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LABOR HISTORY

Looking back on the Battle in Seattle

It's been 20 years since the Seattle WTO protests. The corporate trade agenda has never recovered.

By Don McIntosh

On, Nov. 30, 1999, 50,000 union members, residents and activists from a huge variety of causes came together in downtown Seattle to protest a meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO). At the invitation of then-president Bill Clinton, 700 trade officials from 134 countries were in Seattle to talk about expanding the WTO, and hundreds of journalists from around the world had come to report on it.

Until then, few people in the world had heard of the WTO, established five years earlier to police a new set of global trade agreements. Earlier international trade agreements dealt with trade in goods, and focused on reducing tariffs as barriers to trade. The 1994 agreement that created the WTO went well beyond that, opening up trade in services, enforcing commitments to respect "intel-



Photo by Mike Barkin.

lectual property" (state-sanctioned monopolies like patents and trademarks), and giving unelected trade dispute judges the authority to strike down "non-tariff barriers to trade" — such as public health and environmental regulations. By 1999, WTO trade tribunals had ruled repeatedly for corporations and against regulations intended to protect dolphins and sea turtles, food safety and many others.

This is what democracy looks like What happened in Seattle the week of Nov. 28-Dec. 3 was the reaction to all that. It was the

product of nine months of diligent organizing and coalition building. Labor and environmental groups committed significant resources.

Labor's main contribution was massive turnout on Nov. 30, Day One of the four-day WTO summit. Roughly 25,000 union members and allies filled Memorial Stadium in Seattle Center and — joined by another 10,000 students, environmentalists and community members — took part in a mile-long march to the Washington Convention Center, where they collided with another 15,000 peo-

ple who were already occupying the streets.

For labor, it was a logistical feat that hasn't been repeated since. From San Francisco to British Columbia, as many as 30 national AFL-CIO staff worked with allies in groups like Jobs with Justice to get commitments for local union participation and coordinate the logistics of getting people to the event. All told, 185 buses, nine charter planes, two trains and countless cars brought union members to the rally.

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions arranged its annual meeting to take place in Seattle just beforehand so that hundreds of trade unionists from around the world could be there. So did the United Steelworkers (USW) with its Rapid Response conference, which drew over 500 local union officers. International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) shut down ports all up and down the West Coast so members could take part. As

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Jury says ILWU owes \$93M for dock slowdown

In a decision that threatens the survival of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), a federal jury Nov. 4 held the union responsible for economic harm caused by a sustained and intentional dockworker slowdown at Port of Portland Terminal 6, and recommended that the national union and Portland-based Local 8 be ordered to pay \$93.6 million to ICTSI, the Philippine-owned company that formerly operated the terminal.

The jury held Local 8 responsible for \$42 million of the damages (45%). Local 8's assets total \$151,000. The ILWU international, with assets totaling \$8 million, is responsible for the remaining \$51 million.

It's not clear how the jury-recommended damages could be collected, or whether they'll stick. U.S. District Judge Michael H. Simon could modify the amount down or up, and has agreed to delay a final decision on the amount until he hears more from ILWU lawyers, who argued the amount is excessive and could bankrupt the union. The union could also seek a new trial or appeal the judgment.

The judgment comes from a lawsuit filed by ICTSI, but the facts of the case came from a series of unfair labor practice cases prosecuted by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) dating back to 2012. As outlined in the trial record, ILWU went to war with ICTSI over what amounted to two jobs plugging in refrigerated containers. Those jobs had been performed by members of IBEW Local 48 since 1974, but ILWU said its members were entitled to do the work under its industry-wide agreement with West Coast shippers like ICTSI. Terminal 6 used to be run directly by the publicly-owned Port of Portland, but was rented out to ICTSI in 2010 under a 25-year lease.

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Journalists vote to unionize at Vancouver newspaper The Columbian

By Don McIntosh

The Columbian, Vancouver, Washington's daily newspaper, is now a union shop. The National Labor Relations Board held an election Oct. 31 for reporters, photographers, copy editors, page designers and editorial assistants — 28 workers in all — and the result was 19-8 in favor of joining the Pacific Northwest Newspaper Guild, a local of The NewsGuild, which is a division of the Communications Workers of America.

Management at the family-owned paper didn't wage the kind of no-holds-barred anti-union campaign like some employers do, but did make it

clear they preferred to remain non-union. The anti-union pushback reached its peak with what Columbian photographer and union spokesperson Nathan Howard called, "the Great Sign War of 2019."

"Vote no" signs started going up around the office—but in the wrong departments, like advertising and circulation, which weren't part of the union vote. When "vote no" signs started appearing in the newsroom's shared spaces, they were soon surrounded by pro-union signs. Truce was declared with a company email calling for an end to signs in public spaces.

Owners Scott and Jody

Campbell also held small-group meetings where they invited workers to voice their concerns.

"We said, 'No, we'll talk about it at the bargaining table,' and they said 'okay,'" Howard said.

The next step for the Columbian Guild will be preparing to negotiate a first-ever collective bargaining agreement.

The union vote at The Columbian comes as part of an extraordinary wave of unionization in print and online media. More than 4,000 journalists at more than four dozen national and local media companies have unionized since

2015, and the wave only appears to be picking up speed.

The same week as the union vote at The Columbian, journalists at The Daily Progress newspaper in Charlottesville, Virginia, voted 12-1 to join the NewsGuild; workers at WHYY in Philadelphia voted 70 to 1 to join SAG-AFTRA; NBC News Digital staffers announced they are forming a union; journalists at the Los Angeles Times ratified the first union contract in the paper's 137-year history; and journalists at the Miami Herald began a vote they expect to win, which will close in mid-November.