



# *The* DISPATCHER

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# IEB reviews activities, sets policy and direction

The ILWU International Executive Board met in its San Francisco headquarters Dec. 7 and 8 to review the union's finances, political and legislative program and its organizing efforts.

International President Bob McEllrath opened the meeting by introducing the officers of the ILWU's new affiliate, the American Radio Association, the radio operators aboard ships (see sidebar page 3). As a maritime union with a long-time relationship with the ILWU and a tradition of rank-and-file democracy, both sides agreed it would be a good fit.

The union trustees met the day before and scrutinized the union's budget and expenses. They reported to the board that the union was in the black and on track to build its reserves. International Secretary-Treasurer Willie Adams walked the board through the details of the expenses for the first three quarters of 2006, explaining particulars and answering questions.

Clerks' Local 63 Secretary Peter Peyton, who along with Secretary-Treasurer Adams and the union's Washington, D.C. office, had helped devise the union's political action strategy and fundraising, reviewed the results of the union's 2006 activities and presented an outline of the union's plan for the 2008 election cycle.

Peyton said that in the 2004 presidential election the ILWU set a goal of raising half a million dollars—more than it had ever done—to help labor friendly politicians win office, and was successful. The union also mobilized its members, sending them out across the country to work on campaigns in battleground states.

In the 2006 mid-term election the union did not raise as much—only about \$221,000—but used the money wisely and successfully. More importantly, the union got more of its members involved in the campaigns. Of the politicians the ILWU gave money to, 57 won their races and only 12 lost. Peyton pointed out that the ILWU led the way in backing California Congressional candidate Jerry McNerney who went on to defy all predictions and defeat seven-term Bush hatchet man Richard Pombo. McNerney had planned to come to the board's meeting to personally thank the ILWU for its support, but at the last minute was summoned to Washington, D.C. by new House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to attend a "boot camp" for freshmen Congressional representatives.

"Our success was incredible, but we can do even better," Peyton said.

The ILWU now plans to use what it has learned in the last two elections in fundraising and member mobilization. It's goal for the 2008 presidential election will be to raise \$1 million, the same amount Wal-Mart contributes.

"We should go toe-to-toe with Wal-Mart," Peyton said. He added that the dollar amount was less important than building rank-and-file participation in the political action program, and that it would be better to get a five dollar contribution from 20 members than \$100 dollars from one.

Vice President, Mainland Joe Radisich presented his report on the organizing program, focusing mostly on the Blue Diamond almond processing campaign in Sacramento and



Clerks' Local 63 Secretary Peter Peyton (left) presents the union's political action plan as International President Bob McEllrath looks on.

the Rite Aid warehouse campaign in Lancaster, Southern California. Organizing Director Peter Olney gave a brief presentation on those two efforts and how the employers' aggressive anti-union activities in both cases would be blunted if Congress were to pass the Employee Free Choice Act. The bill, sponsored by Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and Congressman George Miller (D-CA), would change current labor law and level the playing field for workers trying to organize. The board went on to pass a Statement of Policy in support

of the bill (see page 3).

The Hawaii Local 142 delegation updated the board on an issue that had been discussed at length at the International Convention in Vancouver, B.C. last May—the closure of the Del Monte pineapple fields and cannery. At the convention delegates from the 700-employee operation reported that in February 2006 the company announced it was closing up shop and leaving Hawaii in two years and moving their pineapple production to Guatemala where labor costs are lower.

The announcement came as a surprise to the workers. In 2004 they negotiated a five-year contract to give the company stability in its costs.

"Del Monte had been in Hawaii for 100 years and they indicated they would be here for another 100 years," Local 142 President Fred Galdones said.

The local immediately went into "effects" bargaining, asking the company for enhanced severance pay, extended medical benefits and financial assistance with keeping the workers' plantation housing and community. Del Monte would agree to nothing, so the convention passed a resolution supporting the workers' proposals, and the delegates signed a petition calling on the company to agree to them. The local continued talking with the company, but on Nov. 17 Del Monte announced it was accelerating its closure plans and would shut down in 60 days. Again, the local asked for assistance for the hundreds of workers who not only faced unemployment and the loss of health care for their families, but possible eviction from their homes.

Again, the company has refused to make any commitments to the workers who built its business for decades. So in response the board voted unanimously for a Statement of Policy calling on ILWU families to boycott all fresh Del Monte produce (see page 3).

The board also reviewed the report of the International Balloting Committee that oversaw the vote count of the last union election. It agreed to set up a subcommittee to look at the IBC's recommendations for a smoother and more efficient election process that would report back to the board at its next meeting April 12-13.

—S.S.



The IEB discusses the union's political action plan. From left to right: Hawaii Local 142 representative Kenneth Inge, Columbia River Area representatives Jerry Ylonen and George O'Neil, Puget Sound Area representative Max Vekich, IBU National President Alan Coté, and Northern California Area representatives Fred Pecker and Richard Cavalli.

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# The American Radio Association joins the ILWU

The American Radio Assn. has joined the ILWU as an affiliate and several of its members attended the December IEB meeting. Known in the past as radio officers or radio operators (ROs), they are now skilled Electronics Officers or Master Radio Electronics Officers aboard ships, whose duties have been greatly expanded since the days of Morse code and spark-operated transmitters.

The ARA and ILWU share a history of maritime solidarity, most recently in the 2002 longshore lockout, when ARA members were pulled from ships and walked ILWU lines, and in 1996, when longshore Local 19 and other locals supported the ARA in a dispute with APL. ARA affiliation with the ILWU became official Sept. 8. Like the Inlandboatmen's Union affiliation, the ARA will retain its national officers and internal structure, but on the International Executive Board it will be represented by the Northern California members.

Their work includes the traditional RO communications duties aboard ships of sending and receiving messages, plus a whole new range of responsibilities as the shipping world embraces technology and the information age.

"On the bridge everything is now tied together by computers and computer networks," ARA Secretary-Treasurer Carl Young said. "Global Positioning Systems, the radar systems, autopilot and even the steering is tied in together electronically. We keep all these systems working together efficiently. The bridge officers need all the information provided by the combined data from multiple systems to navigate the ship safely."

ARA members' work is a vital part



Left to right: John Radcliffe, ARA National Council Member, Ed Steinberg, ARA General Counsel, Floyd Hepting, ARA National Council Member, Carl Young, ARA Secretary-Treasurer, Richard Bragg, ARA Vice President

of maritime safety as they operate and repair safety and other electronic equipment aboard ship. They hold RO licenses from the Coast Guard and a number of FCC licenses for operations and maintenance of critical communications systems as well as other industrial certifications for computers and networking, ship security officer, etc. While other ship's officers can operate certain communications equipment on a limited basis, the knowledge and licensed certifications of the RO is vastly more detailed and they may be called on to handle distress com-

munications and emergency repairs of a wide variety of critical communications and safety systems.

But despite the obvious need to have trained electronics technicians aboard ships, the steamship companies would like to cut corners in the interest of profit.

"They'd like to break the union and parcel out our jurisdiction to other crewmembers and/or to shore side vendors if possible," ARA General Counsel Ed Steinberg said. "Essentially, they would like to break the back of a militant union."

As a sea-going officers' union, the 125 ARA members represent an extension of ILWU solidarity onto the high seas.

"Bringing all the maritime unions together has always been an idea the ARA has supported," Steinberg said. "Philosophically we've been close to the ILWU's trade unionism, working for its members, protecting their jobs, livelihoods, medical benefits and providing for their retirement regardless of the cost. Philosophically we're very compatible."

—Tom Price

## IEB Statements of Policy

### STATEMENT OF POLICY IN SUPPORT OF THE EMPLOYEE FREE CHOICE ACT

The ILWU made a serious commitment to organizing more than a decade ago. Dozens of organizing campaigns the union has run since then have given us a close look at the limitations of labor law. Current labor law does little to protect workers who try to organize and less to punish employers who break the rules. The Employee Free Choice Act now in Congress aims to change that and make organizing faster and fairer.

Under the current National Labor Relations Act process, employers can violate the law now and pay later, if at all. The average time between filing unfair labor practice charges and getting an NLRB decision on those charges is two years. If the decision comes down for the workers, the employer at most will have to cough up back pay plus interest for any workers fired illegally. Other violations, such as threats to close the plant, carry no penalties. The employer simply has to post a notice promising not to misbehave again. In the meantime, it can enjoy the fruit of its crime: a scared and pliable workforce.

No wonder employers routinely break the law during organizing drives: 25% of employers illegally fire at least one worker for union activity during organizing drives and 51% of employers illegally threaten to close up shop if the union wins the election.

The workers at the Rite Aid distribution center in Lancaster and at Blue Diamond Growers in Sacramento, organizing to join ILWU Locals 26 and 17, have felt the sting of these illegal employer tactics.

The ILWU filed 11 unfair labor practice charges against Rite Aid over 38 separate violations of the law. These included firing four workers, disciplining, demoting and interro-

gating others and funding anti-union employees. The Board is investigating these charges. Meanwhile the fired workers wait and wonder whether they can make rent, and the chill of fear spreads through the warehouse.

Last spring the NLRB found Blue Diamond guilty of more than 20 labor law violations, including firing union supporters, threatening the workers with plant closure and loss of pensions and other benefits and interrogating workers about their union sympathy. The company complied with the Board's order to re-hire two fired workers—then illegally fired and disciplined other union supporters, drawing more Board complaints.

Current law not only gives employers free rein to poison the atmosphere before an election, but also builds opportunities for bureaucratic delay into the election process itself. The employer can challenge the composition of the bargaining unit, as Rite Aid did, or challenge the outcome of the election, tying the issue up in court and denying workers representation while they do so.

The Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), sponsored by Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-MA) and Rep. George Miller (D-CA), would change the law by setting harsher penalties for employers who break the law during organizing drives; making card-check recognition the standard route to union representation, and setting arbitration and mediation agreements for first contracts.

The ILWU International Executive Board fully supports passage of the Employee Free Choice Act and urges the Democratic leadership in Congress to put the Act among its top priorities.

### STATEMENT OF POLICY TO BOYCOTT FRESH DEL MONTE PRODUCE

For more than 100 years, Del Monte (or its predecessors) has

been growing pineapple in Hawaii. Organized almost 50 years, most of the workers have been members of the ILWU Local 142.

Since 1996, the company has been owned by the Abu Ghazaleh family of United Arab Emirates and headquartered in Coral Gables, Florida. The Hawaii operation is called Del Monte Fresh Produce (Hawaii), Inc. Its parent corporation is Fresh Del Monte Produce, Inc., and indications are that all major decisions for Hawaii are controlled and determined by Fresh Del Monte Produce.

On February 1, 2006, Del Monte announced plans to shut down its Hawaii operations in 2008. The announcement came as a shock to the company's 700 employees. Nevertheless, they were relieved to know they had at least two years to prepare themselves for the shutdown. They needed the time to find new jobs and possibly training for new careers, especially since most of them had little education and experience other than in pineapple work.

Local 142 started bargaining with Del Monte believing it had two years before the complete closure. In the bargaining, Del Monte, directed by its corporate office, was giving virtually nothing additional to ease the workers in their transition from Del Monte, especially refusing to consider additional medical coverage protection, severance pay, or financial assistance to transfer Kunia Camp, home to some 120 families, from the company's control.

In August 2006, the ILWU Local 142 filed an unfair labor practice with the Hawaii Labor Relations Board alleging unlawful conduct and unlawful bargaining. In September 2006, Fresh Del Monte Produce relocated the general manager in Hawaii to operations in Kenya and appointed to the position the human resources director in Hawaii, who had little or

no practical experience in pineapple operations.

Then, abruptly, on November 17, 2006, Del Monte announced *immediate closure* of the Hawaii operations. No more harvesting, no more packing, no more Del Monte pineapple in Hawaii. All of the crop in the ground would be plowed under. Because of the company's repeated assurances to the workers and their union that operations in Hawaii would continue into 2008, the workers felt betrayed.

The company's actions mean that *all* pineapple marketed under the Del Monte label will be grown outside of the U.S. The company has taken the technology and even seed material for the highly successful MD-2 variety of pineapple from Hawaii and the U.S. to grow in other countries where labor costs are cheap and labor standards are low.

Del Monte's behavior contrasts with other plantations that have shut down in Hawaii and have provided for financial assistance for the workers and have cooperated with the union to help with the transition. Del Monte has demonstrated that it has no more use for Hawaii and, unless legally compelled, will likely not provide workers any more than it must under the current collective bargaining agreement. By its actions, Del Monte has shown that it is not a good corporate citizen.

Corporations that squeeze value from U.S. resources and labor and then run away to do business in other countries should be held accountable for their actions. The ILWU condemns the actions of Del Monte and, and because of the conduct of Del Monte in Hawaii and the parent company, ILWU members and their families shall boycott all products of Fresh Del Monte Produce, especially pineapple. The ILWU urges all who support justice to join in the boycott of Fresh Del Monte Produce.

# Season's Greetings from the International

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# Have a Happy and Safe New Year!