Courier contract campaign gears up—page 3

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INTERNATIONAL LONGSHORE AND WAREHOUSE UNION

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MAY 1, 2000

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Put the money into organizing

By Brian McWilliams
ILWU International President

As this is being written the Longshore Division is about to hold a special caucus on Feb. 28 for the purpose of considering recommendation for Constitutional changes to take to the 31st ILWU Constitutional Convention in May. The Longshore Division Constitution Committee will be recommending to the Longshore Caucus a proposal that any single division of the union at its discretion may submit an increase in the salaries of the International Officers across the board. This proposal is born from a longstanding frustration of many Longshore Division members that the current salary of $80,063 for the President and $78,599 for the other Titled Officers may represent a substantial pay cut, discouraging those who might otherwise run for those positions.

While it is important to reach out to every corner of our union to encourage participation, this proposal moves us away from one of the basic tenets of ILWU philosophy that the Officers’ salaries and lifestyles should reasonably reflect those of the members we serve. We should act to preserve that concept. The ILWU Constitution sets the Titled Officers’ salaries and includes a formula for raises in keeping with that philosophy. That formula—first established in 1979—gives a percentage raise equal to the average of the increase in the base rate of pay in the ILWU’s three largest contracts, West Coast, Northern California and Warehouse’s Local 142’s major hotel agreements—during the previous calendar year. The proposal being presented to the Longshore Caucus would give the Officers a nearly 60 percent raise.

The proposal also includes the same salary increase for the two Coast Committee members and the Coast Benefits Specialist who currently make as much as the International Vice Presidents.

When you add up all the ancillary costs associated with salaries (benefits, insurance, etc.) it could easily come to hundreds of thousands of dollars over the next three years. What else could we be doing with that money?

When you look at the average wage available under ILWU contracts, you find that our Officers are actually compensated handsomely. (Besides the salary Officers receive $50 per week for expenses, $150 per month car allowance and auto insurance.)

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Messeniers strike to get what they worked for

By Marcy Rein

Messeniers at UltraEx popped off their three-month-long strike in late June, celebrating the first ILWU win in the San Francisco Bay Area courrier industry organizing drive. Courriers at Professional Messenger claimed victory in a nail-biter last September. Now the four courrier outfits are fighting again as workers at both companies are picketing and striking, putting on the heat to make the union's promise real.

"When they start to worry about losing customers, then we'll get what we deserve—no doubt," said UltraEx negotiating team member Manuel "Rak" Affonso.

UltraEx hired a bottom-drawer union-buster, Sanford Rudnick, who turned out to be a top-notch staller. The company's 42 bicycle, foot and vehicle messengers put together a modest list of demands that included a small, guaranteed hike in commis- sions; sick leave, vacation and holiday pay; a 25 percent employer contribution to health coverage, and respect for their representation—"No deci- sions about us without us."

In response the company offered cuts or status quo on pay, takeaways on paid time off and health insurance, and provisions that would give man- agers the right to change the commis- sion structure whenever they pleased.

"Where's the good faith?" Affonso asked. "They want us as cheap as they can get us.

"They ran on numbers of disrespect and surface bargaining steadily raised the frustration level. Adding to the work- ers' frustration was a decision-making position at Ultra even during the talks. Rudnick and the 30-member San Francisco site supervisor sat at the table. In late November five messengers decided that they'd take the issue to Ultra's top officers themselves. They gave up a day to make the road trip to company headquarters in Rocklin, California. After a few hours, CEO Sal Grasilia finally showed up.

"Sal was dressed even better than I've ever seen, what with a sharp suit, a fancy watch and a dazzling gold necklace about his neck," said Rudnick, relating. "He made some remarks about 'one fourth of my salary' and 'you've got to give up a day's pay to make the road trip,' which I attacked."

"We didn't have diddly squat," Local 6 West Bay Business Manager Manuel "Rak" Affonso said.

The messengers watched the talks with intent hard looks, keeping discipline. When someone got a bit hotheaded, ready to shout out, others calmed him gently, with a hand on the shoulder—or took a short walk to cool off. But when Rudnick left the session, they remained. They were ready to go.

"They didn't have diddly squat," Local 6 West Bay Business Manager Manuel "Rak" Affonso said.

The company had promised to lay out the numbers to back up its layoff decision, but that was never reported to work.

After investigating the election with current and former ProMess drivers and bike messengers staged the first of after-work unfair labor practice pickets at the transfer station for the company's Express Services Overnite division. The Board's Jan. 31 complaint cited the company for several instances of surveil- lance and interrogation, an illegal firing, requiring all new workers to become independent contractors and several other transgressions.

Instead of settling, Joel Ritch dug in his heels. On Feb. 4 some 20 ProMess drivers and bike messengers staged the first of after-work unfair labor practice pickets at the transfer station for the company's Express Services Overnite division. The Board's Jan. 31 complaint cited the company for several instances of surveil- lance and interrogation, an illegal firing, requiring all new workers to become independent contractors and several other transgressions.

The suit charges ProMess with failure to pay overtime, mileage and vehicle repair costs as legally required, illegally charging drivers of company-owned trucks "gate fees" for use of the vehicles, and failing to pay messengers with full disclosure.

"Most of us were told when we were hired we would earn a 48 percent commission," Green said. "Many of us assumed, as a normal person would, that 48 percent means 48 percent of what the client pays for the service."

Instead, the messengers are paid 48 percent of a confidential "driver book" that they never see—so they never know how they are paid.

When the judge hearing the suit granted the plaintiffs the right to notify current and former ProMess couriers about the action, and ordered the company to give them a list, ProMess owner Joel Ritch balked. He saw not only the mush- rooming costs of the suit, but the ball- looning bill from his $350 per hour union-busting law firm, Littler Mendelson.

For a tentatively hopeful month or so, it looked like a settlement might be reached, and the messen- gers held their fire.

For a tentatively hopeful month or so, it looked like a settlement might be reached, and the messen- gers held their fire.
The most articulate advocates of raising the minimum wage are low-income workers themselves. Cathy Adams, a home care worker from Vola, Illinois, spoke before the House-Senate Minimum Wage Forum on March 19: 

"I literally live paycheck to paycheck," Adams testified. "After paying the bills, whatever is left over goes to groceries. I have $9 in my savings account and I worry about becoming a self-sustainer for my girls' education. I am discouraged that after working up to 60 hours each week, I'm barely able to make ends meet. I sure hope Congress will pass a real minimum wage, because I need the raise." 

It is a disgrace that working families such as Cathy Adams' must live on the edge of financial ruin. Poverty level wages place too much stress on families struggling to stay together and strong. Congress should immediately raise the minimum wage.

Medicare solvency, HMO reform and a minimum wage increase are all winning issues for the Labor Movement if we all concentrate and force Congress to surrender on these points. Working people have the right to demand that we have the future. It is a question of whether we want to keep our families together and live a life of dignity. It is a question of whether we will stand up and demand that Congress pass a real minimum wage.

According to the Economic Policy Institute, when the wage was last raised in 1996, 20 million workers were lifted out of poverty. This year, with the minimum wage further increased, another 2 million workers in 2001 will raise the wage even more since Congress sat on its hands last year and left poor workers out in the cold.

Minimum wage increases ripple upward to help those who are paid more than the minimum wage.

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Minimum wage increases ripple upward to help those who are paid more than the minimum wage.
February 2000

Powell’s talks stick, Local 5 kicks...

By Marcy Rein

After showing a few flickers of reason, management at Powell’s set the stage for the Local 5 strike,Community members, including longshore workers, marched to the local Powell’s in support of the workers.

The Local and its allies to date.

Progress in ILWU Local 5’s first contract talks. The Local and its allies responded with the strongest and most colorful actions of their campaign to date.

More than 350 people filled Burnside Ave. and spilled into Powell’s main store in a pre-strike day party Feb. 12. Just four days later, some 78 workers walked off the job in an unfair labor practice strike and marched downtown to negotiate.

“More and more people are getting involved,” said Gin Enguehard, a Local 5 bargaining team member from Powell’s Beaverton store.

They are willing to talk, to discuss issues. They realize, ‘This is my job. Love songs oozed out of the sound-equipped semi from Teamsters Local 5, the crowd, and two union choirs chimed in. Singing and chanting, bearing valentines and red balloons festooned with hearts and cupids, the crowd urged Michael Powell to stop dallying and start negotiating seriously.

The Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters adjudged its talks with management. The council and two union chairs chimed in. Singing and chanting, bearing valentines and red balloons festooned with hearts and cupids, the crowd urged Michael Powell to stop dallying and start negotiating seriously.

Some 70-plus Powell’s workers and as well, walking off in protest of management’s surveillance of the union caucus during negotiations. An action that could precipitate an unfair labor practice.

A strong majority of the staff at the main store on Burnside left, as did about half the people in the Internet dept., 10 workers from the Hoyt warehouse and a handful from some of Powell’s other locations.

“The more than anything, it had a big effect on people’s spirits,” said Internet service rep Jean-Paul Jenkins. “People were so excited to be doing something together.”

The striking workers massed and marched to the scheduled negotiating session, only to find the corporate team abandoning the talks and scuttling back to the store.

Though unfair labor practices prompted the walkout, they reflect workers’ dissatisfaction with the progress of talks, Jenkins said.

“In coming I thought the whole idea in negotiations was for us to say, ‘We work for you, here are some of the problems we have,’” he said. “But we’ve gotten a much more negative response than we expected to seemingly innocuous requests. They obviously are not ready to share.”

Powell’s last money proposal severely limited advancement and fell far short of providing a living wage. It offered workers with more than two years on the job wage increases of about 25 cents per year after inflation. Workers starting day one of the contract would never reach the Portland living wage, now $10.36 per hour for a single adult.

Powell’s contends the union’s compensation package costs too much, despite the company’s ongoing stellar financial performance. Corporate Manager Ann Smith noted that the company ran a loss for November 1999, even though sales topped any month in company history.

“We had 30,000 more feet in floor space that we had to cover for rent, and legal and professional cost was cut across the board. Michael Powell is the landlord for the expanded Burnside store, so rent increases don’t affect him to pocket. Let the payments go at least in part to Larry Amburgey, the union-buster attorney the company hired to ‘negotiate.’

“Everyone knows who owns the buildings—it blows my mind they aren’t ashamed to say that,” said Susan Vasher, who’s worked in Internet/shipping since September.

But the non-monetary provisions of the contract have provoked even sharper differences. Many workers joined the union drive to secure a voice in decision-making at the store, and they want that in their contract. The company has proposed a management’s rights clause that would allow them to retain the power to make unilateral changes in job descriptions, rankings, evaluation procedures and a host of other matters affecting day-to-day working conditions.

More insidious yet, corporate managers want license to contract out a wide range of jobs. If the contract for work that can’t be done by employees, such as plumbing or janitorial work. If the contract doesn’t hold them to past practice, nothing would stop them from contracting out bookbrowsing at new stores and undermining the union.

Management also stands adamantly opposed to a “fair share” or union shop clause.

“In 17 states the union shop is illegal,” Amburgey said in negotiations Feb. 22. “They don’t feel that a person should pay to keep their job. You’re asking us to force people to pay money to keep their job.”

“That’s totally ridiculous,” Burnside store worker Mary Wrinig said. “The union is there for everyone, pro-union or anti. It’s our protection on the job. Everyone brings their concerns to the union, specific issues they want addressed in negotiations or problems that arise on the job.

“It’s only fair—especially where people make so little money—that everyone contributes,” she said.

In the long run unionizing will benefit Powell’s management as well as its workers, said Peter Kohler, who works in the history sections at the Burnside Ave. store.

“It will be a stronger, more mature company with a contract in place,” he said. “But we may need to make our point with actions again and again to convince them to really deal with us.”

Many workers feel the company is trying to wear them down with a waiting game. “They would love to see a de-contracting, they’re banking on that, it would be a big mistake,” Enguehard said. “If it came to a vote, it wouldn’t be nearly as close as the election last year. People know much more.”

And the ILWU knows how to play to extra unions.

“Employers didn’t recognize ILWU longshore till 1946, 14 years after the ‘34 strike,” ILWU International President Brian McWilliams said. “We had two dozen job actions, a constant struggle with the employer for just place at the bargaining table.

“As long as Powell’s workers are there, we’ll be there for them,” he said.

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Northern California Organizer Agustin Ramirez 415-775-0533
Pacific Sound Organizer Paul Bigrman 206-448-1870

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The Great Depression devastated the working class, while simultaneously provoking a wide-ranging and angry response. In March 1930, over 1,000,000 people demonstrated against unemployment and for jobs across the United States. Organized by the National Unemployment Councils, these workers were given a sense of hope and a realization that through collective activity change could be brought about.

By the mid-1930s worker discontent spread from the unemployed to sectors of organized labor. In 1934 a strike wave spread across the U.S.A. with organizations, particularly the West Coast ILA, were communitarian groups.

The strike affected Black workers in the Bay Area in at least two ways. First, the establishment of a hiring hall meant that Black workers finally had a chance to get jobs on a regular basis on the docks without selling their souls. This led to a steady increase in the overall number of Black longshore workers, particularly in the Bay Area (though the increase was not felt in great numbers initially and was inconsistent in other parts of the West Coast). Second, there was tremendous growth in Black, membership of newly established National Union of Marine Cooks and Stewards, growth accompanied by the breakdown of Jim Crow practices. The West Coast ILA, led by the Black American community.

Lewis's belief in the future of industrial unionism also led him to recognize that a successful industrial union movement would need the active participation of Black workers. Lewis and others in the pro-industrial union movement camp did not want to repeat the mistakes of the union drive that followed World War I where the AFL tried to organize large industries on the basis of craft unionism, often to the actual or virtual exclusion of Black workers. The endorsement of industrial unionism by Lewis, the support that he was getting among the rank-and-file of the African American people, was enough to get the movement going—a movement called the "Congress of Industrial Organizations" after its founding on Nov. 2, 1935. The name was changed to the "Congress of Industrial Organizations" after a full break was made with the American Federation of Labor."

Within four months of the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, Black proportion was a point which was very important in seeking to gain the involvement of Black workers and to combat, within the ranks of its own membership, various racist views on the role of Black workers. Initially there were several companies on the docks where Black workers did not join the strike. The deep suspicion by Black workers on the AFL and its brand of unionism—which had excluded Blacks systematically for decades—led many Black workers to distrust the "hiring hall" system through which all workers would be sent to jobs according to their place on a master list. They felt that this would lead to a breakdown in West Coast dock discrimination.

The 1934 San Francisco General Strike affected the West Coast maritime industry as well as the Bay Area labor movement. Thirty-five thousand Bay Area workers joined unions as a result of the General Strike, despite the employers' claims that unisons, particularly the West Coast ILA, were communistic in their politics.

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Black organization could defeat or reverse the crisis of the Depression and that CIO was probably the most successful organization in America: "The 1934 general strikes and many less publicized moves by labor's rank and file to organize longshore workers on the docks in San Francisco and again in the 1919 strike. By Australian-born dockworker Harry Bridges, the West Coast ILA turned what was initially a dock strike into a full-blown general strike in the Bay Area. Unlike the "shape-up," which was almost certain in the hiring process followed on the docks, known as the West Coast docks in a landmark decision as strikers, Black workers made consistent attempts to enter unions, there were many leaders of the African American people who turned a cold shoulder to unionism, regardless of whether it was craft or industrial. In that sense the NNC, as a collection of organizations, but also as a unit, represented a different pole of opinion within the national African American community.

At the first congress A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was chosen as the President of the NNC. This was a significant move given that Randolph was himself a leader of a labor organization, and in that regard not typical of typical of the formation of the NNC. The support given by Randolph was very supportive of industrial unionism and the work of the CIO."

In his address to the first congress of the NNC (delivered in his absence due to illness), Randolph stressed the importance of industrial unionism, pointing out that: "...the craft union invariably has a color bar against the Negro worker, but the industrial union in structure renders race discrimination less possible since it embraces all workers included in the industry regardless of race." Until he resigned from his position as President of the NNC in 1940. Randolph used this platform as a means to herald the cause of industrial unionism and point to why Black people should endorse this path-breaking movement. The NNC supported the CIO and Randolph was perhaps the most closely felt in the organizing of tobacco workers in Richmond, Virginia and in the steel industry. The work of Randolph was certainly important given that it was primarily among Black women workers who labored in the tobacco factories of the city.

Tobacco workers labored under dreadful conditions. Describing the conditions faced by Black workers in the 1930s, shortly before they became organized, one commentator noted that as miserable as the conditions were for all workers, Black women worked in the worst situations. Black women performed the re-handling of tobacco, whereas men operated the machines. In the manufacturing of cigars and cigarettes were the exclusive province of white women. Black women were completely barred from
The NNC specifically, and Black workers generally, also played a role in organizing the steel industry. In the steel centers such as Birmingham, Alabama, Gary, Indiana and Pittsburgh, Black workers played a key role in establishing a CIO presence. The Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC)—formed in part as the old American Federation of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers, though committed to the principle of industrial unionism—speedily courted the NNC and the Black community generally, realizing that Black workers were decisive in the unionization of the plants. This attitude on the part of the SWOC brought forward a generally positive response from the African American community.

The attitude of the SWOC was not based on moralism, nor necessarily on some higher level of principle. As NNC executive John P. Davis pointed out at the time, Black workers constituted 20 percent of all laborers in the steel mills and six percent of all the operatives. More importantly, the strategic significance of Black workers had to be understood in terms of their high proportion in the three or four key geographic areas of steel production, not simply in terms of their overall percentage within the steel industry.

In these areas of concentration, Black workers faced various forms of racist discrimination. There were disproportionately fewer Black workers in skilled positions. In the South, Black workers doing the same work as white workers were paid less. Black workers doing piece work were often subject to job assignments that would take much more time to complete than jobs assigned to their white co-workers. In addition, the job assignments of Black workers were generally more hazardous than those assigned by white workers.

The SWOC found that in many locations Black workers responded more quickly to unionization efforts than did white workers. This did not mean, however, that Black worker support for unionizing was universal. One step taken by SWOC to encourage Black recruitment was the employment of Black organizers. Given the understandable levels of suspicion held by the African American community towards unions, Black organizers and favorable support by Black community organizations was essential for the creation of the type of climate necessary for unionizing efforts to win.

The SWOC did not stop with the employment of organizers. The national office encouraged the election of Black workers to positions within the unions themselves, ensuring their placement on all committees of the union.

These new Black labor leaders were able to achieve some influence in the direction taken by the industrial union movement. Besides this accomplishment, the SWOC raised wages by one-third, reduced working hours and helped to alter the industrial structure to the advantage of the African American community and worker. Problems which arose within the left-wing-led Transport Workers Union-CIO (in New York City), specifically a hesitation and/or unwillingness on the part of the union to confront racist structural problems in the workplace, led otherwise pro-CIO Black minister and later politician Adam Clayton Powell Jr. to comment that Blacks would have to fight a battle on two fronts: against the employer and against the unions for admission, recognition and advancement.

What was understood by the progressive section of the Black community in the mid-1930s, however, was that there was a development going on within labor which could significantly influence the state of the African American worker. It was understood that a section of organized labor was making a direct appeal to the African American community in general, and the African American worker in particular, to jump on board. When confronted with the treatment Black workers received from the AFL, it made sense to unite with this motion. What must be understood is that the mass entry of Black workers into organized labor was partly a result of the pressure the alliance between the progressive section of the African American population and the progressive section of organized labor created the conditions for eventually changing the policies of organized labor. That these policies have not been changed to the satisfaction of Black workers and other progressive workers should not be misunderstood or lead to the conclusion that the initial alliance was incorrect. Rather, the post-World War II problems speak to some deeper difficulties within the leadership and perhaps the structure of organized labor, but this was not the case at the time.

The CIO organizing experience of the 1930s and especially the 1940s, while not without its faults, remains a model of the possibilities that unionization holds for workers. The SWOC particular model as an example of the type of union that might have been formed, but did not, would be called "special interest," rather than as a centerpieces for progressive change. By aligning itself with African Americans the CIO attempted to represent more than just its own members: it represented a key component of the majority of people of the United States.

This article is an abbreviated version of the original published in 1987 by the University of Massachusetts, Boston William Monroe Trotter Institute. It is reprinted with permission of the authors.
Retired ILWU longshore worker Asher Harer was honored by the Open World Conference Organizing Committee for his lifetime service to the working people of the area. Harer, (center), received the plaque from San Francisco Labor Council Secretary-Treasurer Walter Johnson, (right). His brothers from longshore Local 10, Clarence Thomas (left) and Kevin Gibbons (not shown) escorted him to the stage.

I accept this great honor—not only for myself, but also in remembrance of the hundreds of co-workers, fighters in the battles for human rights, trade unionists, feminists, anti-racists, and so on, who were there," he said. "I participated in five major strikes—two in the culinary industry (hotel and restaurant) and three under the umbrella of the ILWU [1946, 1949 and 1971] served on strike committees and edited various union bulletins.

The presentation Friday night, Feb. 11 followed a banquet dinner and songs from the San Francisco Labor Chorus. The conference was organized under the sponsorship of the San Francisco Labor Council and was endorsed by the ILWU and the Teamsters.

It was especially appropriate that the award be given in front of the nearly 600 delegates from 51 countries at the conference, as the influence of the ILWU and members like Harer has been felt worldwide. The conference itself went on for three days more, with delegates from all continents of the world detailing the working conditions in their regions and building networks of solidarity. Many speakers focused on the devastating effects of corporate globalization on their people and singled out the WTO, World Bank and International Monetary Fund for special criticism. In the end a permanent communications center was established.

"Now, after the recent magnificent victory in Seattle, all of us have great confidence that labor is on the march again," Harer said.

Harer quoted a few lines from the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley's iconic "Rosalind and Helen.

"Fear not the tyrants shall rule forever, Or the priests of the bloody faith; Their thrones and their scepters I floating see, Like wrecks in the surge of eternity."

"Of course, today, it is not throats and scepters that must be defeated— but world capitalism," Harer said.

Local 6 hospital techs get healthy contract

Bargaining for the Local 6 techs who operate x-ray machines, CAT scanners and ultra-sonic imagers at the hospital just outside Oakland dragged on for six months. Talks began in June 1999 for a contract that expired in August, but nothing was going anywhere. The employer placed impossible demands on the table to enlarge management rights in the contract and the workers, who were paid at the low end of the scale for their skill level, were not buying any of it.

Management hired an attorney from Atlanta for the negotiations, and the legal bill was running up as talks dragged on for six months. Members nurses represented by the California Nurses Asso., who started bargaining later, had reached a settlement just before Christmas.

"It came to a point where they went back on even the tentative agreements we had made," Local 6’s TOPs (Technical, Office and Professional workers) BA Jill Duke said. "They still had some of the most important takeaways on the table, too. They were very strong. We said we could not have an agreement without them going away."

One of the employer’s proposals would take away the right to bargain in the event of a strike, weaken management rights. The second would remove bargaining on future changes, detailed performance records in the retirement savings pension plan.

Both sides met with federal mediator Ruth Carpenter present after the nurses settled. Management wasn’t ready to go back to the table after Carpenter’s expansion showed that it had money, although it wouldn’t open the books to prove it. A study of comparable jobs at eight Bay Area Local 6 hospitals showed the San Leandro nurses are at the bottom of the pay scale, strengthening their claim for pay parity.

The locked-out management refused to budge on the issues of pay and management rights. The two sides make no progress on pay issues and worked meal times, as well as unpaid shift differentials, had hung over the negotiations for months and the union decided to file unfair labor practices charges against the employer and the NLRB in early January.

When three negotiation sessions with the mediator failed to produce a contract, the nursing bargaining team saw no choice but to issue a ten-day strike notice Jan. 21. The union also had the strike sanction of the Alameda County Central Labor Council, as well as the support of the Teamsters and city officials. The CNA local, representing several hundred nurses, issued a ten-day strike notice the same day in sympathy.

"CNA Local 6 has a history of mutual support that goes back to the 1970s," CNA representative Joe Lindsay said.

In the 1989 nurses’ strike at Chico Memorial Hospital, CNA Local 6 had supported the CNA, and in 1990 striking x-ray techs at Alta Bates hospital received the CNA’s support and aid.

"We give the notice in order to make sure they have the chance to move to another job, and avoid the ten-day schedule surgeries," Duke said. "About half way through the process the physicians got involved and when all the stake holders got involved it really was a great support of the nurses."

Two days before the strike was to begin the pressure had the employer ready to make some adjustments and improve the situation.

"The employer had some management rights issues moved off the table and an agreement bringing all the workers up to parity was reached. Radiology techs got an extra 2.5 percent first year wage adjustment, and everyone got three percent a year for three years. Ultrasound techs, who had been seriously undervalued, got a 15.6 percent wage increase. MRI techs got a specially rate increase of $2.50 an hour plus the three percent. Shift differentials for evening and night work went up from $1.88 an hour to $2.50.

Some workers had been paid time and a half for weekend work, but the bargaining team gave that up for shift differentials. On-call rates of $15 an hour will be paid, and if some one is called on they will be paid time and a half. Retirement savings will remain the same, and educational leave will include 16 hours of study courses. The outstanding grievances will be resolved promptly, and the union withdrew the ULP charges.

"The outcome was very gratifying, in no small part due to all the support we got, which we really appreciate," Duke said. Members ratified the contract 19 to 1 on Jan. 27.

TOWN HALL TRADE MEETING IN LONG BEACH

Southern California longshore locals will take their stop work meeting April 6 to attend a "State of the Trade and Transportation Industry Town Hall Meeting," a gathering billed as a forum of solidarity action in the transportation industry. It will be held April 6 to attend a "State of the Trade and Transportation (CITT) at the California State University, Long Beach and Gateway Cities Partnership, Inc., a regional economic collaborative, will feature a panel discussion on water-front technology including ILWU International Vice President Jim Sykes and PMA CIO John Johnston. April 6, 5:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the Terrace Theatre in Long Beach.

—Dispatcher staff reports

ANTI-WTO COALITION PLANS ACTIONS AGAINST MAXXAM

The broad coalition of forces that united in Seattle to combat the WTO conference for action to advance social and economic justice. Labor, environmental, student and faith-based groups decided to contest the WTO.

Pacific Lumber has been a target of the environmental movement in both Washington and California. Last year, an action by Earth First! and the Port of Tacoma, ILWU Local 23, at (253) 383-2468; or Jon several hundred workers, providing financial contributions, donations of food and toys and a variety of solidarity actions.

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I'm an artist," he says, "a knot artist—knots because I work and live with them."

"Making knots is an ancient practice, as old as civilization. But on sailing ships a few hundred years ago, it grew into a folk art. Knots and splices, hitches and stitches were all a part of a sailor's job. In the darkness of the foc'sle, men worked on knots for the sheer pleasure of it. The seafarer who could make the "fancy knots" was a master of his art. Billington can make these knots. On the upper deck of the ferry, framed under glass, hangs one of Billington's knot boards displaying his decorative work. In the last few years he's been designing jewelry from lines, ropes and leather.

At 50 Billington has long gray hair and a thin wavy body.

"Sometimes I feel like I'm 18 years old," he says.

He has spent much of his life on boats. Yet sailing wasn't his first choice.

"My dream was to be a defensive back for the NFL," he says matter of factly. "I went to a bunch of colleges on football scholarships."

Within a few years, his dream slipped away. He couldn't tackle the running back behind the line.

"There are bodies that just can't take it—and mine couldn't," he says. The scholarships dried up. His hopes faded and he dropped out of college.

Billington notices the Tiburon pier approaching. The German tourists collect their shopping bags and luggage as a group. The tourists, doing the same, cause a crowd to shuffle around and everyone shuffles down the aisle and out into the sunlight. Another crowd presses at the dock waiting to climb aboard.

"I'm an artist," he says. The old sailor died. "The men who sailed before the lines and tie up. Within minutes the ferry is off again, on its way to Sausalito."

"We used to call these ferries the Loopy Pop Fleet," Billington says, looking carefully around the deck. He remembers how deep water seamen would wrap the lines and tie up. "A banker's job—nine to five, that's what we called it. Well, times have changed..."

Billington and the two other deckhands look after the safety of the passengers. On board some patrons drink too much, others get belligerent, children race about. But there's more to a job than public relations.

"I tell my students," he says as he instructs young boatmen on skills, "I take this work very seriously. I feel responsible for every one of these passengers."

"Chuck is an incredible teacher," says Celeste Ferris, a young deckhand in the IBU. "He got Chuck Billington at work with his knots."

"There was something about the smell of salt water," he says. "I tried to get away and do other things, but I kept coming back."

It was on a towboat, soon after he joined the IBU, that Billington met an old sailor who made knots. Billington watched the old man as he made a Monkey's Fist. "I asked him to teach me," he remembers.

The old timer was delighted by Billington's interest. He showed him how to make Turk's Heads and Chinese button eyes, lanyards, sheepshank and shroud knots.

"He started teaching me so many knots—I've forgotten many of them until I see them in books today," he says. The old sailor died. "The men who taught me are all dead," he says. "It's now fallen to him to pass on the arts he learned.

Chuck Billington can be reached at Chuck Billington at work with his knots.

"Many sailors could not read or write before 20th Century. Boys were put on ships to work as young as ten years old by parents too poor to feed them. Seafaring was hard and dangerous. Often the men in the foc'sle, isolated and illiterate, would occupy their minds by knotting. They made beautiful objects—baskets, lacework, rugs and jewelry created from ropes and lines—the materials they worked with day in and day out."

"Chuck taught me how to make a Monkey's Fist," says Celeste Ferris. She wears a graceful necklace with a familiar shape. Only waterfront workers would recognize the leather weave as the Monkey’s Fist, a knot used on the end of a heaving line.

"My own family is broken up," says Billington. "The union is family now. I make good money. My benefits are great. It's time for me to payback in some way for what the union has given me."

Billington pulls out a line of thin brown leather and twists it in his fingers. He sells his jewelry, but often when someone likes it, he gives it away. When he's not working on his knots, he composes music and plays guitar, selling his CDs on the Internet. (mp3.com)

There are times in his life when he feels a need to write poetry. He's published poems dedicated to struggling, to working people and their unions. "Should We Forget," begins one sad refrain.

"I tell my students," he says as he interfaces the leather, "the union will teach you seamanship. From us old timers, you will learn history and that will broaden your life."

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BLOOD DONOR ALERT

My name is Gary Hinde and I am a member of ILWU Local 34 clerical workers, currently working at the Matson/SSAT auto lot in Oakland. I am writing because my daughter, Surinda Marie, has been diagnosed with Acute Myelogenous Leukemia (AML). Her only chance for survival is a bone marrow/stem cell transplant from a suitable donor. She is currently going through chemotherapy.

Because she is partly of Eastern Indian ancestry chances of finding her suitable match are very slim. Unfortunately, Eastern Indians comprise a very small percentage of donors on the “registry.” As of yet a match has not been found. She is running out of time.

By taking a simple blood test it will determine if you or anyone who takes the test could be a suitable match and possibly save her life or someone else’s life. It only takes a small amount of time and it is not painful.

In response to the letter (The Dispatcher, November, 1999) by Phyllis Mandel/Glick I agree on the increase in pension benefits. My husband was in the union for over 30 years and his father was in the union also. When his dad passed away in the early 1950’s the pension stopped—neither of us got nothing.

All we have have we have today because of a strong union and strong leadership. This woman and everyone else should get on bended knees and give thanks for what we receive.

For example, we get: 1) Medicare reimbursement, I know of no one else who gets this. 2) Fantastic supplemental Medicare-Plus prescription.

No one should ever take these benefits for granted. I know quite a few retired people from other unions and not one has the benefits we enjoy. There aren’t enough ways to say thanks and keep up the good work.

Ruth Bedosa
Sonora, Calif.

A TIP OF THE WHITE CAP

I want to express my thanks and appreciation regarding the fantastic coverage and information The Dispatcher has provided.

I definitely appreciate the coverage for our Retirees coastwise. The articles on the WTO, NAFTA, GATT, etc. have been enlightening as to how they impact.

And now The Dispatcher January 2000, a terrific edition.

It brings back old memories, the articles, the pictures, the history, friends. Our union was extremely fortunate to have the years such leaders and delegates and rank and file members, strong, tough and creative. The image and respect that is known the world over, let alone the agreements and benefits second to none in the world.

Lou Loveridge
President, So. California Pensioners
Carson, CA

The ILWU Legacy Fund

STATEMENT OF POLICY ON ILWU LEGACY FUND

O ver the years the ILWU has received tens of thousands of dollars in donations from members, active and retired—sometimes in the form of bequests—who want to give something back to the Union. Because many of our members and friends also wish to contribute directly to internal education and organizing, the Titled Officers suggest that we formally establish the ILWU Legacy Fund, and that an ongoing request for donations appears in The Dispatcher.

The Legacy Fund is a way to earmark general funds for education and organizing, and to receive voluntary donations to be used only for organizing and educational programs and publications (such as those mandated as not funded by the 1994 Convention). The Legacy Fund will require no additional legal or administrative costs; it is neither a charitable fund nor a corporate entity, and donations to it will not be tax deductible.

The Legacy Fund will stand as a tribute to the men and women who built this Union, and the Fund’s income and disbursements will be entirely under the direction and authority of the elected representatives of the rank-and-file members of the ILWU—the Titled Officers—who will report to the International Executive Board on the status of the Fund.

(passed by the ILWU International Executive Board April 6-7, 1995)

CONTRIBUTIONS SOLICITED

Contributions to the Legacy Fund are needed to finance several programs and projects that are not currently funded by the International Union’s budget. These include:

• Production of non-English language editions of “The ILWU Story” and our award-winning video, “We Are the ILWU.”

• Holding advanced leadership training workshops for members who complete the highly successful ILWU Leadership Development Program.

• Establishing an audio-visual center in the ILWU library for use and duplication of audio and video materials, including the ILWU oral history project interviews.

• Increased involvement in community outreach programs, including ILWU participation in labor history conferences and development of exhibits and other activities at high schools, colleges, museums, and libraries.

• Classes and materials for newly organized ILWU members, and for new locals or units in the ILWU family.

• Matching funds for a major grant to conserve, arrange, describe and exhibit the photographic collections in the ILWU library.

Your contribution to the Legacy Fund, however large or small, will help to make these proposals a reality. All contributions of $25.00 or more will receive a commorative ILWU lapel pin.
WTO protests on video

The revolution will be televised

If you don’t like the news, go out and make some of your own.

By Tom Price

To hear it from the corporate media, the Battle of Seattle was fought by a coalition of anarchists and farmers who wanted to destroy trade and starve the people of the Third World. Fortunately, we don’t have to rely entirely on them.

Now, after the rubber bullets have been swept up and the riot gear stashed away, two videos have been released on the subject of the World Trade Organization’s Seattle ministerial meeting during the week of Nov. 30-Dec. 1, 1999 that present another point of view.

A coalition of more than 100 independent video producers, editors and producers produced “Showdown in Seattle: Five Days That Shocked the WTO.” With little regard for individual ownership, the camera operators pooled their footage into creative effort under the umbrella of Seattle’s Independent Media Center.

“While the WTO protests are history, the battle against corporations, small farmers versus corporations, dolphins versus corporations, the WTO has ruled for the corporations.”

The first interlude of “Labor Battles the WTO” shows the WTO’s Cuba file being stashed away, two videos have been pooled their footage into a cooperative effort by the Seattle’s Independent Media Center.

Chapter Two chronicles the day of gassing Nov. 30 and the 30,000-strong labor march beginning at Memorial Stadium and includes speeches from some of the labor leaders. In a clever juxtaposition of images, a police patrol car, the half-finished club in its work shop, followed by running cops, were shown using the clubs against non-violent protesters.

Chapter Three shows the steel workers’ march to Pier 63, where they held a modern version of the Boston Tea Party and, with the assistance of ILWU longshore workers, dumped physical bodies against unfair trade. Later police attacked the march and arrested steelworkers.

“Labor Battles the WTO” begins with the words, “If you don’t like the news, go out and make some of your own.”

By Tom Price

If you don’t like the news, go out and make some of your own.

By Tom Price

If you don’t like the news, go out and make some of your own.

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If you don’t like the news, go out and make some of your own.
ILWU Book & Video Sale

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

**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

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

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 Kimeldorf: a thoughtful and provocative comparison of the ILA and the ILWU. $11.00

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The Union Makes Us Strong: Radical Unionism on the San Francisco Waterfront By David Wellman: the important new study of longshore work in the ILU. $15.00 (paperback)

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

Work on the Waterfront: A Longshore Artist's View By Jean Gundlach and Jake Arnoff: wonderful line drawings and text about longshore work. $7.00 ($5 benefits Bridges Chair at the University of Washington)

**VIDEOS:**

We Are the ILWU A 30-minute color video introducing the principles and traditions of the ILWU. Features active and retired members talking about what the union meant in their lives and what it needs to survive and thrive, along with film clips, historical photos and an original musical score. $7.00

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

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...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.

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