Legislators blast ‘retail wheeling’ proposal

A proposal by the California Public Utilities Commission to radically restructure the state’s electric industry hit a major speed bump during hearings at the state capitol last month. Assembly member Byron Sher, who convened the May 23 hearing, said the CPUC proposal conflicted with existing laws on utility regulation, energy resource planning, and environmental and ratepayer protection. Sher flatly rejected the CPUC’s plan to start implementing its proposal in August.

SMUD pact hikes wages

Employees represented by Local 1245 at the Sacramento Municipal Utility District approved a new four-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that increases wages, improves benefits, and provides new deferred compensation opportunities.

The agreement, ratified by a large majority last month, raises wages 3.5% in July of 1995, with additional raises of 3% in 1996 and 2.5% in both 1997 and 1998. If the rate of inflation exceeds wages in any of the four years, wages will be adjusted upward accordingly to a maximum of 5%.

The MOU calls for wage reopeners if the inflation rate exceeds 7% in any of the four years. As of Utility Reporter presstime the SMUD Board had not yet given its approval to the negotiated agreement.

Bucking a national trend, the union was able to preserve the employer’s existing level of support for medical plan premium payments. Minor improvements were made to the existing dental plan.

A new benefit obtained in the negotiations was spouse and dependent life insurance. Under the MOU, an employee can elect coverage for a spouse in an amount up to 50% of the employee’s own coverage. Similar levels of coverage are also now available.

Local 1245 prompts NRC to rethink policy

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has announced it will consider reducing the scope of drug testing at all US nuclear power plants in the US, due largely to efforts by Local 1245 on behalf of members at PG&E’s Diablo Canyon nuclear plant.

The NRC declared last month that it was "reevaluating whether utilities licensed to operate nuclear power plants must conduct random drug testing of those workers who do not perform safety-related jobs, but who have unescorted access to the plant’s protected areas.”

The NRC announcement said the reevaluation stemmed, in part, from a June 1992 decision by a three-judge panel of the US Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit. That decision, responding to a petition from Local 1245, upheld the random drug testing requirement, but it questioned the justification for imposing random drug tests on workers whose jobs do not directly relate to safety, particularly clerical workers.

Quickly following up on this opening, Local 1245 requested the NRC to exempt from random testing certain clerical workers at Diablo Canyon.

“We've had a long uphill fight on random drug testing issues,” said Local 1245 staff attorney Tom Dalzell. “The fact that the NRC is now thinking about modifying its position in a way that could help protect the rights of some of our members is a small but significant victory.”
Workers here and abroad
Rolling the union on...

Papers Stonewall: The San Francisco Conference of Newspaper Unions filed unfair labor practice charges against the San Francisco Examiner and San Francisco Chronicle. Management has stonewalled contract negotiations, which union leaders see as an attempt to provoke a strike.

China Crackdown: Weijingheng, a former electrician and China's most prominent dissident, was arrested in April by the Chinese government. Among Wei's supposed crimes was writing an article in Hong Kong's Eastern Express in which he warned foreign business leaders against sacrificing democratic principles in their rush to make money in the Chinese market. Last September Wei was released from prison after serving nearly 15 years for the "crime" of advocating the creation of independent worker organizations. Despite China's abysmal record on workers' rights in particular and human rights in general, President Clinton this month renewed China's "most favored nation" trading status.

Deadly Mines: The Chinese government admits that mine accidentskill an average of 30 Chinese coal miners each day. The actual figure is probably higher, according to China Labor Notes. Mines operated by the prison system are considered the most dangerous of all.

Captive Labor: The Mexican government is planning to turn Mexico City's eight prisons into centers for assembling products for US corporations, according to San Mateo County Labor. Over 100 companies have shown interest in the idea of going from "low" wages to "no" wages. In promotion literature, the Mexican government touts the benefits of the "captive labor of some 8500 inmates."

Low Priority: US, Canadian, and Mexican officials met at the end of March to discuss the environmental and labor commissions set up in the NAFTA "side agreements." According to a New York Times report, the commission responsible for safeguarding labor standards still has no staff.

Murder: The Indonesian military has been implicated in last year's murder of Marsihan, a 25-year-old union steward at a watch factory. According to Free Labour World, Marsihan was last seen alive when she went to army district headquarters last May 5 to protest the detention of 13 fellow workers who had been arrested for union activities. An autopsy revealed she had been raped and beaten with an iron bar. In January Indonesia officially repealed a ban on military intervention in industrial disputes. Since then the army has intervened in at least 23 strikes.

Factories Occupied: Workers in Honduras began occupying factories in the country's maquiladora industry in February after four women were dismissed for trying to form a union at the American-owned MS Mart company.

But We're Sure He Deserves Every Penny: Last year the average CEO of a major US company made 149 times the average factory worker's pay of $25,317. Michael Eisner, chairman of Disney Co., made just over $203 million in 1993. That comes to $3.9 million a week, or $23,238 an hour—every hour. Even when he was sleeping.

No Work: About 30% of the world's labor force is unemployed or underemployed according to the International Labor Organization. Unemployment is forecast to reach 8.6% in industrialized nations by the end of 1994, the highest level since the Depression of the 1930s.

Why So Few Jobs? "Perhaps the most bizarre of our artificial scarcities is the scarcity of jobs. How can there be so few jobs, when there is so much to do? If profit were not the principle guiding human endeavor, we could easily employ a couple of generations just cleaning up the mess: salvaging the environment, curing disease, educating the ignorant, housing the homeless."—Author Barbara Ehrenreich, writing in Dollars & Sense.

Historic strike at Homestead

The labor television series "We Do the Work" presents the historic 1892 strike at Homestead, Pa., in its June program. Homestead Works was the centerpiece of Andrew Carnegie's steel empire. It became a symbol of America's labor struggles when Carnegie brought to Pinkerton thugs to break a strike. Ten people were killed by Pinkertons.

San Mateo, Ca. TV 60 June 8, 6:30 pm
San Francisco, Ca. TV 9 June 19, 2:30 pm

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"Stress" claims restricted by new law

By Sharon K. Brady

Workers' compensation law has undergone several changes in the past year. One of the most drastic regards the new laws that affect "psychic claims"-often called "stress" claims.

These are claims brought by a worker claiming that on-the-job stress has caused an emotional injury. The injured worker is seeking benefits, which include medical treatment as well as lost wages if the treating doctor states that the worker must miss work.

Stress claims are more difficult to prove than the average injury claim, because the injury is not "visible." Under the old standard in effect before July 1993, the injured worker had to show that 10% or more of his or her psychiatric problem was caused by stress. Employers often tried to blame other difficulties such as family, financial, or physical events to show that even 10% of the stress was not caused by work.

Stress claims, the injured worker must show that "actual events of work" are "predominant" in causing the psychiatric injury. Employers' compensation stress claims are not compensable at all, and others require a higher standard of proof.

In sum, these new laws mean that stress claims are now much more difficult to prove. Many types of stress claims are not compensable at all, and others require a high standard of proof.

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Organizing the trees

Local 1245 has organized line clearance contractors since PG&E first began contracting out the work in the 1960s. Here is a brief history of recent efforts to finish the job of unionizing the industry:

June 1989: NLRB certifies Local 1245 as bargaining representative for tree trimmers at Arbor Tree.

January 1994: Arbor Tree organizing drive in Oroville-Redding area.

March 1992: All Local 1245 strikers at Asplundh are hired by union contractor Davey Tree.

November 1992: Union signs prospective agreement with Asplundh Tree to perform work in Sierra Division.

April 1993: Asplundh Tree is awarded contract for PG&E’s Sierra Division.

May 1993: Asplundh Tree assumes responsibility for tree trimming in Sierra Division.

July 1993: Union begins organizing drive in Coast Valley and Mission Trails Divisions.

November 1993: Arbor Tree signs contract with Local 1245.

January 1994: Arbor Tree expands its PG&E contract to include all of Coast Valley and Mission Trails areas.

February 1994: Local 1245 begins organizing drive at Utility Tree in various locations.

Campaign targets non-union contractor

Members boost Utility Tree organizing drive

Local 1245 members are providing valuable assistance in the current campaign to organize line clearance tree trimmers at Utility Tree. Shop stewards in PG&E’s Stockton Division and tree trimmers employed by union contractors have helped union staff in identifying Utility Tree work locations and contacting Utility Tree employees.

“Our members understand that the presence of non-union contractors puts downward pressure on everyone’s wages and benefits, either directly or indirectly,” said Local 1245 Business Manager Jack McNally. "Putting wages into competition hurts all tree trimmers—both union and non-union," said Marttila.

“We have no quarrel with the Utility Tree employees,” he added. “They’re stuck in a bad situation and we’re determined to change that situation.”

Strike of 1992

Involving the wider membership in tree organizing is nothing new.

In 1992, Local 1245 members participated in an unprecedented mobilization to assist 100 tree trimmers engaged in a critical strike against Asplundh Tree. Members agitated meetings throughout the union’s jurisdiction voted unanimously for a dues assessment to aid the strikers.

Large sums were quickly raised through individual cash contributions, and members joined strikers on the picketlines.

These highly-visible demonstrations of support from other union members helped the strikers maintain their resolve and eventually helped produce a victory for the union.

Asplundh has since repaired its relationship with Local 1245 and has resumed its status as a union contractor.

“We all learned a lot about unity during that strike,” said Bob Irwin, a member of the union’s negotiating committee during the Asplundh strike. “We all learned a lot about unity during that strike.”

“People still talk about it. It’s like a bond that’s still there between people in this union.”

Marttila urged union members to be on the lookout for Utility Tree crew working in Sierra, Sutter, Nevada, Yolo, Solano, San Joaquin and El Dorado Counties. Members who spot crews in the field should call the union hall at once.

Marttila said union members should be friendly to Utility Tree employees and “talk up” the union.

“Remember, these guys are not our enemy,” he said. “One of these days they’re going to be part of this union. It’s in their best interest and it’s our job to help them see that.”
Assemblywoman Gwen Moore noted that she had proposed a legal prohibition on retail wheeling "because of the enormous operational and financial instability it creates for all entities who provide electric service."

Study links cancer with EMF exposure

Utility workers with greater than average cumulative magnetic field exposures are three times more likely to develop acute myeloid leukemia (AML) than less-exposed workers, according to a recently-completed industry-sponsored study.

However, because no dose-response relationship was observed for AML, scientists conducting the study advised that "caution must be exercised in interpreting the present results as evidence of a causal association."

The study, conducted by two Canadian and one French electric utility, showed that workers with the greatest exposures to magnetic fields had 12 times the expected rate of a type of brain tumors known as astrocytomas. But the study found no connection between magnetic field exposure and male breast cancer, prostate cancer or skin melanoma, three cancers which have been linked to EMFs in previous studies.

"The methods were excellent, but the results are murky," said Dr. David Savitz, an American researcher currently conducting an EMF study for the Electric Power Research Institute. Savitz told Microwave News that the Canadian-French study "increases the evidence that magnetic fields are linked to cancer."

The investigators controlled for workers' exposures to known and possible carcinogens-including ionizing radiation and chemicals such as benzene. There was little change in the observed risks when these agents were taken into account.

"Stranded Investments"

One of the biggest uncertainties surrounding retail wheeling is the extent to which utilities would be entitled to compensation for "stranded investments." Under the CPUC proposal, large consumers who turn to independent power producers would have to pay a "transition charge" to utilities. In theory the transition charge could serve to level the playing field among utilities and independent producers. But it could just as easily be structured in a way that favors one or the other.

Environmental Risk

Environmentalists worry that renewable energy production and energy efficiency measures will also be victims if retail wheeling is enacted. Testifying on behalf of the Natural Resources Defense Council, Ralph Cavanagh warned that the CPUC proposal "threatens to unlock significant and irreversible damage to both California's economy and its environment."

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**COAST VALLEYS**

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**UNIT MEETING SCHEDULE**

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### CITY OF REDDING
- **Beef Western:** Chairman: Thursday, 9:30 p.m.
- **2300 Hilltop**

### NEVADA
- **RENO**
  - ISB Hall: Chairman: Wednesday, 7:00 p.m.
  - 2712 4th St: Chairman: Wednesday, 7:00 p.m.

- **CARSON CITY**
  - Chehie: Chairman: Monday, 6:00 p.m.
  - 2114 South Lake Tahoe: Chairman: Thursday, 7:30 p.m.

- **MT. WHEELER/ELY**
  - Wells R.E.C.: Chairman: Thursday, 9:30 p.m.

- **WELLS, NV**
  - Elko: D. Carone, 6:00 p.m.

### DESABLA
- **WINCHA**
  - Mrs. Mike’s Pizza: Chairman: Thursday, 7:30 p.m.

### DRUM
- **AUBURN**
  - Moose Lodge: Chairman: Tuesday, 9:00 p.m.

### COLGATE
- **MARTINEZ**
  - Velasquez: Chairman: Wednesday, 6:00 p.m.

### NORTH BAY
- **MARIN COUNTY**
  - Zim’s Red Northgate Shop Ctr.: Chairman: Thursday, 5:30 p.m.

### SACRAMENTO REGIONAL TRANSIT
- **65th Club**
  - 65th and Broadway: Chairman: Tuesday, 5:30 p.m.

### CITIZENS UTILITIES COMPANY
- **SUSANVILLE**
  - Grande Cafe: Chairman: Thursday, 5:15 p.m.

### DAVEY TREE
- **DAVEY TREE/REDDING**
  - Angelo’s Pizza: Chairman: Wednesday, 5:00 p.m.

### OUTSIDE LINE
- **OUTSIDE LINE/SACRAMENTO**
  - 2941 El Centro: Chairman: Saturday, 10:00 a.m.

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**Attend Your Unit Meetings!**

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**Members:** some unit meetings have recently changed their date, time or location. Please check this listing for current information.

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**June 1994 Utility Reporter 7**
Deforming the law

Radio commentator Jim Hightower recently offered these views on his national radio program.

No matter how cynical you get, it's almost impossible to keep up, isn't it? Well, grab an aspirin—you'll need it when you get an earful of this. Twenty-two huge corporate defense contractors are now stalk ing the halls of Congress trying to get our lawmakers to "reform" something called "The False Claims Act." No matter how cynical you get, it's almost impossible to keep up, isn't it? Well, grab an aspirin—you'll need it when you get an earful of this.

The False Claims Act is our nation's toughest anti-white-collar-crime law. It fines corporations that cheat us taxpayers on stuff they sell to the Pentagon. We just had yet another case of this disclosed—did you see it? A contractor sold $10.77 spark-plug connectors to the Navy...for $344 each.

This outrage was revealed by three courageous whistleblowers, who are protected and rewarded for their honesty under the very False Claims Act that the 22 giant contractors now want to "reform," What reform do they have in mind? Right, Do away with the Whistleblower provisions and substitute a "voluntary disclosure program."

Well, take another aspirin because here comes the finale: 20 of the 22 corporations trying to gut this anti-fraud law have themselves been caught within the last three years defrauding our government, frauding our government, frauding our government, one after another...Hughes Aircraft with nine, Martin-Marietta with five, Boeing, Marin-Marietta and McDonnel Douglas say they want to "reform" a law that punishes corporate fraud...they really mean "deform." And that's the case here.

The False Claims Act..."was model law..." the reason we're all here today," Lockyer told the assembled unionists, "the reason we're still alive and still able to tackle labor's legislative agenda is very simple: throughout every one of those 12 long years we've maintained our pro-labor majorities in the state Assembly and in the state Senate."

The Democratic majorities that have defended labor are now under a concerted attack. An ultra-conservative Political Action Committee with strong ties to the religious right gave more than $3.6 million to anti-labor candidates and causes in 1992-93, Lockyer said.

As labor's long-time allies are forced out of office by the "term limits" law, anti-union elements could win control of the Legislature, he warned.

A leader of this effort is billionaire builder Howard F. Ahmanson, Lockyer said. In 1992, Ahmanson told a Sacramento publication: "My purpose is total integration of Biblical law into our lives."

Lockyer said Ahmanson's movement interprets the Bible "in a very selective way."

"Their agenda starts with lots of tax breaks to make the rich richer and continues with this trend of destroying the middle class and having an increasingly polarized, third-world economic status," Lockyer said. "It's also anti-union."

More Schools

Assemblywoman Delaine Eastin made an impassioned plea for better schools for educating California's children, Eastin, who won labor's endorsement for Superintendent of Public Instruction, reminded delegates of the position taken by the first president of the American Federation of Labor, Samuel Gompers.

"Gompers said what labor wants is more schools and less prisons," said Eastin. "In the entire history of the civilized world, can you name me one country that is considered great because it had the best prison system? "If you concentrate on building the finest prisons and neglect your children's education, then you'll never be able to build enough jails."

Eastin pointed out that 82% of the people in California prisons dropped out of high school and never completed their high school education.

"You want to deal with the problem of crime? Then let us help these young people get through high school," Eastin said.

Eastin noted that California spends less than $1,000 on vocational training for a high school student while spending $5,800 on vocational training for each person in state prison.

"More schools and less prisons was what Gompers was talking about, and the only way you can get there is if you build the schools. The truth is that children without skills are not going to be able to compete in this economy," Eastin said.

Local 1245 Vice President and COPE delegate Howard Stiefer studies booklet listing current legislative bills of interest to labor. Also checking out the list of bills are Local 1245 Executive Board members Ron Blakemore and Mike Davis.

An ultra-conservative Political Action Committee with strong ties to the religious right gave more than $3.6 million to anti-labor candidates and causes in 1992-93.
LOCAL AT LARGE

Local 1245 President Howard Stiefer (right) swears in new Advisory Council members Terry Andreucci (left) and Keith Burkhart at the May Advisory Council meeting.

Agreement hikes wages at South San Joaquin ID

Local 1245 members recently ratified a new four-year agreement with the South San Joaquin Irrigation District that provides for wage hikes ranging from 2.7% to 6.5% in the first year and cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) in succeeding years.

Bargaining unit employees will receive a minimum wage increase of 2% in each of the last three years of the agreement, with a maximum of 5% in any year.

The pact also provides a half-percent equity adjustment for ditch tenders in the first year. In the third year, the employer will pick up part of the employees' contribution to the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS).

Under the new agreement, employees with over 20 years of service will receive extra vacation days.

Serving on the bargaining committee were Robert Geer, Liz Juarez, Ron Sbrinska, Jr., Sam Bologna, and Frank Avila, along with Business Rep. Gary Mai.

Outside Line pact ratified

New contracts approved last month will boost wages for Local 1245 members in Outside Line Construction.

The contracts were negotiated with the Western Line Constructors Chapter of the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA) and with Henkels and McCoy.

Randolph Institute conference

Local 1245 trustee Norma Ricker was appointed parliamantarian at the 13th Annual California State A. Philip Randolph Institute (APRI) Conference in Long Beach, Ca. Featured speakers included Assemblywomen Gwen Moore and Juanita McDonald.

The second annual awards dinner of the Napa Solano Chapter of APRI featured Pete Guildry, who was introduced by Local 1245 Assistant Business Manager Dorothy Fortier. Guildry spoke on "Racial Equality and Economic Justice." Three high school graduates were awarded $250 scholarships by the Chapter: Tiaresha Gaines, Vallejo High School; Robert Brooks IV, Hogan High School; and Sallie Wooley, Fairfield High School. Geri Willey of ILGWU was awarded the A. Philip Randolph Achievement Award.

Contract interpretation is key to protecting employees' rights

As a union member, your rights on the job are protected in black and white: the black and white of the union contract. But life is more complex than the printed word, and written agreements—including labor agreements—can be interpreted in different ways at different times by different people.

For Santiago Salazar, the shop steward's job really comes down to contract interpretation, "making sure the rights of the employee are protected."

Thinking about employees as having rights is not something that comes easy for management. As a result, the steward often finds himself in an adversarial role.

Salazar, a SCATA tech at Sierra Pacific Power in Reno, Nev., believes the bottom line in protecting employee rights is fairness.

"We want to keep personality out of it so everyone is treated the same," says Salazar. "That's not always the case, unfortunately. Sometimes [managers] will be lenient, and some won't."

Salazar has had many opportunities to observe management behavior at Sierra Pacific. He's been a union member since 1967 and a shop steward since about 1980.

During that time he's learned that grievances sometimes come about simply because people are not sure how to interpret a specific provision of the contract. To help employees get clarification on a contractual matter without having to go through a time-consuming grievance, Salazar helped institute a new procedure.

As a result, "if anyone needs interpretation of the contract they can submit it as a question to the grievance committee," says Salazar, who is one of four union members, in addition to Business Rep. John Stralla, serving on the joint grievance committee.

There's no guarantee, of course, that company and union will agree on the appropriate answer to any particular question, but sometimes they can.

Salazar says the new procedure has "helped quite a bit."

As a steward, one of Salazar's responsibilities is to bring new employees into the union. In a so-called right-to-work state like Nevada, it can't be taken for granted that new employees will pay their fair share for union representation.

"I try to make a habit of talking to new employees coming into the department," said Salazar, who shares this responsibility with another steward.

A common excuse given by new employees for not joining the union is that they can't afford it. Salazar says he tells such employees "they can't afford not to be a union member. Union membership, he says, is about having a voice versus just being "a bystander."

When someone won't sign up, Salazar says, "I come back in a day or two. And I keep coming back."

"You have to have the conviction that unionism is a good thing," he adds, "because you have to sell it to someone else."

In his dealings with management, Salazar says the most important asset he can have is credibility. It's an asset he's worked hard to develop and maintain "so that when I talk to management what I say has value."

One way to help stewards develop credibility, he believes, would be for the union to offer more training opportunities for new stewards.

June 1994 Utility Reporter 9
Utility Reporter recognized

The Utility Reporter was named Best Overall Publication for 1993 in the Western Labor Press Association (WLPA) journalism contest. An analysis of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) by Communications Director Eric Wolfe won first prize for Best In-Depth Article, and his series “New Hopes, New Hurdles: Unions in the Clinton Era” won first prize for Best Series.

Local 1245 member Eugene Williams won first prize in the cartoon competition for a NAFTA-related cartoon appearing in the September issue. Business Manager Jack McNally’s column “Deregulation Bandwagon,” published in May, was awarded second place for editorials. Wolfe won second prize for Best Feature Story for “To Leave or Not to Leave,” a look at the voluntary retirement incentive at PG&E. A story by Wolfe on utility deregulation took third prize for Best News Story.

The Utility Reporter competed against other union newspapers of more than eight pages. Winners were announced at the annual meeting of the WLPA in Seattle on June 4.

Health Security Plan: it has to work

The 1994 Al Sandoval Memorial Competitive Scholarship has been awarded to Sonny Snodgrass of Reno, Nev. Snodgrass is the son of Dwight Snodgrass, a Local 1245 member at Sierra Pacific Power in Reno. He will graduate this month from Reno High School and expects to attend the University of Nevada in Reno. The scholarship will provide Snodgrass with $500 a year for up to four years so long as he maintains academic eligibility.

Judge for the contest was Margaret Skelleda, deputy executive director of SEIU Local 790 and president of the Central Labor Council of Contra Costa County.

Attention Golfers!

Mark your calendar for the 10th Annual Local 1245 Golf Tournament. Four-man best ball scramble.

Date: Saturday, Sept. 10, 1994
Time: 1:00 p.m.
Location: Lake Don Pedro Golf & Country Club (30 minutes east of Merced, Ca.)

$75 includes golf, cart, sit-down prime rib dinner, and lodging at the course (double-occupancy). $50 without lodging. Prizes galore!

Hurry! Limited Tee-space available! First 18 foursomes are guaranteed. Singles will be placed. Deadline to register is Aug. 30, 1994.

For more information contact Frank Saxsenmeier at (415) 898-1141 or (510) 933-6060 or write to the address given below. To register, make checks payable to “Local 1245 Golf Tournament” and send with registration form to: Local 1245 Golf Tournament, P.O. Box 4790, Walnut Creek, CA 94596.

1. Name
   Address

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3. Name
   Address

4. Name
   Address

If nothing is done, by the year 2000 one out of every five dollars we spend will be on health care.
Watch out for scams

Two scam groups are seeking to make money by preying on the fears of the elderly, according to a report by the Research Unit of the Democratic National Committee's National Health Care Campaign.

The Democratic study concludes that two groups claiming to represent the interests of seniors have in fact been dragged by scandal. These groups are the Seniors Coalition and the United Seniors Association, Inc.

The United Seniors Association, Inc. is a two-year-old far-right group whose principals are "a bunch of crooks," the Democratic study found. According to the study, the Seniors Coalition's alleged purpose was to lobby Congress on behalf of seniors but it didn't register as a lobbying organization until July 14, 1992, some three years after its founding. The Seniors Coalition has been investigated by the Attorney General of New York as part of a network of organizations involved in "a pattern of fraud and abuse," according to a New York Times story.

Members discuss common concerns

Local 1245 Retiree Club chapters held regular meetings last month to discuss issues of concern to retirees and their union.

The San Jose Chapter heard a report by President Richard Murphy on the recent AFL-CIO Legislative Conference in Sacramento. Vice President Watie Anthney reported on recent activities of FORUM, the association of retired union members.

Ory Owen reported to the San Jose Chapter on his recent visit to Nevada, where he attended a meeting of the Reno Chapter of the Retirees Club.

According to Owen, members in Reno are following with great interest the progress of negotiations with Sierra Pacific Power. In particular they are concerned about any possible impact on health benefits for retired members.

Officers of the East Bay chapter met in Walnut Creek last month to discuss the billing of Club dues. Don Hardie, president; Louie Rangle, secretary; Rene Geiger; and Bob Himelick, vice president.

Health care solution could involve Medicare expansion

A proposal to create a national health insurance system by expanding Medicare is now backed by two important players in Congress.

Rep. Pete Stark of Hayward, Ca. authored the proposal in March and got it through his health subcommittee by one vote. And now the new head of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee, Rep. Sam Gibbons of Florida, said that he also supports the Medicare expansion.

Although there are some minor differences, both proposals would require employers to pay 80% of the cost of their workers' health insurance, with employees picking up the other 20%. Payments would go directly to insurance companies, eliminating Clinton's "alliances." Both proposals call for expanding Medicare to cover workers at firms with fewer than 50 employees, and others not covered through work.

Gibbons' plan differs from Stark's on several points. It includes a more generous basic benefits package that expands subsidies to low-income workers, provides long-term care for the disabled, and limits people's out-of-pocket expenditures for insurance.

With so many variations of national health insurance now under discussion, it is important for seniors to insist that any plan contain several key elements. These include: complete coverage for all Americans, pharmaceutical benefits, home and community-based long-term care, and preserving the single-payer option for states.

Seniors face uncertain future

For people born in 1931, the average life expectancy was 75.5 years. By 2020, the average woman will live to be 82 while the average man will live to 74, according to current predictions.

But as life expectancy increases, millions of Americans in their 50s, 60s, and beyond face an uncertain future, the National Council of Senior Citizens (NCSC) points out. Many lack health insurance and pensions, or they fear the loss of the benefits they do have.

According to the national Institute on Aging, almost half of the people in the United States nearing retirement believe there is some likelihood that they could be laid off permanently during the next year, and that their chances of landing a new job are 50-50 or less. It is obvious that many aging Americans feel insecure despite the current "economic recovery."

The 1995 White House Conference on Aging will produce recommendations for aging policy over the next decade. The NCSC believes this conference provides a valuable opportunity to carefully examine trends in pension and retirement income and to reaffirm support for the Social Security system. The conference could also explore ways for the government to help seniors enhance their work skills.
New SMUD pact increases wages, provides deferred compensation

From PAGE ONE

able for dependent children.

Business Rep. Dennis Seyfer praised the work of union members on the negotiating committee.

"This committee worked long and hard to gather information prior to meeting with the District. Their efforts served us well and for that I want to thank them," said Seyfer.

"I would also like to thank our members for supporting the bargaining committee's efforts by ratifying this agreement," he added.

Deferred Compensation

Employees will receive significant new opportunities for deferred compensation under the MOU. Under this program, a fund of $4 million will be made available to provide a "service bonus" for retiring employees in the first year of the agreement. The balance of the $4 million will be used to fund individual 401(k) or 457 retirement accounts during the last three years of the agreement.

The program provides for direct contributions by the District during the four-year term of the agreement. Beginning in 1999, the District will provide additional funds matched to voluntary contributions by employees.

All permanent full-time IBEW-represented employees, including probationary employees, are eligible to participate in the deferred compensation program as long as they are employed on July 1 of the year in question.

"A Better Deal"

The union negotiated the deferred compensation plan in lieu of a proposed adjustment to the PERS retirement formula which would have calculated the PERS benefit based on an employee's "single best year" rather than the best three-year period.

Negotiating committee member Jim Loy, a control room operator at Rancho Seco, said the deferred compensation program offered "a better deal" for bargaining unit employees than the proposed upgrade of the PERS formula.

The only major disappointment voiced by members was in something the contract didn't contain: an upgrading of the retirement formula to "2% at age 55." Union negotiators determined they would have to give up too much in other compensation in order to persuade the District to agree to an improved formula.

Some members had a "philosophical ceiling" on what they'd be willing to trade to get 2% at 55, observed union negotiator Art Torres, an electrician/cable splicer who represents SMUD employees on the Local 1245 Advisory Council.

"The people I talked to would have liked 2% at 55 but were not willing to sell their mother to get it," he observed. Torres called the retirement formula "a very emotional issue" for the membership during the negotiations.

New Style

This year's negotiations represented the first attempt by SMUD and Local 1245 to utilize a process called "interest-based negotiations."

This style of negotiating attempts to move the bargaining parties away from traditional "adversarial" roles, according to Torres.

Part of interest-based negotiations is style. The parties, for example, are mingled rather than sitting on opposite sides of a negotiating table.

There are also differences in substance, according to Torres. The parties are supposed to bring all relevant information to the table at the start of the process. There is no caucusing during negotiations. And management negotiators, at least in theory, are supposed to be empowered to make decisions rather than continually adjourning to check with higher-ups.

Torres called interest-based negotiations useful, but said it was "a very long, drawn-out process" and questioned whether it could completely replace traditional bargaining.

Interim Bargaining

Although negotiations for the new MOU began March 15, union members laid the groundwork for the agreement during several years of interim bargaining. Since the last agreement, members of the previous negotiating committee met with management on a monthly basis to work out a variety of problems.

Among the issues resolved during interim bargaining, according to Torres, were flex benefits, commercial drivers licenses, and alternate work schedules. The current bargaining committee will continue this tradition by meeting on a regular basis with management during the new contract period.

Torres said the committee was "well rounded" with each member contributing expertise in particular areas.

"We put all that together and came up with a very good committee," he said.

Serving on the committee, in addition to Seyfer, Torres and Loy, were Dan Byrne, plant mechanic, CCPA; Martin Correia, tree trimmer, Foothills; Raymond Gladden, apprentice building mechanic, 59th Street yard; Don Hurdle, line foreman, Foothills; Dave Reishus, vehicle mechanic, Fresh Pond; and Ike Williams, utility crew foreman, 59th Street yard.

"The people I talked to would have liked 2% at 55 but were not willing to sell their mother to get it."

Art Torres

Local 1245 negotiators look over the MOU one last time prior to submitting it to the members for ratification. From right: Don Hurdle, Ike Williams (standing), and Art Torres.