Peace on Earth

SOLIDARITY FOREVER
IIEB meets the candidates

The ILWU International Executive Board met at the union’s headquarters in San Francisco, Dec. 11-12 and reviewed the union’s finances, set new policies and interviewed three Democratic candidates for president with the intent of making an endorsement.

Dave Freiberg, the IBEU representative to the board and chair of the Trustees Committee, reported on the International’s finances. Because of unexpected increases in the Officers’ and staff’s health and welfare costs, the union will be nearly $500,000 in the red after the three-year budget cycle. The Trustees discussed various options to deal with the problem, including a possible one-time assessment, an increase in per capita, a loan and budget reductions. The Trustees decided to recommend tightening expenses, looking at options for increasing income and closely monitoring the cash flow at the International.

Three Democratic presidential hopefuls agreed to address the board and make their pitch for the union’s official endorsement. Ohio Congressman Dennis Kucinich appeared in person and Missouri Congressman Dick Gephardt spoke via speaker phone. Former Governor Howard Dean were interviewed via speaker phone. Each candidate gave 20 minutes to address the issue and took questions from board members.

Kucinich presented himself as the worker’s candidate, saying his father was a truck driver who never owned a home. He is a unionarian for working people,” he said. “This is where I come from.

Kucinich said he brought trade as an issue into the presidential debate and said NAFTA did not break unions and drive down wages and benefits. He said the act as president will be to cancel NAFTA and WTO and set bilateral trade agreements with labor and environmental protections,” he said.

Kucinich called Bush’s use of the Taft-Hartley injunction against the ILWU when it was locked out “an aberration” and said it proved that Taft-Hartley must be repealed. He called for ending the U.S. unilateral relationship with the WTO and allow no privatization of Social Security and bring the retirement age back down to 65.

He called for single-payer health coverage for all Americans and distinguished that from Gephardt’s plan for employer tax incentives to give workers health coverage through private insurance companies.

I am not running for Insurance-Saleman-in-Chief,” he said.

Gephardt emphasized that he could beat Bush because he is from the Midwest, has strong support there and those states will be the swing decision area in the 2004 election. He said the Republicans fear him precisely because of that.

Gephardt had a Sierra Club record in support of working people and unions and his endorsement from 21 AFL-CIO unions. He said he fought hard against the Bush plan to limit overtime pay and has always opposed NAFTA, saying it was a fair trade, not free trade. He also pointed out the strong support of the Sierra Club and the American shipping industry.

Gephardt emphasized his position as the perceived front-runner in the race and his ability to beat Bush. He called for no more free trade agreements and said the right to organize must be the basis of any future trade agreements. He said his policy would be to create jobs by investing in small businesses where most jobs are and by investing in building the country’s infrastructure. It would be every American should have health care coverage and that he would undo Bush’s recent Medicare prescription plan that he said only protects pharmaceutical companies.

Dean also spoke about his position to Bush’s Iraq policy. He said the U.S needs to work through the UN to get other countries to deploy troops to replace the American military and make the activity there a real re-struction and not an occupation. He said Iraqis need to draw up their own constitution and elect their own representatives, not be ruled by Bush appointees.

Dean also defended Social Security, saying it has served us well and is still solvent and will be for decades. If any changes are to be made, it should be in raising the cap of current-income for contributions to the fund.

After hearing from the candidates, the board agreed to meet again for a special session Jan. 7, 2004 to see if they could make a decision on an endorsement for president.

In accordance with Convention action, the officers moved to conduct a International. The board agreed that the board take over the negotiation process with the new director of the International Dept. At the board decided it would appoint the title of the committee at its next regular meeting.

The Board also heard an appeal from representatives of Sacramento-Longshore Local 18 for help in their port’s ongoing fight for survival.

As a niche port, specializing in bulk shipments of rice, wood chips and fertilizer, Sacramento has always operated on a narrow profit margin. It has limited ability to diversify, because it sits 47 miles up a 30-foot deep man-made channel.

Longshore Local 18, and warehouse House Local 17 have worked hard over the last 6 years, when their terminal was losing money and unable to support its workers, the company’s commodious, family-wage jobs. With help from the longshore Division Fighting Fund, they built a grass-roots campaign that turned a local ballot initiative last year which would have closed the port.

Now Sacramento faces a new threat. When the federal government closed the Navy base at Rough and Ready Island, it turned the land with its five million square feet of warehouse space over to the Port of Stockton. Subsidized by revenue from this space, Stockton undercut Sacramento by $4 per ton on rice. Sacramento cut its own prices to remain competitive—and lost $1.8 million in FY2002 and $1.4 million so far in FY2003. It could exhaust its cash reserves within a year.

“The Port of Sacramento is dying a slow death and the only way we can save it is through political action,” said Local 17 President/Busines Agent Everett Burdan.

The Sacramento locals want the federal government to level the playing field so their port can remain competitive. Stockton got Rough and Ready, so they are seeking federal aid to deepen their channel and develop infrastructure on port land to make it available for development. The Board agreed to put the Port of Sacramento on the ILWU legislative agenda.

The board had to make several personnel changes in its own composition. John Evans, one of the two representatives from the Columbia River area, just made the transfer from longshore Local 10 to foreman’s Local 92. Since the union’s constitution does not allow for him to members of the IEB, Evans had to give up his seat and the Columbia River area representatives selected Local 6 member Jerry Ylonen as the replacement. Ylonen had previously served on the Safety Negotiating Committee during the 2002 longshore contract bargaining.

Kevin Gibbons, one of the three representatives on the board from Northern California, also just transferred from longshore Local 10 to clerks’ Local 34. Since Local 34 already had one member on the board and the Constitution does not allow any local to have more than one representative, he had to step down. The Northern California area has not yet decided who his replacement will be.

Pamela Green, the representative of General Traders from Hawaii’s Local 142, will also step down since she just won theil seat on the State executive Board. The local will nominate her replaceable at the next board meeting.

The board also passed four Statements of Policy. One was in recognition of San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown upon his retirement from elected office after four decades. Brown appeared before the board and thanked the ILWU for its support from the very beginning of his career. The other policy statements included one in support of Iraqi workers’ right to organize unions in the face of opposition from the U.S. occupation forces, another in support of the striking and locked-out grocery store workers in Southern California and one in support of the Institute for Labor and Employment, a pro-labor think tank at the University of California and the new Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Congressman Dennis Kucinich right) greets ILWU International Secretary-Treasurer Willie Adams as International Vice President Wexley Firtado applauds.

ILWU Titled Officers

JAMES SPINOSA President

ROBERT McBLARRAH Vice President

WESLEY FURTADO Vice President

WILLIAM E. ADAMS Secretary-Treasurer

ILWU Titled Officers

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December 2003

Congressman Dennis Kucinich right) greets ILWU International Secretary-Treasurer Willie Adams as International Vice President Wexley Firtado applauds.

(Left to right) International Secretary-Treasurer Willie Adams, International Vice President Robert McBlarrah and President Jim Spinosa welcome longshore Local 8 member Jerry Ylonen to the IEB.
STATEMENT OF POLICY
IN SUPPORT OF THE RIGHT OF IRAQI WORKERS TO ORGANIZE

Since George W. Bush declared an end to the war on Iraq in May 2003, unemployment among Iraqi workers has reached 70 percent, causing many families to face hunger and destitution. The U.S. occupation authority has frozen Iraqi wages for most workers at $60 per month, the lowest paid Saddam Hussein workers, while at the same time eliminating the bonuses, profit-sharing and subsidies for food and housing workers to receive, causing a sharp cut in the income of Iraqi workers still employed. Congress approved $207 billion for the reconstruction of Iraq—coming at the expense of jobs and services in the U.S.—yet not a dime is set to be used to raise Iraqi wages or for unemployment benefits.

Since May 2003 Iraqi workers have begun to reorganize their trade union movement, seeking a better standard of living and preservation of their jobs and workplaces. But at the same time the U.S. occupation authority is continuing to enforce a 1922 union-busting law, prohibiting unions and collective bargaining in the public sector and state enterprises where most Iraqis work. The U.S. occupation authority has announced it intends to privatize and sell off state factories, refineries and other state enterprises and has issued a decree allowing 100 percent foreign ownership of Iraqi businesses. This privatization will result in mass dislocations and unemploy-...
### Season's Greetings

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*Have a Happy and Safe New Year!*