Community leaders march to save good jobs and fight union-busting in Boron

Six hundred families who depend on good jobs at the U.S. Borax mine in Boron, California, received a powerful shot of support from local community leaders who turned out in force on December 16. They joined ILWU Local 30 members in their battle with Rio Tinto, the global mining conglomerate that’s bent on busting their union and destroying good jobs that support local communities in California’s high desert, where 2,500 residents live next to the state’s largest open-pit mine.

The landscape may appear desolate to visitors, the region has been a hotbed of labor struggles over the past century, as companies employed miners to harvest the rich deposits of gold, silver and precious minerals beneath the desert surface.

Boron pastor Darryl Nichols MC’d the evening, calling on community leaders to show their support. Business owners are sometimes hard to find at union halls, but at this community meeting, they were out in force, and Pastor Nichols made sure they got a chance to speak.

“I've been living in this town for 52 years, and all of you know me,” said F.O. Roe, who sells furniture in town, but previously did a stint at the mine. “Every business in town depends on the good jobs at Borax and the union that makes it possible, so you know we’ll be with you when it comes to standing up to protect those jobs.”

In addition to Pastor Nichols, attendees from the religious community included a minister from the Lutheran Church in California City, and Brady Martz, a bishop from the Church of Jesus Christ and Latter Day Saints, who delivered one of the most powerful speeches of the evening by weaving bible passages together with a compelling call for justice and compassion.

“I hope some of you don’t mind if I read the bible here tonight,” said Martz, “but we’re here to search for strength and inspiration, and for me and many others, that strength can be found in the bible.” Martz read a passage from Matthew 25:35, which he said calls on all people, including the wealthy and powerful, to share what they have with others: “For I... continued on page 6
LETTERS TO THE DISPATCHER

Dear Editor,


I also retired 23 years ago after only 27 years in Local 34. I just turned 85 on December 2. I am thankful for a good pension.

There is so much agitation against the unions and for the right-to-work agenda. I am thankful to be an ILWU member and for the news given in The Dispatcher. Keep on keepin’ on!

Jack Casebeer
Nampa, ID

Dear Editor,

This is a big THANK YOU to all the brothers and sisters who supported me in my bid for Port Commissioner in Olympia. WE WON!

From San Diego to Anchorage and Honolulu to Vancouver BC the support was humbling and I can only hope I can give back as much as was given to me.

Again, thank you to all and thank god for the ILWU!

Jeff Davis, Local 21
Olympia, WA

Dear Editor,

Thank you for reporting about the grain handlers’ negotiations and contract ratification in last month’s Dispatcher (“Grain Handlers Agreement Ratified,” Dec. 2009). I wanted to add that everyone on our negotiating committee was involved and deserves credit for helping us get a good contract, including members from Locals 4, 8, 19, 23 and representatives from Local 21’s grain division.

Harold Ugles, Local 19
Seattle, WA

Dear Editor,

We hear about how unions are pressuring Democrats on health insurance tax. But what’s missing is that we don’t hear the House or the Senate talking about their Cadillac health care plans. Whenever they feel they need or deserve a raise they just give it to themselves.

Having had the benefits of a union job most of my life I personally know that the first issue on the table during negotiations are health care and pension before any wages are ever discussed. Over many years of working we have never gotten raises anything like the ones Congress gives itself, every few years with benefits including pensions that are probably the best and safest in the country.

In my travels to other countries where healthcare is provided and in talking to workers from all walks of life they say they can’t understand why the people here don’t just demand health care. One of the reasons unions have been backing health care for all is because it would be fair to everyone including the employer and small business owners, so it would make getting a job with good pay a lot more possible.

Michael Mullen, Local 14 Pensioner
Eureka, CA

Dear Editor,

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Michael Mullen, Local 14 Pensioner
Eureka, CA

CORRECTION

Last month The Dispatcher neglected to recognize the contributions from Local 94 members who are supporting local charity events, including the ILWU’s 12th Annual Thanksgiving event, Holiday Toy Drive, and the Golf Benefit for Miller Children’s Hospital. We’re sorry for the mistake and want to give a special mention to Local 94 members Mark Grgas, John Davich and Gary Alexander, who worked so hard to make the golf benefit such a success.

Fierce Winds Topple Dutch Harbor Crane:

Winter weather in Dutch Harbor/Unalaska is often stormy, but the winds that blew the night of Friday, Dec. 4 were especially strong – estimated at 150mph, enough to bring a 110-foot gantry crane crashing down onto the dock. “The last time we had a storm like that was the year I moved out here, January ’89,” said Alaska Longshore Division Unit 16 President Dennis Young, adding that he hoped the accident wouldn’t make thing too rough for area longshore workers. Unit 223 President Randall Baker said he’s fairly certain that the APL (American President Lines) crane was totaled after it blew over backward around 8:45pm. “As far as I can tell, nothing on it is salvageable. Everything is bent.” No other equipment was damaged and no injuries were reported. The terminal was shut at the time and the wind was roaring so loud nobody hear the crane go down, but the next morning townspeople immediately noticed a familiar presence on their skyline was missing. No time estimate for repairing or replacing the crane was available at press time, but Baker said APL has promised to do everything it can to protect the work by bringing in smaller-class ships and using the Horizon crane on another dock.

Photo by: Jim Paulin
Leaders of the Mine Workers’ Union of Turkey were welcomed to San Francisco in early December by ILWU International President Bob McEllrath, Secretary-Treasurer Willie Adams and Coast Committeeman Leal Sundet. The Turkish Mine Workers’ Union leadership then travelled to Boron where they met with ILWU Local 30 members who took their guests to observe contract negotiations with Rio Tinto. Instead of welcoming the guests, Rio Tinto officials insulted the Turks, stormed out of the meeting, and accused Local 30 of hosting “competitors from Turkey.” Local 30 has a different view. “These aren’t competitors, they’re our brothers who came to support us,” said Local 30 acting President Jack Liebengood, who apologized to the workers for management’s rude behavior. Combined, the Turkish workers and Local 30 members produce over 90% of the world’s borate minerals.

Local 63 President and former International President James “Spinner” Spinosa capped a long and illustrious career with a festive retirement party in San Pedro on Dec. 11. The well-attended event featured a cocktail hour, dinner and dancing, and a video highlighting Spinosa’s ILWU accomplishments. Many stories were shared by scores of ILWU members, friends and colleagues, and Long Beach Mayor Bob Foster presented Spinosa with a proclamation honoring his contribution to the waterfront community.

Spinosa was born in New York in 1940. He joined the union in 1969 as a terminal warehouseman in the Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles. He became a marine clerk with Local 63 in 1970 and received his A status in 1973. In 1988 he became president of Local 63 and served on the Coast Labor Relations Committee from 1991–‘94. He was elected president of the International in 2000 held office for two terms until 2006.

The Cunningham Report, a respected trade publication, covered Spinosa’s retirement and reported that “Spinosa is best known for leading the union during the negotiation of the contentious 2002 contract, which opened the way for greater use of technology on the waterfront, while guaranteeing the union the jobs that accompanied the new technology.”

ILWU Honors Jim Spinosa, former International President

Long Beach Mayor Bob Foster presented Spinosa with a proclamation honoring his contribution to the waterfront community.

James Spinosa addresses the crowd at his retirement party, where he was recognized for his long and successful career helping ILWU members.

Solidarity irks Rio Tinto officials

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Local 23 Decks the Halls: Local 23 members and their families donated more than $20,000 to their eighth annual Longshore Holiday Toy Drive—enough to provide holiday gifts for more than 400 children in and around Pierce County. On Sunday, Dec. 13, representatives from nine local organizations were able to shop through the collection of donated toys, children's clothing and bicycles. Among the recipients were Pierce County AIDS Foundation, St. Leo's Food Connection, Children's Home Society, the Hospitality Kitchen, South Sound Recovery Services, Lions for Kids House, and local women's shelters, schools and churches. Members of the local had a friendly competition between dispatchers, crane drivers, supervisors and longshoremen/mechanics who work at different terminals to see who could donate the most funds to the toy drive. The winner received a large handmade longshoreman's hook from member Mike Neff. By pooling their funds, members were able to get some great deals on toys, bicycles and children's clothing at a local union store. Members also donated $200 gift cards to students in need who were nominated by their teachers.

Local 13

Christmas in the Southland: More than 1,200 kids got the chance to see Santa Claus at Local 13's annual children's Christmas party on December 21. Over 36 organizations were invited to attend the party, where 100 volunteers greeted children with candy canes throughout the day and helped them pick out the toy of their choice. Once the kids had their fill of cake, cookies and punch they got to have their faces painted and then it was time for some face-time with Santa.

Local 10

Oscar, 10, and Catalina, 11, from Oakland, get a chance to share their secret wish list with Santa.

Buki the Clown makes friends with Justin Le, a.k.a. Batman, at Local 10's Children's Christmas party on Dec. 12.

Santa had his hands full with Patrick, Sydney and Christopher, from San Francisco. Magicians and face painters had fun with the kids.

R-L: Alise Butler-Franklin and her daughters, Nicole Meadows and Pam Harrington, were among many who generously donated gifts to families in need.

Local 23

Nine-year-old Eric, who lives in Oakland, shows off his Spiderman face paint while getting a balloon animal from Ravioli the Clown.

Oscar, 10, and Catalina, 11, from Oakland, get a chance to share their secret wish list with Santa.
MEMBERS SPEAK OUT

“What do you think of President Obama’s decision to send more troops to Afghanistan?”

“The president in whom we had so much hope has just disappointed us severely with a very grave mistake. The comparisons to Vietnam are all too apparent. Our occupying army will not make friends. What might have a greater chance of working are broad education and infrastructure programs. The teens and young adults who are all too available for recruitment by the Taliban would be just as happy with the salary and structure of a building or educational program. They are not zealots yet. The real leadership and hierarchy of al Qaeda is considered to be only 100 strong. The new Taliban recruits are Afghan citizens who are wooed by receiving a walkie-talkie and sometimes a rifle (and our presence.) The same sense of importance and dignity could be given to the dirt poor with a substantive program of local benefit.”

Robin Doyno, Local 13
Long Beach, CA

“I have mixed feelings about the troop surge. Obama has gone back on his promise, but the Pakistan and Afghanistan borders are a threat to our safety. I’m worried that my father, who has served five tours since 2001, will be killed—and for what? Will Afghanistan be this generation’s Vietnam?”

Britta T. Duncan, Local 5
Portland, OR

“President Obama wants to stabilize the critical border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan by sending 30,000 more U.S. troops. The goal is laudable, and unlike Iraq, is not preemptive. After all, this is the area from which Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda hailed. Nonetheless, it will be our young men and women who will pay the price, some of whom will die or become physically and psychologically disabled. They will be returning to a veterans’ system that is already stretched to the breaking point. As a Vietnam Vet, I don’t want to see any more of our young people coming home in flag-draped coffins or in wheelchairs, or displaced and homeless on our streets. The Democrats have betrayed us almost as much as the Republicans have. I want the wars to stop and I want the nation-building to happen here. Bring all of our troops home now!”

Rudy Finne, Local 19
Seattle, WA

Keeping labor history alive: Local 34 pensioner Don Watson is an active member of the Bay Area Labor History Workshop, a group that sponsors monthly events which are open to the public. On Sunday, February 21, the group will explore the stories behind Nick Bordoise and Howard Sperry, who were killed in San Francisco’s 1934 waterfront strike that led to the creation of the ILWU. On March 14, Watson will host an event in his home by historian Elizabeth Lamoree who will discuss California’s grape growers and the efforts by grape workers to unionize. “We usually meet in someone’s home, and I’m especially happy to host this one,” says Watson, who spent many years supporting the United Farmworkers Union, including time in Salinas where the union was helped lettuce workers organize in the 1970’s. Watson has also done research into the history of California’s “fruit tramps,” workers who travelled the rails and were employed in packing houses from the late 1800’s to the middle 1900’s. On April 18, historian Harvey Schwartz will discuss his new book, “Solidarity Stories, An Oral History of the ILWU.” Anyone interested in joining or attending can reach Don Watson at 510-652-3116.
Community unites to save good jobs in Boron

continued from page 1

was hungry and you gave me some-thing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

Rose Fowlkes, a waitress at the Kwik Café, stood to speak, explaining that she had bought a “Proud to be Union” T-shirt and wears it to show her support while waiting tables at the town’s favorite place to get a bite and enjoy a cup of coffee. “We did have a problem one day when we wore our shirts on a catering job up at the mine,” she said, because mine officials complained about the shirts. However, “We put them back on when we left, and we have been wearing them since.”

After a parade of speakers that included retiree Ed Davies and Auxiliary 41 leader Judy Rowley, everyone re-assembled outside for the long march from the union hall to the company gates, a mile and a half away. With the sun setting and temperatures dropping to a chilly 45 degrees, families gathered their children and strolls together and walked in a large group along a lonely stretch of desert road that ran straight to the company gates. There was singing and clapping, but also times when everyone walked silently. Workers in front carried a banner reading, “U.S. Borax/Rio Tinto: Have a heart, don’t be a Scrooge!” Children followed behind them with homemade signs and Christmas cards asking the company to share the spirit of the holidays and season of sharing. When the marchers reached the company gates, they were met by security guards wearing paramilitary black jumpsuits tucked into tactical boots, a style the company adopted after the contract expired on November 4.

Families lit several dozen candles that cast a soft glow over the crowd gathered at the gates. Pastor Darryl Nichols asked everyone to bow their heads in prayer, saying, “Lord, we’re asking you for the strength to see us through the difficult times ahead. We know this struggle will be challenging, but we also know that together we can accomplish great things. Help us stay strong so we can protect the families and communities here that are depending on us for support.”

The candles had almost burned down when the marchers turned around and started the return trip back. Heated vans were waiting to carry passengers back to the union hall, but the company hired a professional union-busting “security” firm that specializes in breaking strikes and protecting scabs.

Tyler and Kayla Martz were among dozens of families who attended the “Unity With Our Community” event on December 18th in Boron where small business and religious leaders pledged to help their community fight for good jobs.

Is Rio Tinto trying to bust the ILWU in Boron?

Negotiating a new contract with a powerful employer like Rio Tinto is often difficult and can sometimes lead to a high-stakes showdown. In 2002, big shipping and stevedoring companies demanded contract concessions that triggered an employer lock-out and shut down of West Coast ports, testing the resolve and resources of dockworkers and their union.

Local 30 acting President Jack Liebengood thinks something similar is happening today in the desert, 100 miles from the waterfront.

“You can tell the difference between an employer who’s just being tough and one who’s trying to bust the union,” says Liebengood, “and it seems clear to me that Rio Tinto is out to bust the ILWU.” Some of the evidence, says Liebengood, is based on the employer’s behavior in negotiations.

“Rio Tinto isn’t just asking for some adjustments or tweaks, they’re trying to rip the guts out of our contract,” he says, offering these examples:

Eliminating seniority. The company wants to gut seniority and give management the right to pick and choose who gets job assignments, promotions, shifts, overtime, and more.

Getting rid of guaranteed raises. The company wants workers to compete against each other for some of their raises. Under the company plan, the boss would decide who gets a raise.

Gutting grievances and arbitration. The company wants to eliminate entire parts of the contract from being enforced by an arbitrator.

Doing away with the union shop. The company wants to end the “union shop” and hire workers who refuse to pay dues.

Slashing benefits. The company wants pension plans would be frozen for current workers and eliminated for new hires who would only get a “savings plan” with no guaranteed benefit. Health care costs could increase; families are already paying almost $400 a month. Accumulated sick leave would disappear, replaced with a maximum of 5-days per year.

Operating part of the plant as non-union. The company wants entire sections of the operation to run without any union representa-tion or contract protection.

In addition to their anti-union agenda in negotiations, Rio Tinto has hired a professional union-busting “security” firm that specializes in breaking strikes and protecting scabs.

“It’s not unusual for employers to make threats, but Rio Tinto seems dead-set on putting their anti-union agenda into practice here, says Liebengood. “If an employer like Rio Tinto can get away with busting or weakening our union in Boron, it will encourage other ILWU employers to try the same thing.”

Businessman Efil Ro (left) has been working in Boron for 52 years. Borax worker Hector Noriega and his wife (right) heard Ro and others offer support for winning a fair contract with U.S. Borax/Rio Tinto.

Mormon Bishop Brady Martz (right) cited scriptures and verse to encourage families struggling for justice at Borax. Marchers ended their “Unity With Our Community” event with a prayer and candlelight vigil at the mine gate (left).
Solidarity Through History

The Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies is fighting to preserve our labor heritage for future generations.

The Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies at the University of Washington has not been immune to the damaging effects of the recession. The Center has seen a 40 percent cutback in its budget, has had to curtail some of its activities, reduce staff and cut back on scholarships and grants.

Even so, the Center is thriving, and has remained unavering in its goal of establishing a Labor Archive for the state of Washington.

Professor James Gregory, who holds the Harry Bridges Endowed Chair in Labor Studies, says such an archive is crucial.

“Teaching labor history and preserving labor history are particularly important,” he says. “Some unions do a fine job of preserving their heritage, but others do not. This is tragic. If the stories and records of the past are not preserved, they disappear, and will be forever lost to new generations who will never know about the struggles that built and preserved their union. History is one of the keys to maintaining solidarity. If workers don’t understand the past, don’t understand why it was necessary to fight for rights and build a strong union, it is less likely they will fight to maintain it.”

The ILWU agrees, and is committed to helping the Harry Bridges Center achieve its goal. It will cost approximately $100,000 a year to make the archive a reality. In June the ILWU pledged a $50,000 three-year matching grant; in other words, every dollar donated to the Archive will be matched by the ILWU, up to $50,000 a year for three years. The Center met its 2009 fundraising goal and Gregory is confident that financial support will come through in subsequent years as well.

“I think that the enthusiasm for this campaign has been remarkable,” he says. “We received dozens of donations from workers and from union members who know the importance of labor history.”

The Center received support from the Washington State Labor Council in the form of a $10,000 matching grant. Local 23 pensioner Terry Mason contributed $5,000 and many other individuals and locals have given generously.

Gregory says the Center will continue to seek grants to permanently fund the Archive after the first three years, and will also create an endowment that will generate annual income.

But funding isn’t the only challenge facing the up-and-coming Labor Archive. Gregory says labor education programs at universities nationwide face attacks from right-wing and anti-labor organizations that target the programs with lawsuits and pressure administrators and state legislators to close them down. “There is a war going on, a behind-the-scenes war to destroy labor studies programs at universities across the country,” he says, adding that it was just such a malicious lawsuit combined with budget cuts that nearly closed the Labor Education and Research Center at Evergreen State College in Washington State last year.

“Fortunately the labor movement put pressure on the legislature and the legislature pressured the College to save the program. Labor education programs in the University of California system face similar attacks almost every year. Universities and unions need to work together to stop the assaults and expand labor education programs. Universities have large, well-endowed business schools. Why shouldn’t they place equal emphasis on teaching about working people and labor issues?”

Gregory’s vision for the Labor Archive includes what he calls the double mission of collecting and preserving the history of the region’s unions and also creating educational resources for teaching this vital history to workers, to students, and to the general public.”

He explains that as part of the University of Washington library system, the Archive will merge several significant union collections, including ILWU materials, and make them more accessible. The Center plans to hire a labor archivist by next summer who will also advise unions on how to preserve their valuable records, and secure contributions for the Labor Archives.

At the Center’s annual awards banquet in November, Local 52 Pensioner Ian Kennedy received the Robert Duggan Distinguished Supporter of Labor Studies Award, which is given annually to someone who has contributed significantly to the Center’s work. Kennedy, a member of the Visiting Committee since 1997, was instrumental in facilitating the ILWU’s matching grant to the Labor Archive.

“His help has made a huge difference and is partly of why we can move forward this year with the appointment of the archivist,” said Gregory.

International President Bob McEllrath and Executive Board member Herald Ugle of Local 19 were both recently named to the Bridges Center Visiting Committee, a 32-member group of labor union members and state legislators that advises the Harry Bridges Center and the Harry Bridges Endowed Chair of Labor Studies. Gregory says 18 members of the Visiting Committee currently have ties to the ILWU.

“We are especially grateful to the many ILWU members and pensioners who have served on the Visiting Committee,” says Gregory. “The ILWU community provided the funds and inspiration to create the Harry Bridges Chair and Center in 1992 to honor the memory of the great union leader. And ever since then ILWU members and pensioners have been very active.”

The Center’s Waterfront Workers History Project Image & Document Repository, which contains this photograph of 1948 Seattle Longshore strikers, will become part of the Labor Archive.

The celebrated Harry Bridges Bust, housed in the lobby of the University of Washington’s Suzzalo Library, will eventually be adorned by a plaque listing donors to the Labor Archive.

The archives will be a permanent home for historic objects such as a press pass that belonged to Earl George, the civil rights activist and ILWU Local 9 president (1950) who became a photographer for The Dispatcher after retiring.

This charter dated 1908 is an example of the kinds of historic documents that will be preserved in the University of Washington’s Labor Archive.
Books and videos about the ILWU are available from the union’s library at discounted prices!**

**BOOKS:**

A Spark Is Struck: Jack Hall & the ILWU in Hawaii. By Sanford Zalburg. A high quality re-issue of the informative epic account of Jack Hall and the birth and growth of the ILWU in Hawaii $13.50 (paperback).

Along the Shore/Por la Costa—ILWU Coloring Book. A bilingual English/Spanish coloring book about waterfront workers and their union. Originally developed by the California Federation of Teachers’ Labor in the Schools Committee in consultation with member Patricia Aguirre and the ILWU local 13 Education Committee. Meets K-3 classroom standards for History and Social Studies. Two (2) for $5.00.

The Legacy of 1934: An historical exhibit by the ILWU. Produced as a catalogue to accompany this brief but vivid publication stands on its own as a pictorial history of the coastwise strike and an account of the extraordinary sacrifices and democratic principles of the founding members of the union. Two (2) for $5.00.

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