not a guarantee that it will be affordable or that cover-
age will be adequate,” Pulaski added.

Schwarzenegger’s plan creates an incentive for employers who currently provide health care to drop coverage and instead pay only a minimal tax. The proposed employer contribution is 100 percent of the wage that Wal-Mart’s lief in a big money lobbyists and rich business interests that it was not even willing to hear about the needs of the American people for common sense policies. They deserved to lose their jobs.

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servative Democrats that do not want change. But still, today we have hope. We can change America.
Transport workers host international meeting

by Tom Price

Transport unionists from Mexico, Japan, Korea and the UK met with their Bay Area counterparts Nov. 16 to compare conditions and strengthen the bonds of working solidarity.

Called by the Transport Workers Solidarity Committee, the conference at the longshoremen's 10th annual meeting brought workers together from around the world to discuss the effects of corporate globalization on themselves.

“We have similar problems—everyone involved in transportation in this global economy will take the load of the heat,” Local 10’s Jack Heyman said. “The capitalists understand that they can’t only have to make money off this while they talk. They also have to rely on transport workers, and they have to beat up on us also.”

The delegates discussed the working conditions and wages, health care and pensions, and the need for unions to maintain solidarity.

“The labor laws in the UK are so repressive, workers 100 yards away can’t help out striking workers. We were able to get our message out on the internet, and the first place we went to was New York. They refused to cross our line. We were taken to court and we won. We would now go to the U.S., but not in our own country,” said T. S. Crow, President of Local 10, International Transport and Maritime Workers of Canada.

“Reagan and Thatcher in the U.S. and the UK launched similar neo-liberal attacks on workers,” Yamamoto said.

“Workers’ actual status undeniably shows the devastating consequences of these attacks,” said Herb Mills, retired President of Local 10, who reminded the conference of the historical solidarity that had brought the union together. After President Truman busted the railroad strike in 1946, he said, “Workers got off the shipping lines into the streets and fought for their rights.”

“Now Truman said he would unload the ships, but the government took the officers and said they would not work on the ships,” Mills said. “And they would not be unloaded.”

Consulting at the IDC meeting (left to right) ILWU Coast Committeeman Leal Sundet, ILWU International President Bob McEllrath, IDC General Coordinator Julian Garcia, IDC Staffer Teresa Alert and Swedish Dockworkers’ Union President Bjorn Borg.

The IDC’s international General Coordinator, Julian Garcia of the Spanish dockers union La Coordinadora, reported on his recent organizing travels. He succeeded to convince the dockworkers in Brazil—some 12,000 to 15,000 of them—to join the IDC. Their representation is a significant first step in this meeting, but visa delays prevented their trip.

Garcia proposed establishing a zone office in the Brazilian city of Itahai, where the second biggest port is located. He cited the assistance the IDC received with the Brazilian dockworkers. ILWU International President Bob McEllrath (who also serves as Zone Coordinator for North America’s West Coast and the Pacific Rim), in light of the IDC’s current difficulties in Brazil, encouraged them to avoid further delays, announced that the ILWU Coast Committee would fund the trip and the zone office in Brazil with a check of $5,000.

Bjorn Borg, the European Zone Coordinator for the Swedish Dockworkers’ Union, reported on the successful demonstration in Malmö the previous weekend. He cited a second attempt at a European Port Directive, a plan in the European Union that would allow foreign dockers to dock at European ports and thus avoid further delays, announced that the ILWU Coast Committee would fund the trip and the zone office in Brazil with a check of $5,000.

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A labor delegation

By William E. Adams
Integral Secretary-Treasurer

January 2007

F rom Nov. 26 to Dec. 4, I took my own time and money to be a part of a labor delegation to Israel. It was very moving, emotional and inspiring. It has been impossible to remain unaffected by the experience. We live in a moment when you can almost hear the wheels of history turning. Change is in the air. International conflicts, natural disasters, and the emergence of new democracies—these are expanding our worldview. Times like these demand that we pay attention. Engaged people are effecting change and affecting our lives every day.

In the wake of the war with Hezbollah, things were somewhat calm. Yet you had the feeling that things could explode at any time. It’s clear to me that the Middle East is a middle, wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.

While the peoples of the Middle East continue their centuries long dispute, one factor remains constant—in each country workers have to fight for their share of the wealth they produce. Whether they live and work under the rule of the Mullahs of Iran, or under Saddam Hussein’s labor laws in Iraq, or in the sweatshops of Saudi Arabia, workers have felt a need to organize and struggle. In Israel it’s no different. Our labor delegation would look at Israel’s working conditions and the state of the class struggle there.

Our tour started in the seaport town of Haifa where they move containers and general cargo. APM Maersk had two gangs working that day. I counted 15 cranes and the ports were very busy.

On Wednesday, Nov. 29 the Histadrut Labor Federation held a general strike that shut down the entire country. The 650,000-member federation represents both Jewish and Arab workers. Our labor delegation was in solidarity with our striking brothers and sisters. The issue was the finance ministry’s failure to pay massive sums of money that the labor federation claims it owes to thousands of municipal workers. The strike was a very strong statement, all government offices, airports and seaports, railroads, and garbage collection workers went out. About 100,000 workers had not received back pay in months, some six months, some eight months, some a year and a half. The head of the financial management committee was on strike too and told the workers to pay the debt by Sept. 20, but he did not keep his promise.

“We had no choice to strike,” the Histadrut said. The courts ordered the workers back to work Nov. 30 and a settlement is in the works.

The workers also struck over not receiving their social benefits, according to David Ben-Sheetrit, chairman of the powerful Histadrut union. Fox news and CNN did not cover this story. Polls showed 71 percent of the people were in favor of the strike. Workers need to be paid and they have families and bills to pay. The strike cost the economy about $70 million a day. What a great way to start our trip!

Education in Israel is a precious legacy. Following the traditions of past generations, education continues to be a fundamental value and is recognized as the key to the future. The education system aims to prepare children to become responsible members of a democratic, pluralistic society in which people from different ethnic, religious, cultural and political backgrounds coexist. It is based on the principles of liberty and tolerance.

We were honored to be addressed by Joseph Wasserman, General Secretary of the Israel Teachers Union, at our breakfast one morning. There are 120,000 teachers in the union. One of the problems is that the pay is very low and they are having a hard time attracting new teachers into the field. They have a close relationship with AFT here in the U.S.

We were able to visit two schools and mingle with the kids. All the schools have bomb shelters. At the first school, Jewish, Arab and other Muslim kids all went to school together in a multi-cultural program to teach common respect for one another. When the war with Hezbollah took place three months before. A quiet came over the delegation. We were right there, with all the tension, pressure and instability.

We met with a young man, a lieutenant colonel who was in charge of the army post. He was very nice and polite, and he answered all our questions. Yet he had an edge to him. They are at war and on high alert all the time. He kept his finger on the trigger of his Uzi machine. The whole time he talked to our delegation.

He was clear that at that moment, when things seemed calm, it was not. It was very clear that dying is not hard, living together is what is hard. The lieutenant colonel was 22 years old.

As we looked over the border, we saw Lebanese troops, Syrian troops and U.N. troops. I thought to myself that this is a high-stakes poker game among rich and powerful men to control and shape one of the world’s most volatile regions, a region that tugs at emotions that have gone on for generations, ranging from national pride to hate and destruction. The young people are protecting their country, and when they are 18 years old men and women go into the army. For them it’s a badge of honor. They are children of the struggle.

On Wednesday we headed for Gilad and a kibbutz, an Israeli cooperative community. We met with Rachel Jacob, the sister of the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. She spoke to our delegation about her life. She spoke with passion and courage. She is a very regal lady in her early 80s. She spent most of her life on a kibbutz, an austere life for a very humble woman. She spoke of her late brother, Yitzhak Rabin, who was an instrument for peace. There was iron in her words of life and death for the whole delegation. She began a year ago. She came from the working class and her family lived a modest life. Her presence was like that of Golda Meir, Israel’s first woman prime minister. When she was finished speaking our group gave her a hug and thanked her for spending time with us. It was the first time I had ever spent on a kibbutz.

Bob Ellis, an ILWU Local 23 member and friend told me many years ago that he went to Israel when he got out of high school and worked on a kibbutz. He picked bananas, and remembered the air raids back then and hiding in the bomb shelters.

Later that afternoon we headed up to Jerusalem. It was a beautiful drive. We had dinner with M.K. Yuli Tamir, the Minister of Education. We were also honored to perform the song of “Me’urav Yerushalmi” by the youth choir of Jerusalem. They were great, with so much energy. These young people were so uplifting. After the dinner we had a chance to talk with the young kids. The dialogue was great. They had performed in San Diego last year. They all love the show "American Idol" and hip-hop music. Music is a universal language.

Thursday, Nov. 30 was a sunny day around 10 degrees and our first day in Jerusalem. It would be a day I will never forget. We went to the Yad Vashem Museum, the Holocaust museum. I was overwhelmed with grief, sadness, anger and tears. How could something like this happen to human beings? Just like slavery, why, how, can human beings be so cruel? It makes me look at myself every day in the mirror and ask that question. History holds no parallels to those horrors.

From that museum we visited the Menachem Begin Heritage Center Museum, built in honor of the late prime minister and revolutionary who shared 1978 Nobel Peace Prize with Egypt’s President Anwar al-Sadat. To be fair, we also have to remember that Begin authorized the invasion of
MINISTER YITZHAK RABIN was gunned down Nov. 4, 1995 by a Jewish assassin. The Center was established by the daughter of the slain prime minister. The delegation was given a tour of the Center and the new Museum of History, which displays the life and times of Yitzhak Rabin.

Rabin is missed because of his personal qualities of modesty, integrity, truthfulness, devotion and adherence to principle, no matter how difficult or unpopular. He belongs not to the past, but to the present and to posterity. His grave has become a shrine of pilgrimage and inspiration. He was the privileged and chosen instrument to carry peace to the Middle East. Dr. King was very clear when he said: "If we do not act, we shall surely be dragged down the long, dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality and strength without sight."

"We must all rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter, but beautiful struggle for a new world. For me it hits the brain and tugs at the very heartstrings.

Every person we met, regardless of religion or gender, wants to see peace in the region. And yet Fox News, CNN and others focus on just the violence, and yes, there are problems. While we live in an age when every thought and utterance is filtered through the media, we sometimes forget that our world is torn by 25 border disputes involving some 40 nations. But even as technology has facilitated the global exchange of ideas and made the world a smaller place, it has failed to make it a peaceful one. It was Martin Luther King who taught us that a real moral struggle seeks to win partners—not leave victims. It’s not the past or present, the Middle East must gaze toward the future.

Sunday, Dec. 3 was our last day. We spent it in Tel Aviv and the delegation visited the Etzel Museum and Independence Hall, where the Israeli Declaration of Independence was signed May 14, 1948 and Israel became a state.

As the sun was setting, our delegation visited the Etzel Museum and Independence Hall, where the Israeli Declaration of Independence was signed May 14, 1948 and Israel became a state. The sun was setting, our delegation visited the Etzel Museum and Independence Hall, where the Israeli Declaration of Independence was signed May 14, 1948 and Israel became a state.

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TOYS AND FOOD FOR NORTH PORTLAND COMMUNITY

For the fifth year in a row, ILWU members in the Columbia River area collected gifts for the Caring Community of North Portland’s “Holiday Gift Drive.” This year, the entire ILWU family contributed to this effort. Locals 5 and 28 joined Locals 8, 40, the Ladies Auxiliary 5 and Local 8 Federal Credit Union in making the gift drive a complete success.

The Caring Community of North Portland (CCNP) is a non-profit whose mission is to serve as a unifying force between the community, shop in the community, and on other stations covering four

Lake Home and Community: shop in the community, and on other stations covering four
day season of charitable giving, in which Southern California ILWU organizations helped raise more than $200,000, ended with a flourish just days before Christmas.

The ILWU “Yes We Can” committee, which coordinates the local unions’ humanitarian giving in southern California, wrapped up more than $17,000 in toy giveaways. Overall, the union worked with 22 organizations and handed out more than 3,000 new toys. It started with Yes We Can’s annual holiday party, held at longshore Local 13’s Memorial Hall Dec. 19, where a union volunteer walked each child through rows of toys before families enjoyed holiday cake and cookies. Yes We Can also stepped in for Santa Claus with the children of unionized janitors in Orange County, providing 628 new gifts for SEU Local 1877 families as well as needy families at the San Pedro Service Center who received 100 new toys courtesy of the ILWU. The Yes We Can crew finished their toy deliveries with a caravan of minivans carrying nearly 700 gifts to the Los Angeles City Firefighters annual “Spark of Love” event held Dec. 22 at Dodger Stadium.

Yes We Can was set up in 1998 by younger dockworkers who saw a need for a community project. In one year, the Yes We Can committee collects individual member donations and matching funds from the locals, unionized janitors and Local 10 families. It then travels across the country to gifts, the program makes sure that every child receives something. The CCNP created a three-month season of charitable giving in which Southern California ILWU organizations helped raise more than $200,000, ended with a flourish just days before Christmas.

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Longshore Local 12 in North Bend, Ore. donates $12 per member every month to Community Action. “This has added up to almost $100,000 over the years,” Local 12 President Marvin Caldera said. Community Action, a local helping-hand group, uses some of the money to sponsor a Christmas Toys for Tots program. It also contributes food and utility bill help, and sponsors Head Start programs.

Longshore Local 32 in Everett sent out turkeys to many needy people. The local also made a Christmas donation of $1,400 to local churches, a battered women shelter and housing charities. But giving is not just for Christmas. “All through the year the local donates to Little League, churches and high school teams,” Local 32 Secretary-Treasurer/BA Ken Hudson said. “We are proud to have donated to the Snohomish County Search and Rescue since 1971. One of our members, Ron Miller, used to be part of that, he passed away and we donate $100 twice a year in his honor.”

Longshore Local 54 in Stockton, Calif. collected bicycles, toys and even origami boxes for local kids. Members took the presents to the Stockton Shelter for the Homeless. The local collected money at the hall to buy bicycles and toys and organized collection points at the Commercial Exchange Club on the port grounds and at Four Seasons Travel. “It was a pretty good turnout,” Dispatcher Dave Gutierrez said. “To give a kid a smile, it really warms you up and makes us appreciate what we have. There’s a lot of kids whose parents are struggling. If we can make the kid forget about that for a while, I’m all for it and so are our members.”

Longshore Local 4 in Vancouver, Wash., like many others in the ILWU family, supports needy people in their community all year long, with some special efforts during the holidays. The local contributed $250 to the Chronis Restaurant’s homeless holiday dinner. It also supports Longshoremen’s Local 4 Federal Credit Union’s toy drive and adds to the credit union’s donation to Dornbeckers Children’s Hospital. The local gives a lot through its credit union, which usually donates throughout the year, usually between $3,000 and $5,000 a year.

“Each July 5 picnic donation comes out to about $4,000 over the year,” Local 4 President Cager Clabaugh said. “We also give $8,550 to the Seafarers’ Center and $1,500 to Jobs with Justice. We gave $1,000 to the Clark County Skills Center, a vocational school. The local’s total donations come out to about $18,000 a year.”

Tacoma’s Local 23’s Toy Drive had another successful year. The local collected $17,000 cash for toy purchases and equal amount of toys brought in by the membership. The number of organizations the local helped out increased from nine last year to 13 this year, and they ranged from women’s support shelters, Pierce County Labor Council, and foster child organizations to religious community services and military children who attend on-base and off-base schools. Another $12,200 was donated to Tacoma School and Fife School Districts with the “Family Of Need Program.” The local hopes to expand this program further out into Pierce County next year.

—Dragan Butorac, Local 23
BLUE DIAMOND WORKERS WIN ONE AT HOME

SACRAMENTO, CA—It seemed the Sacramento City Council would never stop droning on at its Dec. 5 meeting. It plodded through parking meter contracts, stadium restoration, intermodal site acquisition.

The boredom ground hard on the 40 Blue Diamond Organizing Committee members in the room. Day shift had started at 6:30 a.m. and they knew they had to start at 4:30 the next morning. But in the last two years they have taken their fight to join ILWU warehouse Local 17 all over the state and all over the world, and they were determined to see their hometown City Council vote on the resolution supporting their efforts.

The measure calls on Blue Diamond Growers (BDG) to sign a neutrality agreement with the ILWU, and condemns the almond co-operative’s nasty anti-union campaign. The NLRB found Blue Diamond guilty of more than 20 labor law violations last spring. The company never admitted it did anything wrong. The board issued more complaints against BDG in October, and is investigating more charges filed by the ILWU.

“IT’S SIMPLE,” Blue Diamond Organizing Committee member Randy Reyes said. “We have a set of rules to follow at work. Blue Diamond has a set of rules to follow too, called the labor law. They need to be accountable.”

The resolution came up last month, but the Council members agreed to postpone the vote so Mayor Fargo could meet with Blue Diamond management. The delay gave them a chance to call in its troops and work on its spin. The Dec. 5 Council session turned into a showdown between business and workers’ interests.

An editorial in Sacramento’s daily paper the day before scolded the City Council for “telling the company how to handle its internal labor relations.” AM radio talk show host Tom Sullivan made nice with Blue Diamond’s head of PR while he fumed about “The United Farm Workers are our family, why don’t they care for us? Why don’t they protect us? Why don’t they respect us? If we are a dysfunctional family, normally in those situations, people are told to go to counseling—but counseling doesn’t help if you don’t listen, and Blue Diamond doesn’t listen to us. That’s why we need the Free Choice Act.”

“The rally highlighted a two-day organizing summit convened by the AFL-CIO to seize the momentum of the Democrats’ November sweep. The Dec. 8-9 meeting brought together some 600 organizers and organizing directors to plot strategies to push EFCA through Congress. EFCA, which had 44 sponsors in the Senate last session and more than 200 in the House, would overhaul labor law to make organizing faster and easier. It would:

-- set stiff penalties for employers who violate workers’ rights;
-- make card-check the normal way to see if workers want union representation;
-- end require employers and unions to go to binding arbitration if they don’t reach agreement on a first contract within 90 days.

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Blue Diamond Organizing Committee member Larry Newsome (at mic) joined U.S. Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA), several national union leaders and local organizers rallying at the steps of the Capitol on Dec. 8. They came together to kick-start a new round of organizing to pass the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA). Shouting into the winter wind, Newsome gave the crowd a taste of life in the cross-hairs of an anti-union campaign.

“Blue Diamond likes to say we are a family,” Newsome said. “But if we are a family, why don’t they care for us? Why don’t they protect us? Why don’t they respect us? If we are a family, we are a dysfunctional family. Normally in those situations, people are told to go to counseling—but counseling doesn’t help if you don’t listen, and Blue Diamond doesn’t listen to us. That’s why we need the Free Choice Act.”

“Two days later it was a done deal,” Chavez said. “The agreement they reached Oct. 27 included 50 percent raises for some workers, 100 percent employer-paid health benefits and a four-week of vacation and the first sick days the workers ever had.

“By the end of the contract, we’ll be in the middle of the scale for this type of work in this area,” Cano said. “Before, the people cleaning up in the refinery [working under the PACE contract] made almost the same as we do.”

They also won minimum staffing levels and the right to refuse unsafe work.

“The contract gives us a lot of power to work safe,” Chavez said. “We have the right to say if we have to if the boss tries to make us do unsafe work.”

The organizing session ran round the clock, just as it had for the Oxbow workers at the harbor. The first thing was to clean up at the refinery when we finished at 6 a.m. to call Carlos (ILWU International Organizer) Corridan and the other organizers. We’d have to barbequed at the refinery gates, met the harbor crew would be there with the trucks and the workers could only watch.

“On Dec. 8, the ILWU Local 13-A Business Agent Alex Galvan said, “They thought they were going nowhere. But the harbor guys came and gave them a lot of testimonials about what is possible.”

“Over the next several months, the harbor crew would be there with the Marsulex workers as they rallied and bargained. Whatever petition the crew regularly to go over contract proposals, and attended the negotiations in force. Some 15-20 people would come each time to back up the bargaining team of Javier Chavez, Juan Villegas, Raul Vega, Cano, Galvan and ILWU Organizing Director Peter Olney.

Because the Marsulex reps would only come down from Monday to two or three days a month, almost every session turned into an 18-20 hour marathon.

“We had to make those two days worth it,” Galvan said. In the slow-moving talks, the workers took a number of days off. Cano. "We had a day's holiday, a day of vacation and the first sick days the workers ever had.

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Local 52’s first woman BA

Andrea Finne Struller, a third-generation union member and Local 52’s business agent this year, she came over to the clerks in 2003 in Los Angeles, CA, 19, where she had been a member since 1992.

She had spent most of the last year as a dispatcher and relief BA for her local.

“I felt pretty confident running for the position because I had worked on it and I felt like I knew what I was getting into,” Finne said. “I loved sitting on the LPC (Local Business Committee). That’s where my heart is—jurisdiction—that means the world to me.”

Her father and grandfather’s names are Paul Finne, Jr. and Sr.

“My uncle, John Finne, a Local 13 member, encouraged me to take my dad’s book when he died and I can never thank him enough,” she said.

She has two stepchildren and two kids of her own.

“A lot of my time is spent being a mom, which I love,” she said. “I’m a runner, I run triathlons and marathons. I’m into physical fitness, so if I have any free time, it’s mostly doing that. And there are always jurisdictional arbitrations to read. I’m always reading about what’s going on with the Coast and what we’re trying to get done with the local.”

Finnie spends a lot of time reading on jurisdictional matters and learning the history of the local. She would like to move ahead in several areas.

“I look forward to updating our constitution, and getting our port working rules and dispatch rules updated, since that hasn’t been done for quite some time,” Finne said.

She had a lot of positive feedback while dispatching and serving as relief BA, and many members asked her to run for BA.

“I’m not daunted by the fact that I’m the first woman, but I’m really excited that I can be a part of this union in this position,” she said. “It’s a great honor.”

—Tom Price

Dock accident takes life of Local 23 man


When we opened the container, we could see the load was terribly unstable,” Kossman said.

In the old days before containerization longshoremen took great pride in the ingenious ways they could pack a ship’s hold, using dung-nage of scrap wood, nets, ropes and other items to shore up the load and keep the ship stable in heavy weather.

The container on Eddo’s chassis that day had probably been stuffed in a country where there is lax safety rules and no unions to enforce the rules that do exist, Local 23 President Conrad Spell said.

“We just don’t enough to do a safer workplace,” Spell said. “We already work under the best safety code in the country. That’s great, but we’re always trying to make it better at every bargaining.”

APM Terminals President Anthony Sciozzi called IWWU International President Bob McElrath and said he wanted to shut down all APM terminals in the U.S. for a safety meeting on Nov. 13. McElrath quickly agreed. In Oakland, APM managers stood with Local 34 clerks and office clerks for a moment of silence. Local 34 President Frank Riley helped organize that meeting.

“It’s a tragedy when accidents happen, but it’s also very important for members to read our safety code and exercise our rights under APM’s code of conduct,” Riley told the members.

Local 23 will get a permissive agreement for Eddo’s son, but he plans to work on the docks. The youngest son Josh was picked in the lottery.

Local 23 set up an account for the family with the Tacoma Longshoremen’s Credit Union. To contribute contact them at: 3602 Alexander Ave. Tacoma, WA 98424.

Eddo and Nancy, his partner in a 30-year marriage, were renovating a 30-year marriage, were renovating their 1931-vintage house when he died, and it’s all torn up, Spell said.

“We have a bunch of guys who were contractors. They’re getting supplies together, and they’re going over to finish it up,” Spell said.

Kossman announced he would not run for re-election and would ask the membership of the PCPA, assisting the union in this position, “It’s a great honor.”

—Tom Price
Books and videos about the ILWU are available from the union's library at discounted prices!

BOOKS:

**Harry Bridges: The Rise and Fall of Radical Labor in the United States By Charles Larson: A limited number of copies of this out-of-print and useful biography are now available through the book sale by special arrangement with Bolerium Books in San Francisco, which specializes in rare publications and documents about radical and labor history. $10.00**

The ILWU Story: reveals the history of the union from its origins to the present, complete with recollections from the men and women who built the union, in their own words, and dozens of rare photos of the union in action. $5.00

The Big Strike: Mike Quinn: the classic partisan account of the 1934 strike. $6.50

The Union Makes Us Strong: Radical Unionism on the San Francisco Waterfront By David Wellman: the important new study of longshoreing in the ILWU. $20.00 (paperback)

A Terrible Anger: The 1934 Waterfront and General Strike in San Francisco By David Selvin: perhaps the most comprehensive single narrative about the San Francisco events of 1934. $16.50

The March Inland: Origins of the ILWU Warehouse Division 1934-1938 By Harvey Schwartz: The most complete history of the origins, meaning, and impact of the 1934 strike. $9.00

Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s By Bruce Nelson: the most complete history of the origins, meaning, and impact of the 1934 strike. $6.50

Reds and Rackets: The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront By Howard Kimledorff: The most comprehensive study of the ILWU and the International Longshoremen's Association.

**NOTICE:** TWO IMPORTANT BOOKS ARE NO LONGER AVAILABLE TO THE ILWU LIBRARY AT A SIGNIFICANT DISCOUNT, but may be purchased from bookstores, including the ILWU LOCAL 5 WEBSITE (powellsunion.com)

**BOOKS:-radical:**

Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s By Bruce Nelson: the most complete history of the origins, meaning, and impact of the 1934 strike. $6.50

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Limited numbers from earlier decades also available, contact The Dispatcher for details.