

...Standing Rock

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ber. White found what he described as a temporary city on the prairie, a self-policing voluntary temporary community with prohibition on alcohol, drugs or weapons.

“It is absolutely incredible what they’re doing to keep this together, keep this peaceful, keep it prayerful, and feed 10,000 people,” White said.

White spent a week at Standing Rock helping out, setting up stations for supporters to drop off firewood.

By the end of October, rank-and-file union members were maintaining an ongoing “union camp” within the protest camp, set up by a group called Labor for Standing Rock. Labor for Standing Rock was founded by Cliff Wellmeng as a way to coordinate rank-and-file support. Willmeng, a former union Carpenter from Chicago, is now a registered nurse at Kaiser Permanente and a member of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 7 in Lafayette, Colorado. The group’s Facebook page, which has over 25,000 likes, includes dozens of video testimonials from union officers

and rank-and-file members.

On Nov. 10, several hundred union workers rallied in Oakland outside Wells Fargo — one of the pipeline’s funders — in an anti-Dakota-pipeline event sponsored by over a dozen local labor organizations.

The protest encampment continued to grow. On Nov. 21 — three days before Thanksgiving — police turned water cannons on Native American protesters in sub-freezing temperatures.

More than any other issue, that’s what spurred a group of Northwest Longshore union members to take action.

On Thanksgiving Day, International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 4 put out a call for donations of cold weather gear for Standing Rock to be brought to the union hall. By Monday, Nov. 28, they’d filled a 14-foot trailer with warm clothes, boots, food, propane and other supplies.

Longshore worker Steve Hunt was calling into ILWU Local 4 to see what jobs were available when he heard about plans by Tacoma ILWU Local 23 President Dean McGrath and other ILWU members to go to Stand-

ing Rock. Hunt ended up joining more than a dozen ILWU members from Locals 19, 23, and 4 for the trek to Standing Rock.

“I wanted to know the truth, to find out exactly what was going on,” Hunt said.

At the camp, finding that camp donation centers were backlogged, Hunt volunteered to help set up tents. He chipped ice so that canoes could get in and out. And he worked kitchen duty, smoking 400 pounds of

meat a day.

“ILWU stands behind an injury to one is an injury to all,” Hunt said, “and there’s an injury going on when private security and police are stamping on freedom to protest.”

With the arrival of a contingent of 2,000 veterans, the camp swelled to over 10,000 people the weekend of Dec. 3-4. Hunt was on his way back to Vancouver on Dec. 4 when word came of a seeming victory for the pro-

testers. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced it was revoking its permit to drill underneath Lake Oahe on the Missouri River.

The pipeline — for now — is on hold. It appears to be unlikely to move forward while Obama remains president. President-elect Trump has refrained from taking sides on the controversy, but told Fox News Dec. 11 that he will decide quickly what to do about it once he’s sworn in.

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