



CONTROLLING THE FLOW

STRIKING A FAIR DEAL FOR PIPELINE TEAMSTERS

Pipefitters and Other Trades Show Solidarity

Members of the Pipefitters and other trade unions—5,000 members strong—have stepped up to show their solidarity by honoring the Teamster picket lines throughout the strike. They understand that if the PLCA succeeds in gutting Teamster pensions, the other trades will be next.

“Support from the other trades was overwhelming,” said Ty Sees, Secretary-Treasurer of Teamsters Local 764 in Milton, Pennsylvania. “Everyone saw the writing on the wall. If they’re victorious in their attack on Teamsters’ retirement, the PLCA won’t stop there, but will continue to go after everyone else’s retirement. We all understood this was a time we had to stick together.”

Nonunion Crews Cause Piedmont Heartburn

The Pipefitters have a campaign to organize Troy Pipeline, a notoriously anti-union contractor from Texas. Piedmont Gas in North Carolina contracted with Troy to install gas lines. In February, crews from Troy, working on a subcontract for Piedmont Gas, repeatedly damaged gas lines in North Carolina, exposing hundreds of families to hazardous leaks and multiple service disruptions. In addition to disrupting local gas service, Troy is killing the good local jobs of union workers

Now, hundreds of Teamster members in North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee have called their local government officials and Piedmont branch offices to register their complaints and demand that Piedmont use union craftsmen to install pipelines and to keep good jobs within their communities. This is another example of how important it is to contract only with skilled, experienced union members to perform pipeline work.

Negotiations Update

On New Year’s Day, 200 Teamsters in Pennsylvania and West Virginia walked off the job to protest the Pipe Line Contractors Association’s (PLCA) attack on their retirement security. Over the next two weeks, the initial 200 Teamsters turned into nearly a thousand as picket lines went up in Alabama, North Carolina, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

The strike in January was necessary because the PLCA refused to accept a reasonable alternative defined benefit pension fund to substitute for those Travelers and local pipeline hands who had been participating in the Central States Pension Fund.

The Teamsters are proposing that members go into the Minnesota Teamsters Construction Division Pension Fund. Independent actuaries report the Minnesota Fund is 95 percent funded. However, the PLCA is insisting on these members going into a 401(k) or creating an entirely new pension plan. The Teamsters rejected the 401(k) because it will not provide an adequate retirement and most of the funding will come from each Teamster’s own pockets. The Teamsters rejected an entirely new pension plan because the PLCA offered no detail as to benefits or plan structure. The Teamsters are also concerned that starting a new fund could cost up to a million dollars in legal fees—money better kept to pay pension benefits rather than lawyer fees.

Two weeks into the strike, the PLCA offered to extend the current agreement until April 13, 2012, in order to explore possible settlement. The two bargaining committees met on January 31, 2012. While the meeting resulted in a good discussion, it became clear that the PLCA did not have basic data necessary to evaluate their proposal for a new pension fund. This information has been requested from Central States. The parties are scheduled to meet again on March 13.

The Teamsters are convinced that the Minnesota Fund is the best solution, but are willing to explore the PLCA’s alternative proposal to create a new fund.

The Teamsters are concerned about comments by some contractors at the recent PLCA convention that the industry would be better off without the Teamsters. The Teamsters believe that most contractors value their relationship with the Teamsters and that such irresponsible talk by a few small contractors is meant to sabotage the talks and provoke another strike. Industry sources say that the January strike cost contractors millions in lost revenues. The Teamsters and many contractors are hoping that, in the midst of a pipeline boom, a fair pension can be secured without Teamsters being forced into another strike.

