First messenger victory at UltraEx

Australian miners call on the ILWU

Karl Yoneda
Working class hero
1906-1999

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BUST THE UNION BUSTERS

The sweetness of the first victory in the ILWU's messenger organizing campaign was captured perfectly on the front page of the San Francisco Examiner the next day—a big color photo of Rask Afflousino of the workers' organizing committee popping a bottle of champagne. The nearly 2-1 election landslide at United Docks of Seattle won despite the company's anti-union consultant's scare tactics,N9306a00 as joint workers and attempts to have the workers switch their ballots to six other companies rather than the boss. The victory gives the courier campaign big momentum (see page 8).

A few days later the messenger, Lightning Express—already signed ILWU cards and previously asked their boss for voluntary recognition—met again with the employer. Showing up to address the workers was none other than the ILWU's anti-union consultant UltraEx used, one Storey with the mother board (as directed by the messengers). Irate, the workers unanimously let the boss know that the real outsider here was not the union but this Redneck fellow and they wanted him the hell out of there. He did a number and the messengers quickly found his car keys. A little further discussion left the employer suggesting that he would reconsider their voluntary recognition demand.

But for the campaign to reach its goal of industry-wide organization and an industry-wide contract, the messengers will have to soon take on the largest companies in the industry—DM and ProMee. And that means facing off with the big company's anti-union consultant UltraEx used, one Storey with the mother board (as directed by the messengers). Irate, the workers unanimously let the boss know that the real outsider here was not the union but this Redneck fellow and they wanted him the hell out of there. He did a number and the messengers quickly found his car keys. A little further discussion left the employer suggesting that he would reconsider their voluntary recognition demand.

With a batch of new anti-labor laws at its disposal Rio Tinto is selectively sucking union activists, stonewalling contract negotiations, getting injunctions against picketing, appealing every court decision the workers win and offering recognition only to those who are willing to abandon the union and sign an "individual workplace agreement." Disputes continue at all the coal mines Rio Tinto owns in the country.

The MUA and the Australian labor movement are lending much needed support, but Rio Tinto is a major transnational corporation with almost limitless resources. To get out word of their plight representatives of the miners are visiting workers at other Rio Tinto facilities around the world. Recently they paid a call on the ILWU workers at the borax mine in the Southern California Desert and at the ultraEx used, one Storey with the mother board (as directed by the messengers). Irate, the workers unanimously let the boss know that the real outsider here was not the union but this Redneck fellow and they wanted him the hell out of there. He did a number and the messengers quickly found his car keys. A little further discussion left the employer suggesting that he would reconsider their voluntary recognition demand.

DOWN BUT NOT OUT UNDER

Union busting is the same the world over. In Australia the same anti-union, notorious anti-union law bust the dock workers union (the Maritime Union of Australia) last year when it tried to bust the UltraEx used, one Storey with the mother board (as directed by the messengers). Irate, the workers unanimously let the boss know that the real outsider here was not the union but this Redneck fellow and they wanted him the hell out of there. He did a number and the messengers quickly found his car keys. A little further discussion left the employer suggesting that he would reconsider their voluntary recognition demand.

The process is completely non-democratic and the panel of trade bureaucrats who make these decisions are accountable to no one. The tribunals are held in secret and all documents, hearings and briefs are confidential. You can't even find out about it and you have no say. National and local laws passed by voters or elected officials can be voided without recourse.

The bosses never know when enough is enough. They only learn through loss of money and power and are arrogant they think they can summon almost any government to their aid. They will have their way with us if we don't speak out.

In another case the U.S. challenged a European Union ban on beef from cattle raised with artificial growth hormones out of concern for the hormones' effects on human health. A WTO panel ruled against the ban and set a deadline for the EU to change its policies or face sanctions.

The U.S. also challenged a European Union trade preference for bananas from the Caribbean and other former European colonies, claiming these preferences were directed against bananas grown by U.S. companies in Central America. The preference allows Caribbean banana workers to make a decent living, much better than the workers toiling under the repressive, anti-union conditions imposed by Chiquita in Central America.

In Seattle the WTO will be considering a new "intellectual property" agreement pushed by pharmaceutical companies that would restrict the development of generic, affordable drugs those companies have patents on.

The WTO is enforcing a global race to the bottom—in health, in the environment and in workers' rights. It comes down to the air you breathe, the food you eat, the healthcare you do or do not get and, ultimately, whether you have a job and at what pay and conditions. All these plans are promoted as deregulation, free trade and letting the invisible hand of market forces run the economy. Yet they require numerous complicated agreements, regulations and enforcement mechanisms to work. That's because what's really happening is that transnational corporations are changing the rules. It all amounts to an attempt at a massive transfer of wealth from the world's working people to a very few corporate elite.

What we have seen in five years of NAFTA—the huge loss of manufacturing jobs in the U.S. and Canada and the explosion of sweatshop factories in U.S.-right-to-work states and in Mexico's maquiladoras—should tell us all we need to know about these free trade agreements. The WTO wants to enforce a global super NAFTA.

What happened to Hawaii ILWU members in the sugar industry is a blue print for WTO policies. They were the best paid agricultural workers in the world producing the highest yield per acre and the best quality product. But the competition from cheap foreign sugar produced for subsistence wages with no environmental or labor standards and dumped on the world market drove most of the Hawaiian producers out of business. And, of course, if our own thousands of workers into unemployment with no means of finding new jobs in those rural communities.

At the same time those workers producing sugar overseas do not have the opportunity to share in the wealth of their labor. Workers on both sides of the picket line are organizing. Consumer prices didn't go down, but corporate profits skyrocketed. It worked so well the transnational corporations decided to make it a law. This is not a conspiracy fantasy. This is the explicit plan of the world's most powerful governments and corporations. The Clinton administration and both parties in Congress support it.

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UltaEx messengers clinch first factory victory

May 1999

By Marcy Rein

M
ore than a year's work hung in the balance as UltaEx workers crowded the doorway of the bike room at UltraEx, where NLRB agents removed a stack of ballots in the June election. Rodriguez unfolded each sheet of yellow and blue. He had it laid on the pile. Then he held one up for observers to verify.

"This is a 'no' ballot," he said. Another one. "This is a 'yes.'" He laid all the ballots aside until the count reached 8-8. Ishane. Then a roll of yes votes and a slight exhale. Creeping up on the magic number, 22 needed to win. 19, 20, "No." 21, 22.

Eyes light. Final count: 27-15. UltraEx's unionization victory is a sweet and sharp triumph for a few minutes.

People pile out into Tehama St., which is really more of an alley. Organizing committee member Manuel "Rak" Affonso breaks out a bottle of champagne and sprays the winning team, the messengers and ILWU organizers who claimed the first victory of the union's industry-wide drive.

"We can do it!" said committee member Nana Robinson. "We showed we have the power to change things. We don't have to be shit on all the time any more." And Ultra's bike messengers, walkers and drivers went to the polls in the first election in San Francisco's courier industry in more than a decade. As the newest members of ILWU warehouse Local 6, they're the first unionized messengers in the country.

Dissatisfaction with wages and working conditions underpinning the organizing. Ultra is one of the better paying companies, but contributions toward health insurance. Still, many messengers can't afford the co-payments after they cover the company makes them carry. Better-paying companies, and solidarity reeled in the Ultra victory. The messengers who felt most strongly about the union formed the organizing core, and tirelessly talked with the company makes them carry.

So fight election theft

By Marcy Rein

Dennis Dunn & Associates (SD&A), the organizing committee's best efforts couldn't overcome a relentless pro-union campaign rife with abuses. The company won the June 3 election at the ballot box by a 34-31 margin. But the next day, committee members met with ILWU organizers and documented SD&A's labor law violations so the union can file objections to the election with the NLRB.

"We can't let them get away with this," said committee member Harlan Cross.

Some company tactics were technically legal, like the captive audience meetings that built a crescendo of three or four a week by election time, Norris Motley, all of them going through a genial sort, succeeded in making the election a referendum on his management.

He ran the committee meetings himself, and appealed to people's sympathy for him as an African American who had worked his way up through the ranks. "Not too bad for an old Negro from Detroit," he commented to the election a referendum on his management.

A masochist, he battled back with an anti-union campaign, his hired honcho Sanford Rudnick hammered away at messengers with the cutthroat scare tactics. "Not too bad for an old Negro from Detroit," he commented to the Local 6 hiring hall, who turned out in force when the Ultra messengers filed with the NLRB and again the day of the election.

ILWU organizers backed up the organizing committee with phone calls and house visits, and went round to Ultra to answer questions as people were getting off work—and rented a van to drive people back from the annual Russian River "Slug" Ride, an 80-mile bike safari from San Francisco to Toronto, London, and even Ypsilanti, Michigan. "How can you lose when you have Ypsilanti?" said Howard Williams, a member of the organizing committee and president of the San Francisco Bike Messenger Assn.

The ILWU weighed in with solidarity too, particularly people from the Local 6 hiring hall, who turned out in force when the Ultra messengers filed with the NLRB and again the day of the election.

Ultra owner Ernest Holbrook battled back with an anti-union campaign. His hired honcho Sanford Rudnick hammered away at messengers with the cutthroat scare tactics. "Not too bad for an old Negro from Detroit," he commented to the Local 6 hiring hall, who turned out in force when the Ultra messengers filed with the NLRB and again the day of the election.

UltraEx messengers and friends after the vote count. (Back row, left to right) Eric Ketkas, Marc Gurucharri, Scott O'Brien, Stephan Kizziar, Tom Horner, Bob Ingalls. (Front row) Paul Mottley, Gunther, Scott O'Brien, Nana Robinson, "Rak" Affonso, Steven Bodzin, Howard Williams, Rick Condron. (Kneeling, center) Dan Crew.
T he ILWU has consistently sup-
ported policies that protect, pro-
mote and preserve the U.S. mar-
time industry. Of course, thousands of
ILWU and IBU jobs are tied to the
strength or weakness of this industry,
but our nation's workers, consumers
and farmers also depend on the stabil-
ity of the U.S. maritime industry for
the economic security of their homes,
both domestic and international.

These are tremendous fringes of
fiscal support around our maritime industry and maritime jobs,
which we have watched the erosion of
this industry over the last few
decades. The Congress and the
President appear unwilling to make
the kinds of investments necessary to
ensure the strongest of industries.
The lost shipbuilding and merchant
maritime industry and maritime jobs,
which the new generation of larger contain-
ental dredging is needed to handle
the kinds of investments necessary to
ensure the strongest of industries.

Threats to the maritime industry con-
cern and the Jones Act and other
foreign vessels. Thousands of new jobs are
expected to be created by these pro-
\ports. Maritime unions need and deserve
their support of most of the mar-
time political proposals to waive the Jones Act
been offered by shippers to avoid paying
the $2 per $100 of cargo tax on exports.

Newt Gingrich, Gingrich refused to
schedule the bill on the House Door
because right-wing Rep. John
Do舐ttle (R-CA) decided he would
hold WRDA hostage until the House
acceded to his demand that a new
dam be built in the Sacramento
Valley. Never mind the feasibility of this
proposal—to build the dam on a
major fault line.

A paper lobbying effort was need-
ed to rescue WRDA from its captors
during the first few months of this
legislative session. Seizing on the ILWU members in the San Francisco
Bay Area was particularly active in the
Bay Area Dredging Coalition. Last month both the House and
Senate passed WRDA '99. The legis-
lation will very soon reach President
Clinton's desk for his signature.

"It's a tribute to all of our Bay
Area members and their local officers
who, together with community
organizations and other labor organizations,
worked successfully with the Port of
Oakland and our Congressional dele-
tation to pass this legislation," said
International Secretary-Treasurer
Joe Barea, the International's represen-
tative on the coalition.

HARBOR SERVICES FUND

In another harbor dredging relat-
ed matter, the Clinton Administra-
tion has proposed a tax called the
Harbor Services Fund (HSF) of up
$11 billion annually to finance port
maintenance of our nation's ports. If
implemented, this tax will have the conse-
quence of steering ships away from U.S. ports, costing thou-
thousands of man-hours and jobs for long-
time jobs without jeopardizing current
benefits for American business, farm-
workers and consumers. The
administration live up to their historic com-
mitment to maintain our port infra-
structure.

"Passenger Services ACT"

A controversial issue before
Congress and within the ILWU
involves the future of the Passenger
Services Act (PSA). Like the Jones
Act, the PSA is designed to protect
American workers, consumers and
farmers also depend on the stabil-
ity of the U.S. maritime industry for
the economic security of their homes,
both domestic and international.

"We believe that abolishing anti-trust
restrictions on NVOCCs. "Confiden-
tial deals between NVOCCs and
their customers is that while it is the
first step toward repealing the
Jones Act and the Passenger
Services Act outright. Their fears
are not without foundation. Bob Quartel,
who leads the Jones Act repeal coal-
ition, has attempted to move his dra-
gic proposals to waive the Jones Act
alongside legislation on the
Passenger Services Act.

However, the proposals to reform or repeal the Jones Act
have gone down to resounding defeat.
Last Congress, H. Con. Resolution 65,
which called for full congressional sup-
port for the Jones Act, garnered
244 cosponsors, including rep-
resentatives from all 50 states and
cross all political and ideological
derives. So the Jones Act is not
likely to go away. But it does mean
forces in Congress for the foreseeable
future, although there is increasing
time, we could be risking amendments that
would expand reforms to ferries and
carrier vessels, that too, is unlikely, since the proponents of
reform are focused on attracting
business to U.S. ports. Maritime unions should
consider this and counter with an
alternative. We must continue to
support the Jones Act, but these alternative proposals that could gar-
ner the support of most of the mar-
time industry.

"Ocean Shipping Reform ACT"

Lastly, the Ocean Shipping Reform Act, or OSRA, went into
force on May 1, 1999. The Act allows,
for the first time, carriers and shippers
to engage in confidential service
contracts. How this deregulatory
measure will affect ILWU members is
still unclear. But the ILWU success-
ful in combating the attempts by some
of the major lines to bypass your union to access critical informa-
tion about who is responsible for the
financial risks involved in this indus-
try. This information, which was
obtained through a law passed in 1984,
allow the Longshore Division to more
effectively secure jurisdiction gained through the ILWU.
The ILWU was also successful in
winning some restrictions on the abil-
ity of port workers carrying
NVOCCs) to continue to take jobs away from ports and long-
shore workers in the final version of
the PSA. Rep. Henry Hyde (R-IL),
Chairman of the Judicary Commiss-
tee, was so enraged by this important
victory for Labor that he held a hear-
ing on the possibility of taking away
anti-trust immunity for carriers.

In testimony submitted to Chair-
man Hyde for the Committee hearing President McWilliams said,
"We believe that abolishing anti-trust
immunity for ocean carriers would
create great instability in the mar-
time industry and lead to the loss of
thousands of jobs. Virtually every
country in the world recognizes the
financial risks involved in the mar-
time industry and provides some form of anti-
trust immunity to ocean carriers."

The ILWU has consistently sup-
ported the ILWU International Vice President Jim Spinoso slid the union's demands for
the next longshore contract across the table to Pacific Maritime Association
CEO Joe Miniaci on the first day of bargaining May 18. Although the sides
have several significantly different concerns, both have expressed "cautious
optimism" that an agreement will be worked out by July 1, the expiration
date of the current contract.

Longshore negotiations begin

Efforts to improve the Port of Oakland’s competitiveness and keep the work there union are beginning to show results. The ILWU is working on this project in a labor/community coalition that includes the Alameda County Building and Construction Trades Council, the Teamsters, the Health, Employee, Restaurant Employees, the Service Employees International Union, the International Association of Machinists and the AFL-CIO’s Transportation Trades Dept. as well as a number of community organizations.

The first big push has been to get the federal funding to deepen the port’s channel to 50 feet so it can accommodate the big new container ships. That money was included with a package of projects in the Water Resources Development Act of 1999 which has passed both houses of Congress and is expected to be signed by President Clinton (see Washington Report, page 4). The dredging is key to the other expansion projects the port has planned.

The labor/community alliance has gotten the Oakland Port Commissioner to direct their staff to begin negotiations for a Project Labor Agreement with the unions covering the $8 billion in construction work to be done over the next six years at the port. This means all the work—the dredging, building new marine terminals, the rail intermodal terminal, the new airport expansion—will all be done under union contracts at prevailing wages. Part of the coalition’s goal in these negotiations is to make sure none of the apprenticeships generated by all this work will go to young people in the Oakland community who desperately need the jobs.

The coalition is also lobbying the Port Commissioners to pass living wage legislation mandating that any port subcontractor must pay its employees at least $9.25 per hour with a decent benefit package. The Commission has agreed to take up the issue in the near future.

The ILWU and the Teamsters are continuing to meet with port officials in an attempt to ensure that both unions retain jurisdiction at the two intermodal terminals at the port. For many years the Teamsters have performed the ramping and de-ramping work at the United Pacific Intermodal facility. But recently UP accepted a new bid from a cut-rate subcontractor to run the facility and there are concerns that this new operator will try to get non-union labor. Since the ramping work, it is essential that both be union operations.

Oakland Fruitvale district city councilmember Ignacio De La Fuente pulls registration cards for casuals at a couple of Oakland neighborhoods, West Oakland and the Fruitvale. Wind patterns blow much of the pollution from these communities that also have high unemployment rates.

“Wanted to give them some of the benefits of the port and not just the side effects,” said Local 10 President Lawrence Thibeaux.

Registration forms were distributed in those communities as well as at the Fort of Oakland and on May 25 cards were drawn from a barrel of community cards were drawn from a barrel of the two communities, 65 from the Fruitvale and 65 from West Oakland drawn by Port Director Chuck Foster and 65 from the Fruitvale drawn by the Oakland city councilmember from the area, Ignacio De La Fuente.

The remaining community cards were dumped into the large barrel and 5,000 cards were pulled in sequence. Those people will be notified of their sequence number and will be called into work as Local 10 members retire and work increases at San Francisco Bay ports.

The ILWU Joint Intermodal Terminal Committee consists of ILWU International Secretary-Treasurer Joe Barra, Chairman; Lawrence Thibeaux, Local 10, Frank Billeci, Local 34; Bill Nelson, Local 91, Bride Thibeaux, Local 10, Frank Billeci, Local 34; Bill Nelson, Local 91, Marine Sicchitano, IUB, Fred Pecker, Local 6, Bill De La Mater, Local 75, Lloy Ring, retired Northern California Regional Director. "Stevie Stanton" STATE OF THE ART MISSILE LAUNCH SHIP A PRISON FOR ITS FILIPINO CREW

The Filipino crews of the super modern ship Sea Launch Commander and her companion, the launch vessel Odyssey are unusually well treated and properly paid. Their problem, however, is that even the most pleasant ship becomes a prison when they are not allowed ashore.

Their job is to sail to the equator and launch satellites for the Sea Launch Co., an international consortium led by Boeing with headquarters in the Cayman Islands. Once the two ships reach their launch site in the middle of the Pacific, the crew of the Odyssey, a self-propelled converted oil-drilling platform, boards the Sea Launch Commander and the missile is fired from the Odyssey by remote control.

Unlike so many sailors on flag-of-convenience ships they have good food and regular rotation homes. They are the best crew the managing agents in the Philippines can provide, and they have passports. What they didn’t have is representation, and that is what they needed in the former U.S. Navy yard in Long Beach.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service refused to let the Filipinos into the U.S. as visitors, and they have to spend their port time confined to the ship or the dock area. The ship’s officers have the same work visas, but are allowed ashore on ship’s business due to an INS exemption from the strict quarantine the sailors must obey.

So while the Scottish-built ship launched Russian rockets tipped with American satellites from a Liberian-flagged ship the INS marooned the Filipinos aboard like prisoners. Without crew, no work, the crew had no way of collectively appealing to the INS for visitors’ visas and the rights in the U.S. courts.

"The company had a successful launch March 27 and I met them at the dock on their return," ITF Inspector Rudy Vanderhider said. He told them it was disgraceful to have a 21st century ship with 19th century INS rules holding over the crew.

The ship’s agents agreed to ITF representation, giving the crew grievances procedures and contract enforcement.

Modern technology has reduced the costs of satellites, but lifting them into orbit takes enormous amounts of energy. What is so profitable from the equatorial launches is the fuel savings. The effect of the earth’s spin is greatest there, nearly 1000 miles an hour, savings of as much as 30 percent in fuel. With nearly 1000 launches planned for the next decade that adds up to a lot of money.

While the rockets are notoriously dirty, they have a 95 percent reliability, said Mr. Vanderhider. The whole ship will blow up once every four years.

A lot of money was included with a state-of-the-art environmental control system, but the crew doesn’t see it.

"This isn’t some poor bulk carrier," Vanderhider said. "It’s not. If there’s no profit to go around, they’re just trying to save costs where ever they can." Vanderhider opened discussions with the INS as the crew representative as so soon as the ink was dry on the contract.

Once had official status INS officials told him about the exemption granted to Sea Launch. Under INS regulations the Filipinos were kept off the U.S. land for 29 days.

The exemption was just another perk the company got out of the government, in return they promised to keep the crew aboard ship.

The Sea Launch Co. told Vanderhider the crew may get leave once there is a regular sailing schedule. The Filipinos promised to the INS that leave would be granted 29 days before the first regular launch, which should be in August.

"The contract levered the company into a commitment," Vanderhider said. "They won’t have to do this forever. It’s easier to control the crew if they can’t leave."
Sixth year the ILWU played a major role in stopping an employer/government attempt to bust the Australian longshore union. Members of ILWU longshore Local 13, clerks Local 83 and walking bosses Local 94 refused to cross picket lines to work seafarers-loading cargo on the ship Columbus Canada in May 1998. Unable to break the international solidarity and move cargo through to the U.S., the ultra-conservative Australian government and Patrick Stevedoring Co. eventually relented and the longshore union, the MUA, retained its jurisdiction on the docks.

But the same government and an internationally infamous mining company are now deploying the same anti-labor laws used against the MUA in an attack on Australia’s unionized coal miners. Again workers in a major industrial sector are fighting a predatory multinational to save their jobs and communities. And again they’re are looking to the international workers’ movement for help—and the ILWU finds itself strategically situated in the conflict.

This May representatives of the Australian coal miners came to the U.S. to meet with ILWU officers, members and other unionists to establish ties and discuss problems they are having with a common employer: Rio Tinto, the largest mining company in the world.

The two Australians have been battling Rio Tinto for years. Reg Coates is the National Vice President of the Mining and Energy Division of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), and Stuart Vaccaneo heads a CFMEU mining local locked out of their jobs in one of Rio Tinto’s union-busting efforts. The giant company operates more than 60 mines and processing plants in 40 countries—among them the borax mine in the Southern California desert worked by mining and mineral processing ILWU Local 20A (see sidebar). More Trouble Down Under

Mining borax at Rio Tinto’s operation in Boron, California.

When the Liberal Party—which actually is a right-wing, anti-worker political party—took over after the 1996 Australian national elections, it refused and all 312 workers were sacked. The company tried to restart operations with a new workforce under individual contracts. But the company's strategy is the same every-where in Australia. It refuses to reach any agreement with the union and resists any attempts by the union to gain improvements in wages and conditions. When it downsizes, it uses the legal elimination of seniority rights to sack union activists first. It uses the courts to get injunctions against workers picketing and appeals every decision that does not favor the company. While thwarting all the union’s efforts, the company offers the workers individual contracts, making it clear that the only way they will see improvements is to abandon the union.

A few desperate coal miners have taken the offers, but the vast majority have hung tough despite the heavy toll. Months out of work have destroyed families and ruined the small rural mining communities where every coal job supports another three jobs.

When Rio Tinto makes its move, it’s very dev-astating on the mining communities because a lot of other businesses rely on them,” Coates said. “I go to a lot of picket lines and disputes involving Rio Tinto and they just go to the court and don’t care. I’ve seen mates’ marriages break up, I’ve seen people go bankrupt, I’ve seen suicides.”

The Gordonstone Standoff

The biggest dispute going on in Australia’s coal industry is a 19-month lockout on the Gordonstone property where Stuart Vaccaneo is the lodge secretary. Gordonstone was owned by U.S.-based ARCO. It was the biggest coal mine in Australia and its miners, who set national and world production records, were considered the very best. Yet in October 1997 ARCO asked to change the wages and conditions of the 1996 contract. The workers refused and all 312 workers were sacked.

The company tried to restart operations with a new workforce under individual contracts. But the union took the matter to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC), which ruled in the workers’ favor. The commissioners acknowledged they could not order the company to reopen the mine, but said if it did, it had to rehire from the sacked workforce in reverse order of seniority. ARCO decided to leave the mine closed instead.

The CFMEU then took 282 unfair dismissal cases to the ALRC and the commissioner found the company had fired them unfairly to avoid their legal obligations under the union contract. The commis-sioner ordered the biggest unfair dismissal pay-ment in Australian history—$4.6 million in Australian dollars.

Keeping the mine closed was costing ARCO’s lot for maintenance and it had to buy coal from other companies to fulfill its contracts, so it decid-ed to get out of the coal business in Australia. Four companies expressed interest in buying the mine, including Ingwe, a South African firm. Officials from Ingwe contacted the CFMEU wanting a con-tract with the union before their board of directors would finalize the purchase. They drew up a contract, but once ARCO got word of the deal with the union, it broke off negotiations with Ingwe and sold the mine to Rio Tinto for 50-100 million Australian dollars less than Ingwe offered.

Rio Tinto claimed that the CFMEU’s dispute was with ARCO and it was free to hire a new work-force under separate conditions. Rio Tinto reopened the mine in February 1999 and the CFMEU put up a picker line in response.

Since then there have been more than 300 arrests on the Gordonstone picker line. One of the bail conditions prohibited returning to the picker, so other CFMEU workers came to staff the line.

Rio Tinto then obtained a court injunction against Rio Tinto’s policies towards its workers directly violate the basic labor standards of the International Labour Organization (ILO) promoting collective bargaining and recognition of trade union rights. Rio Tinto has a long record of violating human and worker rights. During the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s the company worked closely with the fascist military regime of Francisco Franco. In the 1970s Rio Tinto’s dealings with the South African apartheid regime brought it international condemnation. The U.N.
any of the 140,000 CFMEU members picketing at Gordonstone. So in an impressive act of worker solidarity the MUA longshore workers came to the picket line, paying back the miners who massed on the port pickets last year when the courts banned the MUA from its own picket lines. “We have a pact with the MUA,” said CFMEU’s Coates. “It’s touch one, touch all.”

The union currently has a case before the Federal Court seeking reinstatement of the union miners.

GOING INTERNATIONAL

The CFMEU miners know they are up against a transnational octopus that can use the profits from its other mining operations to cover the costs of its war against them. So they’ve hit the road seeking contacts and support.

Coates and Vaccaneo arrived in southern California May 2 and met up with Kenneth Zinn, the North American Regional Coordinator for the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers Union (ICEM), an international union organization representing 20 million workers in 114 countries. The next day they drove out to the Mojave Desert and the borax mine owned by Rio Tinto and worked by ILWU Local 30. They toured the open pit mine and the processing facilities with Local 30 President Ray Panter, then returned to the union hall where they addressed the Local members about the problems they are having with their common employer.

So far Local 30 has fared better with Rio Tinto, coming out of last year’s negotiations with a good contract. Panter suggests that’s in part because the mine has more in common with the company than Local 20A does.

“We’re their gem in the desert,” Panter said. “Things are going well for the local right now. A recent huge mine slide has required Rio Tinto to invest millions in new, bigger equipment to keep up production and 200 new people are being hired. But, especially after hearing of the Australian situation, Panter’s optimism is tempered with skepticism.

“We know if they’re going to spend this much money, they’re going to try to get it back somehow, and where that’s going to be, I’m not sure,” Panter said. “They’ve put out a memo asking for our participation in how to cut costs. I balked on that big time. In other words, ‘Here’s a butcher knife. Cut your own throat.’

The next day the Australians visited Rio Tinto’s borax packaging and processing operation at the L.A. port, which is worked by ILWU Local 20A members. Local President Eddie Sanches took them on a tour of the facilities and the export bulk ship loading system worked by ILWU Locals 13, 63 and 94. Then the visitors talked about Rio Tinto and their natural alliance with the ILWU.

They wanted to have a global connection via e-mail and their Web site, Sanchez said. “So any time anything happens or comes up over here, all the other unions working for Rio Tinto are aware of what’s going on so we can join with them in some kind of protest and let the company know what’s going on is not right and we’re not going to stand for it. They have the right idea.”

Local 13 had previous relations with the CFMEU. A Local 13 delegation, including current President Mike Freese, had attended a CFMEU national convention in May 1997 and another group, including then Local 13’s Ramon Ponce De Leon, Local 63 Secretary/B.A. Joe Gasparo and Local 94 President George Kurkavits, visited CFMEU in the spring of 1996 and checked out a coal export dock the LAXT facility was modeled after when it was still in the planning phase.

“We’d formed a friendship,” Freese said. So when Coates and Vaccaneo arrived in L.A., Local 13 put them up in a hotel and hosted a dinner for them with members of Locals 13, 20A, 63 and 94. They talked about the plight of the mine workers in Australia and how the unions are being forced out,” Freese said. “They were really adamant about telling us what a good job we did when we had the Columbia Canada. They said it was the biggest thing in the news in Australia at the time. ‘They didn’t ask for direct help because of the tough secondary boycott laws there,’ Local 63 President Tom Warren said. “And they didn’t ask for direct financial help, but we didn’t think if they need it, we’d be sure to help because of what they did for the longshoremen there.”

ILWU International Secretary-Treasurer Joe Ibarra also met up with the CFMEU officers in L.A. and pledged the union’s help.

“The ILWU is appalled at Rio Tinto’s failure to recognize worker rights in Australia,” Ibarra said. “We intend to notify our members about this situation and do whatever is necessary to support the Australian workers.”

MORE TRAVELING, MORE MEETINGS

From California Coates, Vaccaneo and the ICEM’s Zinn flew to Utah to meet with USWA members who work the Kennecott copper mine owned by Rio Tinto and with officials of the Utah State AFL-CIO. Both groups offered their support.

“We informed Kennecott officials that the USWA is in full support of the CFMEU,” said Terry Bonds, Director of the USWA’s District 12 which includes about 1,500 workers at the Kennecott mine. “An injury to a worker anywhere is an injury to workers everywhere and we want to ensure that Rio Tinto adheres to the highest labor standards no matter where it does business.”

The traveling delegation then proceeded to Washington, D.C. for meetings with AFL-CIO officials and Jerry Jones, Vice President of the United Mine Workers. From there it was off to London to crash Rio Tinto’s annual stockholders meeting.

At the meeting the CFMEU officials, joined by CFMEU National Secretary John Maitland and ICEM British Vice President Fred Higgs, distributed their own 38-page “Stakeholders Report” on Rio Tinto’s business operations. Entitled “Rio Tinto: Behind the Facade,” it details the company’s human rights abuses, worker health and safety violations and large-scale environmental pollution and ties these to the company’s poor financial performance.

A number of Australian and British unionists had bought shares in Rio Tinto so they could raise questions during the meeting about the company’s policies towards unions in Australia and around the world. ICEM officials also offered to facilitate a resolution to the dispute between Rio Tinto and the CFMEU, but company officials declined.

“In the present circumstances we have no choice but to continue and intensify the ICEM campaign on Rio Tinto,” Maitland said.

For more information on the campaign against Rio Tinto visit the ICEM web site at www.icem.org.
The ILWU Blues Band rocks the night shift

By Maria Brooks

The sounds of hot Chicago Blues spill from warehouse Local 6. Sundays are usually quiet at the hall, but on this day the musicians of the ILWU Blues Band have come together to jam.

A hoarse vocalist with long black hair struts back and forth clutching a mic, his voice nearly drowned out by the electric guitar. "Tellautomatic. Slim...we're gonna pitch a ball down to that union hall," belches Pecker, ducked in a demonic chant that would have made Howlin' Wolf proud.

Pecker's job is West Bay business agent for Local 6. He has gained a reputation for his rendition of "Wang, Dang, Doodle." He appears soft-spoken until he takes the microphone.

"Fred can really Wang Dang Doodle," Dave Williams, an ILWU member and fan, says admiringly. "I always request it when I hear them play. They played a benefit at New College awhile back. They were the warm up band, but they stole the show. They got people dancing. They play good old dancing blues.

The band's four musicians are members of Local 6: "I've been in the union for 23 years," says Joe Vasconcellos, the band's harmonica player who recently lost his job when California Builders Hardware closed.

Like the others in the band, Vasconcellos is married with kids. "We have families. We're home owners with responsibilities," he says. But he makes time for music. "When I first heard a harmonica in that Chicago style, I got hooked. I had to learn it."

Vasconcellos can use up his harmonica addiction. It's like a drug habit." At twenty-five bucks a harp, it adds up.

Hiram Bell, the leader of the ILWU Blues Band, works as a forklift operator and warehouseman at Guittard Chocolate Company in the daytime. At night he plays one of eleven instruments. Born and raised in the Paholo Valley of Hawaii, Bell also paints and draws.

"It's a pleasure to play with somebody of his caliber," says Vasconcellos when Bell is out of the room. Bell plays guitar, keyboards, and alto saxophone and is the band's lead singer. In his free time he plays in an Hawaiian music band and teaches the ukulele.

Quiet and intense, he selects material for the group. "The musician who's had the greatest affect on me is Igor Stravinsky," Bell says. The Russian composer gave the world the "Rite of Spring" and "The Firebird." Bell has drawn portraits of Stravinsky, whom he calls the "greatest of them all."

Buddy Trujillo, the band's drummer, is another Guittard worker and a third generation musician. His mother comes from the Apache nation in Arizona.

"Music was a part of our family," he says sitting behind his drums, sporting an ILWU tee shirt and dark glasses.

The band is as diverse as the blues. "We are one Mestizo, one native Hawaiian, a Guatamalan and a Jew," says Pecker, the band's bassist. Each comes from a different background, but together they share a powerful bond—a passion for music.

They jam in the union's conference room. On the wall behind them hangs a dark, brooding painting depicting a pitch battle between police and workers in 1936. A bloody arm waves a torn banner with the single word—SOLIDARITY.

"The painting used to hang in the old ILWU building at 150 Golden Gate," says Pecker. For blues and jazz lovers in the 1940s and 50s that address was the place to be on Saturday nights.

The Blues Band carries on an ILWU tradition of bringing music and people together when the workday is over. The "Green Room" in the basement of the old ILWU headquarters was known to musicians around the country. Even today, it is remembered by old timers with a taste for great jazz.

"We wanted the membership who worked together to play together," says Bill Watkins of Local 10. "We had top acts.

Louis Armstrong played the Green Room several times. On one occasion he brought Jack Teagarden on trombone and Earl Hines at the piano. There was dancing,

"It seemed like the floor was on fire," remembers Watkins. "As the place filled up with dancers, you'd feel the floor go up and down. There was no better place to be in town."

Armstrong was not welcome in some nightclubs in the city because of segregation and racial restrictions. In the early 1930s Harry Bridges had befriended him. In later years Armstrong would make a point of playing at the Green Room when he came through town.

Many jazz and blues greats appeared at the union. Kid Ory's Creole band performed after WWII. Buck Johnson, the Louisiana bluesman and trumpeter, jammed regularly at the ILWU. Harry Bridges offered him a job, but Johnson stuck around and play his Delta Blues.

There were popular workers' bands too, garage bands made up of musicians from the ILWU and the seamen's unions. When times were rocky, these bands kept up workers' morale.

"When the 1948 Strike came along, nobody was working," says Watkins. "The picket lines were up and the members needed some place to blow off steam. Many went to the Green Room.

Then times got better. By the end of the 1950s members drifted away from social events at the union hall. They bought television sets and moved out to the suburbs.

"They'd work all day long," says Watkins. "Come five o'clock, they went home. They knew nothing about each other off the job."

At Local 6 the door to the alley is propped open. People on the street are slowing down to listen.

"You've gotta help me, Mama, I can't do it by myself. You gotta help me, Mama or I'm gonna find somebody else," croons Pecker. Vasconcellos bends over the harmonica, cupping his hands around the mic. His tattooed arms press tightly against his chest. The dusty, whining sounds of the blues harp fill the room.

The band is rehearsing for a special performance for Bloody Thursday, July 8th. The ILWU Blues Band will be featured at a concert and light show at Justin Herman Plaza, an event to celebrate the naming of the "Harry Bridges Plaza" in front of the San Francisco Ferry Building.

When the last chords of the song fade, Vasconcellos, grabs a beer from the ice chest.

"It's open mic nights," he says. "Any members of the union can come down to the hall and bring their instruments. We're the union brothers who love to play music."

Hiram Bell gives the cue and the bluesmen get back to work. Out on the street, the opening chords to Mystery Train causes a passerby to stop a minute and smile.

The ILWU Blues Band is available for hire and can be reached at 415-563-2317.

Protesters greet Zedillo

ILWU International President Brian McWilliams addressed more than 100 labor and human rights protesters at a spirited rally in front of San Francisco's Fairmont hotel May 18, greeting Mexico's President Zedillo on his first official visit to California. Fair trade and human rights activists, environmentalists and unionists called on Zedillo to deal with the root causes of illegal immigration by enforcing workers' rights and the rights of Mexico's indigenous people.

"Workers have the same problems where ever we are," McWilliams told the crowd. "The ILWU very well understands that the rights of U.S. workers are never secure as long as Mexican workers rights are not secure.

Although dozens of cops kept the demonstrators behind barriers across the street, the 15 foot-tall maquiladora worker puppets were hard to miss. Protestors displayed 395 crosses honoring the immigrants who have died crossing the border since 1994.

"The crosses represent another group of NAFTA victims," said Sandra Alvarez from Global Exchange. "Zedillo should remember that his inability to create safe, healthy working conditions and enforce workers' rights is fueling much of the immigration."
After a year of hard bargaining, workers at the Allegience Healthcare warehouse in Hayward, Calif., have a union contract and a $500 signing bonus in their pockets.

While full employer-paid medical benefits have not been won, the contract firmly establishes warehouse Local 6 in the house. The union hiring hall—local language requires management to post jobs at the hall with the right to choose from outside sources if no one meets their requirements. The agreement, signed April 12, nearly eliminates the large temp worker contingent, and most of the previous temps have been hired as probationary employees.

"We had a first contract goes, it’s okay," said bargaining committee member Richard Rouse. "Hopefully we can improve it in three years."

The nine percent pay increase over the three-year deal will help make up a slow erosion in wages workers experienced since decertifying a different union a few years ago. Since then pay increases lagged even further behind inflation than most non-union outfits, with the last increase of 1.5 percent coming in 1993. The approximate one worker will now have seven sick days and eleven paid holidays per year.

The owners of Allegiance’s profits increased enormously last year. The company reported a five percent sales increase to $4.574 billion, while corporate profits soared 38 percent in the last quarter. It merged with Cardinal Healthcare in February to create a $21 billion conglomerate that can supply as high as 80 percent of a typical hospital’s needs. Cardinal’s 15,000 employees and Allegiance’s 22,000 employees are scattered around the world in 100 facilities on six continents. The new Local 6 workers at the Hayward warehouse warehouses make medical kits and ship hospital supplies in a just-in-time delivery system.

The employees had been imposed a two-tier wage system last year and increased the temp-worker contingent to 30 percent, workers knew they were in trouble. Some people had to re-apply for their jobs. Others left when they could no longer afford medical co-payments. Workers faced the ironic situation of working in an industry that made massive profits off the health care they could no longer afford.

Management’s trail of broken promises at the company’s parent company, Plummer’s furniture warehouse, is a problem. The company reported a 10 percent profit over the last quarter. It merged with Cardinal Healthcare in February to create a $21 billion conglomerate that can supply as high as 80 percent of a typical hospital’s needs. Cardinal’s 15,000 employees and Allegiance’s 22,000 employees are scattered around the world in 100 facilities on six continents. The new Local 6 workers at the Hayward warehouse warehouses make medical kits and ship hospital supplies in a just-in-time delivery system.

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I4ETTERS

at the Southwest Labor Studies

Conference April 30. Choi has a post-

Rhetoric of Inclusion: The I.WW and

innocent man’s life is greatness in

action to stop the execution of Mumia

(Theresa), John Brower, John Carey;

Abu-Jamal honors the labor move-

ment, unionism and ourselves.

The Elaine Black-Yoneda Award

I am so proud of the ILWU. Your

The Walter Williams story edited

The Rev. Jesse Jackson and former

Local 4—William

Local 3—Alrina

Local 10—Muriel Melin, Pauline Dorsa,

Margaret DeCloedt, Lucy Martinez,

Mercedes Frizzar, Barbara Brooks; Local

Local 14—Genevieve Borgeson; Local

Local 6—Elizabeth Otis, Mary Presley,

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Theresa Marquez, Julia Aguila...
Karl Yoneda, Working class hero

By Tom Price

Karl Yoneda's father named him after Karl Marx. He meant "strength of character." He later re-named himself Karl Yoneda, in the same way two names would serve him well in his 92 years of life, the given name symbolizing his class consciousness and the taken name honoring his penetrating analytic of capitalist society. He and his wife, Elaine Black-Yoneda, dedicated their lives to building the labor movement and were intimately involved with the history of the ILWU.

Yoneda was born to Japanese immigrant parents in Glendale, Calif. in 1906, and into an America still fouled by racism barely 40 years after the violent abolishment of slavery in 1865. He grew up the Pacific. He marched with the most militant groups, and barely escaped when the police charged into the crowd. He quickly returned to San Francisco, this time with a passport.

Instead of returning to school he joined the labor movement, working his strength of character, the taken names would serve him well in his 92 years of life, the given name symbolizing his class consciousness and the taken name honoring his penetrating analytic of capitalist society. He and his wife, Elaine Black-Yoneda, dedicated their lives to building the labor movement and were intimately involved with the history of the ILWU.

Yoneda read the works of Marx and the Russian anarcho-Vasily Eroshenko, who was killed with a Russian ship in 1922. Along the way in the port of Shimonoseki he worked his first job at a cafe to send money to his family in Russia.

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ILWU Book & Video Sale

BOOKS:
The ILWU Story: unrolls 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. $7.00
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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. $13.00
Reds or Rackets: The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront By Howard Krimeldorf: a thoughtful and provocative comparison of the ILA and the ILWU. $11.00
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Workers on the Waterfront: A Longshore Artist's View By Jean Gundlach and Jake Arnautoff: wonderful line drawings and text about longshore work. $7.00 (55 benefits Bridges Chair at the University of Washington)

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Life on the Beam: A Memorial to Harry Bridges A 17 -minute VHS video production by California Working Group, Inc., memorializes Harry Bridges through still photographs, recorded interviews, and reminiscences. Originally produced for the 1990 memorial service in San Francisco. $28.00

ORDER BY MAIL

BACK TO BASICS IN 1999
The ILWU has always come together during contract years. Now is the time for the membership to show the employers and the world that we understand who we are and what we want. This union was founded on the principles of protecting longshore workers through protecting our hiring hall, protecting our conditions on the job, protecting those who came before us with a good pension and protecting our families through good medical coverage.

White Hat Day EVERY THURSDAY
To show our colors the Coast Committee is asking the membership and their families to wear the Lundeberg Stetson, the old longshore white cap, EVERY THURSDAY until we have the contract we deserve!

A Helping Hand...
...when you need it most. That's what we're all about. We are the representatives of the ILWU-sponsored recovery programs. We provide professional and confidential assistance to you and your family for alcoholism, drug abuse and other problems—and we're just a phone call away.

ILWU LONGSHORE DIVISION
ADRP—Southern California
Jackie Cummings
870 West Ninth St. #201
San Pedro, CA 90731
(310) 547-9966

ADRP—Northern California
George Gobbs
400 North Point
San Francisco, CA 94133
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ILWU WAREHOUSE DIVISION
DARE—Northern California
Gary Atkinson
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ILWU CANADIAN AREA
EAP—British Columbia
Bill Bloor
745 Clark Drive, Suite 205
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ADD $2.00 PER ITEM FOR ORDERS OUTSIDE THE U.S.

Total Enclosed $