Five hundred workers at Rite Aid’s distribution center in Lancaster scored a remarkable victory on May 1st when they reached a tentative agreement on their first contract. On May 12th, a strong majority of employees ratified the three-year agreement that provides guaranteed raises, fair health insurance rates, protection against subcontracting, and powerful new tools to control the pace of work and promote safer conditions inside the million-square-foot warehouse.

“Everyone on the team deserves credit for helping win this fight,” said ILWU International President Rob McEllrath, “beginning with the rank-and-file warehouse workers, our coalition allies around the country, and especially the ILWU members up and down the coast who pitched in to help us win.”

Nasty anti-union campaign

The five-year effort required a level of dedication and commitment that most union members haven’t experienced for a generation or more. The fight began soon after Rite Aid workers Lorena Ortiz and Angel Warner contacted the ILWU in March of 2006. The ILWU Organizing Department began...
LETTERS TO THE DISPATCHER

Dear Editor,

I was in Whittier, CA recently, speaking at a showing of Locked Out, 2010, the documentary by Joan Sekler on the struggle of Local 30 miners in Boron CA against the mining giant, Rio Tinto. The subject came up that the Dispatcher was considering doing an article about the recent screenings of this documentary. It is important that as many people possible know about our struggle last year in the high desert. Locked Out tells our story and the tremendous outpouring of solidarity that made our victory possible. It is impossible to thank everyone that helped us during “our hour of need” but this film shows what people can accomplish when we work together.

I’m a nobody in the labor movement. I’ll never be a Harry Bridges, Jack Hall or Bob McEllrath. But I can take care of my small part. And there are thousands of other workers just like me that serve on negotiating committees, attend union meetings, demonstrations and do the unsung work that make our unions strong.

Send your letters to the editor to: The Dispatcher, 1188 Franklin St., San Francisco, CA 94109-6800 or email to editor@ilwu.org

Longshore caucus: As the Dispatcher was going to press, the week-long meeting of the Longshore caucus was underway in San Francisco. We will have more details of the issues discussed by the caucus in next month’s issue.

Pinpoint boycott strategy pays off: On April 1st, Coast Committeeman, Ray Ortiz, Jr., led a delegation of customers into the Rite Aid on Gaffey St. in San Pedro, CA to “strip their ‘scripts’ from the store and move them to another union pharmacy. The pinpoint boycott was an important part of the strategy to encourage Rite Aid management to negotiate a fair, first contract with 500 Local 26 workers at their Lancaster distribution center. The boycott ended after a contract settlement was ratified by workers on May 12th. For the full story, see pages 4 and 5.

Labor Archives turns 25: Scores of people joined in celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Labor Archives hosted at ILWU Local 34 in San Francisco, CA on May 1st. The celebration began with a labor history fair featuring organizations such as the California Historical Society, Freedom Archives, and also included a historical exhibit on the ILWU put together by the ILWU library. There was also a film screening of rare labor footage by Rick Prelinger from the Internet Archive, and a recording booth with FoundSF where people shared their work and union stories. There was also a cultural program honoring labor through music, theater, poetry and a talk by SF State Professor Robert Cherny on local labor history. Art Pulaski, head of the California Labor Federation, opened the event. In the above photo, ILWU historian Harvey Schwartz hands a button to a young girl.
Throughout its history, the ILWU has been committed to rank and file democracy, social justice, and solidarity with other workers and unions on behalf of economic and social gains for working people. The ILWU’s power rests on the hard work of rank and file members who both create and carry out these policies. Earl George (1894-1985) of Seattle Local #9 was one such person. He dedicated his life to tireless work on behalf of the ILWU and progressive causes, most passionately in the struggle to end racial discrimination. In a sense, his life is a snapshot of the ILWU and the wider progressive movement, in which rank and file members inspire policy in the union, and the union inspires social change that extends beyond its membership.

“\nAll the movements I’ve been part of had one important goal: a little more bread, slightly thicker broth, and a bigger piece of the pie for everyone.\n”

George was born in Denver in 1894. He once said that “growing up black in this country gives you a pretty good political education.” Early on, the struggles of Denver’s black community and the violent Colorado miners’ strikes shaped his thinking. George studied math and chemistry at the University of Denver before being drafted into the segregated Army in 1917 and sent to Fort Lewis in the Puget Sound.

George arrived in Seattle in time to participate in the 1919 general strike. 65,000 workers in Seattle walked out for wage increases. The action effectively shut down the entire city. In an oral history interview, George recalled of the strike that “nothing moved but the tides.” He remembered that it was his introduction to the class struggle.

Like other African Americans, George was excluded from many jobs as well as many unions. In the 1920s and 1930s, he worked in a number of low paid, non-unionized jobs in the service sector, peppered with periods of unemployment. He found work as a steward aboard coastwise vessels, where he joined the Industrial Workers of the World, a militant labor union founded in 1905 which rallied under the banner, “an injury to one is an injury to all.” When the Great Depression hit, George marched in Seattle’s streets with the Unemployed Citizens League and the Workers’ Alliance, an organization which fought to get collective bargaining rights for people working on federal projects. He also helped build the Washington Commonwealth Federation and the Pension Union, whose influence in Washington State politics helped pass the state’s first pension bill in 1939.

George joined ILWU Local #9 as a warehouseman in 1938. While working as a warehouseman, he continued to dedicate himself to ending discrimination and bettering the lives or workers. In 1948, he worked on a campaign that succeeded in forcing Seattle-area grocery stores to hire African Americans. A dedicated ILWU member, he participated in the 1946 strike, and in 1950 became the first Black president of the ILWU.

While serving in local office, George and then ILWU Regional Director Bill Chester (later International Vice President) were among a number of African American unionists who helped found the National Negro Labor Council (NNLC). A powerful but short-lived labor organization, the NNLC focused its goals on ending racial discrimination in industry and racism in unions. They campaigned to get unions to organize Black workers and were successful in getting a number of unions to call for non-discrimination clauses in their labor contracts.

George was a survivor of racism and also a strong combatant against it. Like many labor activists of his time, he also faced bitter harassment. Along with ILWU President Harry Bridges and other members of the union, George was scapegoated for his political views. In the early 1950’s, former Communist Party member Barbara Hartle testified at the Veld Committee hearing, part of the House Un-American Activities Committee, and named Earl and his wife Vivian along with over 200 other possible members of the Communist Party. Earl himself was subpoenaed to appear before the committee to answer whether he was a Party member. He recalled that “the committee was so self-righteous. They were going to save the world from dangerous folks like me. What did I have to say to them? I took the Fifth Amendment and walked out.”

Earl George was a friend to legendary performer and honorary ILWU member Paul Robeson. In 1952, the Seattle City Council barred Robeson from performing at the Civic Auditorium. George came to his aid, organizing protests in Robeson’s support. He took similar action when the US State Department revoked Robeson’s passport, preventing him from touring outside the US because of his political beliefs.

Lonnie Nelson, a longtime Seattle-area activist and member of the ILWU, was close to George, who stated that “he was one of the people in the ILWU who represented a wide understanding of life and industry. He was a working class intellectual.”

George remained with Local #9 until 1961, when he retired from work. However, retirement did not mean an end to his commitment to the ILWU and labor and civil rights activism. As soon as he left the workforce, George became a committed and active member of the Seattle Pensioners, where he variously served as Trustee, Secretary, and Secretary-Treasurer. He was integral in organizing freedom schools during the school boycott to protest segregation in 1966. He also became a well-known photog- raper, chronicling union picket lines, demonstrations, and rallies for social justice through his camera’s lens. The ILWU International appointed him as a correspondent/photographer for the Dispatcher, and a number of his images appeared in the paper in the 1970s and 1980s.

In an interview taken shortly before his death, George stated that “for ninety years I’ve been outraged by injustice wherever it rears its ugly head. All the movements I’ve been part of had one important goal: a little more bread, slightly thicker broth, and a bigger piece of the pie for everyone.”

— Rob Walker
wheels of justice turned slowly at the
Testimony from workers was gathered
tant law-breaking and enforce the law.
and difficult to enforce. ILWU lawyers
federal law, but it can be hard to prove
porters is supposed to be illegal under
Firing and harassing union sup-
Legal help
have a union." 
many of us were being disciplined and
fired for standing up for our right to
Estrada, "but those first two years
hard," said Rite Aid worker Sylvia
"The whole process was really
opposed campaigning against the union.
"The whole process was really
working with Local 26 President Luisa
Gratz to help Rite Aid employees build
a strong committee inside their ware-
house. Rite Aid management responded
with an aggressive anti-union cam-
paign, hiring a team of union-busting consultan-
ts and unleashing a barrage of
illegal threats, retaliation and firings –
aimed at chilling union support
inside the giant distribution center.
The company also organized their own
committee of anti-union workers who
openly campaigned against the union.
"The whole process was really
"Some workers were being disciplined and
fired. Companies and union-busting
consultants know most workers fold
under that kind of pressure. But the
Rite Aid workers pressed harder and
boldly called for a union election in
March of 2008 – which they won,
against all odds.
"Winning that election seemed like
an incredible victory at the time –
and it was," said Rite Aid worker Igna-
cio Meza. "But it was really just half
the battle – because we still had to
negotiate a first contract and Rite Aid
didn't seem the least bit interested in
cooperating with us."
First contracts can be fatal
By the spring of 2008, Rite Aid workers had survived long enough to
be among a handful of private-sector workers in the U.S. who had weath-
ered a blistering anti-union attack and still managed to win a union elec-
tion supervised by the National Labor Relations Board. Now they faced
a final but formidable hurdle of win-
nig their first contract.
"First contract fights have been the
grey area of many union struggles," said ILWU International Vice President
Ray Familathe who oversees the ILWU Organizing Department. "Without the
mendous pressure from workers on the inside and support on the outside,
employers have every reason to stall and
obody who lost wages.
The "inside/outside" strategy
The first year of contract negotia-
tions was unproductive – confirming
that Rite Aid wouldn't be negoti-
ating seriously without more pressure. In the fall of 2008, the company
announced a series of layoffs and cut-
backs that left 46 workers holding
layoff slips and 300 employees with
lower paychecks. The company said
their actions were sparked by eco-
nomic necessity, but it was no acci-
dent that these cutbacks raised fears
in the warehouse. The ILWU argued
that the layoffs and cutbacks were illegal because workers had voted for
the union, obligating Rite Aid to nego-
tiate with employees before making
changes. Eventually, federal officials
agreed and required Rite Aid to re-hire
employees and provide back-pay to
everyone who lost wages.
Workers and the ILWU Organiz-
ing Department developed an "inside/
outside" strategy that could gener-
ate enough pressure to dramati-
cally increase the odds of winning
a first contract. The approach relied
on workers to take action to defend
their rights on the shop floor, while
a support network was built on the
outside to back them up. By working
together in a coordinated strategy, the
plan aimed to increase pressure on Rite
Aid to do the right thing and sign a
fair agreement.
In-plant protests
Workers inside the Lancaster Distri-
bution Center stepped up and orga-
nized around shop-floor issues that
needed attention – with or without a
contract. After Rite Aid announced the
layoffs and cutbacks in late 2008, workers didn't wait for the federal Labor
Board to respond – they took action by organizing a picket line at
their warehouse, marching in front of
management's offices to demand that
the co-workers be re-hired.
Employers also protested against
dangerous working conditions inside
their warehouse, including the danger-
ous practice of stacking heavy items on
the high shelves that could cause seri-
ous or fatal injuries if they fell down
onto someone. That's what happened to
Pedro Lopez who was hit by a box of
liquor that crashed down on his head in
late 2009. Lopez suffered a head
wound from the incident, and the inci-
dent sparked warehouse workers to
take immediate action. Three hundred
shoppers and co-workers surrounded the plant manager to
demand that heavy liquor bottles be
lowered to the ground floor, which
management finally agreed to do.
Solidarity outside
While workers were asserting their
rights in Lancaster, ILWU's Organiz-
ing Department was contracting other
unions that represented Rite Aid work-
ers across the country, including the
United Food and Commercial Work-
ers Union (UFCW), Teamsters, SEIU-
1199, and the Retail, Wholesale and
Department Store Union (RWDSU).
The goal was to build a network to
promote solidarity, share informa-
tion, and coordinate action. The first
joint action took place in April 2007,
when Rite Aid unions co-sponsored
a reception for union benefit admin-
istrators in Anaheim, CA. Other joint
actions followed, many taking place
in front of Rite Aid retail stores during
high-traffic times that included Valentine's Day, Halloween, Easter, and the
Christmas holiday season. The ILWU
Communication Department created
a special website that featured the
growing number of actions and par-
ticipants who were joining the effort:
www.RiteAidWorkers.net.
Building a coalition
International Vice President Fami-
lathe was overseeing work by the
Organizing Department to build the
Rite Aid campaign coalition, expand-
ing it beyond the Rite Aid unions.
Early support came from ILWU Pen-
sioner and Auxiliary groups, plus
chapters of the Alliance for Retired

A banner outside of the Rite Aid store on Gaffey St. in San Pedro welcomes back ILWU members after the pinpoint boycott of the two Rite Aid stores ended following an agreement between management and the 500 workers in Lancaster.
It takes time. The Rite Aid campaign in Lancaster took five years. Many organizing campaigns take even longer. Companies and union-busting consultants use delaying tactics to wear down workers.

It requires resources. Besides paying “lost-time” for worker-organizers and maintaining a staff of professional organizers, there are costs for legal work, communications and travel expenses. No money was wasted, but it adds up.

We can’t do it alone. Critical help came from Jobs with Justice, United Students Against Sweatshops, the Alliance for Retired Americans, politicians, and unions including the UFW, Teamsters, SEIU, and the AFL-CIO. Local 13 and 63 volunteers recruited small business support for the Rite Aid Boycott.

A strong committee is key. The campaign begins and wins with a strong committee inside the shop composed of rank-and-file leaders. They made important decisions and helped co-workers take action.

Help from the whole family. Critical support came from ILWU locals, the Coast Longshore Division, Pensioners and Auxiliary members. Coordination and cooperation made a big difference.

One fight, many fronts. Rite Aid workers talked with investors, shareholders, and customers. They met members of Congress and state legislators. Attended trade shows and award dinners, talked with TV, radio, and newspaper reporters.

The road ahead
The San Pedro boycott ended on May 1st and customers who honored the boycott are now returning to both Rite Aid stores. Inside the Lancaster warehouse, workers say they’ve been changed forever by the five-year experience. “All of us want Rite Aid to succeed now more than ever, but in a way that respects everyone, not just a few at the top,” says Lorena Ortiz, one of several warehouse workers who travelled from Lancaster to San Pedro to support the boycott. During an April 1st visit to San Pedro when she attended the boycott kickoff, Ms. Ortiz met with three Rite Aid workers who came from Ohio to support the event. The Ohio workers were striking against six Rite Aid stores in the Cleveland area because the company was using illegal tactics against them, trying to force workers into accepting an unfair health insurance deal. “We’re all still in this struggle together and have to keep helping each other,” she said. “Things will be better now in Lancaster with our contract and a union, but I’ve learned that we have to stick together and help each other because that’s what the union is really all about.”

Lessons learned from the Rite Aid campaign

Strength in unity: The ILWU spearheaded a national coalition of Rite Aid workers that united the struggle across the country. The local in Lancaster was part of the May 1st rally in San Pedro, CA. Six Rite Aid stores in Northern Ohio represented by the UFWC are still on strike. In the photo above, three Ohio Rite Aid workers (l to r): Victor Alicea, Elsie Romero and Florine Rose stand in solidarity with Lancaster Rite Aid workers (R to L): Jeanice Smiley, Angel Warner, Sylvia Estrada and Lorena Ortiz.
California ports meeting focuses on infrastructure, Panama Canal, jurisdiction issues

Longshore division locals throughout California met at Local 13 in San Pedro March 29 and 30. This was first time since 1999 that the Locals from Eureka to San Diego have met to discuss vital issues.

Issues discussed included port specific problems including jurisdiction, California’s infrastructure problems, discretionary cargo and the widening of the Panama Canal.

“Not only was this meeting informative on the important issues facing California’s ports, but we all were made well aware of the employers making the same orchestrated move on our jurisdiction,” said Local President, Danny Miranda.

Local 63 President Peter Peyton was elected chairman and Local 18’s Secretary-Treasurer, Rena Smith, was elected recording secretary. The representatives not only heard from each other but also from speakers representing railroads (BNSF and UP) and Norman Fassler Katz, Sr. Consultant, California Select Committee on California Ports and Goods Movement.

International President Robert McEllrath led a lunch time discussion of contract issues facing the Locals coast wise in 2014. Growing jurisdictional concerns which will affect the entire coast such as Clerk technology and MiER technology were also discussed.

“This was a fantastic meeting. It was good to meet other Longshoremen from California and hear their problems and try to come up with strategies to fight the issues together,” said Anthony Flores, Local 54 LRC Representative.

“This meeting could not have come at a better time,” said Rena Smith. “It was an eye opener for me to hear that each port in California faces problems and try to come up with strategies to fight the issues together, and form a battlefront on our behalf. We are going to have many jurisdictional battles for a long time. But we’re tough and with solidarity we will win those battles.”

Leaders from Longshore locals in California met at Local 13 in San Pedro on March 29-30.

America’s Cup coming to San Francisco

Oracle CEO Larry Ellison’s racing boat was unloaded at Pier 80 in SF on Feb 28th by members from ILWU Locals 10, 34 and 91. Pier 80 will become the headquarters for Ellison’s sailboat operation during the 34th America’s Cup race being held in San Francisco in the summer of 2013.

Ellison’s $45 million sailboat had to be unloaded in 4 separate pieces, said Local 10’s Frank Gaskin. “This was a very unusual job. The mast of the ship was 230 feet long,” Gaskin said. It took 30 ILWU members three days to unload the ship. ILWU members expect to get more work from the America’s Cup project.

Leaders from Longshore locals in California met at Local 13 in San Pedro on March 29-30.

Scholarship available for the children of Local 10 members

Trustees of the Smolin-Melin Scholarship Fund are prepared to accept applications for scholarships for the academic year 2011-2012. Now is the time to indicate your interest. June 1, 2011 is the application deadline.

Vitor Smolin and Carlton Melin were long time members of Local 10. They left a sum of money to establish the scholarship fund. They specified that scholarships were to be available to children of Class A Local 10 members to further their “collegiate” education. Trustees of the Fund interpret “members” to mean active members in good standing at the time of disbursment of scholarship funds, deceased members and retired members. The Trustees interpret “collegiate” to apply only to full-time study (at least 12 units per semester or quarter) at either a four-year college or an academic junior college.

The Trustees have agreed that (1) no applicant will be awarded more than four scholarships, (2) a fifth scholarship would be considered after careful review of the applicant’s record and if circumstances warrant and (3) in no event would an applicant be considered for a sixth scholarship.

Based always on available assets, the Fund historically has awarded scholarships in a range from $1000 to $2500 for full-time students at four-year colleges or universities, and from $750 to $1750 for full-time students at two-year colleges.

Trustees are Beth Ross, counsel for ILWU Local 10, David Erkkila, a retired member of Local 10 and a friend of Victor Smolin, and Eugene Vrana, Director of Educational Services and Librarian for ILWU.

If you have a son or daughter who is applying to enter college next fall, or is a college student who is planning to continue, and the above requirements are met, you might want to apply for one of these scholarships.

To request an application, simply call Maria Ascaruz at (415) 771-6400. She will then send you the application form with the necessary explanatory materials.
Contract victory for Canadian longshore members

Canada's 3,500 west coast longshore workers have won a new contract after almost a year and a half of negotiations. The new eight-year agreement was overwhelmingly ratified by members in early May. Key points of the new agreement include:

- Wage increases averaging 3.5% each year
- Inflation protection via “cost of living adjustments” in years 6, 7 and 8
- New provisions for paid maternity and paternity leave

Before the old contract expired on March 31, 2010, workers had voted by 95% to authorize a strike if necessary, but a 72-hour strike notice was never issued. The last longshore job action on Canada’s western waterfront was initiated by employers in 1999 when they briefly locked-out workers. Negotiating the new contract was difficult because employers adopted an aggressive stance. Canada’s Industrial Relations Board described the negotiations as “…often infected by a fierce employer lobbying campaign against the ILWU.” The British Columbia Maritime Employers Association (BCMEA) tried to gain leverage over ILWU members by enlisting support from Canada’s anti-union government, led by Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Employers also used a report on efficiency at the docks – written by an anti-union academic expert – to generate negative media reports that were aimed at adding pressure on union members to grant employer concessions. Among the concessions sought but not secured by the BCMEA was a plan to settle disputes through binding arbitration instead of the current right of negotiate and strike if necessary.

Union president Tom Dufresne described the new agreement as fair, noting that the eight year term was longer than he and others had wanted, but came with pension increases and other improvements that were popular and important to members.

ILWU Local 514 members are still negotiating their agreement which covers forestry.

Adding the union perspective: Plenty of business leaders and lobbyists attended the annual Bay Planning Coalition conference, but ILWU Secretary-Treasurer Willie Adams (3rd from right) was on hand to speak for workers at the annual event. Willie Adams and local government officials from the Coast Guard, Army Corps, NOAA Fisheries, plus State and local government agencies including six Bay Area ports. The goal of the group is to advocate for good jobs, business and the environment. “The Bay Planning Coalition has a heavy business slant, but it’s important for us to have a voice and work together where there’s common ground,” said Willie Adams. In past years, the ILWU has worked with the group to advocate for the dredging of Oakland’s Ship Channel.

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Call for proposals: Ah Quon McElrath Fund for Economic and Social Justice

The Ah Quon McElrath Fund for Economic and Social Justice (FESJ) is issuing a Request for Proposal for grant funding for 2011-12. See below for a description of the FESJ, the type of proposals being solicited, deadline for submission of proposals, and the date of the award announcement. Two proposals will be awarded up to $5,000 each. The first awards from the FESJ were made in 2010 and included a $2,000 grant to the ILWU’s LEAD program.

Request for Proposals:
The Ah Quon McElrath Fund for Economic and Social Justice, a fund of the Hawaii Labor Heritage Council, is seeking proposals from non-profit organizations to develop educational programs for rank and file members and leaders of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) and other community and labor activists.

About the Fund:
The Ah Quon McElrath Fund for Economic and Social Justice (FESJ) was established in February 2009 after A.Q.’s death on December 11, 2008. Through the generous contributions of her friends, family members and organizations—including those who did not always agree with her—the FESJ reflects A.Q.’s wishes to establish a program whose purpose is to “educate members (of the ILWU), leaders and others in the areas of political action, economic structural changes, globalization, equality, and democracy and how they are affected by employers with whom they negotiate and by occurrences throughout the world.” Implicit in A.Q.’s wishes was the need to combine educational objectives with action programs.

The FESJ is a fund of The Hawaii Labor Heritage Council (HLHC). The HLHC serves as fiscal agent for similar funds. The FESJ Advisory Board is composed of a representative of the ILWU Local 142, the Center for Labor Education and Research at the University of Hawaii (CLEAR), the HLHC, a family member, and others who were close to A.Q. in work and in her personal life. The Fund will make two (2) annual awards of up to $5,000 each.

Criteria for Proposals:
The Fund will review submissions based on the following criteria:

• Does the proposal address issues related to political action, economic structural changes, globalization, equality and democracy and how they are affected by employers with whom unions negotiate and by occurrences throughout the world?

• Does the proposal focus on members and leaders of the ILWU, or the broader labor community?

• Does the proposal include a specific action program?

• Are the results identifiable and measurable? If so, how?

Eligibility:
Not-for-profit organizations and individuals who are supported by a nonprofit fiscal sponsor.

Deadline:
Proposals are due on Thursday, July 1, 2011 and may be submitted by e-mail or ground mail postmarked no later than July 1, 2011.

E-mail: long-gail@sbcglobal.net

Ground mail: Gail Long
Ah Quon McElrath Fund for Economic and Social Justice
17012 Lomond Blvd.
Shaker Hts. OH 44120

Format:
• No more than 1,000 words;
• Electronic documents must be submitted in Microsoft Word 1997-2003 compatible format; and
• Include: description of organization; description of project; goals and objectives; action steps; timeline; budget; and evaluation criteria.

Documentation:
Please submit as attachments the organization’s IRS determination of nonprofit status (or that of your fiscal sponsor). If applying as an individual, also include a letter of support for the proposal from the executive officer(s) of your sponsoring organization.

Announcement of Awards: Wednesday, September 1, 2011.


FESJ Project Showcase (Dec. TBD, 2012):
Present and describe project including photos, print materials and any publicity developed.