



## Union mobilizes to defend jobs as California's energy crisis deepens

Members talk with legislators about service reliability before key vote

As California harvested the bitter fruit of electric deregulation with electric price gouging and rolling blackouts, Local 1245 in January mobilized to keep the lights burning, the gas flowing, and its members working.

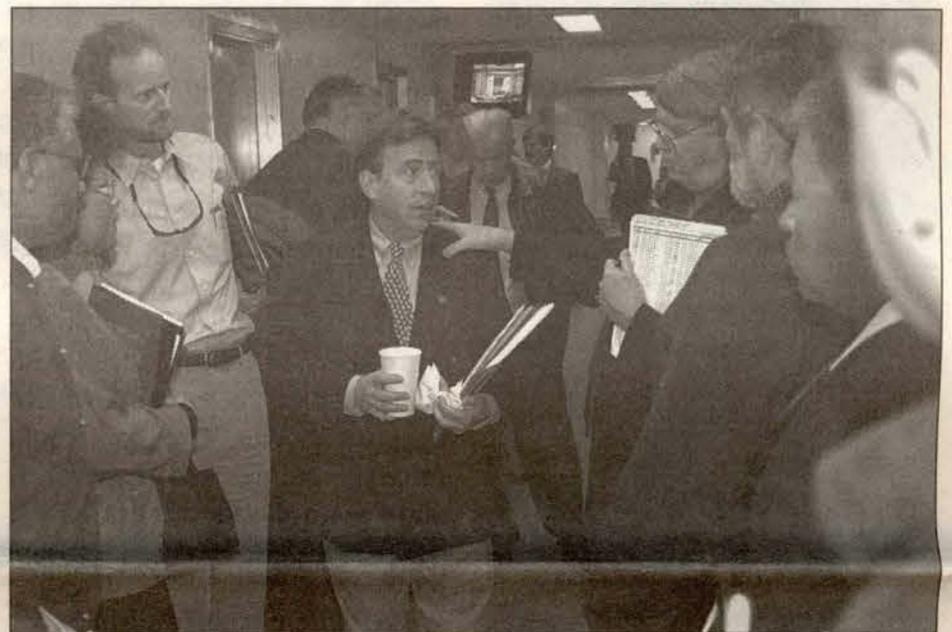
On Feb. 1, Local 1245 members fanned out across the state capitol building in Sacramento to urge support for AB1X, a bill to strengthen the state's hand in dealing with unregulated power providers whose outlandish prices have driven California's utilities to the brink of bankruptcy.

The Assembly had narrowly rejected AB1X just hours earlier, and, with another vote just hours away, the Local 1245 members concentrated their efforts on legislators who had voted "no," including Democrat Barbara Matthews and Republicans Anthony Pescetti, Tim Leslie, Tom Harman, Dick

Dickerson and Robert Pacheco.

"We explained to them that bankruptcy would put our gas and electric service in the hands of a federal bankruptcy judge, whose main job would be to protect creditors and stockholders," said PG&E Equipment Operator John Mendoza, one of the Local 1245 member-advocates. "In that situation, you're going to see layoffs and serious problems in terms of service reliability, and very little protection for consumers."

The union member-advocates—including PG&E Lineman Jeff Schlocker, Customer Service Representative Linda Lawrence and Electric Crew Foreman Rich Cowart—left packets with every legislator explaining how layoffs can erode customer service. (See "Letter to Legislators," pages 4-5, and "California Energy is People Powered," page 6.)



Assembly Member Mike Briggs (center) is politely surrounded by members of Local 1245 and Engineers and Scientists of California, along with CUE lobbyist Pete Conaty.

**"We explained to them that bankruptcy would put our gas and electric service in the hands of a federal bankruptcy judge, whose main job would be to protect creditors and stockholders. In that situation, you're going to see layoffs and serious problems in terms of service reliability, and very little protection for consumers."**

*Rich Cowart, electric crew foreman*

Warnings about service are designed to be wakeup calls to vote-conscious legislators, said Assistant Business Manager Bob Choate, who coordinated the Local 1245 legislative effort. "It gets their attention when you talk about all the problems people could be facing with their gas and electric service."

Local 1245 was joined in its efforts by other utility unions, all lobbying under the banner of the Coalition of California Utility Employees (CUE). According to published reports, legislators were also being called on by the Democratic legislative leadership and Gov. Davis.

In the end, Assembly Members Mathews, Pacheco and Pescetti

switched their votes and AB1X immediately became law on a 54-25 vote. While AB1X doesn't solve the state's energy crisis, and doesn't guarantee the solvency of California's utilities, it gives the state an important tool for reining in the sky-high wholesale electric prices that precipitated the crisis. (See "AB1X: The first step," page 7).

### Vital Link

The legislative victory on Feb. 1 capped a month of intensive efforts by Local 1245, through CUE, to alert policymakers to the growing

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### Energy Crisis



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## FEBRUARY 9

Service Awards  
Stockton, CA

## FEBRUARY 10

Service Awards  
Concord, CA

Stewards Conference  
Concord, CA

## FEBRUARY 23

Service Awards  
Oakland, CA

## FEBRUARY 24

Service Awards  
San Francisco, CA

Stewards Conference  
San Francisco, CA

## MARCH 3

Steward Conference  
Sacramento, CA

## MARCH 9

Service Awards  
San Jose, CA

## MARCH 10

Service Awards  
\*Chico, CA

Stewards Conference  
Chico, CA

Service Awards  
Monterey/Salinas, CA

Stewards Conference  
Monterey/Salinas, CA

## MARCH 17

Service Awards  
Bakersfield, CA

Stewards Conference  
Bakersfield, CA

## MARCH 23

Service Awards  
Ukiah, CA

## MARCH 24

Service Awards  
Santa Rosa, CA

Stewards Conference  
Santa Rosa, CA

\* indicates new date

## Keeping the flame alive

By Jack McNally, Business Manager



Money occupies center stage in the current energy crisis, just as it has since the beginning of California's electric deregulation experiment. In the beginning everyone wanted to talk about who was going to profit from deregulation. Now everyone is talking about who is going to pay.

But there is an even more pressing issue, one that the public is just now beginning to grasp: Who's responsible for keeping the lights on?

In January both PG&E and Southern California Edison, faced with crushing debts, began to downsize their workforces. Creditors could force the utilities into bankruptcy, putting into play the utilities' assets, their employees, and the service they provide.

Legislators passed a bill on Feb. 1 that seeks to rein in the runaway wholesale prices that have trampled

the utilities' finances. Legislators also must find a way to deal with the massive debt the utilities have accumulated due to those runaway wholesale prices.

It took rolling blackouts last month to make people realize that more than money was at stake in California's deregulation experiment. Electric service isn't an Act of God, it's not a force of nature, and it's not a market commodity. It's a product of work.

Without workers, gas and electric service doesn't exist.

Our union first raised this issue back in 1993, when I testified to the California Public Utilities Commission that competitive markets would undermine the utilities' historic commitment to training. In 1994, our Coalition of California Utility Employees (CUE) warned the legisla-

ture that competitive markets would lead to boom-and-bust cycles of electric supply that could undermine the stability of the workforce.

Frankly, back then, no one gave a damn. Now maybe people will give the issue of reliability a closer look. And here's what they will discover: when you're looking at reliable service, you're looking at people.

For 60 years, service reliability was the primary objective of utilities like PG&E, which had a legal "obligation to serve." Many of us believe that PG&E, with Local 1245's help, was at the head of the class. Reliable service was an obligation our members took personally. The public only noticed this during the storms and fires and earthquakes and floods, when our members worked around the clock under sometimes dangerous conditions to restore service. To their friends, to their neighbors, to their communities.

Unfortunately, not everyone understood the importance of this "obligation to serve" as well as our members. In fact, those who pushed us into electric deregulation belittled our regulatory apparatus, deriding it as a "command and control" system, and insisted that a competitive market could meet people's needs more efficiently and at cheaper cost.

Now, years later, all that free market rhetoric rings hollow. Markets don't keep the power on and the gas flowing—people do. Our members are like the athletes who carry the torch leading up to the Olympic games. In both cases, it takes a lot of people working together to keep that flame burning, people with a *commitment* to keep that flame burning.

Our members, even though often ignored by policymakers and sometimes berated by the public, still have that commitment. California's leaders had better take care not to let that flame die.



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**Business Manager & Executive Editor**  
Jack McNally

**Communications Director & Managing Editor**  
Eric Wolfe

**President**  
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**Executive Board**  
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E. L. "Ed" Mallory  
Anna Bayless-Martinez  
Chris Habecker  
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John Mendoza

**Treasurer**  
Michael J. Davis

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# Union mobilizes to defend jobs

## ► From Page 1

threat of service disruptions, and to remind the public about the vital link between utility jobs and service reliability.

"This problem has to get fixed, but there are a lot of different ideas on how to go about it," said Business Manager Jack McNally, who serves as chairman of CUE. Last month McNally met personally with Senate President pro Tem John Burton, Assembly Speaker Robert Hertzberg, and with staff members for Gov. Davis, state Treasurer Phil

Angelides, and Senator Byron Sher. "What we're trying to do is make sure that these key folks don't lose sight of the workers who provide the service. Any solution that doesn't protect workers just isn't going to work," said McNally.

CUE also took action in the regulatory arena last month when it filed an emergency motion asking the California Public Utilities Commission to prohibit PG&E and Southern California Edison from laying off employees during the energy crisis.

"Reliability must be protected during this crisis," said McNally in a news release that accompanied the filing. "If the utility workforces are reduced, service and reliability will suffer." (See "Unions seek ban on layoffs," page 8.)

At a news conference on Jan. 12, Local 1245 decried PG&E's decision to lay off 1,000 contract and hiring hall employees. The union also harshly criticized 1,850 layoffs announced by Southern California Edison which put some 400 Local 1245 contract linemen immediately out of work.

"These skilled workers will easily find work in other states: there is a critical shortage of linemen throughout the United States," said Communications Director Eric Wolfe at the news conference, which was widely covered by Bay Area television and radio. "You can lay off linemen in a minute, but it may take months or even years to get them back." (See "PG&E, Edison layoffs protested," page 8.)

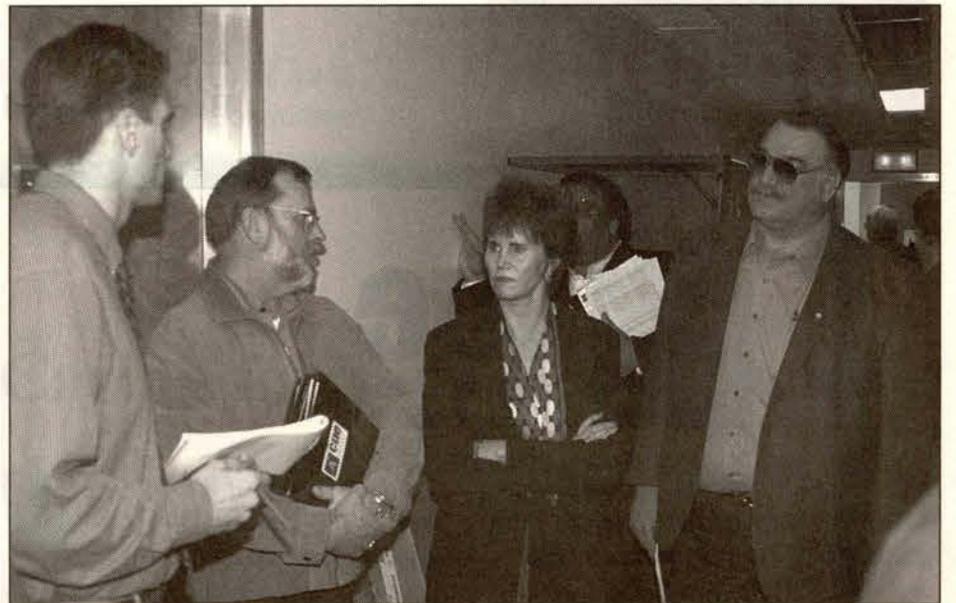
The following week saw an upsurge in media interest on how the



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Discussing the unions' concerns about energy reliability with Jedd Medefind (left), staff aide to Assembly Member Tim Leslie, are, from right, Local 1245 Assistant Business Manager Bob Choate, Local 1245 Business Rep. Bernard Smallwood (partially hidden), Engineers & Scientists of California Business Manager Marlayne Morgan, and ESC Sacramento Shop Steward Jim Cline.



Members of Local 1245 and Engineers and Scientists of California expressed their thanks to Assembly Member Sarah Reyes for her support on Assembly Bill 1X. Local 1245 members advocating for AB1X were: Lineman Jeff Schlocker, Electric Crew Foreman Rich Cowart, Equipment Operator (and Local 1245 Executive Board member) John Mendoza, Service Representative Linda Lawrence, Assistant Business Managers Bob Choate and Dorothy Fortier, Communications Director Eric Wolfe, and Business Reps. Bernard Smallwood, Bill Brill, and Junior Ornelas. Engineers and Scientists of California representatives were: Business Manager Marlayne Morgan, Sec.-Treas. Major Norton and Shop Steward Jim Cline. Directing the effort were CUE Legislative Advocates Art Carter and Pete Conaty.



San Francisco PG&E Lineman Jeff Schlocker discusses his concerns about service reliability with a legislative aide. Looking on are Local 1245 staff members Bill Brill and Junior Ornelas.

energy crisis was affecting PG&E employees. Stories appeared in the San Jose Mercury, the Sacramento Bee, the Santa Rosa Press Democrat, and the Contra Costa Times.

National Public Radio's Morning Edition, with an audience of 8 million listeners, interviewed Local 1245 members for a major story that aired Jan. 26. Oakland's Channel 2 interviewed Local 1245 members in a news feature that aired Jan. 27. And a public television outlet in Los Angeles featured Local 1245 Outside Construction linemen affected by the downsizing at Southern California Edison. (See "Members and the media," page 8.)

Events unfolded at such a rapid pace during January that the union turned increasingly to on-line communications to update its members at PG&E. Regular postings on PG&E's Intranet now offer summaries of daily news items related to the energy crisis, as well as updates on the union's actions. Members with access to PG&E's Intranet—known as Page One—can get to the Local 1245 updates by selecting Employee Services & Activities, IBEW site, What's New.

The union is also posting information about the energy crisis on its homepage on the Worldwide Web. Go to: [www.ibew1245.com](http://www.ibew1245.com).

## Letter to Legislators

Hand Delivered February 1, 2001



1020 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 310  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
(916) 446-3413  
(916) 446-4805 fax

Brian D'Arcy  
Business Manager  
International Brotherhood  
of Electrical Workers,  
Local 18

Patrick Lavin  
Business Manager  
International Brotherhood  
of Electrical Workers,  
Local 47

David Moore  
Business Manager  
International Brotherhood  
of Electrical Workers,  
Local 465

Ronald Jones  
Business Manager  
International Brotherhood  
of Electrical Workers,  
Local 659

Jack McNally  
Business Manager  
International Brotherhood  
of Electrical Workers,  
Local 1245

Dan Davis  
President  
Utility Workers Union  
of America, Local 246

Marlayne Morgan  
Business Manager  
Engineers & Scientists  
of California, Local 20,  
IFPTE, AFL-CIO/CLC

Art Carter  
Legislative Advocate

Pete Conaty  
Legislative Advocate

Marc Joseph  
Legal Counsel

Dear Honorable Members of the California Legislature:

The Coalition of California Utility Employees (CUE) represents 35,000 employees at California's investor-owned utilities and municipal-owned utilities. Our members are the frontline workers who deliver gas, water and electric service throughout the state.

Some claim that utilities deserve bankruptcy because "they wanted deregulation." But there is blame to be shared by all, and utility bankruptcy would punish us all. **If deregulation was a bad idea for California, utility bankruptcy is a worse one, threatening to turn a policy disaster into a genuine economic calamity.**

Everyone, not just the utilities, shares some responsibility for the deregulation fiasco:

- **Large industrial electric consumers** were principal advocates of electric deregulation but now want no part of the outrageous prices found in the free market they once yearned for.
- **Investor-owned utilities** sold off power generating plants that California so desperately needs today, moving the money out of the regulated utility into other ventures.
- **Consumer groups** fully participated in the legislative process, and in the end, did not oppose deregulation.
- **Unregulated power generators** promised that deregulation would increase competition and lower prices, but then took advantage of the short energy supply to gouge the public.
- **Agriculture and irrigation districts** sought to shift their responsibility for costs to residential consumers.
- **The media** virtually ignored deregulation when it was proposed. More stories have run in the past week than in the entire year before deregulation.
- **Renewable energy** advocates wrongly believed that market forces could provide incentives for resource diversity.
- **And utility unions**, despite our misgivings, acquiesced to deregulation by supporting the legislative measure that brought it about, AB 1890.

Together, we have created a crisis. Now California faces a choice. Should our energy policy be set by a bankruptcy judge, who legally is responsible only to creditors and shareholders? Or should energy policy be set by our elected representatives, the Governor and members of the California State Legislature, acting in the best interests of commercial and residential electricity users?

*Representing 35,000 employees who deliver gas and electric service throughout the state at California's investor-owned and municipal-owned utilities.*

## Letter to Legislators

Hand Delivered February 1, 2001

Reliable service requires financially stable utilities employing a trained and dedicated utility workforce. This can be achieved only through sound public policy, not bankruptcy decrees.

We must craft a solution that shares the burden and preserves the state's vibrant economy by assuring continued access to safe, reliable gas and electric service. The solution must contain these components:

- The investor-owned utilities must again become creditworthy, stable companies.
- The Governor must continue his leadership by pursuing a blend of power supplies at a just and reasonable cost.
- A state agency, not "the market," must ensure an adequate power supply for California.
- Power plants financed by Californians should be dedicated to serving California first.
- Power plant maintenance procedures should be regulated and a state inspection and enforcement mechanism should be established.
- The utilities must have the resources to pursue an all-out effort for conservation and energy efficiency. Such utility programs have a strong record of achievement, reducing demand by thousands of megawatts.
- The integrity of municipal utilities must be preserved as models of safe, affordable and reliable service throughout this crisis. These utilities should not become guinea pigs for experiments with state ownership of transmission or other assets.
- In the event the energy crisis is not solved in the near future, the State should exercise its power of eminent domain to take control of power generating plants previously owned by the utilities as a way to force power generators to lower prices.
- The workers who build, operate and maintain our gas and electric infrastructure must be safeguarded as our most prized energy asset.

A reliable power supply must be our first priority. Don't let a bankruptcy judge put this in jeopardy.

Sincerely,

Brian D'Arcy  
Business Manager  
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers,  
Local 18

Patrick Lavin  
Business Manager  
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers,  
Local 47

David Moore  
Business Manager  
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers,  
Local 465

Ronald Jones  
Business Manager  
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers,  
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President  
Utility Workers Union of America,  
Local 246

Marlayne Morgan  
Business Manager  
Engineers & Scientists of California,  
Local 20,  
IFPTE, AFL-CIO/CLC

Michael Mowrey  
International Vice President  
9<sup>th</sup> District of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers



## California's Energy is People-Powered

Editor's Note: The following employee profiles were among those included in the information packet given to legislators by Local 1245 member advocates on Feb. 1.

Meet a few of CUE's 35,000 workers. These eight employees at California's major and municipal utilities, who between them have more than 180 years of on-the-job experience, are keeping the electricity and gas flowing to California businesses and homes.

### John Toney, PG&E 23-year employee IBEW Local 1245

John is a gas service representative with PG&E in Sacramento. "We're normally the first ones who get called for any gas service problems, for standard turning on or shutting off of service, and restoring disconnected service."

Although California's energy crisis hasn't yet impacted his work as much as others, he has seen some effects. As one PG&E spokesperson was quoted in the press, with "not enough bodies to walk the routes," the utility has reduced meter

reading and, in intervening months, is relying on estimated bills. As John points out, with gas rates two-and-a-half times higher than last year, people are understandably questioning their bills, with a high estimated bill certain to spark inquiries. "That then triggers a service call to one of us service reps to go out and investigate why an estimated read is so high. It actually creates work by not reading the meter once a month. It's like robbing Peter to pay Paul."

### Jim Bethel, PG&E 24-year employee IBEW Local 1245

Jim is a senior service representative in PG&E's Sacramento Call Center. He fields the calls from frustrated customers who have already talked with a representative but don't feel their concerns have been addressed.

Soaring energy bills are creating a tense work environment. "Customers are alarmed. They're nervous about how they're going to pay their bill and they're concerned about reliability and the impact on their lives," reports Jim. "The crisis is highly impacting people with fixed incomes. We help them work out alternative payment plans,

trying to find the balance between good business judgment and meeting the human needs of our customers."

With calls on the rise, Jim worries about the impact of possible layoffs in his department. "With fewer people to do our job, we're not going to be able to quickly meet all of the customer's needs," says Jim. "If you're not in place to help the customer, their concerns are going to go unanswered."

Already, according to Jim, "We're putting off customers a little more than we would like to."

### Ken Jones, PG&E 36-year employee Engineers & Scientists of California

Ken is a senior engineering estimator in PG&E's gas department in Ukiah. Regional engineers like Ken, design and engineer the distribution facilities—transformers, gas mains, and power lines—that we all see in our communities. He also is your first contact if you're building a new business, manufacturing plant, or home. He visits sites and then produces construction drawings to determine the cost and scope of the job—all the time ensuring that regulations are followed. For instance, for the recent construction of an assisted living facility in Ukiah, he determined the route for gas facilities to be installed and the suitable location for meters.

"We are the glue that holds it all together," he says. "We give the lineman in the big blue truck

their project assignments," whether it be a new company site, or reconstruction of an existing site requiring increased energy capacity.

The technical professionals at PG&E include nuclear engineers, civil engineers who look at dam and hydro structures, electrical engineers who work on substations, and even architectural engineers. In the current energy crisis, Ken is concerned about the ability to budget the manpower needed for everything from ongoing system maintenance to new construction.

"Someone has to run and maintain distribution facilities. Someone has to design and engineer these facilities. The question is, who will be around to support this intricate infrastructure should PG&E go under?"

# AB 1X: a first step, not a panacea



It's not easy passing a bill nobody likes. Especially when you need a two-thirds majority for passage.

But that was the challenge facing those who worried that utility bankruptcy could come any day.

"We were not facing a situation where we could pass this bill or do nothing," Assemblyman Fred Keeley, author of AB1X, told the San Francisco Chronicle on Feb. 1. "We had to either pass this bill or find ourselves in a situation that would spiral wildly out of control."

Keeley put it another way to the Associated Press that same day:

"If we don't do this, the imminent bankruptcy of the utilities is so awful...it is almost unimaginable."

Utility bankruptcy seemed to grow ever more likely during late January as both PG&E and Southern California Edison found themselves unable to make payments owed to institutional investors and power generators.

On January 19, Gov. Davis signed emergency legislation authorizing the state to spend \$400 million to buy power for the utilities. That appropriation, which bought less



**"We were not facing a situation where we could pass this bill or do nothing. We had to either pass this bill or find ourselves in a situation that would spiral wildly out of control ... If we don't do this, the imminent bankruptcy of the utilities is so awful...it is almost unimaginable."**

*Assembly Member Fred Keeley,  
Author of AB 1X*

than two weeks of power in California's run-away wholesale electricity market, was intended to buy enough time for the state to negotiate long-term contracts at considerably lower rates from power generators.

And that is where AB1X came in. AB1X authorizes the state to spend up to \$10 billion starting immediately to purchase thousands of megawatts of power on long-term contracts and sell it to consumers. S. David Freeman, the former head of

SMUD who is currently on leave from the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power to negotiate those long-term contracts on the governor's behalf, said AB1X would be essential for his negotiations.

"Without that legislation, I'm just whistling Dixie," Freeman told the San Francisco Chronicle.

The new law allows the Public Utilities Commission to raise rates for businesses and residential accounts who consume more than 130% of their so-called baseline usage.

## No Panacea

AB1X is no panacea for California's energy woes. It is not yet known how much power California will be able to procure under long-term contracts, nor at what price. Until those issues are resolved, California continues to buy power at the exorbitant rates commanded by energy wholesalers on the spot market.

AB1X doesn't address the huge debts accumulated by PG&E and Southern California Edison over the past several months. Further legislation will be required to determine who will pick up that tab, an issue guaranteed to spark intense debate.

But the alternatives to AB1X were simply unacceptable to most lawmakers: letting the power go out, or acquiescing to more price gouging in the spot market, with taxpayers continuing to pick up the tab.

Debra Bowen, chair of the Senate Utilities, Energy and Communications Committee, told the San Francisco Chronicle that passing AB1X "was the easy part."

"Our next big task is to structure some kind of mechanism that gives ratepayers something of value, keeps the utilities from bankruptcy and get us out of management by crisis."

**"This was the easy part ... Our next big task is to structure some kind of mechanism that gives ratepayers something of value, keeps the utilities from bankruptcy and get us out of management by crisis."**

*State Senator Debra Bowen, Chair  
Senate Utilities, Energy and  
Communications Committee*

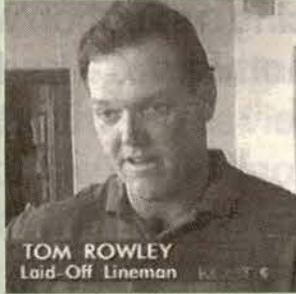


## Members & the media

### TELEVISION

◆ Oakland's Channel 2 interviewed Ray Shepherd, Gas Service Representative, for a Jan. 27 story.

◆ KCET, a Los Angeles-area public television station interviewed Advisory Council Tom Rowley, Outside Construction Lineman, and Local 1245 Business Reps. Tom Brown and Jim Rowley for a late January story on how Southern California Edison downsizing is affecting contract linemen.



### RADIO

◆ National Public Radio's Morning Edition, with an audience of 8 million listeners, interviewed John Petrovitz, Gas Crew Foreman, and Steve Segali, Welder, in San Francisco for a Jan. 26 story about the "end of the PG&E family."

◆ KQED-FM public radio in San Francisco included Local 1245 Communications Director Eric Wolfe in an hour-long panel discussion of the energy crisis on Jan. 16.

### NEWSPAPER

◆ The Press Democrat (Santa Rosa) interviewed Russell Fairbanks, Lead Driver, Advisory Council member Jim Findley, and John Kent, Lineman, for a Jan. 21 story about customer anger directed at PG&E employees headlined "PG&E workers bear brunt of public's anger."

◆ The Mercury News (San Jose) interviewed Gary Presley, Senior Meter/Regulator Mechanic, Bob Baldasano, Plant Technician, Arlan Presley, Plant Assistant, and Bill Smith, Senior Meter/Regulator Mechanic, for a Jan. 22 story about the impact of PG&E's declining stock value on employees, headlined "PG&E's 'family' falling apart."

◆ The Mercury News (San Jose) interviewed Bob Mayer, Troubleman, Don Barnett, Gas Service Rep., Xavier De La Rocha, Gas Service Rep., and Local 1245 Business Rep. Bill Brill for a January 25 story about customer anger directed at PG&E employees headlined "PG&E foot soldiers take brunt of abuse."

◆ The Contra Costa Times interviewed Ron Weakley, retired Local 1245 Business Manager, and Don Hardie, one of Local 1245's original organizers, for a Jan. 28 story about PG&E's history headlined "Powerhouse from the past now struggles for survival."

◆ The Sacramento Bee interviewed Bryan Carroll, Service Representative, John Toney, Gas Service Rep., Dan Parmenter, lineman, and Local 1245 Business Rep. Arlene Edwards for a Feb. 5 story about customer anger directed at PG&E employees headlined "PG&E workers on firing line: Customers vent their frustration."

## Unions seek ban on utility layoffs

**Note: The Coalition of California Utility Employees issued this news release on Jan. 8.**

Today the Coalition of California Utility Employees filed an emergency motion asking the California Public Utilities Commission to order Southern California Edison and Pacific Gas and Electric Company *not* to lay off employees as a result of the current electric crisis.

"Reliability must be protected during this crisis. If the utility workforces are reduced, service and reliability will suffer," said Jack McNally, Chair of the Coalition of California Utility Employees and Business Manager of IBEW Local 1245. "Cutting the utility workforce creates extremely dangerous risk for the California economy."

"Consumers need stability and safety in electric service. There should be no layoffs that affect service to California consumers," said Howard Owen, Executive Director of the Consumer Federation of California.

On Friday January 5, Edison proposed to lay off 1,450 employees. As Edison admitted, this would mean "reduced service levels.... The reductions will also result in a fundamental change in our responsiveness to customers, who ultimately may wait longer for service, wait longer to talk to a customer service representative, wait longer to have power restored in an outage, and experience reduced reliability."

## PG&E, Edison layoffs protested

**Note: Local 1245 issued the following statement at a Jan. 12 news conference in San Francisco.**

Our union represents approximately 14,000 workers at Pacific Gas & Electric.

Unregulated electric power generators are plundering California. They have taken billions of dollars from our state. But this crisis is entering a dangerous new phase. We are about to witness the dismantling of California's gas and electric system.

Southern California Edison has begun laying off nearly 2000 workers. About 300 of those are contract linemen who belong to our union. Pacific Gas & Electric has announced plans just yesterday to release about 1,000 contract and hiring hall employees, beginning immediately.

As we stand here today, skilled electric linemen are hitting the road, looking for work outside of California. These are the people you rely on to replace rotten power poles before they fall down, to restore your electric service during winter storms, and to put the system back together after fires, floods and earthquakes. These skilled workers will easily find work in other

At the current exorbitant cost for wholesale electricity, the savings to Edison from laying off these employees and reducing customer service would buy *less than 5 minutes* of generation per day from the California Power Exchange.

The Coalition of California Utility Employees strongly supports the State's efforts to avoid bankruptcy by the utilities, and empathizes with the utilities' plight. However, utility employees are needed now, more than ever, to provide customer service and preserve electric reliability.

"Utility employees are not the cause of the utilities' financial crisis and laying them off is not the solution," said Jack McNally. "The utilities are on the brink of bankruptcy because of the irresponsible greed of the electric generators and marketers. Even if every utility employee were laid off, there would not be enough money to pay the extortionate rates of the generators."

"Customers depend on utility employees to provide reliable electric service. It makes no sense to decimate the utility workforce just to buy 5 minutes of generation," said Pat Lavin, Business Manager of IBEW Local 47. "The State must help prevent utility bankruptcy. But we should focus on meaningful action against the generators, not symbolic action against utility employees."

states: there is a critical shortage of linemen throughout the United States.

You can lay off linemen in a minute, but it may take months or even years to get them back.

Where will it stop? How many more people will the utilities have to lay off as the unregulated electric power generators drive them into bankruptcy?

On Monday our union, along with several other unions, filed papers asking the CPUC to prohibit any layoffs during the current electricity crisis. This is a genuine emergency. California customers have already been mugged. We're about to get mugged again.

Our union calls on the CPUC to prevent this dismantling of our state's gas and electric system. And we call on the governor and legislature to take immediate action against these unregulated generators and bring down the price of power to something resembling the cost of service. If that means taking over these plants by eminent domain, then let's get on with it. Every day of delay brings us closer to a genuine catastrophe.

## Mercury News story describes employees safety concerns during current energy crisis

Like several other media outlets in the last part of January, the San Jose Mercury News asked Local 1245 about the impact of the energy crisis on the daily worklives of PG&E workers. The Mercury News published the following story on January 26, under the headline "PG&E foot soldiers take brunt of abuse."

BY GIL JOSÉ DURÁN  
Mercury News  
Jan. 26, 2001

In 32 years as a PG&E employee, Bob Mayer has twice stared down the barrel of a gun while on the job: once as he inspected power lines at a house where a drug raid was pending, and another time when he tried to cut service to a non-paying Hells Angel in Campbell.

But the grizzly-bearded 57-year-old, who flew Air Force B-52s in Vietnam before getting into power line work, says none of his experiences prepared him for the public backlash that's currently socking PG&E's blue-collar workers.

Eggs, trash, paint and blocks of wood have been tossed at utility trucks. Employees responding to calls about gas leaks or power outages find themselves confronted by upset customers clutching bills and demanding explanations.

"Several times a day people go by and flip me off," said Mayer, who works out of PG&E's Cupertino yard.

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers 1245 in San Jose, which represents 14,000 utility workers, says reports of harassment and vandalism have streamed in over the past month as people frustrated by possible rate hikes and blackouts lash out at company field workers.

Mayer, who said he felt like a hero after being featured in a Mercury News photo that showed him at work restoring electricity in the Santa Cruz mountains after the 1989

Loma Prieta earthquake, agrees that the tide has turned against PG&E employees.

"I feel like I've gone from being a hero to being a goat," Mayer said.

The situation recently became so tense in Moss Landing that employees who drive their company vehicles home at night received permission to strip the permanent PG&E decals off of their trucks and use magnetic decals instead, said union spokesman Bill Brill.

Last week, a man who identified himself as an Alameda County PG&E worker called KMEL radio and made an on-air plea for listeners to give the crews a break.

"Everywhere I go, people are hating on me," he said.

Utility workers must routinely watch out for high-voltage hazards, gas leaks and snarling pets, but many say they're now wary of outraged consumers.

PG&E spokesman Scott Blakey said the utility hasn't identified any threats to worker safety, and the company refuses to say how many acts of vandalism have occurred. But the union says it's taking the incidents seriously.

"They're basically being told to watch their backsides," Brill said. "We're getting reports daily of workers saying that customers are abusing them. There are too many people who find the PG&E workers an accessible scapegoat."

No one's keeping an exact tally of verbal abuse against the company's employees, but Brill said it's routine. The trend is not specific to Northern California; rate hikes in San Diego in October resulted in insults and spit assaults on San Diego Gas and Electric's workers, said union spokesman Dave Moore.

Don Barnett, a gas service representative in Gilroy and a 29-year PG&E veteran, said he has been confronted by upset customers who demand to know why their bills are

By the Local 1245  
Safety Committee



## Caring for your brain bucket

What could go wrong with the brain bucket, you ask? There are lots of names for a hard hat, but when was the last time you inspected your hard hat for defects?

Before you put it on next time take a minute to inspect it thoroughly. Look for cracks, check for broken mounts for the suspension. How is the sweat band? Is the chin strap elastic weak?

Have you cleaned the hat recently? That can help restore its nighttime visibility.

Your hard hat may be an older

style and you should consider upgrading it for one that has a brim all around, thereby protecting your ears from hot falling objects.

It is easy to forget to wear your hard hat. But one thing that will help you remember is to be aware of all the situations where it could protect you.

Overhead crane controls could malfunction. Wire rope could snap. Work in the bucket might put you into a conductor

or cross arm.

And there is always the falling objects from above!



Current members of the Local 1245 Safety Committee are: Stoney Burke, Alameda Power & Telecommunications; Keith Hopp, Pacific Gas & Electric; Ralph Muraca, City of Santa Clara; Mark Rose, Davey Tree; Al White, Pacific Gas & Electric; Rod Wright, Modesto Irrigation District; and Assistant Business Manager Art Murray.

higher while their service is less reliable.

"It's kind of an uneasy situation," he said. "I don't take it personal, but I do think it's unfortunate that the working people are being held accountable for this. I find myself being asked a lot of questions I don't have answers for."

As 16-year PG&E employee Xavier De La Rocha inspected gas meters in San Jose's Willow Glen neighborhood Wednesday afternoon, he said the dirty looks and snide comments get under his skin because he, like many other PG&E blue-collar workers, worries about his job security. De La Rocha and his wife had planned to get braces for one of their five children, but the

orthodontic work is on hold until they know whether they'll have health insurance in the coming year.

"I'm just a guy out here trying to do my job," he said.

As De La Rocha finished an inspection on Sandy Wood Court, Laverne Randall strolled by and called out: "PG&E! I didn't know they still had people who come out to check on the lights."

But as she climbed into her car, Randall said she doesn't hold the current crisis against the beleaguered company's foot soldiers.

"I know it's a complex situation that has to do more with planning and it's not their fault," she said. "I was just being facetious."



## WOMEN WORKERS' HISTORY

### In the Jungle

Upton Sinclair's novel "The Jungle," published in 1906, was a forceful expose of the brutal and unsanitary conditions in Chicago's meat-packing plants. It was also an enormous hit with a horrified public, selling hundreds of thousands of copies. In describing the exploitation of immigrant women workers, Sinclair tried to make a case for unionism and socialist politics. But instead, middle class readers were struck by his descriptions of unsanitary and diseased food. "I aimed at the public's heart," he said, "and by accident hit it in the stomach."

President Theodore Roosevelt, under public pressure to clean up the meat industry, challenged Sinclair to prove the allegations made in *The Jungle*. Sinclair had two fellow socialists prepare testimony for a presidential commission. Posing as husband and wife, Ella Reeve and Richard Bloor convinced Chicago packinghouse workers to testify before the commission, and arranged extensive publicity exposing conditions in the meatpacking plants. The organizing and investigations of Ella Reeve Bloor (as she came to be known) contributed to passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906.



Ella Reeve Bloor returned to the stockyards the following year. At a journalist's request, she got work in plants owned by Armour and Swift in order to see first-hand whether the packing companies were obeying the new law. She found evidence of fake and faulty meat inspections. Through widely published articles and lectures, she exposed the poor pay and horrific conditions in the packing plants and the threat to public health posed by the companies' dishonest practices.

## Global survey on working women

A major survey of working women all over the world has been launched by the world's biggest trade union body, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU).

The survey will help the 156-million member confederation learn the priorities of working women in such areas as pay, working hours, child care, etc.. Women workers are also being asked whether they belong to a trade union and if the union meets their needs.

Those who are not union members are asked what the reasons are, such as cultural constraints, fear of repris-

als from the employer, or the negative image of the unions.

Women now make up 40% of the workforce worldwide and about 40% of the global confederation's membership. The survey will be sent to 25 affiliated organizations and is being posted, in English, French and Spanish, on the ICFTU's website and can be completed electronically.

The ICFTU is currently working on a review of the priorities, structures and strategies of the international trade union movement. The process, known as the "Millennium Review," is due to be completed by the end of this year.

The organization wants to ensure the active participation of women in the millennium debate, and has called on its Women's Committee to conduct the discussion on gender equality. It is within this context that the Women's Committee has produced the questionnaire, the results of which it hopes to feed into the debate.

The ICFTU is appealing to working women worldwide to take part in its survey by filling in the questionnaire as soon as possible.

To participate in the survey, go to:

[www.icftu.org/questionnaire/questionnaire.asp?Name=workingwoman](http://www.icftu.org/questionnaire/questionnaire.asp?Name=workingwoman)

## Women fare poorly in 'right-to-work' states

When it comes to earning decent wages, voting in crucial elections and having access to health insurance and higher education, women across the country have vastly different experiences.

In its recent report, *The Status of Women in the States*, the public policy organization Institute for Women's Policy Research rates the best and worst states for women—and finds that women are at a particular disadvantage in so-called right to work states, in which laws prevent unions from being fully effective in improving workers' lives.

Women experience the worst conditions—based on such factors as political participation, annual earnings, equal pay and poverty—in "right to work" states, with Mississippi, Ala-



bama, Tennessee and Arkansas all ranking at the bottom. In general, workers in states with laws restricting union representation earn 19% less than in states without those laws,

according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"Women who have union representation have higher wages," says AFL-CIO Executive Vice President Linda Chavez-Thompson in the January 2001 edition of *America@Work*. "And their union contract provides health care coverage, pensions and sometimes even child care," she notes.

See the IWPR report at [www.iwpr.org/states/worst.htm](http://www.iwpr.org/states/worst.htm)

**In general, workers in states with laws restricting union representation earn 19% less than in states without those laws, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.**

## Power crisis poses hardships for seniors

By Orv Owen

**D**uring recent meetings with senior organizations, I have heard varying positions and concerns regarding the power crisis (or market hoax, depending on how you look at it).

Most of the seniors that I am in contact with favor one of two alternatives to the deregulation mess. These are: return California's electric system to the regulated utilities as they were prior to the ill-advised deregulation; or the legislature should establish public ownership of the electric power system.

In contacts with seniors, I must

continually remind myself that not all seniors are from Electrical Workers unions or even from the labor movement. There are over 500,000 retired citizens in California that come from all walks of life and may hold political, economic and social views that may differ from mine.

Still, most seniors support the view that electricity, gas and water are essential services that must be reliable, safe, affordable and available to all. Since seniors live on modest monthly incomes, they cannot absorb increases in the cost of basic essentials like electricity, gas and water. If there are any economic

changes in seniors carefully budgeted monthly expenditures, then obviously seniors will be concerned. Any increases in costs of basic utility services could require seniors to alter, reduce or eliminate other everyday necessities, such as food, medicine and clothing.

The current market mess must be resolved in a way that assures reliable electric service while not putting an undo burden on ordinary consumers.

Keep alert and keep the faith!

Orv Owen is a former Assistant Business Manager for Local 1245.



## Make a Date...

The Local 1245 Retiree Club invites you to join us for companionship, discussion and projects. Current meeting locations are:

**East Bay Chapter:** meets 2nd Thursday each month, 10 a.m., at Local 1245 headquarters, 3063 Citrus Circle, Walnut Creek, CA.

**San Jose Chapter:** meets 1st Thursday each month, 10 a.m., at Local 332, 1870 Stone Ave., San Jose.

## Bush's drug plan gets off to rocky start

**P**resident George W. Bush on Jan. 30 announced a plan to provide prescription-drug coverage to the elderly and disabled.

The Bush plan would make states eligible for block grants underwriting the entire drug bills of those seniors whose incomes are less than 135% above the poverty line, or \$11,300 for an individual and \$15,200 for a couple. Smaller subsidies would be given to other seniors. The cutoff level for aid would be 175% of the poverty line.

A "catastrophic plan" would guarantee payment of all prescription-drug costs in excess of \$6,000 a year for anyone, regardless of income.

Bush's plan would cost \$48 billion over four years.

Opposition to the plan took shape immediately in many quarters, including Congressional leaders of both parties, the National Governors Association and the prescription-drug industry.

The biggest concern for lawmakers is that Bush's plan would reach only a tiny percentage of the

elderly and disabled who lack prescription-drug coverage. Roughly one-third of the 39 million elderly and disabled who have Medicare health insurance have no coverage for prescription drugs, while another third have plans that vary widely in coverage and cost.

Bush's plan would reach only part of the first group.

Many members of Congress in both parties said Bush's proposal would have to be made bigger, with prescription drug coverage established as a permanent part of Medicare, the federal government's health insurance programs for retired people.

"Congress wants to do something more comprehensive," said Sen. Charles Grassley of Iowa, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, a key

committee in the Medicare debate.

An analysis of Bush's proposal by Ken Thorp, a former Health and Human Services official in the Clinton administration, suggests that fewer than 1 million of the nearly 6 million people eligible for help would actually get it.

Earlier in January California Gov. Gray Davis announced a new state initiative to help about 40,000 elderly and disabled Californians afford Medicare + Choice HMO plans that include prescription drug coverage not available in traditional fee-for-service Medicare.



## Congratulations!

The Local 1245 Retirees Club congratulates these recently-retired members of the union. We invite you to participate in—or start!—a Retirees Club chapter in your area.

Samuel Adams, 35 years  
Livermore, CA

Reynaldo Albovias, 20 years  
Daly City, CA

Melvin Bailey, 30 years  
Oakland, CA

Ronald Blais, 29 years  
Healdsburg, CA

Frederick Bomben, 36 years  
Kingsburg, CA

Christopher Calhoun, 32 years  
Pleasanton, Ca

Linda Capsaliaris, 34 years  
Oakley, Ca

Kenneth Clark, 35 years  
St. Helena, Ca

Robert Costa, 31 years  
Willits, CA

Eddie Dias, 33 years  
Modesto, CA

## Improvements bargained at Mt. Wheeler Power

Local 1245 has negotiated improvements in wages and benefits for members at Mt. Wheeler Power in Nevada.

The union bargained equity increases of 6% for Line Working Foreman, Lineman, Meter Technician, Substation Technician and Apprentice effective Jan. 1, 2001. All other classifications received 3.5%. General wage increases of 3% were bargained for both the second and third years of the agreement.

Negotiating for Local 1245 were Sue Gulley, Coordinator; Ron Miller, Line Foreman; and Mike Venturino, Lineman, along with Business Rep. Ray Thomas.

Among the other provisions were:

- 401k increase from 9.2% of 10% effective Jan. 1, 2001.
- Employer matches 50% of employee's 401k contributions, with a



MT. WHEELER NEGOTIATING TEAM

The Local 1245 negotiating team at Mt. Wheeler Power, from left: Mike Venturino, Business Rep. Ray Thomas, Sue Gulley, and Ron Miller.

- 1.5% cap on employer contribution.
- Unlimited lifetime maximum medical benefit for illness.

The union accepted a new medical plan provided by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

## Calendar for Union Election

March  
Nominations of candidates at Unit meetings.

May  
Election Issue of Utility Reporter published; ballots mailed to all eligible voters before June 1.

June 1-22  
Mail ballot election held.

June 22  
Ballots retrieved from Post Office box by election committee, then verified and counted. Results reported to all Unit Recorders immediately after certification.

## Local 1245 retains legislative advocate for Nevada's 2001 session

Local 1245 has retained Carson City attorneys Ernest Adler and Robert Johnston to represent the union's interests during the 2001 session of the Nevada Legislature.

The 2001 session poses special challenges to Local 1245 members in Nevada, where electric deregulation continues to threaten jobs. The session is also important because it will act on reapportionment—the process of carving out new legislative districts in the wake of the 2000 census.

"It's hard to tell where deregulation is going to go in Nevada," said Local

1245 Business Rep. Ray Thomas. "The problems of Southern California Edison and Pacific Gas & Electric (in California's deregulated market) have Nevada spooked."

Nevertheless, some Nevada legislators seem determined to steam ahead with deregulation, "with no true understanding of power costs or service continuity to the consumer," Thomas said.

Local 1245 is the only local union to actively lobby and submit written comments on behalf of its members regarding deregulation. The union's

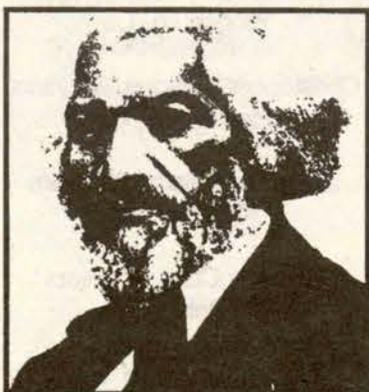
concerns include:

- Divestiture of generation is a risky move, possibly jeopardizing the solvency of Sierra Pacific Resources.
- The Business Code of Conduct as written is unfair to Local 1245 customer service employees, including meter readers and troublemen. District employees represented by Local 1245 at Sierra Pacific need variances to the code in order to fairly compete.
- SB 438, dealing with deregulation, is tainted legislation. It does not allow Local 1245 customer service

employees, meter readers or meter technicians the opportunity to perform their services for customers who choose an alternative seller. Local 1245's lobbyists plan to submit bill revisions in order to address job retention issues and equitable treatment for our members.

The Governor's Deregulation Committee has recommended slower implementation of deregulation, perhaps phasing it in over a four-year period.

"Local 1245 will be involved with this process all the way," said Thomas.



February is  
Black History  
Month

## Gains for Modesto, South San Joaquin Irrigation

Local 1245 members at Modesto Irrigation District ratified a new four-year agreement in December that provides wage increases of 6%, 4%, 4% and 3.5% or full CPI.

The agreement also provides dental and vision benefits for retirees and their dependents.

Also negotiated was a 6% benchmark adjustment for 4th step line apprentices, linemen, electric crew

foremen and troublemen.

On January 18, members at the South San Joaquin Irrigation District approved a new two-year agreement.

The South San Joaquin pact provided 4.5% wage increases in both years. It also improved the PERS retirement benefit to the single highest year option.

Negotiating for the union at

Modesto Irrigation District were Mike Stout, Karri Daves, Chuck Mount, Ed Cox, Steve Auldridge and Forrest "Woody" Mouw.

Negotiating for the union at South San Joaquin Irrigation District were Joseph Catanzarite, Kevin Smith and Ray Hellstrom.

Local 1245 Business Rep. Dennis Seyfer assisted with both sets of negotiations.