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Beat Bush in November

By James Spinosa
ILWU International President

In less than 10 months—D-day, Nov. 2, 2004—the future of our country and that of the whole world will be decided. If George W. Bush gets another four years in the White House, if both houses of Congress remain controlled by the Republicans, the labor movement will be facing its biggest crisis since the McCarthy witch hunts of the 1950s.

The fate of all American working people—union and nonunion—of working people around the world, of human and civil rights and of the global environment hang in the balance. Fathoming the depths of damage Bush has done in the three years since he lost the election—while knowing he faced another race—it’s hard to imagine what he’ll dare to do if he wins this time and doesn’t ever have to face voters again.

Between war, globalization, unemployment and privatization, working people haven’t faced so grim a reality since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Back then a desperate working class movement, inspired in large part by the West Coast Maritime Strike of 1934 and its victory that established the ILWU’s tenuous foothold of the corporate greed of the 1920s. It brought unions, decent wages and conditions and basic human dignity to workers. Paved the way for employer-paid vacations, health care and pensions—all now under attack by the employers and the Bush administration.

Once again the ILWU is challenged to become a force in turning the labor movement into the leaders of a social movement. Even if the deck seems stacked against us, we are not without hope. This union has faced odds this tough before.

The ILWU’s International Convention last spring decided almost unanimously that beating Bush in November 2004 is the number one goal of the union. We don’t stand much of a chance of moving forward on our other programs until Bush is out of the way. We are already moving on the Convention’s mandate and are continuing to develop our strategies to stop Bush’s war on workers.

First, all members must donate as much as they can to our Political Action Fund. It is an unfortunate truth of politics and power that money opens doors when our rank-and-file legislative activists go to the halls of Congress to lobby for our issues. Be they port security to protect our longshore members, or cabotage laws to protect our ILWU members, or support for the domestic sugar industry to protect our sugar workers in Hawaii and California, or occupational health and safety, Social Security or trade agreements that affect all of us, including all American working people.

One thing we learned during the 2002 longshore contract struggle, when Congressional Republicans were threatening to pass laws taking away our rights to strike and bargain collectively, is that we need friends in high places. And if we are to withstand the employers’ continuing onslaught of slanders against us, we need to make sure that those who stood up for us then remain in a position to help us later. With your contribution, the job you save may be your own. (See page 4 for details on how to donate to the ILWU Political Action Fund.)

But money alone is not enough. We need every ILWU member to become a political activist. First you must be registered to vote so your voice can be added to the chorus calling for change.

But the ILWU, although strong and vocal, is a small union. So we need each member’s voice to be amplified. That means you need to make sure everyone in your family eligible to vote is registered, and that all your friends and their families, friends and co-workers are registered and understand what is at stake for working people in November.

From there we need to fan out to our communities. The ILWU needs to be visible in our communities, leading and inspiring by example. You can join these coordinated efforts by volunteering at your local. Your local officers will help you plug in with the work of the ILWU District Councils—the political organizations of the union in each region—and the area’s Central Labor Councils—the political coalition of all AFL-CIO unions locally.

On Jan. 20 the ILWU International Officers and Coast Committeemen convened a meeting of the officers of our District Councils, our Coast Legislative Action Committee and other political activists in the union to map out and coordinate our fundraising, campaigning and lobbying efforts. Your union has a plan and we are moving forward with it.

But the ILWU will not be acting alone. We are already working with the national AFL-CIO to multiply our efforts. While we focus most of our attention on the states where we live—California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska and Hawaii—we plan on taking our influence nation-wide.

In the November 2002 Congressional elections we pioneered a new program with the AFL-CIO, sending more than 30 members to campaign in battleground states, those swing states where the vote was close and we could help make the difference between victory and defeat. Our ILWU political road warriors were an inspiration to union members wherever they went, galvanizing the campaign and getting out the vote. In 2004 we are planning to send at least 100 ILWU activists out on the campaign trail.

We do not stand a chance of moving forward on our programs until Bush is out of the way.
January 2004

ILWU rallies to support grocery workers
by Tom Price

G rocery workers in Southern California are feeling the pain as their strike enters its fourth month. While the companies are losing millions of dollars, workers are losing their jobs. Without help, they might not be able to hold out much longer.

It’s bigger than just this battle. We hope other unions will do the same.”

We don’t see this as just a fight for the workers involved. It’s a battle for all workers in America,” marine clerks’ Local 63 member Julie Brown said.

people are getting more aware of this through the work of the Harry Bridges Institute (HBI) and its Adopt-a-Family program.”

Within three days of the beginning of the strike-lockout the Friends of Labor Project and the HBI mobilized picket line support, bringing water, fruit and supporters to the line. The HBI also coordinated the “adoption” of distressed UFCW members, matching them with ILWU members to help them get by while they are out of work.

We're fighting together for our futures and our families’ future. “I don’t think this is in any way charity, because these people are holding the line for all of us,” Brown added. “It had been a great day when we were locked out in October 2002. They are fighting for medical benefits for all of us.”

The UFCW found big trouble when the employers came to the bargaining table early last year demanding bracing concessions. These included a pay freeze, two-tier wages and a gutting of the healthcare plan.

About 20,000 workers at Safeway-owned Vons struck Oct. 11. Then Albertsons and Kroger-owned Ralphs, the other two companies in the employers’ bargaining group, locked out 50,000 of their workers and set up a profit-sharing scheme with Safeway to share the costs of the labor dispute that California Attorney General Bill Lockyer is investigating as a possible violation of anti-trust laws. Ralphs, Albertsons and Safeway respectively are the third, fourth and seventh largest private employers in the five-county Los Angeles area.

The companies released misinformation that they only asked cuts by 5% to $15 a week for health insurance, a claim the union refutes. The actual proposal cuts benefits by 50 percent and places caps on medical expenses. In all, management’s demands would shift $1 billion in costs to workers. New hires, under the two-tier wage system, would effectively have no insurance at all. Many workers make less than $10 an hour now and three-quarters of the workforce are part timers, averaging only $312 per week. By the end of the three-year deal, the workers would pay an average of 855 per year for family healthcare, according to the union. The health insurance that traditionally came with the job made the difference in workers being able to support their families.

These prosperous companies—over the last five years Safeway’s operating profits were up 47 percent, Albertsons’ was up 101 percent and Ralphs’ was up 143 percent—claim competition from Wal-Mart makes the concessions necessary. That retail giant, already the eleventh largest private employer in the L.A. area, plans more stores with low wages and benefits. They are looking for other UFCW contracts coming up, plus auto and tractor fights, as it did with the ILWU Charleston Five struggle the year before. And the ILWU, led by its lead by example,” Donato said.

The ILWU Coast Committee—International President Jim Spinosa, Recording Secretary of the Pacific Commercial Workers Union at 859 members of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union at 859

workers in America,” marine clerks’ Local 63 President Joe Gasperov said. “It feels like we’re all in this together.

and who was about to be evicted,” Brown continued. “I heard about a woman who had breast cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and who was about to be evicted. Local 63 member Julie Brown said. “She wasn’t able to walk the picket line because of her health. I committed to donate a paycheck. It just happened that her rent was exactly that, $1,265. Now we’re fighting together for our futures and our families’ future.

“Local 13 has always been a leader in the labor movement and we lead by example,” Donato said. “That’s what we need to show the rest of the country. We’re going to be a lead, we’re going to start the ball rolling, reaching out to these UFCW workers. We hope other unions will do the same.

“We don’t see this as just a fight for the workers involved. It’s a battle for all workers in America,” marine clerks’ Local 63 President Joe Gasperov said. “It feels like we’re all in this together.

Within three days of the begin-
The Bush administration unveiled its transportation funding plans for the next six years May 14, 2003, a plan inadequate to meet the nation’s transportation needs. The proposal would authorize $247 billion over the next six years, in spite of the fact that the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) says that the U.S. will have to spend at least $375 billion to begin to meet the need. The Bush administration has given Congress the pathetic excuse that we have no money to meet the transportation infrastructure that would benefit the country now and in the future. But, we apparently have enough money to go back to the moon.

Bush has spent all the nation’s reserves on massive tax cuts for the wealthy and the occupation of Iraq. Those are his priorities—not jobs, not safety and not the welfare of the American people.

Why should America address the highway and transportation needs of the country? First and foremost, funding will enhance public safety. Each year 42,000 motorists are killed in accidents. Nearly a third of all fatal crashes each year are caused by substances and reckless driving. The economic cost of these accidents is more than $500 billion.

Secondly, highway and transit funding creates thousands of good-paying jobs. For every $1 billion invested in federal highway and transit spending, 47,500 jobs are created or sustained, according to the Bush administration’s own figures. Highway and transit investments stimulate national economic activity for the nation.

They increase productivity by decreasing time spent on the road, and they attract new jobs and real estate development to occur. More than 64 percent of the nation’s freight moves by highways, an annual value to the economy of more than $5 billion.

Finally, considering the congestion and highway safety impacts of insufficient investments in transportation alone, our economy is losing $300 billion per year because we are not investing the necessary resources to maintain and improve our nation’s transportation systems. We cannot afford to continue to shortchange these systems. To effectively reduce congestion, to increase mobility, to truly improve highway safety and to achieve continuing long-term increases in productivity and economic growth, we must invest in our nation’s transportation future. But we cannot afford to do that right now. That cannot be a priority, because Bush is going to the moon.

The bi-partisan solution to this problem is being proposed. Rep. Don Young (R-AK) and Rep. James Oberstar (D-MN) have introduced H.R. 3550, the Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users. This bill would authorize $1.3 trillion over the next six years. The proponents claim the legislation will create 1.7 million new jobs by 2009.

Recently, the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure asked for transportation union’s thoughts about the bill, including our overall view of it and ways to improve it. We made several suggestions that would greatly advance the interests of ILWU members.

First, the ILWU supports the bill’s commitment for ferry transportation. The Transportation Equity Act allocates up to $125 million for the construction of ferry boats and ferry terminal facilities. This increased funding has already been allocated among three states: Alaska, New Jersey, and Washington. Yet the San Francisco Bay Area ferry system currently has the third largest passenger ridership, and has launched an initiative to more than double that. This critical transportation project will greatly help to alleviate bridge traffic in the Bay Area. The ILWU and other transportation unions asked Young and Oberstar to include a set-aside for the San Francisco Bay Area.

Secondly, the ILWU asked the sponsors of the legislation to ensure that ferry service maintained at the docks are safe to be taken over the road. Chassis, special trailers fitted with wheels used to transport shipping containers, are vital to intermodal transportation in the U.S. Global shipping companies transport goods to the U.S. in large containers, thousands of which are mounted on chassis and hauled by trucks to their final destination. Yet these chassis are not sufficiently inspected for structural or mechanical defects, nor are they maintained to federal standards, placing motorists on America’s highways at risk.

Current law allows chassis owners—usually steamship lines and their employees do not have the expertise to inspect chassis for defects, and more importantly, they are not authorized to perform any necessary repairs. This places drivers in the untenable position of being financially responsible for unsafe equipment that they ultimately can do nothing about.

So the ILWU requested legislative language in the bill to require equipment providers to inspect and maintain all intermodal equipment under their control, and to be held responsible if a chassis fails to meet federal motor carrier safety regulations. In addition, this language should require the DOT to establish a process to remove violations for to unsafe chassis from the records of drivers and motor carriers.

Lastly, the ILWU testified before a Congressional panel concerning the congestion crisis around our nation’s ports. We specifically emphasized the crisis in Southern California concerning the I-710 freeway and the bottleneck of trucks in and out of the Ports of Los Angeles/Long Beach. Consequent of our voices and others, the bill includes a section on freight intermodal transportation. This section would authorize $2 trillion over the next six years, in spite of the fact that the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) says that the U.S. will have to spend at least $375 billion to begin to meet the need. The Bush administration has given Congress the pathetic excuse that we have no money to meet the transportation infrastructure that would benefit the country now and in the future. But, we apparently have enough money to go back to the moon.

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Prop 56: Busting budget gridlock

Republicans on California's West Coast, worried that the state was on the verge of building budget deficits and raising taxes, regrouped this year to pass by the voters a measure that would impose a one-cent sales tax,군 to be used to build public transit systems. The measure, Prop 56, was placed on the ballot as part of a three-bill package that included Prop 57, which would allow the Legislature to increase spending on public transit, and Prop 58, which would require the state to establish a "rainy day fund." The three bills are expected to raise more than $2 billion per year, which would be used to build new transit lines and improve existing ones.

In the last couple of years, in the face of limited revenues and rising costs, the state has had to make cuts in education, health care, and other programs. The Legislature has been forced to rely on temporary measures, such as one-time sales taxes and fee increases, to fund its operations. With Prop 56, the Legislature hopes to establish a more stable source of revenue for public transit.

Voters will also face two other budget-related propositions in March, both backed by Schwarzenegger. Prop 57 would let the state float an "Economic Recovery Bond" worth up to $15 billion, while Prop 58 would require the state to set aside a "rainy day fund" in 2003-2004 budget deficit. If it passes, taxpayers will be paying off this bond for up to 14 years.

Prop 58 requires the state to balance the budget and establish a reserve fund of $8 billion. It is expected to pass for Prop 57. To take effect at press time the California Labor Federation had taken no position on Prop 57 or 58.

RM-2: Boosting transit

Hard work by a new coalition of transit unions put a measure on the March ballot to boost bus fares and rail service in seven San Francisco Bay Area counties. The measure would raise the toll on five bridges in the area by 81. Residents in Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco, Santa Cruz, Solano and Sonoma counties will vote on March 2.

Users of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge as well as the Richmond-San Rafael, Benicia-Merced, Dallas-Carquinez and San Mateo-Hayward spans would pay an additional toll.

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SOLIDARITY BEATS THE ODDS FOR LOCAL 17

Finally the former Fleming workers in ILWU warehouse Local 17 could exhale. They ratified a contract with their new employer, C&S Wholesale Grocers, an overwhelm-
ing margin July 17—ending a bitter years on an upswing, thanks to strong solidarity with the Teamsters.

Local 17’s members worked at the Sacramento distribu-
tion center for Fleming, the top U.S. grocery distributor. They covered all the routine warehouse jobs except for the hostler, loader, palletizer and front-office clerical positions filled by Teamsters Local 150 and the inventory clerk job, which was taken by former ILWU Local 17 members.

Fleming started sliding in early 2002, after its main customer, K-Mart, went bankrupt. Local 17’s siters mounted later that year when Fleming began shedding its retail stores and the SEC started looking into accounting practices.

Local 17’s contract with Fleming was set to expire May 31, 2003. Negotiations began in March. Fleming declared bankruptcy April 1. At the table, management demanded more than $1 million in concessions from the union.

“Holiday take-backs, two-tier wages—they wanted everything,” said night shift steward and Local 17 Vice President John Fleming. “We met them you get a contract with both unions or you have no contract.”

Facing these unreasonable de-
mands and Fleming’s unstable situa-
tion, the ILWU decided to take another approach to negotiations. Business dropped further and people lost work. By the fall, only 47 of 52 employees on the seniority list were being scheduled for 40 hours a week. The rest got anywhere from 32 hours a week to none. They worked half the time, the rest of the time they were on furlough.

C&S filed paperwork to buy Fleming’s wholesale business in June. When the offer was in place, they offered to extend Local 17’s contract to February 2004. But when they came to the table in December, they brought a Scrooge of an offer. They wanted a $1.71 per hour wage cut, then a wage freeze for one year. The rest got any-
thing they could exhale. They ratified a contract and keep the galleys onboard .

The new management agreed to honor Local 17 members’ seniority and past practices at the shop, and to keep the contract language allowing them to respect picket lines. The agreement will expire May 31, 2007, giving them a common expiration date with Local 150 for the first time.

“For a new company coming in that has a third of the business the old one did, this is a good contract,” Jenkins said. “I don’t know if we would’ve done better with a solvent Fleming.”

Burdan gave lots of credit to his fellow negotiating team members—Wyatt Jenkins, Carter Benning, Ernest Vasquez and Chief Steward Dale Farrow.

“They were a great team,” he’s been called lately. “A few months before, these guys didn’t know if they’d have jobs. The company thought they could use the fear factor, but the whole bargaining unit upheld the ILWU traditions and principles of fighting back. We pulled together and got this done.”

—Marcy Rein

FERRY WORKERS FIGHT FOR THEIR JOBS

Thanks to unity, solidarity, political pressure and strategic organizing, some 130 food service workers aboard the Washington State Ferries may yet get their jobs back.

Washington State Ferries manage-
ment announced Dec. 30, 2003 it could not reach an agreement with Sodexho, the food service vendor aboard the ferries, to extend their con-
tract and keep the galleys onboard. Shocked workers, represented by ILWU’s marine division, the Inlandboatmen’s Union, continued to serve the public and load trucks with produce and equipment owned by Sodexho on New Years Eve. By New Year’s Day all galleys aboard WSF vessels were closed and the IUB members were unemployed.

This shutdown occurred despite repeated concessions by the workers to cut hours and some benefits in an effort to reach an agreement. On Dec. 19 IUB officials and Rick Bender, head of the Washington State Labor Council, met with WSF top manage-
ment officials Mike Thorn and Gary Balwin. The managers suggested the IUB meet with Sodexho and try to come up with some concessions that might enable the galleys to stay open through August 2004.

The IUB did just that and Sodexho went back to WSF with its offer. WSF would not accept the Sodexho terms and offered a two-
week extension to try to work out a longer deal. Sodexho found this unac-
ceptable and decided to shut down its operations as of midnight, Dec. 31. Informational pickets started going up at terminals the next day.

The financial trouble in the WSF system is directly linked to Initiative 695, passed in November 1999, and the current legislation. After the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (2.2 percent of the value of all motor vehi-
cles) in the state of Washington. Loss of the car tax revenue sucked 20 per-
cent of the capital funding from the public ferry system. WSF manage-
ment is now looking to make up some of that lost revenue by taking money from union workers.

Earlier last year Sodexho informed WSF that it did not want to continue its contract with WSF under the current terms, claiming they were making too much money. WSF then started the process for Requests for Proposals (RFP) for new food service vendors that did not include long-established worker protection language to give preferential hiring to the existing galley workers and to honor the terms and conditions of their current contract. The IUB filed a formal Labor Practice charge against WSF because of the omission and on Dec. 8, 2003 the union won a huge victory when the Marine Employee’s Commission, the state agency that governs labor relations in the WSF, ruled that WSF had violated labor law and ordered it to rescind the RFP’s that did not contain work-
er protection language.

“The state and the IUB have a relationship concerning labor protec-
tions in the RFP process,” IUB President David Freiboth comment-
ed. “If WSF wishes to modify those protections they are obligated to bar-
gain with the IUB.”

WSF is currently engaged in an effort, through court action, to get the RFP’s overturned.

The first RFP round produced no bidders for the contract and WSF put out new requests with letters of intent due Jan. 9. As of Jan. 13, 21 companies submitted letters of intent for on-shore food and beverage serv-
ices and 11 for on-board food and bev-
erage service. Final proposals are due Feb. 10.

WSF has asked potential bidders to contact the IUB about their pro-
posals. According to Dennis Conklin, IUB Patrolman, any new vendors must now honor the current terms and conditions of the contract and rehire laid off Sodexho workers. As of press time only one potential bidder has contacted the union. While this is good news for WSF IUB executives say the earli-
est that a full-scale galley operation could be up and running wouldn’t be until late March or April.

The IUB is continuing to run informational pickets and inform the public that they need to contact their legislators, the state Transportation Commissioners, as well as the gover-

dor to put pressure on WSF to come to an agreement and reopen the gal-
leys. WSF CEO Thorpe’s vision of a new way to do business aboard the ferries has resulted in the loss of jobs, inconvenience for thousands of ferry riders every day, and the loss of any revenue the state could have contin-
ed to make from the concessions for a period of three to four months.

—Jay Ubelhart and Peter Hart

ELECTIONS BRING BIG CHANGES IN LOCAL 142 LEADERSHIP

HONOLULU—As the result of local-wide elections held last November, close to half or 13 of the 27 elected full-time offices of Hawaii’s Local 142, will be filled by new people.

The biggest change occurred in the top offices of the local, where five of the seven executive positions will be filled by new people. Of the three highest officers—president, vice-pres-
ident, and secretary-treasurer—two are newly elected. Former Hawaii Division director Fred Galdones will take the lead as president and Maui member Donna Domingo will serve as vice-president. Guy Fujimura is the only incumbent, having served as the local’s secretary-treasurer since 1985.

The next highest positions are the four division directors—Hawaii, Maui, Kauai, and Oahu—who administer the work of the union, particularly in the areas of contract negotiations and grievance handling.

Of the 20 elected business agents (BA), who carry out the day-to-day work of the union, more than half or 11 will be fairly new to the job. Six were newly elected and another five business agents were from appointments and less served within two years in office.

The three titled officers and four division directors also serve as the local’s executive committee and meet monthly to discuss the work of the union, especially in the areas of contract negotiations and grievance handling.

The delegation had done their job, but then they saw a company truck parked in the lot that had the phrase “Where corporate greed is the final word.” Jake Carton, an organizer for JWJ, suggested they fix the slogan for the protest.

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The country’s judicial system, which itself has been frequently attacked, has seldom interfered. Among the 1,875 murders of union leaders that have occurred since 1991, only five convictions have been obtained.

International Vice President Trinidad Esquivel III got in touch with the ILWU Local 8 Business Agent Mike Thompson to set up an intensive training workshop for the locals. Except for two stewards, all stewards and local officers attended the session in Bonifacio, Cali. Guests included the ILWU’s former international Business Agent, the International and we set it up.

The training program was initially developed under the direction of former International Secretary-Treasurer Joe Barra. Willie Adams steered the activity after he was appointed to that position and he and Barra led the training.

Some of our stewards are pretty well seasoned, but we figured we could all learn something,” Local 30 President Roy Panter said. “So Trini [Vice President Trinidad Esquivel III] worked out in consultation with the International and we set it up.”

The course began with the rights and responsibilities of stewards as defined by law and the collective contract. It uses a combination of formal presentations, instructional videos and role-playing to increase stewards’ understanding of their tasks on the job. These tasks include contract interpretation, grievance handling, negotiations and member mobilization.

Stewards are on the union’s front line of defense representing workers on the job. But they are also on the front line in representing the workers to the company and to the workers. One of the goals of the training is to educate them on the history of the union and its place in the world.

International stewards Russ Bergmann, President of ILWU Local 20, and Gene Vrana, Director of Educational Services and Librarian, spent many hours developing materials for the training. Because of the widely diverse groups represented by the union, the materials have to be flexible and adaptable to different work places. Local 30 workers mine copper ore from geographically isolated from each other and from the rest of the union. They also face an unusually hostile employer. However, the huge multi-national Rio Tinto Ltd.

“The training satisfied their thirst for knowledge, and that knowledge gives them the strength to stand up to the employer and to work in the interest of the workers and the management,” Vrana said. “It was really important for them to also understand the rights and obligations by knowing to which one of the companies they are involved in union-busting paramilitary activity.

Sadly, on Dec. 4, 2003 Jose Rojas Cevallos, a member of the teachers’ union and the brother-in-law of Juan Carlos Galvis, was murdered when two men came to his home and killed him in front of his wife, who is eight months pregnant with their first child.

Some of the union activists have limited protection, such as bodyguards, provided by the government, but their families do not have the same degree of protection.

The President of the Sinaltrainal union in Barrancabermeja, William Mendoza, and Galvis and ask that we all support the boycott against Coca-Cola and contact the U.S. Embassy officials and the President of Colombia to express our concerns.

They can be contacted at: Ambassador William B. Wood Embassy fax: (571) 315-2197.

President of the Republic of Colombia Dr. Alvaro Uribe Velez Palacio de Narino Carrera 8 No. 7-26 Santafe de Bogota, Colombia auribe@presidencia.gov.co/rdh@presidencia.gov.co

—Jack McElwy

STEWARDS’ TRAINING EMPowers BANK AND File

Stewards at mine, mineral processing Local 30 took a day off Nov. 21 to attend an intensive training workshop sponsored by the ILWU International. Except for two stewards, all stewards and local officers attended the session in Bonifacio, Cali. Guests included the ILWU’s former international Business Agent, the International and we set it up.

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What were these guys thinking?

**TWO-HEADED SPACE ALIEN SHRINKS LABOR MOVEMENT**

by Gary Huck and Mike Konopacki

Capitalism Sucks Press

Two-Headed Space Alien Shrinks Labor Movement, by Gary Huck and Mike Konopacki. Their art has appeared in the paper for over a decade, giving punch and focus to issues important to ILWU members, retirees and their families.

Case in point: Last year, at the height of the dispute between the ILWU and the Pacific Maritime Association, Mike’s “Homeland Security” cartoon of President Bush holding a gun to the head of a longshoreman was duplicated, adapted and distributed up and down the coast, much to the delight of union members and the consternation of PMA executives (especially Joe Mirra whose name was substituted for Bush’s after a particularly nasty bargaining session).

And that’s just one example of why, for many of us in the labor movement, Gary and Mike are like old friends: always there when you need them. Their cartoons are a boon to busy labor editors, the bane of bad employers and a boost to beleaguered working stiffs everywhere.

Spoofing supermarket tabloids, their fifth and newest book, “Two-Headed Space Alien Shrinks Labor Movement,” gets its name from the fact that people often confuse these self-labeled “hiriste, four-eyed cheese heads” from Wisconsin who, since forming Huck/Konopacki Labor Cartoons in 1983, have documented their art the shock and awe of a labor movement under siege.

In typical tabloid-ese, the book charges H/K with using extraterrestrial powers to single-handedly shrink union membership in the U.S. by more than seven percent. While vehemently denying any affiliation with the “AFL-UFO,” they admit they had havoc in mind when they put their heads together 20 years ago and started syndicating their monthly package of labor cartoons.

“We wanted to serve labor, not shrink it,” they protest. “We thought we could use humor and acerbic workingclass wit to subvert the capitalist conspiracy against worker solidarity and creativity.”

Apparently they never heard of Murphy’s Law.

It comes as no surprise, then, that Pete Mueller, whose own cartoons have appeared in The New Yorker, The Progressive and other national publications, begins his foreword to “Two-Headed Space Alien” with the question: “What were these guys thinking?”

The answer is in their art. If a picture is worth a thousand words, H/K cartoons speak volumes about the stuff that really matters to working people, the stuff the mainstream media usually ignores. Stuff like decent wages and working conditions; safety in the workplace and healthcare for our families; the right and the inevitable fight to support a union; a future for our kids through a good education; a future for ourselves through retirement with dignity; employment, unemployment and underemployment; free trade vs. fair trade; America’s eroding manufacturing base; the “invisible hand of the marketplace” that pumps up corporate piggery and slashes our social safety net.

Despite labor’s decline there’s still plenty of move in the movement, and it’s those movers and shakers who are H/K’s most avid fans. Whatever the issue, nothing revs up those ever-present, well-heeled, high-rolling, back-stabbing, hoodwinkers, double-dealing, union-busting, money-grubbing, democracy-destroying corporate criminals—and the politicians they own.

Thank your lucky stars, H/K’s got it covered. Otherwise, pass the Prozac, please.

H/K Labor Cartoons aren’t just about sorely needed comic relief, though. They make us think, and that’s the last thing the powers-that-be want us to do. Masters at emasculating the high and mighty, H/K’s enterprise boldly goes where no one has gone before, which is precisely why the “kept press” won’t touch them with a two-foot light saber. Maybe that space alien thing isn’t so far off the mark after all.

Celebrating Huck/Konopacki’s 20-year collaboration, “Two-Headed Space Alien” also features other works by the artists, including Gary’s hilarious gag cartoons, “Oddservations,” and moving tributes to John Lennon, Malcolm X and Lenny Bruce, along with Mike’s occasional zine, Wage Slave World News, and thought-provoking political comics for Amnesty International and others.

At $14.95, the book is a bargain and can be purchased online at: http://solidarity.com/hkcartoons/. Even if you don’t buy the book, check out the website for cartoons, animations, political comics, web links and more. It’s fun, it’s funny, it’s...out of this world.

Kathy Wilkes is past editor of The Dispatcher and has done freelance work for several other labor publications, all on this planet.
January 2004

One day at a time: George Cobbs retires

By Maria Brooks

The mayor of San Francisco, Gavin Newsom, on January 24, termed George Cobbs ‘Day.’ A member of ILWU Local 10 for 38 years, Cobbs is hanging the hook to celebrate his extraordinary career, the Local put on the gital with a candle lit retirement dinner. The event turned into a loving tribute to a man who has offered many a second chance at life.

George Cobbs is Coast Director of the ILWU-PMA Alcoholism/Drug Recovery Program and a certified substance abuse counselor. His stewardship of the program has grown into a nationally recognized model, one that has been copied around the country.

Colleagues flew in to celebrate his retirement. Many were members of the national organization of Employee Assistance Professionals. With its membership in the thousands, EAPA counselors work in recovery programs from Seattle to Maine. Cobbs has been international president of the organization. He’s traveled world wide and met with the powerful. He’s even spent an evening at the White House.

Although he can smooch with hucksters and charm elected brass, he appears most comfortable with people most of us shun—the down and out, the drunks and drug addicts.

“He is heart open to any suffering alcoholic who wants to change,” said Honey Powell of Local 10 who went through the PMA-ILWU Recovery Program.

Three men sat at a long table dinner Cobbs sat surrounded by six pretty women, all of them his daughters. Nearby were grandchildren and next to them sat his 83-year old mother. The family listened to a parade of well wishers. The ILWU presented a special award of life membership and in a loud voice asked, “Do you hear him? Do you hear him?”

Sitting with his family, listening to laudatory praises from friends and union members, Cobbs reflected on how starkly different it had been the night before.

Suddenly, he looked over at her and in a loud voice asked, “Do you want to be a longshoreman?” For a second, the words hung in the air.

Brother George Cobbs is a member of Local 10 from the class ’65, Book #6851.

Brother Cobbs is a pioneer in alcohol and drug counseling. He is the first and only Director of the ILWU-PMA Drug & Alcohol Program coastwise and for Northern California. He has served in this capacity since 1980. His leadership has promoted the development of drug and alcohol recovery programs through the ILWU and beyond.

Brother Cobbs’ work has helped create a community for brothers and sisters. This community has sustained the ILWU-PMA Drug & Alcohol Program with a track record second to none. The program has helped countless members maintain sobriety. The program developed included weekly meeting at Local 10, an annual picnic, dances, annual fundraisers for independent social service programs, and an annual week long rank & file DARE Coordinator training.

Brother Cobbs assisted other organizations in starting programs, and he is a leader in the national movement to promote treatment and support for alcoholics and drug addicts through Employee Assistance Programs.

We thank and commend Brother George Cobbs for the years of service to the membership of the ILWU and his fellow human beings from other walks of life.

Brother Cobbs is an important leader of the ILWU. The ILWU International Executive Board wishes Brother Cobbs a lengthy retirement filled with joy, fellowship and good health.

Brother George Cobbs is a star, at least, he felt like one.

State of Policy

IN HONOR OF BROTHER GEORGE COBBS
UPON HIS HANGING UP THE HOOK

December 11-12, 2003

STATEMENT OF POLICY

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It’s one day at a time.”

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“In a couple of years Cobbs had become a maintenance supervisor. During this time, he heard at least 100 people give me second chances. Cobbs got one.

There are people that honestly don’t believe that you can get sober. I have that kind of legacy to my kids,” he said.

“Tribal” was one of his last functions as area director of the Recovery Program, only two days after he retired. Rich Marino, employee rep for PMA, said Honey Powell of Local 10 who went through the PMA-ILWU Recovery Program.

“I’m grateful for my life,” he said. “People’s lives don’t have to be perfect. Most do the best they can—from where they are. They may not have big houses—they may not have shit. But you know what they got that can’t be taken away?”

“I had no goals for myself,” he said in a voice trailing off.

“Friends I grew up with worked for liquor. It was organized crime. It was murder. I saw it every day. I was a part time DEA agent. We blew him away,” he said.

“When you’ve been a drunk,” Cobbs once said, “you have to understand how much success you might achieve, you always have a feeling inside that says, ‘I ain’t worth shit.’”

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This notice applies to all ILWU-represented employees, ILWU members, financial core members and new hires at any time to become financial core members by any means, including by choice, suspension or expulsion from union membership in any local or division affiliated with the ILWU, for the one year period following the date of the notice.

The information contained herein applies to ILWU International only, and for those working in the Longshore Division, the ILWU Coast Pro Rata fees or payments of any kind under a union security clause. This notice also applies to local dues and fees paid to any affiliated ILWU local, division or affiliate. No local need have been required to issue their own separate notice under their own separate policies and procedures. This notice and its content must be superseded or amended by any other notice issued by any affiliated ILWU local or division with respect to its dues and fees.

Please be advised that individuals working under a union security clause contained in a collective bargaining agreement or otherwise, for whom any union or local has imposed any of the sanctions required as a condition of employment under such clause to pay uniform dues and any required fees and charges and including not voting for a successor negotiating agent, is not a member of ILWU Local 20, or the ILWU Local 20, or the ILWU International, or an ILWU Local 20 employee, as they have not been required to join the ILWU.

Please be advised, however, that any financial core member may file an objection within 30 days of the 30 day filing period with respect to other notices of this type, be advised that under this notice only, objections filed by current financial core members will be deemed timely if posted on or before March 15, 2004. In the event a financial core member perfects such objection, he or she shall receive either the appropriate monthly reduction or an advance rebate of a portion of the ILWU Coast Pro Rata fees or payments of any kind, as applicable. Under the ILWU International Procedures on Financial Core Members Objecting to Nonchargeable Expenditures (hereinafter called the “Procedures”) it has been determined that some of those ILWU locals and divisions covered by this notice will not collect or seek to collect financial core members' objections that are greater than the amount of ILWU Coast Pro Rata fees paid to the ILWU International for the applicable collection period herein or until such time as such local issues a separate notice.

For those locals employed in the ILWU Longshore Division and work for a PMA-member company under the Pacific Coast Longshore and Clerks Agreement, please also note that with each 30 day filing period with respect to other notices of this type, be advised that under this notice only, objections filed by current financial core members will be deemed timely if posted on or before March 15, 2004. In the event a financial core member perfects such objection, he or she shall receive either the appropriate monthly reduction or an advance rebate of a portion of the ILWU Coast Pro Rata fees or payments of any kind, as applicable.

Under the Procedures, an objection by a financial core member must be in writing and postmarked within 30 days of receipt from the date of the notice. If the objection is from a financial core member under an ILWU union security clause and receipt of this notice, whichever is the later date, and addressed to the ILWU Local 20, 1188 Franklin Street, San Francisco, CA 94109. To be valid, the written objection must specify the objector’s name, address, social security number, current wage rate, the name of his or her employer and the name of the local or division which represents him or her. In addition, objections from those ILWU locals and divisions covered by this notice will not collect or seek to collect financial core members' objections that are greater than the amount of ILWU Coast Pro Rata fees paid to the ILWU Local 20 or the ILWU International, as well as any Coast Pro Rata fees paid to the ILWU Coast Pro Rata Committee. In the event a financial core member perfects such objection, he or she shall receive either the appropriate monthly reduction or an advance rebate of a portion of the ILWU Coast Pro Rata fees or payments of any kind, as applicable.

This notice may be superseded or amended by later notices as issued by the ILWU, the Coast Pro Rata Committee or affiliated locals and divisions of the ILWU.

January 2004
For more than five hours children of locked-out and striking grocery workers parted Dec. 19 at the longshore Local 13 hall, selecting toys, feasting and meeting Santa. This year’s festivities also had a serious side, as Southern California ILWU locals banded together with pensioners and the Federated Auxiliary to provide for the children’s families.

A six-foot tall stuffed Grinch standing on a pile of coal greeted the children as they arrived. The Dr. Seuss character, who stole Christmas in the famous story, wore a sign reading “Corporate Scrooge Steven Burd.” Burd is President and CEO of Safeway. ILWU members wore elf hats and helped the kids choose presents.

Santa asked William Chavez Feipel to stand in while he finished negotiations with the elves’ and reindeer’s union, who got everything they asked for. Feipel works as an ID mechanic in his regular job.

“With the ILWU discharging containers loaded with toys from the ships, we have always been Santa Claus on the West Coast,” said Shannon Donato, Director of the Harry Bridges Institute (HBI) and one of the organizers of the Adopt a Family program that helps UFCW families. “The union took it upon itself through Local 13 and its ‘Yes We Can’ community involvement program to organize the giant toy drive.”

The word went out through the HBI and various locals, pensioners and auxiliaries to bring unwrapped toys to the hall.

“At the Dec. 8 membership meeting every one of them walked in with a toy or an armload of toys and placed them at the base of the tree,” Donato said. With 71,000 grocery workers off the job, the need for solidarity has rarely been greater. Warehouse Local 26, marine clerks Local 63, port pilots Local 68, walking bosses Local 94 and Federated Auxiliary 8 joined Local 13 in making it all happen. Office clerical Local 63 had a party the same day and donated extra toys to United Food and Commercial Workers locals.

UFCW workers have been out since Oct. 11, when workers struck Safeway/Vons. Ralphs-Kroger and Albertsons, the other companies in the employers’ bargaining group, locked out their employees in retaliation.

—Tom Price

With Seattle’s economy in a slump, longshore Local 19’s annual holiday drive faced a special urgency this season. The members and their families were determined to respond, and 20 volunteers from ILWU families raised nearly $15,000 to buy presents and food for distressed families.

Local 19 set up the ILWU Christmas for Kids Program as a special, tax-exempt foundation to sponsor the annual drives some 20 years ago. Members sign up to donate throughout the year.

This year the union had an opportunity to share union solidarity as well as holiday cheer with locked-out Teamsters. Local 19 supported the Darigold creamery workers when the company locked them out last August. Since then the company outsourced 60 driver jobs and eliminated 14 warehouse jobs. In all, 300 Teamsters are out of work and Darigold products are now on the AFL-CIO boycott list. Local 19’s Curt Cunningham and his partner Leona contacted Teamsters Local 66 President Mark Jones and asked what their families were doing for Christmas.

Mark Jones reported as some of the Darigold families were going to have a pretty bleak Christmas,” Curt Cunningham said. “So we offered to adopt 15 families for a Christmas party.”

Local 19 turned their hall into a party room Dec. 19 for 11 of the 15 Teamster families. The longshore worker spent about $60 on gifts per family and provided gift certificates from local grocery stores for their holiday meal. The four families that couldn’t make it got their presents from their union stewards who made sure the gifts were hand-delivered.

With the ILWU Christmas for Kids Program went on as well. Volunteers first consult charities or social workers who locate truly needy families and then deliver the presents.

“One of the homes we went to had no presents under the tree and eight kids,” Cunningham said. “They looked at us and must have thought ‘who are these people with longshore jackets and big red bags?’ Their faces lit up when we pulled out the presents and called out each child’s name. They took the presents and put them under the tree.

Local 19 members also get the union’s name out and show community involvement.

“Leona and I always wear our longshore colors when we go shopping for the gifts,” Cunningham said. Leona is a past president of ILWU Federated Auxiliary 3. “She got in a conversation with an elderly couple and told them we were shopping for needy kids. They said ‘I didn’t know longshoremen did that.’” Well, there’s another convert.

Leona Cunningham reported on another Christmas phenomena, the benefits those who give receive from their actions. Some local kids had a little trouble with the authorities the previous year and were sentenced to do community service. They carried out their stretch with the Christmas program.

“They were completely transformed,” she said. “They were so moved by giving to those who had nothing they went and donated their own presents. They came back this year to volunteer again.”

—Tom Price

**Local 23 members mobilize for holiday giving**

“Within a week we had toys coming in,” Charity Committee Chair Dragan Butorac said. “The ID casuals really went above and beyond. They put the push on, and they and the travelers brought their toys early and inspired everyone else.

The traveling longshore workers, who came to Tacoma from other ports to work, were happy to donate to a community that was not, technically, their own. Butorac and the committee went to local charities, county welfare agencies and other groups known to the local through previous drives. The YWCA and St. Leo’s hospitality kitchen provided names and addresses of needy people, and the American Legion hooked up the longshore workers with military families distressed by a parent’s deployment in Iraq.

Because so many needy people get evicted, the volunteers had to track some of them down to get them their presents.

“The toys kept coming in right up to Christmas Eve,” Butorac said. “We sent $200 gift cards from Fred Myers stores for families. That store is a grocery and variety store. We also distributed $50 food cards for 80 families.”

Member participation was tremendous, Butorac said. Workers had friendly competitions to see who could raise the most money or provide the most blankets. Some of the money came in $500 and $1,000 chunks from an individual or a small group.

With the hall stuffed to the rafters, volunteers worked long and hard sorting presents, loading pickups and driving to the homes of the needy. Local 23 families also found lists of toys to take to Everett in support of locked-out Teamsters at the Darigold creamery.

“In all we had 96 bicycles, about $35,000 in toys and $20,300 in gift cards,” Butorac said. “The toy drive was the new part and a great success. The members, casuals and travelers really came out for this and they deserve all the credit.”

—Tom Price
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**
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