

Biggest labor struggle in years dismissed by major media

ILWU is in a fight to secure work at a new \$200 million grain terminal in Longview

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CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Four months ago, contract talks between the ILWU and EGT broke down, making the Longview site the only grain terminal on the West Coast not operated by the ILWU. The union says its contract with the Port of Longview requires EGT to hire the ILWU Local 21 labor for the terminal. EGT attorneys sued the port in federal court in January, saying the company is not bound by the port's contract. A trial is scheduled for next year.

As the Northwest Labor Press correctly observed, "one of the most determined labor struggles in recent times is unfolding on the waterfront of Longview," a Columbia river port town on the Washington side not far downstream from Portland. But as significant as that struggle is, it seems to have escaped the attention of the editors and reporters at *The Oregonian* and other local media. So at a time when labor unions have practically disappeared from the private sector (only about 7 percent of its workers are organized), and a union as historically militant as the International Longshore and Warehouse (ILWU) is fighting a Portland company's scheme to herd scabs at its new grain terminal, attention must be paid.

In a nutshell, the struggle began when Portland's EGT (Export Grain Terminal)—part of the transnational Bunge agribusiness corporation together with Japanese and South Korean shippers—forced the Port of Longview to sell it a tract on the waterfront. EGT then built a \$200 million grain terminal with mainly unorganized, out of town and even foreign labor and determined to operate it with scab labor. Longview ILWU Local 21's 202 members have a union contract with the Port to handle all its shipping and determined EGT would not operate the terminal with scabs. The contract issue is in the courts, but in the streets and on the docks, the human struggle is surging.

The fight began in June, after EGT's negotiators rejected a contract with Local 21. In response, about 1,500 ILWU members from up and down the west coast and hosted by Portland Local 8, protested EGT's scab herding at its downtown Portland headquarters. *The Oregonian* dismissed the major event with nothing more than a snide note that failed to report who the target of the protest was! On July 11 about 100 ILWU members were arrested in Longview after tearing down a fence and invading the terminal and on the 14th some 600 members and supporters were successful in stopping a 100-car Burlington Northern train from delivering grain. BN



PHOTO BY NORTHWEST LABOR PRESS

announced future trains would wait until the labor dispute was settled.

EGT's response was to try an end run around the ILWU by signing up Oregon's Operating Engineers Local 701 to operate the terminal through a Seattle area subsidiary of Kiewit. So Local 701 leaders, accused of anti-union behavior, now also became prime targets for pickets who blocked cars at the terminal gates as well as the entrance of the OE local in Gladstone with a large inflatable rat. After a heated debate, during which President Tom Chamberlain was overruled when he tried to kill the effort, the Oregon AFL-CIO executive committee passed a resolution "strongly condemning" local 701 for "anti union actions," and on Aug. 5, hundreds of longshoremen and their supporters came back to Gladstone and loudly denounced its leaders.

Many of Longview's 37,000 residents support their neighbors' struggle and about 250 local business, as well as homes and cars, display signs reading: "We Support the ILWU in the fight for a decent standard of living in our community."

If residents of other Northwest communities could break through the media blackout, public support would mount. Local 21 President Dan Coffman has it right when he pointed out that EGT's plan, is "to sit off to the side and let the working classes fight it out. Our fight should be against corporate America that's taking collective bargaining rights from everybody. They want us to fight amongst each other."

Michael Munk's *Portland Red Guide* second edition has just been published by PSU's Ooligan Press. Visit his website www.michaelmunk.com

Members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 21 and allies demonstrate outside the EGT Development headquarters in Portland after the company refused to honor the union's contract with the Port of Longview.

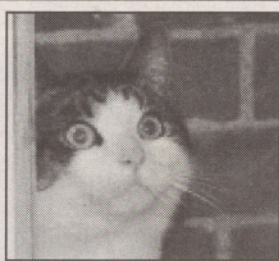
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