Peace on Earth

Solidarity Forever
Inside Line

SEATTLE SHOWS WTO'S TRUE COLORS

If there were ever any doubts about the World Trade Organization representing a cynical and sinister corporate coup, one week in Seattle laid them to rest.

On the morning of Tuesday, Nov. 30 police assaulted anti-WTO demonstrators with tear gas, pepper spray and rubber bullets in large sections of downtown Seattle. Local television stations broadcast a scene described as "clad anarchists" started smashing windows and stealing media attention from the tens of thousands of protesters in the streets with a message.

Freedom of speech and assembly was not to be tolerated when the upper echelons of the world's ruling class were gathering to carve up the big pie. The police state, ruled by the Constitution, was banished. We got a quick preview—a horror movie teaser—of the future envisioned by the WTO.

Although even President Clinton and Trevor Manuel, the editor of the Journal of Commerce have called for opening up the WTO to more public scrutiny, accountability and debate, the Seattle delegates made it clear they had tolerated just about as much "transparency" as they were going to—and that wasn't much.

The accesses the WTO gave to members of non-governmental organizations would get you past the police on the street. You could get past the police at the front gate of the Convention Center, the police at the door of the Convention Center and the security at the metal detectors just inside the door. From there you could make your way to the smoke-filled hallways or go to the plenary hall where a procession of trade bureaucrats gave boring speeches, reveling in their 15 minutes of fame.

But the NGO badge couldn't get you past the plain clothes security in front of the side rooms, where delegations were doing the dirty work of debating and cobbling together the details of the new trade agreements. Even the Assembly Member Audie Bock, the Delegate for the Convention state with a higher GNP than most of the WTO member countries, couldn't get in.

The delegates also made it clear that any agreement that included global labor standards would lose them the right to organize and bargain collectively. If a country violated these standards, it would face trade sanctions similar to those the WTO levees for what it decides are unfair trade practices.

But expecting the corporate trade bureaucrats who run the WTO to enforce labor rights is a case of letting the fox guard the chicken coop. As we build these coalitions and alliances toward corporate globalization, we must face the tough questions and ask ourselves: Where do we go after Seattle?

The labor movement did itself proud in Seattle, demonstrating its potential as a progressive social force in the U.S. And that goes double for the ILWU. With our high turnout, our militancy and especially our closing the Coast, we grabbed the media and captured the imagination of the movement.

Once again the ILWU is being looked to for leadership. So we must face the tough questions and ask ourselves: Where do we go after Seattle?

By Brian McWilliams

ILWU International President

The week of demonstrations against the free trade policies of the World Trade Organization in Seattle charged the nature of the debate—and perhaps most importantly, the range of participants in the debate—about international trade and the global economy. Seattle brought up the issues of labor standards and environmental protections front and center, and these must be addressed.

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Calling for the abolition of the WTO is like blaming the messenger for the message.

Our sugar workers in Hawaii are an example of the way protect quality, environmental concerns and labor standards have been held hostage to the trade policies of international cartels long before the WTO was conceived. After fighting long and hard for decent wages, conditions, benefits and pensions, they watched production and jobs move to other parts of the world where the employers can exploit other workers for far less compensation.

Our warehouse and allied divisions have also been hit by these global policies. They've lost jobs and members due to runaway plants and downsizing, without any consideration for the unemployment and dislocation suffered by the workers and their families.

So we shouldn't feel too giddy that our street actions in Seattle ended with the WTO making no new agreements, not even one on how to continue negotiations. Instead we must stay aware of all the different ways corporate globalization attacks workers and the environment and be prepared to fight each individual assault as we fight to implement global policy. To do that we'll need a strategy. This includes building the coalitions we made in Seattle. Labor, environmentalists and social justice activists gained new respect for each other. As we work together, we realize that we have common goals and saw once more that unity brings strength. Most importantly, though, we can only hold up these attacks by transnational capital if workers organize internationally.

The ILWU is already an active member of a number of international workers' organizations, like the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), the International Federation of Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant Workers Associations (IUF) and others.

Through these orgs we can continue development and advocate global labor standards. As we build these coalitions and alliances toward corporate globalization, we must respect differences in social and cultural norms. For example, although we may want to prohibit child labor, in some countries the income children earn is crucial for a family's survival, so such prohibitions must include alternatives to make sure that the policy doesn't become an enforcement of poverty.

Such policies should also recognize the shortcomings of labor rights in developed countries and move to improve them in such areas as a prohibition against strikebreaking, obstacles to organizing and collective bargaining, the right to free health care, living wages and protection for the rights of immigrants. Any international organization will need to address the significant gap in living standards between workers in developed and less-developed countries. As long as this gap exists decent wages-paying jobs will drain out of developed countries—with or without the formal agreements of the WTO.

U.S. unions need to take that into consideration when formulating any international policies. We must always work to protect the jobs of our North American brothers and sisters. We must always be on the lookout for the wages and benefits that come with jobs. We must be aware of the campaigns run by activist labor and the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively. If a country violated these standards, it would face trade sanctions similar to those the WTO levies for what it decides are unfair trade practices.

For example, the United States has only agreed to two of the seven core labor rights the ILO set out 80 years ago, and President Clinton just signed onto the second one, prohibiting prohibitions against strikebreaking, obstacles to organizing and collective bargaining, the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively. If a country violated these standards, it would face trade sanctions similar to those the WTO levies for what it decides are unfair trade practices.

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THE DISPATCHER
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WTO protests rattle Seattle

McWilliams was nearly drowned out when he turned to the north stands where the ILWU contingent assembled, their bright yellow and blue picket signs punctuating his words. “No one can make this statement stronger than longshore workers who make their living moving international cargo. And what do we want? We demand fair trade—not free trade—not the policies of the WTO that are devastating workers everywhere and the planet that sustains us,” he said.

As the speeches wound down, the crowd filed out of the stadium and lined up to march to downtown Seattle to take its message to the WTO.

While the unionists were in the stadium that morning, tens of thousands of other WTO protesters—environmentalists, social justice activists, fair trade advocates, students and others—had taken the streets of downtown Seattle, many planning—and succeeding—to physically block and shut down the WTO’s opening ceremonies at the Paramount Theater.

The outnumbered police responded with tear gas in an attempt to disperse the crowd. Later that morning a handful of so-called “black-clad anarchists” began smashing the windows of such sweatshop outlets as The Gap and Old Navy as well as other Seattle-based companies like Nordstrom’s and Starbucks. Police used these activities as an excuse to escalate their “crowd control” tactics, hoisting people with pepper spray, shooting rubber bullets into crowds and beating and arresting protesters who had nothing to do with the vandalism.

Although the labor march had ended and dispersed peacefully by late afternoon, Seattle Mayor Paul Schell suspended First Amendment rights to free speech and assembly in the city, imposing a 7:00 p.m. to dawn curfew and declaring a large 50-block section of downtown a “no-protest zone.”

Later that night police pushed protesters away from the downtown area to the Capitol Hill neighborhood. There, far from the no-protest zone, police inundated the residential neighborhood with tear gas and beat and arrested people completely unconnected with the protests as they patronized their local restaurants and cafes. Skirmishes between demonstrators and police continued in the streets and the stinging smell of tear gas lingered in Seattle most of the night.

The corporate media focused on the spectacular—the broken windows and street bonfires and the violent clashes between police and demonstrators. Those scenes were easier to report and sold more newspapers than stories dealing with the political criticism of the WTO’s free trade policies.

The next day the United Steelworkers of America held a rally in conjunction with environmentalists at Seattle’s Pier 63 to protest Japan, Russia and other countries dumping steel at below production costs on the American market, resulting in the loss of many steel workers’ jobs. At the demonstration steel workers throw mock steel I-beams made of styrofoam labeled “Dump prison labor goods” and “Human rights for working families overseas” into the Puget Sound to symbolize their disconcerted.

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The free trade advocates of the WTO have come to Seattle to further their strategic takeover of the global economy. We in the ILWU want to give them the welcome they deserve and let them know what we think of their plans. So we've closed the Port of Seattle and other ports on the West Coast. There will be no business as usual today.

In closing these ports the ILWU is demonstrating to the corporate CEOs and their agents here in Seattle that the global economy will not run without the consent of the workers. And we don't just mean longshore workers, but workers everywhere in this country and around the world.

When the ILWU boycotted cargo from El Salvador and apartheid South Africa, when we would not work scab grapes from the California valley or cross picket lines in support of the fired Liverpool dockers, these were concrete expressions of our understanding that the interests of working people transcend national and local boundaries, and that labor solidarity truly means that when necessary we will engage in concrete action.

That is why the ILWU is here today, with all of you—to tell the agents of global capital that we, the workers, those who care about social justice and protecting our rights and our planet, will not sit quietly by while they meet behind closed doors to carve up our world. We know that what they have in mind for us is a race to the bottom, dismantling our protective laws wherever they find us weak, that they want to pit workers of one country against the workers of another, to erase our protections and standards in an international corporate feeding frenzy in which workers are not just on the menu—we are the main course. We will not cooperate!

We know our history, our legacy and our ongoing responsibility. No one can make this statement stronger than longshore workers who make their living moving international cargo. And what do we want? We demand fair trade—not free trade—not the policies of the WTO that are devastating workers everywhere and the planet that sustains us.

And let us be clear. Let's not allow the free traders to paint us as isolationist anti-traders. We are for trade. Don't ever forget—it is the labor of working people that produces all the wealth. When we say we demand fair trade policies we mean we demand a world in which trade brings dignity and fair treatment to all workers, with its benefits shared fairly and equally, a world which the interconnectedness of trade promotes peace and encourages healthy and environmentally sound and sustainable development, a world which promotes economic justice and social justice and environmental sanity. The free traders promote economic injustice, social injustice and environmental insanity.

We are sending the WTO this message loud and clear. We will not sit idly by while you corporate puppets of the WTO plot this economic coup. You will not seize control of our world without a fight.

Are you ready for the fight?
Damn right!
30,000 unionists marched through the streets of Seattle, Nov. 30.

Longshore Local 10 President Lawrence Thibeaux (left) conducts a chant with his umbrella.

Protesters face a line of police.

ILWU rank and file made their voices heard.

Tear gas fogged downtown Seattle regularly during the WTO meeting.
Steelworkers and longshore workers were the largest and most militant union presence at the Seattle demonstrations.

Coast Committeeeman Ray Ortiz Jr. (center with cap) marched with the ILWU contingent.

Protesters blocked WTO delegates from opening ceremonies, locking themselves together inside steel tubes covered in duct tape.

Police handcuff demonstrators before hauling them off to the county jail.
Local 23 President Roger Boesphlug, International Vice President, Mainland Jim Spinosa, Coast Committeeman Bob McElrath and International Vice President, Hawaii Leonard Hoshijo march with the ILWU contingent.

Many students from the University of Washington turned out for the week’s demonstrations.

Workers from France’s La Confédération Générale du Travail (General Workers Confederation) joined the Seattle demonstration.
Members of the ILWU International Executive Board join Longshore Locals 12 (North Bend) and 21 (Longview) on the march.

King County Labor Council Secretary-Treasurer Ron Judd (second from left) and ILWU International President Brian McWilliams (third from left with cap) on the march.

French farmers came to Seattle to protest the WTO’s policies on agricultural trade and genetically modified foods.

(Longshore Local 10 BA Richard Mead (second from right) protected longshore jurisdiction as he helped steelworkers throw mock steel I-beams into Puget Sound at their anti-dumping demonstration Wednesday, Dec. 1.

(ILWU-Canada contingent. (Left to right) Longshore Local 10 President Lawrence Thibeaux, Hawaii IEB member Ernesto Domingo, Hawaii IEB member Teddy Espeleta, International Vice President, Hawaii Leonard Hoshijo, Hawaii IEB member Rocky Sanches and Hawaii IEB member Patrick DePonte.
By that evening the media began to get it that police were out of control, using excessive force and systematically violating citizens' Constitutional rights. Reports, photos and video footage of police brutality were everywhere. Suddenly Mayor Schell and Seattle Police Chief Norm Stamper were on the hot seat.

Thursday students from the University of Washington and Seattle Central Community College organized a march challenging the no-protest zone and joined up with another march of several thousand farmers from all over the world protesting the WTO's policies on genetically modified foods and its attempt at establishing an agricultural agreement favoring corporate farming over family farms. The police, on the defensive about allegations of attacking non-violent protesters, kept their distance and allowed the march to proceed to Steinberg Park on the waterfront for a rally. Speakers included Ralph Nader and Jim Hightower, who jabbed the WTO with humorous lines. With an almost warm sun shining the gathering took on a festive mood.

Later that evening hundreds of demonstrators marched on the county jail, surrounding the complex for several hours and demanding that the nearly 500 people incarcerated that week during protests be released. Many people, at times surging to a crowd of 1,000, maintained a round-the-clock presence at the jail continuously through Sunday. Trade unionists, including ILWU members, played an important role at the prison vigil. The gathering culminated on Sunday afternoon in a multi-faith religious service with testimony from some who had been victimized by the police and jail authorities. Ultimately the number of arrests rose to nearly 600, with most of them released by Monday, Dec. 6.

On Friday local labor leaders, community activists, environmentalists and students organized another march to claim back their city from the police state imposed and to refocus attention away from the violence issue and back to their concerns about the WTO. Some 4,000 people assembled in front of the Labor Temple and marched into the no-protest zone and back again, pulling off a peaceful demonstration. Some of the youths involved in Tuesday's vandalism joined the march looking for more action, but they were graciously escorted by a contingent of longshore and construction trade workers throughout the day without incident.

By the end of the week the media—and President Clinton—acknowledged that the protesters had legitimate points to make and even reported some of them. The demonstrators—labor, environmentalists, social justice activists and students—built new bridges and found through their experiences that they could be allies and could make each other stronger.

The WTO delegates, on the other hand, learned that they could not find common ground. No consensus was reached on the agricultural agreement that WTO proponents had touted as the all-important one. And no agreement was reached on how to proceed with the next round of trade talks, giving a victory to opponents who called for no new extensions of WTO power.

—Steve Stabone
Mobilizing For Contract Negotiations

By Leonard Hoshiio
ILWU International Vice President, Hawaii

More than 1,200 newly organized Hawaii members in the past two years translate into the best results this decade, and that’s not counting significant West Coast wins. Not since the “boom economy” organizing of 1986-1991, or for decades before that, have we achieved these figures between Hawaii conventions. Yes, we know how to build a program, now that resources were redirected to organizing after the 1997 International Convention, but we’ve only thus far translated the gains into the next round.

We can be proud of the success, but to build on it we should also look for problems. We have something good to support in the organizing program, interrupted development, growing pains and all. But now are we geared up to mobilize for contract negotiations?

A MAJOR CHALLENGE

Our organizing success accentuates a major challenge facing our union: Local-wide mobilization for contract negotiations. We see more employer aggression, rather than bargaining, and must respond. Furthermore, if a Local doesn’t increase its capacity to fully integrate new Units, with contracts, it becomes a limit on future organizing.

In preparing to fight for a contract, or “internal” organizing, is critical to existing ILWU Units as well as for the newly organized. Some existing Units have straightforward, businesslike negotiations. Some Units have mobilized. However, even leadership from well-mobilized longshore ranks has pointed out the need to educate and organize new generations of members.

More and more Units need to start mobilization months ahead of negotiations, preparing for confrontational employers. Mobilizing can also result in smooth negotiations when an employer comes in motivated to bargain in good faith.

Building a Local’s capacity to impact negotiations calls for “multi-pronged” mobilization for contract negotiations:

• Do the most basic work of educating and organizing members to take action as their contract talks approach.
• Develop corporate pressure campaigns, probing where owners or management companies can be helped or hurt in the business world, and/or the importance of their corporate image.
• Build public support among other ILWU members, ILWU pensioners, other unions, community organizations and in government. Consider using the media to keep employer behavior in the public eye.

While all conditions are intensified for first contracts at newly organized companies, more employers in general see squeezing organized companies, more employers in general see squeezing, pensions, other unions, community organizations and in government. Consider using the media to keep employer behavior in the public eye.

Mobilizing to fight for a contract, or “internal” organizing, is critical.

This approach would avoid immediate changes in duties for existing staff. No matter who is ultimately assigned to contract mobilization, everyone must take up a share of the work. Those assigned to contract campaigns can’t be told: “You do it,” instead of “We will do it.” Leadership must make their commitment felt. BAs and organizers should stand prepared to reinforce any public activity. Political action must be aimed at upholding contractual standards of living. Rank-and-file members must take up the struggle for their own future. It sounds a lot like what’s needed for successful organizing because facing employer wealth and power is a form of organizing.

The need for contract mobilization organizing isn’t new. Leaders of the 1990s and early 1990s knew that. They also knew that the type of organizing work would have to be accounted for, and it would be a definite change for anyone doing strictly “servicing.” Is this viable? Or instead, should selected BAs be shifted and trained for contact organizing?

Whether or not this route is taken, extra ordinary work by BAs is needed when a new Unit is organized, understanding it can’t be treated like an established Unit. If “servicing” staff can shift gears to develop newly organized Units, that’s a contribution in itself, short of a substantial shift of BA time to new organizing.

Do we add specialized contract mobilization staff? The alternative to changing the work of existing staff is to add staff, probably with organizing backgrounds. In the end any new program means taking resources from somewhere else, but...

AN ORGANIZER’S APPROACH

The key starting point is an “organizing approach” internally, among our members in both new and long-established units. An organizing approach includes:

• Leadership recruitment and training
• One-to-one contact with members
• Analysis of workplace relationships, issues, and power centers
• Knowledge of 1986-1991 tactics and strike
• Clear communication with the members
• Legal support
• Workers doing it for themselves.

From that foundation community outreach, corporate work research, political action and other components make it a campaign. The negotiating committee, with an overlapping mobilization committee, sets direction.

Who will do it? That’s the tough question. Rank-and-file members must mobilize their Unit, but assistance is needed for planning, training and other coordination.

Do we shift organizers over? Experienced organizers may be most oriented to such approaches, but when we deploy organizers to contract campaigns, “new organizing” doesn’t happen. We could add organizers, conceding that a number of them would be on contract campaigns at any given time. We’ve done that, but it doesn’t suit our priority of new member organizing.

We’re also reminded that the purpose of a union, the entire union, is to organize workers to advance themselves, including those who are already members. Contract negotiations and grievance handling grow out of that “internal” organizing. They don’t replace it.

Do we expect Local BAs and/or staff to do it? They could be given tools and training to lead this aspect of union work. Their current work would not be accounted for, and it would be a definite change for anyone doing strictly “servicing.” Is this viable? Or instead, should selected BAs be shifted and trained for contact organizing?

Mobilizing to fight for a contract, or “internal” organizing, is critical.

ORGANIZING SUCCESS IS FRAGILE

We’re in position to move to a higher level. An organizing team has been assembled and tested in Hawaii. Various combinations of organizers, key infusions of hard work by both members and non-members, a learning attitude, basic research capacity, etc., produced results.

Recent drives have been against heavy anti-union campaigns in drag-out NLRB elections, with no clear-cut leverage on the companies. Our positive results have come while organizers have been engaged in other battles of the union, preventing full concentration on organizing.

We’re on a good course, but with a long way to go. Even a successful program can be very fragile. A “new misdirection,” a lapse in concentration or internal politics can spur a reversal. To the extent we have a coordinated, unified program we can organize. “If it ain’t broke” support it and build it.

TRADEWINDS

December 1999
Season's Greetings

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Joe Ibarra  Secretary-Treasurer

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