San Francisco Answers Birmingham

We Shall Overcome
(See Pages 4 and 5)

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Canada ILWU Awaits Board Ruling; Ready to Take Strike Vote for M&M

VANCOUVER, B.C.—The Canadian Area ILWU has been asked by the federal Department of Labour that the long awaited port of the Conciliation Board all be ready by the end of May. The Board has been studying the dispute between Canadian ILWU members and the BC Shipping Federation over a master contract and mechanization agreement. The announcement that the Board would have its report in by May 31 was soon after members in the after Vancouver area walked off the job for two hours on May 16 and gathered in front of the building where the Board was holding its meeting. The Union cannot legally take a strike vote to enforce its demands until the Board brings down its report.

PARLIAMENT TOLD

The delay in bringing in the resolution was also raised in the House of Commons by H. W. Herridge, member of parliament for the constituency of Kootenay West in B.C. Mr. Herridge was assured by the government that the report would be ready.

As soon as the report is made available, it will be considered by the ILWU Negotiating Committee, and special membership meetings may also be quickly called. "The Union tried for many months to negotiate with the Shipping Federation on the strike threat removed from the scene," says a bulletin issued by the Canadian Area headquarters. "It is with reluctance that we have to take now the only course open to us to achieve a settlement."

The strike vote can be taken seven days after the Minister of Labour receives the report of the Conciliation Board.

SETS STAGE

The union has pointed out to members that a strike vote does not necessarily mean immediate strike action.

The strike vote will "set the stage for the last effort—direct negotiations with the Shipping Federation—and we will have the responsibility of our membership and their welfare as our guide, along with the responsibility to our community and country," the union report to the membership stated.

While the men would be in position to strike by the end of June, and have clearly stated their determination to take economic action if necessary, any report by the Conciliation Board would not keep the union from reentering negotiations at any time—even before a strike vote.

MORALE HIGH

Morale is extremely high, it was reported here. The men have been clamoring for action to break the long stalemate.

Negotiations started more than 14 months ago. The union has worked without a contract since August 1, 1962, and has demanded that any wage settlement will be retroactive.

In addition to a master contract covering the jurisdiction of all longshore work—ship and dock alike—the union asks an M&M Pact.

The strike vote will be taken by the local members for the final resolution. The reviving ILWU was heard in the board's meeting.

The men stepped off the curbs to express their views on freedom. This city or any other.

From the time the idea of this parade was first considered some 10 days earlier by the newly-formed Church-Labor Conference to the final insp"
We shall overcome. We shall overcome. We shall overcome someday.

With this as a theme song, and with sound trucks blasting forth, "Battle Hymn of the Republic," the marchers started eight abreast up Market Street. Thousands joined other thousands. And at certain points along the famed wide thoroughfare, the San Franciscans watching from the sidewalk could not see either end of the marching line.

It was, a historian told the press corps, the greatest mass demonstration devoted to civil rights since the Civil War.

The people came off the side streets close to the Ferry Building, and moved in orderly lines like a slow stream up the main road. Many demonstrated sympathy and support for those who fight for freedom in Birmingham, Alabama, and in every city of the deep South, where the Negro people are walking, standing, or sitting-in, or singing in jails to break the barriers of segregation in voter registration officials, and schools. In restaurants, on buses; where there is a revolution of courage, not seen in this country since the great days of the Thirties and the Renaissance of labor organization.

Became Part of the Protest Instead of Mere Spectators

Estimates of those who actually marched vary from 12,000 to 20,000. It was hard to tell because so many San Franciscans—hundreds, perhaps thousands—just walked off the curbs and joined the march—to become part of the protest rally for freedom, instead of mere spectators.

They were of every race, color, creed; of all ages—tiny infants, small children held on shoulders or arms, youngsters, teenagers, and even some very old who barely could make it—but kept right on marching. White and Negro were about equal in numbers.

There was singing, music in the background, people speaking to each other as they marched, and now and then slogans were shouted. But the prevailing mood was quiet dignity, a serious note—
as it should be.

There were men and women of all faiths—Jewish rabbis, Protestant ministers, Catholic priests and nuns.

Labor was well represented, with the ILWU longshoremen and warehousemen in conspicuous numbers, with Local 10 and Local 6 banners flying, and the Local 6 drum corps adding a well disciplined marching group. There were many other unionists as well, including NMU men, and a group which carried a banner saying "Rank and File—Building Trades Council."

All the while, everyone who marched, or watched, or finally crowded—some 30,000 strong—into the Civic Center in front of the City Hall, knew that racial segregation and denial of human rights in Birmingham or the deep south was not alone an issue.

San Francisco, and the West, and the North were being called to task for the more subtle, but just as destructive discrimination that takes place in so-called "enlightened" parts of the nation.

It was officially proclaimed "Human Rights Day" by Mayor George Christopher. The city fathers gave their official blessings, and the mayor spoke of San Francisco's great reputation, and somehow overlooked the facts of racial bias.

Yet, the fact remains that no American city had ever before spoken up with such powerful backing to a demonstration for integration.

The true test, Negro comedian Dick Gregory, had said after the mayor had proclaimed Human Rights Day, was what kind of parade it would turn out to be.

"Sunday could turn out to be a beautiful thing," Gregory said. "It would be wonderful to have a whole city turn out for the justice of all men. Or it could turn into a purely Negro parade. The full test of what the mayor said will be on Sunday."

And the people of the city met the test and met it well.

We are Attempting to End the Racial Nightmare

Several days earlier famed Negro author James Baldwin wrote a statement expressly for the march up Market Street, that many San Franciscans pondered deeply. He said:

"Birmingham has never been, for Negroes, as far away as most white Northerners would like to believe. Negroes refer, for example, to liberal New York as being 'up South.' We are not trying to achieve any more 'token integration,' and we are not, please God, trying to teach the South how to discriminate Northern style. We are attempting to end the racial nightmare, and this means confronting and changing the racial situation in San Francisco. If you don't know what I mean, ask your maid. If you haven't got a maid, ask any Negro school-child."

Many of the hundreds of signs and banners told the story, speaking loud and clear—not only for Birmingham, but for freedom for all in all parts of the nation.

"We March in Unity for Freedom in Birmingham and Equality of Opportunity in San Francisco," said one great banner extending across the line of march.

Another proudly carried by teenagers said simply: "San Francisco Youth Is Proud of Birmingham Youth."

Others spoke in a like manner:

"Let San Francisco lead the nation in human rights."

"To Fight Tyranny Is Obedience to God."

"Together We Work."

"Human Rights—Human Dignity."

At one point, eight youngsters walked abreast each with a different letter in his hand, and together they spelled "E-Q-U-A-L-I-T-Y."

Another man held a large map of the United States, with words pictured across its face, from coast to coast and border to border: "Education—Employment—Housing."

Some of the signs were sharp, with a twist, and several discs. One such was: "Where were you when Bull Conner was?"

And there was another, held by a young girl: "I like dogs, but not in government." And many signs simply carried the name of the Birmingham fighters:

"We Shall Overcome."

At the far end of the march one man held a large banner with the single word: "I."

The mayor had said, "We cannot have a problem, just by passing a resolution."

San Franciscans—it was estimated at as many as 30,000—gathered at the Civic Center, and approved. Resolutions are not enough; fight for freedom.

The co-chairman of the parade and co-chairman Hamilton T. Boswell of the Jesus Church, opened the meeting with an question:

A 400-voice youth chorus made up from Hymn of the Republic, and religious songs...
The lead off line of marchers for Human Rights Day in San Francisco included Co-Chairmen Rev. Hamilton T. Boswell and William H. Chester, Father Eugene J. Boyle of the Catholic Interracial Council, Rev. Bernard Lee, Very Rev. Darby Bates, Episcopal Archdeacon, Harry Bridges and Beniamino Bufano. [Names are not necessarily in order and some were not identified to The Dispatcher].

The young Dr. Lee was preceded by a 30-minute collection of funds for Birmingham. The folks in the great crowd stuck their bills and coins into boxes carried by ushers. And some sizeable contributions were announced, with pledges and checks from ILWU locals alone amounting to almost $3,500.

At one point the crowd cheered lustily when Police Chief Cahill, who remarked he was deeply impressed by the demonstration, passed a $5 bill to the front of the platform to be placed in a collection box.

"Today’s demonstration will go down in history as one of the significant events to have taken place in this area of the country since the westward movement," Reverend Lee said.

And then this veteran of Birmingham and many other fights for equal rights brought the crowd up cheering:

"We want to be free. We want to be free now, not tomorrow, not next week, but yesterday."

A New Wave of Militancy:
A New Fighting Spirit

He described the new wave of militancy, the new fighting spirit in the South:

"They say the Negro in the South is not educated enough. That’s all right, we’re coming any-how! They say he doesn’t keep up his property, that he doesn’t bathe often. We’re coming stinking, anyhow! They say Negroes are not ready for their freedom, but we are saying to the nation: ‘ready or not, here we come!’"

The part played by the ILWU in the rally was given recognition many times — during the parade in which large numbers of union members participated; and when the Local 6 and Local 10 banners came swinging by; when the St. Francis Square housing project was mentioned; and when the many international and local officers on the speakers platform were introduced.

After the meeting ILWU President Bridges expressed to a reporter his pride in the union’s participation. He emphasized not merely the locals but “the whole ILWU was on parade today.”

Bridges said he and Congressman John F. Shelley, sitting side by side on the platform, were recalling old days when labor used to swing out in parade.

Shelley reminded him that the last time they had walked together in a great spontaneous outpouring resembling this rally was the day framed labor leader Tom Mooney was released from prison.

The role played by press, radio and T-V was spelled out in a letter of appreciation sent to all media in the Bay Area by the Rev. Hamilton T. Boswell and William Chester, co-chairmen of the Church-Labor Conference of San Francisco.

"May we express our congratulations and deep appreciation for the great contribution made by you and your staff to the success of Human Rights Day in San Francisco," each editor and station manager was told.

"Both in the promotion of the demonstration and in coverage of the event the press, radio and T-V rose to the occasion in a manner in which all the Bay Area can take pride.

"Never before in our experience or knowledge has a whole community in America displayed such unity behind the drive for equal rights and justice, and we ascribe this in large part to your own spirited participation."

The nonprofits included Maryknoll Sisters from the Catholic Social Service Agency.