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Foreign-owned grain company locks out Longshore #4

VANCOUVER — The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 4 has filed an unfair labor practice charge against Mitsui-United Grain for the company's lockout of its workforce at the Port of Vancouver that began Feb. 27.

United Grain Corporation, a subsidiary of the Japanese conglomerate Mitsui, said through a spokesman that it took the action after an internal investigation showed sabotage by a member of the union bargaining team.

The ULP charge was filed March 4 at the National Labor Relation Board's Region 19 office in Seattle. The basis of the charge includes the union's assertion that Mitsui-United Grain "took the extreme measure of locking out its entire bargaining unit even though by its own statements it had identified and terminated the employee allegedly responsible for the property damage [that the company claimed took place on Dec. 22 — five days before its unilateral implementation of its final offer.] This constituted loss of employment based on anti-union animus, and a sweeping unilateral change of terms and conditions of employment."

Cager Clabaugh (right), president of ILWU Local 4 in Vancouver, addressed a crowd March 8 at Esther Short Park in Vancouver. Longshore workers were locked out of their jobs Feb. 27 by Japanese-owed Mitsui-United Grain. ILWU Local 4 members have loaded grain and other cargo at the Port of Vancouver since 1934.

> *'They want to take our union protection, and that's it; eliminate our voice from the workplace.'*
>
> CAGER CLABAUGH
> PRESIDENT ILWU #4

In a press release, ILWU called the company's allegations of sabotage "fabricated" and "an excuse to do what they've wanted to do all along, which is to lock workers out instead of reach a fair agreement with them."

United Grain was a party to a collective bargaining agreement between ILWU and the multi-employer Pacific Northwest Grain Handlers Association. But that contract expired Sept. 29, 2012. ILWU members continued to work, without a contract.

On Dec. 22, United Grain and two other members of the employer group — Louis Dreyfus Commodities and Columbia Grain — imposed the terms of their final offer, after ILWU members rejected them in a vote the union reported as 93.8 percent opposed. ILWU members continued to work under those employer terms.

A third member of the employer group, TEMCO LLC, broke ranks and kept the old contract terms in place after the contract expired, and then negotiated a separate "interim" agreement covering its three grain terminals in Portland, Kalama, and Tacoma. That agreement was ratified by ILWU Locals 4, 8, 19, 21, and 23 and was announced Feb. 27.

TEMCO is a joint venture owned by Cargill and CHS, Inc., which are U.S. companies based in Minnesota.

"The United States is a major supplier of grains to the world, and the export facilities in Portland, Tacoma, and Kalama are important export terminals to serve those markets," said Paul Butters, general manager of TEMCO in a press statement. "We appreciate the constructive approach that the ILWU leadership provided in reaching this agreement, which is good for U.S. farmers and global customers who seek U.S. products."

Though it has a five-year term, the contract is described as an interim agreement because it's "subject to modification to reflect an eventual final agreement between the ILWU and the Pacific Northwest Grain Handlers Association."

Neither side would divulge details of the interim agreement.

At a rally March 8 at Esther Short Park in downtown Vancouver, ILWU International President Robert McEllrath — with the TEMCO contract in hand — led a crowd of approximately 500 people to personally deliver it to United Grain's office a few blocks away. When they arrived, doors to the building were locked. After a lengthy round of chanting, a Vancouver police officer offered to deliver it to the company, which he did.

Pacific Northwest Grain Handlers Association spokesperson Pat McCormick told the Labor Press United

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Oregon Legislature says 'Build the Bridge!'

SALEM — The Oregon Senate voted 18-11 on March 4 to approve a bill authorizing $450 million in bond funding to help pay for the I-5 Bridge Replacement Project, also known as the Columbia River Crossing.

The Oregon House of Representatives approved the measure, HB 2800, last month. The vote in that chamber was 45-11, with 30 Democrats and 15 Republicans supporting the bill.

Four Senate Republicans joined 14 Democrats to pass the bill. Sen. Jackie Dingfelder of Portland was the lone Democrat in opposition.

"This represents a major milestone for the I-5 Bridge Replacement project that will create thousands of construction jobs in Oregon," said John Mohlis, executive secretary of the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council. "Now all eyes are on the Washington Legislature."

The $3.4 billion project would replace the I-5 bridge with a new span and light rail and improve interchanges from Portland to Vancouver.

Oregon's portion of the funding for the next two years will come from existing funds in the Oregon Department of Transportation budget. Legislators placed a number of safeguards on the project so that bonds will only be sold when a specific set of criteria are met. Those criteria include commitments from Washington State and the federal government to pay for their share of the project, and the completion of an investment grade analysis by the state treasurer.

The federal government won't appropriate funds until both Oregon and Washington commit $450 million each to the project. The project also must win approval from the U.S. Coast Guard.

The Washington Legislature is still debating how it will approve its share of the funding.

Oregon's HB 2800 includes a number of "buy America" requirements that will ensure goods manufactured in the United States are used to construct the bridge. Provisions to utilize apprenticeship training programs are also included.

In addition to construction jobs, the economic impacts from replacing the bridge and improving the interchanges will result in the creation of 4,200 jobs and $231 million in additional wages in 2030, Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber said in a press release.

Kitzhaber signed the bill March 12.