Notes from Inside —

Taking Charge Of Our Lives

The pending decision of the National Labor Relations Board to hold an election to determine whether or not we want to be represented by the ILWU is a real triumph. Win or lose, we have been fighting for better than two years for our constitutional right to make just such a choice. Remember this: it was the Committee of Concerned Crocker Employees and the International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union that fought for and won your right to vote. Crocker management specifically asked the government to deny you that right, and then dragged the hearings out for more than a year to delay things as long as possible.

You’ll be hearing a lot of arguments for and against the union over the next few weeks. We hope that the debate will be constructive and honest, and in the interests of the people who work here. Crocker’s recent barrage of leaflets, filled with half-truths, distortions (which we intend to clarify) and threats, indicate that management is in a state of near-panic.

NOT ASKING MUCH

They needn’t be. We don’t want much. We want only a decent living wage and some protection against inflation, a real pension plan, medical and dental coverage, and some protection against favoritism and other abuses on the job. Millions of workers all over this country have won these things by peacefully organizing into unions and engaging in collective bargaining with their employers. We don’t see why that can’t happen at Crocker.

In the meantime, we want to invite all employees at NOCC to play an active part in this whole process between now and the election date. Don’t just sit there and get lectured to by Crocker management or, for that matter by us. The whole idea is for all of us to take some control over our own lives. Submit articles for publication in this newspaper, make suggestions, come to meetings and ask us the most difficult, embarrassing questions you can think of. To meetings and ask us the most difficult, embarrassing questions you can think of.

We need more money

Low wages are a sore point at Crocker Bank’s Northern California Operations Center — and one of the most important reasons so many of us signed cards asking for collective bargaining representation by the ILWU.

The bank is so profit-minded, that it does not really concern itself with the common problems of the staff at NOCC. It is hard to imagine that the bank is really concerned with a clerk who must support a child or two, a pay baby sitter, pay rent, buy food, pay OASD, the phone company, and other bills. All on, say, $300 per month or less. There are people at NOCC who do this.

The bank does not even pretend to be keeping up with inflation. The only way to win an 8% increase, for example, is by earning a “superior” rating and everyone knows that you have to be some kind of superperson to get it. Unless you can be a super-person all the time, the raise that you do receive does not keep up with the cost of living.

COMPANY’S PROFITS

The bank can afford decent wages. In 1977 Crocker reported a 16.5% increase in net income — up from $46 million in 1976 to almost $54 million in 1977. On top of that, the bank is in line for an enormous tax windfall because of the recent passage of Proposition 13 (see back page).

All we are asking is that the employees who make all this prosperity possible be given their fair share. We don’t have any illusions — voting to join a union is just a first step. But by uniting our strength we have a much greater chance to win wages increase, and perhaps a cost-of-living pay hike which will allow all of us to live with a little more dignity and security.

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Are You Confused?

Or would you like some more information? Would you like to play an active part in the coming campaign to lead the National Labor Relations Board election?

The ILWU and the Concerned Crocker Employees will be holding a series of meetings to discuss the issues, answers questions, and plan the campaign.

Time: Every Tuesday at 4:45 p.m.
Place: Cathay Teagarden, 48 Fifth Street.

You are cordially invited to attend. It’s your life.
A First Look at Bargaining--ILWU Style

What's collective bargaining all about, really? When it gets down to the nitty-gritty, who makes the decisions about what goes into a contract? What's the role of the union official in all this, what's the role of the rank and file representative?

Here's an article by two clerical employees, George Martin and Lee Price, who recently were elected by their fellow workers at Crocker National and Citizens Bank to negotiate their first ILWU contract. For Guy and Lee it was the first time around and what we thought Crocker NOC employees might be interested in some of their reactions.

We spent the last four months sitting across the table from our employer sometimes for twelve hours at a stretch. It became a very, very important process. You learn a lot, not only about health and welfare plans and jurisdiction, but also about yourself.

To really understand the atmosphere of those talks, you have to understand why we joined ILWU in the first place. The most obvious reason was wages. They were extremely low -- the whole unit averaged only $5.87 per hour.

GRIEVANCES

An accumulation of unresolved grievances posed enormous problems. Before the absence of a union contract, there was nothing which required the company to do anything about them.

We had one woman working in a job undergraded by two grades. She worked with her supervisor, he had to discuss it with some other supervisor, and on and up the line, all the way to the president of the company.

Finally, we know about the ILWU. We were able to come together in a union and make the kind of working conditions they enjoyed and the kind of union they thought was fair.

Still, with all that, it was a pretty close choice for us. We were impressed with the ILWU representation. The company worked hard, they convinced some people in the unit that they could do better than the union representation. But once the union was in, the ILWU was really impressive to us that people who voted against union representation accepted the majority will and came together so that all of us could benefit.

FIRST SESSION

The first time we met in the local negotiations with Matson it was scary. A whole new educational process began right then. We got over our initial feelings of inadequacy and recognized the fact that the employer puts his pants on his legs at a very early age.

One thing we had going for us was that the company was seen, because of the presence of Vice-President George Martin, that the International was very much interested in our negotiations. George was very helpful and supportive, particularly when the company tried hard to negotiate an agency shop. We went around and around it until we broke through on that issue. It was a major victory to win the union shop.

SLow PROGRESS

Things went very slowly, particularly on the matter of grievances. We got a few language changes and a grievance procedure, seniority, overtime and jurisdiction. We never realized how precise the language has to be if you want to have a gimmick-proof agreement. One got the language items, the wages and the cost items fell into line relatively easy.

What to Do With

Crockers' Prop. 13 Windfall

Crocors recently charged that the ILWU does not intend to establish a new local for bank employees. Is this true?

The ILWU will issue a separate charter for a new local of bank employees once we have won a majority vote of the employees at Crocker NOC.

A union charter is a document which attests to the local's affiliation with the International, guarantees its autonomy and its right to run its own affairs, and spells out its jurisdiction—what it is, what sorts of workers it will accept as members. It is the necessary foundation for the establishment of an autonomous organization.

It's the option of the Committee of Concerned Crocker Employees that the most democratic procedure would be to issue the chart immediately, and set up the local after the election, when all the affected employees will have a better opportunity to participate—to have their say on the local's constitution, by-laws, structure, meeting times and officers. Moreover, with a small, relatively small group of workers, we have had to make a decision and, however well meaning, fail to really represent the needs of the majority.

The fact that Crocker management has screwed on this trivial issue and tried to beat it to death is another sign of their unthinkingness to look at the real issues—the company is not in any condition of negotiation. The ILWU is widely known and respected, even in management circles, as an extremely democratic and cleanly run union, under the firm control of its membership.

To take a few lines from volumes and volumes of transcripts and print them completely out of context is, at very least, the kind of dishonesty that we hoped a corporation would not have any effect on the decision, which is based upon facts and testimony. After all, Crocker's brief urged against any election at all, and we believe that the NLRB will ignore it.

If we receive the error, we corrected it. The only categories excluded from voting are the following:

"Managers" are those who exercise substantial management authority and make decisions on behalf of the company, but may not directly supervise anyone.

"Clerical employees" are those who are required to have college degrees for the performance of their duties; they are responsible for maintaining or keeping the books—engineers for example.

"Confidential secretaries" are secretaries to managers who have access to confidential materials such as employee evaluations, company negotiating positions, etc.

What's the role of the union official in all this, what's the role of the rank and file representative?

From the start, when ILWU attorneys submitted their closing brief to the National Labor Relations Board, the Board to exclude from the bargaining unit a number of supervisory, managerial, confidential, and certain professional employees. Among these were "some 110 part-time supervisory employees who are called 'lead' or 'senior' employees, according to bank terminology." The request to exclude lead and senior employees was in error, and was corrected by our attorney on August 11, 1978. The ILWU brief now requests that all those employees be included in the bargaining unit except for those used as supervisors. The relevant section of the brief now reads as follows:

CORRECTED TEXT

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