

International Brotherhood  
Of Electrical Workers  
Local 1245, AFL-CIO  
October 1991  
Vol. XL No. 10

# UTILITY REPORTER

SMUD History  
Pages 5-16

## Tree trimmers confront threat from scab contractors

By Eric Wolfe

**A**s part of a continuing union effort to combat non-union forces in the tree trimming industry, Business Manager Jack McNally last month convened a rank and file seminar for union tree trimmers from throughout Local 1245's jurisdiction.

The seminar laid out in detail what many members already know from their day-to-day experience: union tree trimmers are under attack. The threat comes from non-union contractors seeking to capture a larger share of California's lucrative tree-trimming market.

The outcome is potentially disastrous for all workers.

Those unfortunate enough to be employed by scab contractors earn substandard wages, enjoy fewer benefits, and face greater risk of injury. Those who work for union contractors, in turn,

find themselves under growing pressure to make wage and benefit concessions to keep their employers competitive when bidding on contracts.

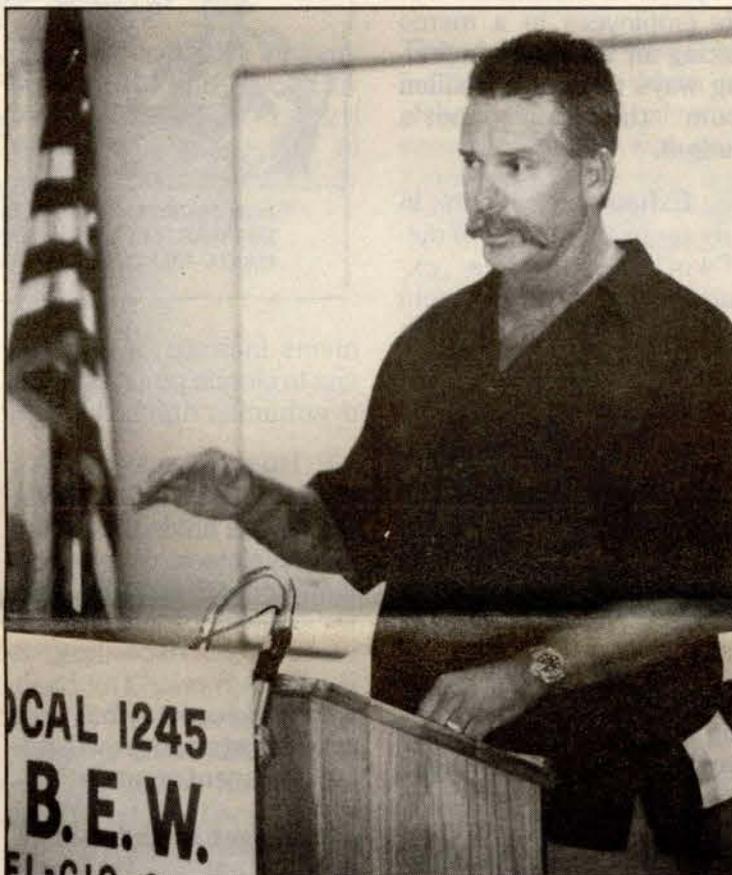
The non-union threat has grown more serious in recent years partly due to changes in the way that utilities operate.

As utilities come under pressure from market forces or regulatory agencies to reduce costs, their tree-trimming budgets come under closer scrutiny.

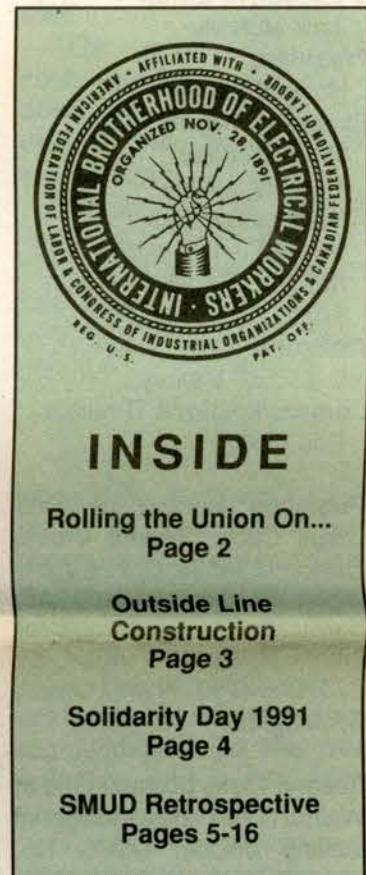
In some cases, utilities simply slash their tree-trimming expenditures. However, this sort of penny-pinching can prove costly, as PG&E found out last year when a company power line sparked a 120,000 acre wildfire north of Sacramento that took three weeks to control.

In August of this year the California Department of Forestry billed PG&E a rec-

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Tree trimmer and Advisory Council member Jim Travis urges fellow union tree trimmers to use "tree power" in fighting the threat from scab contractors. (Photo: Eric Wolfe)



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### CALENDAR

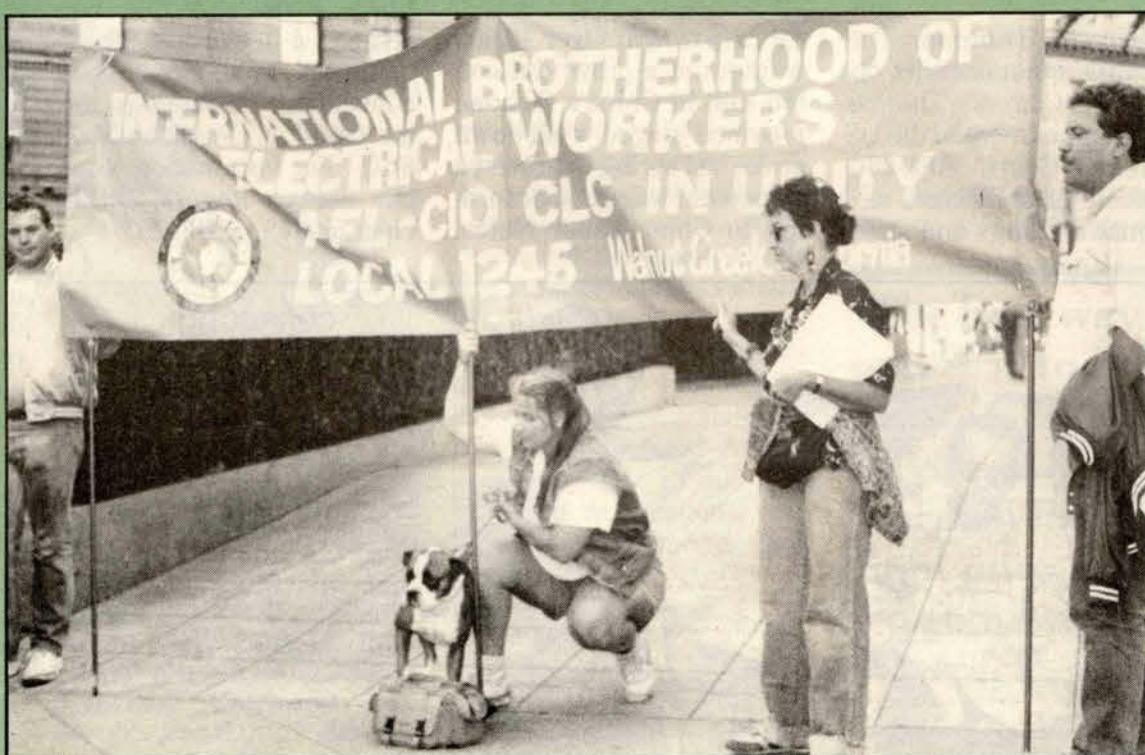
October 5-11  
IBEW 100th Anniversary  
International Convention  
St. Louis, Missouri

October 19  
General Construction  
Stewards Conference  
Walnut Creek

November 2-3  
Advisory Council  
Concord

November 3  
50th Anniversary  
Reception  
Concord

**SOLIDARITY DAY**  
Flying the Local 1245 banner at San Francisco's Solidarity Day demonstration are, from left, Mike Franks, PG&E Gas T&D, Skyline Division, Frances Knowles PG&E Electric T&D, San Francisco, Millie Phillips, PG&E Hunter's Point power station, and Mike Emerson, PG&E Gas T&D, Skyline Division. (Photo: Landis Marttila)



# UTILITY REPORTER

October 1991  
Volume XL  
Number 10  
Circulation: 27,000

(415) 933-6060

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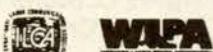
Published monthly at 3063 Citrus Circle, Walnut Creek, California 94598. Official publication of Local Union 1245, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, AFL-CIO, P.O. Box 4790, Walnut Creek, CA 94596.

Second Class postage paid at Walnut Creek and at additional mailing offices. USPS No. 654640, ISSN No. 0190-4965.

**POSTMASTER:** Please send Form 3579, Change of Address, and all correspondence to Utility Reporter, P.O. Box 4790, Walnut Creek, CA 94596.

Single copies 10 cents, subscription \$1.20 annually.

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## LABOR AT LARGE

### Workers here and abroad

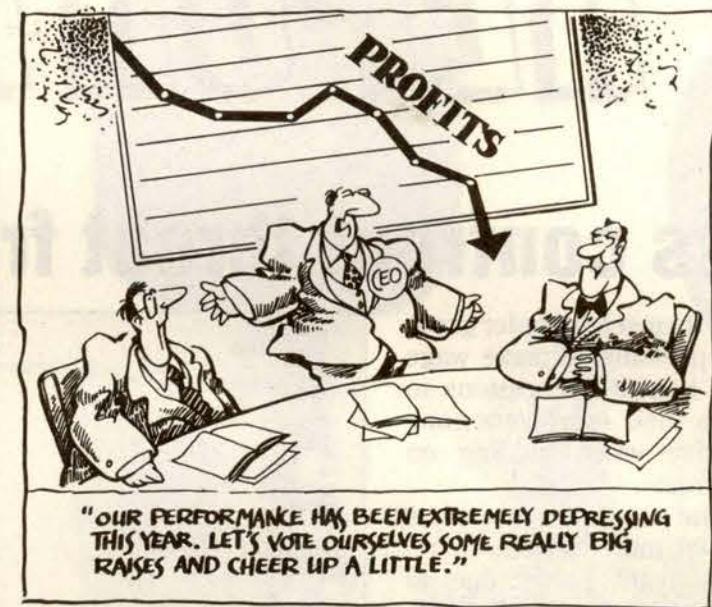
## Rolling the union on . . .

**Just shoot me:** "If you...have an idea about how work could be changed to permanently eliminate your job, I suggest you contact your manager or the human resources department." That's what Roger Parkinson, publisher of the Minneapolis Star Tribune, told his employees in a memo asking for their help in finding ways to cut \$10 million from the newspaper's budget.

**Exhausted benefits:** In July more than 300,000 out-of-work Americans exhausted their unemployment benefits, the highest level in at least 40 years.

**Board game:** Sears Roebuck slashed 21,000 jobs, yet hiked board members' pay from \$65,000 to \$75,000. Aetna Life and Casualty, which raised directors' checks 25 percent to \$64,000, subsequently laid off 2,600 workers. Keep in mind this is compensation just for serving on a board, not actually working in management. Meanwhile, workers put out on the street are having a harder time collecting unemployment insurance. President Bush refuses to authorize extended benefits because he says the recession is over. Especially if you're on a corporate board or two.

**No to Thomas:** The AFL-CIO announced its opposition to Clarence Thomas for an appointment to the US Supreme Court. AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland said Thomas's rulings and state-



ments indicate "a predilection to elevate property rights over human rights."

**Bush-whacked:** After 30 months in office, President Bush holds the record for the slowest pace of economic growth since Franklin D. Roosevelt more than 50 years ago. According to Business Week, "The Bush-whacked economy has been crawling at a real growth rate of 0.1 percent annually."

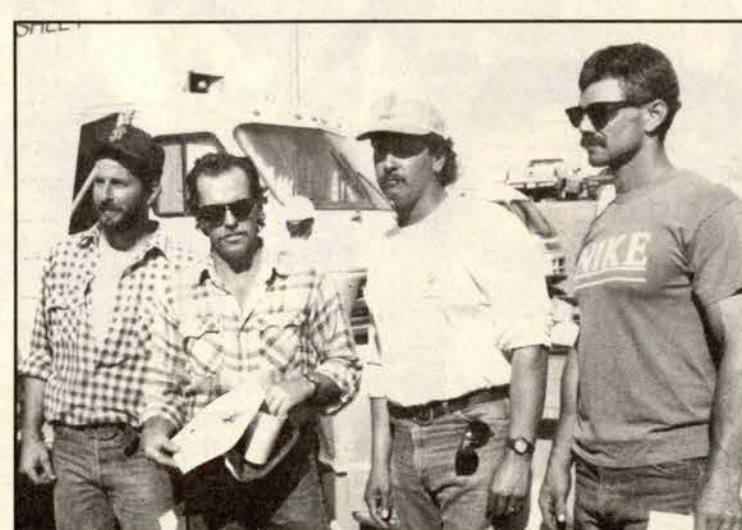
**Forget it:** Union members at DuPont's Martinsville, Va., nylon plant say they won't accept jackets commemorating the plant's 50th anniversary because the jackets were made in Costa Rica.

**Sit down:** Over 10,000 workers at a provincial cotton mill in China's Sichuan province staged a sit-down strike last spring to protest a 40 percent wage cut, according to China Labor Notes.

Concerned that the strikers might take to the streets and be joined by others with similar grievances, the Communist Party bosses caved in and rescinded the wage cut.

**Thoroughly coddled:** The Republican Party, as everyone knows, doesn't believe in coddling criminals. However, the GOP didn't object when a particular organization in April was fined a measly \$24,000 for corrupting our democratic process in 1986 by illegally funneling \$2.7 million to Senate candidates. That law-breaking organization, according to Harpers Index, was the Republican Party itself.

**Black unionists:** The Black Rank and File Exchange, a network of black unionists, holds its annual convention, "Strategies for the 1990s", in Detroit on Nov. 8-10. For information, contact Selwyn Rogers, BRFE chair, at 313/592-8179.



**CORRECTION**  
On Page 16 of the September 1991 issue, the Utility Reporter incorrectly identified a photo from the Lineman's Rodeo held in Livermore, Ca. in August. The photo, reprinted here at left, is the PG&E DBU team from Stockton, which finished second among DBU teams in the rodeo competition. On the team are, from left, George McNeill, Tom Jones, Larry Galvez and Rick Bimson.

## APPOINTMENTS

### PACIFIC GAS AND ELECTRIC COMPANY

**General Construction Joint Grievance Committee**  
Hazel Blanchard (Alternate)

### CONFERENCES AND CONVENTIONS

**AQP-EEI (Employee Involvement) Conference**  
Bob Gibbs

**TWSCO's Lineman's Rodeo**  
Dennis Seyfer

**22nd Annual National APRI Conference**  
Dorothy Fortier  
Norma Ricker  
Danny Jackson

### CENTRAL LABOR COUNCILS

**San Mateo Central Labor Council**  
Robert Quinn  
Mike Emerson  
Leslie J. Davis  
Tim Santo  
Leo Tablizo  
Barbara Fain

## Help needed in search for brother

Donations are needed to aid in the search for a missing union brother whose plane apparently went down in the Pacific off the California coast.

Divers have been searching for Troy Dunn Jr. since his disappearance on Aug. 18. The nose gear of his plane and the body of his son, Troy Dunn III, were found washed up on shore after the plane's disappearance. Troy Jr. is presumed dead, but this cannot be confirmed without locating the body.

Troy Jr. was initiated into Local 1245 in 1964. Union brothers and sisters who wish to help defray the cost of the continuing search can mail financial contributions to:

Troy Dunn Search Fund  
Security Pacific Bank-Aurora Grande Branch  
Aurora Grande, Ca. 93442

## Outside line crews on WAPA job



Local 1245 Outside Line crews were recently at work on a Western Area Power Administration job between Maxwell and Olinda upgrading line from 230 KV to 500 KV. The contractor was Union Power out of Colorado. Local 1245 members pictured above, from left: Jake Alire, Steve Mathes, Jeff Wilson, and Richard Boatwright. (Photos: Art Murray)



Local 1245 Outside Line crew members on the WAPA job, from left: Juan Velazquez, John Girtman, and Brian Steven.



Local 1245 crew members on the WAPA job, from left: Robert House, Salvador Gonzales, Gerry Morgan, and Todd Sherwood.

## 100th Anniversary: a time to renew our commitment

**Jack McNally, IBEW 1245 Business Manager**

This month in St Louis, Missouri, the IBEW will hold its 34th Convention, marking the 100th anniversary of the IBEW representing workers in the energy industry in the United States and Canada.

This convention is being held in the same city where 100 years ago the IBEW was founded. Ten electrical workers representing 286 union electrical workers, met in St. Louis and held the founding convention, adopting a constitution forming our great union.

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, 800,000 strong, has survived the many challenges of the last century in the United States and Canada to be one of the most progressive and efficient international unions in North America.

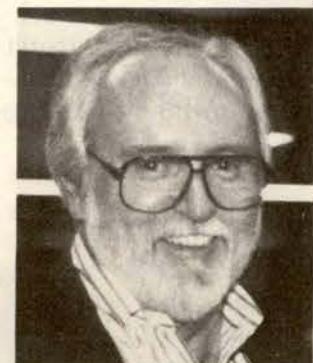
The IBEW is organized into five general branches: Outside and Utility Workers; Inside Electrical Workers; Communications Workers; Railroad Electrical Workers; and Electrical Manufacturing Workers.

Within these branches the IBEW represents all classes of construction, energy, communications, manufacturing, public, government, and technical workers.

Approximately 1,300 local unions will send a total of 2800 delegates to the convention.

In conjunction with this centennial convention will be a parade and celebration to publicly commemorate our one hundred years. There will be exhibits of many of the different employers who have association with the IBEW and its local unions.

The convention will officially open on Monday, October 7th, and run for the week. The business of the



convention will deal with many proposed constitutional resolutions, and other resolutions submitted by many of the locals in the Brotherhood.

Congressional leaders and other dignitaries will address the convention delegates throughout the week. Reports from the leadership of the IBEW will be presented to the delegates.

Issues of fairness in the workplace, health care issues, and the state of the economy and its affect on workers will be discussed.

While we will be celebrating our past, we must learn from it to understand the challenges facing us in the future.

Education, training and re-training will be vital, as new technology changes the way work is accomplished. We must re-organize the organized as well as organize the un-organized if we are to continue as a force for the workers we represent.

The introduction of competition in the utility industry through de-regulation is having an impact on utility workers across the nation, bringing dramatic change like no other change before.

As we celebrate this historic anniversary, let us renew our dedication to meeting the challenges facing us and be prepared to continue the struggle into the next century.

**Solidarity Day draws over 300,000**

## Unionists rally in support of affordable health care for all

Over three hundred thousand union members rallied in Washington DC on Labor Day weekend to press Congress to get off the dime and address important problems facing working Americans.

AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland told the Solidarity Day crowd: "We're here to remind our elected representatives that they were put there to serve not the faceless marketplace, but the aspirations of real people."

In San Francisco, members of Local 1245 joined a companion rally in Union Square.

Affordable health care for all Americans was a key demand in the Solidarity Day demonstrations.

Rapidly rising expenditures for health care account for more than 12 percent of the gross national product, the highest percentage in the industrial world. And yet over 32 million Americans lack health insurance and many businesses are financially burdened by costly benefits.

Congress, to its shame, continues to drag its feet on addressing this crisis in health care despite the fact that solutions are readily at hand. Congress's own investigative arm, the General

Accounting Office (GAO), recently documented how the US could reap tremendous benefits by adopting a Canadian-style system of national health care.

### Canadian system

According to the GAO's report, if the United States were to adopt the universal coverage and single-payer features of the Canadian health system, the savings of \$67 billion a year would be enough to cover the 32 million uninsured Americans and also eliminate co-payments and deductibles for everyone else.

Canada's system operates on three principles which should guide the US approach, according to US Comptroller General Charles A. Bowsher: universal health insurance, uniform reimbursement rules and systemwide spending controls.

At the same time, Canada's system has key features in common with the US approach, said Bowsher, features that could be retained if the US adopts a Canada-style system of national health care.

"Canadians choose their own private physicians. Most physicians are compensated on a fee-for-service rather than salaried basis. And most hospitals are private, non-



Local 1245's banner provides a backdrop to San Francisco's Solidarity Day rally. (Photo: Landis Marttila)

profit institutions," Bowsher said.

How does Canada do it?

In 1971, when Canada fully implemented its system for financing medical services, the two countries spent about the same share of GNP on health care—about 7.5 percent. By 1989, the US share was 11.6 percent and Canada's was 8.9 percent. In 1989, according to Bowsher, Canada spent about \$1,700 per person on health care and the US spent over \$2,300. The difference of \$600 per person per year reflected Canada's lower spending on insurance

administration and physician and hospital reimbursement, he said.

Canada spends less because its publicly-financed single-payer system eliminates costs connected with marketing competitive health insurance policies, billing for and collecting premiums, and evaluating insurance risks. As of 1987, Canada's per capita spending on insurance overhead was one-fifth that of the US.

Also as of 1987, Canada spent 34 percent less per capita on physician services than did the US thanks to controls on physician's fees and lower practice expenses for Canadian doctors who did not need office staff.

And in 1987, Bowsher added, Canada spent 18 percent less per person for hospital services than did the US due to global or lumpsum budgeting and limits on acquiring high technology.

Canada's ample supply of physicians allows ready access to most services. However, tight budgets and restraints on expensive technology mean that Canadians have to wait or "queue" for certain treatments. These include open-heart surgery, magnetic resonance imaging, cataract surgery, and hip replacements. Patients with life-threatening needs go to the head of the line, but queues for elective surgery

or diagnostic procedures may face delays of several months.

Bowsher said waiting lines would be unlikely in the US because of its greater capacity in technology and facilities.

A reformed US system, the GAO noted, should retain and build on the unique strengths of existing US health care. These include the strong research establishment, medical technology, and the capacity to develop service approaches such as health maintenance organizations.

Bowsher estimated that adopting the key elements of the Canadian system would bring \$34 billion in savings in insurance overhead and another possible \$33 billion in savings in hospital and physician administrative costs, for a total of \$67 billion. The cost of serving the newly insured in the US would be about \$18 billion, and the cost of additional services in eliminating co-payments and deductibles could be about \$46 billion.

It is clear that solutions exist. Less clear is whether Congress has the political will to do the right thing, the smart thing, and the most cost-effective thing by enacting a system of national health care.

(Press Associates contributed to this report)



Members of United Mine Workers, many wearing the camouflage shirts that became their trademark during the Pittston strike, march on Solidarity Day 1991 in Washington DC.

# A job for linemen

**O**n January 1, 1947, the Sacramento Municipal Utility District bought an antique from Pacific Gas & Electric--the electric distribution system serving Sacramento. Some of the equipment included in the deal dated as far back as 1895.

Transforming this antique into a reliable source of power for a growing community would be a big job. A job for skilled linemen.

However, the lineman's skilled labor wasn't fully appreciated by the employers of that era. Wages were low. Benefits were few. Linemen could be called out to work days on end without hot meals, without rest breaks, without overtime pay.

But even back in 1947 SMUD linemen had something that eventually would empower them to achieve the wages, benefits and conditions they wanted and deserved.

They had a union.



Above, SMUD line crew at work outside Sacramento, probably in the late 1940s. Above right, SMUD crew at work on Watt Ave. in vicinity of Del Paso Country Club in the late 1940s. (Photos courtesy Elmer Klassen)



## Union linemen remember the early days of the Sacramento Municipal Utility District . . .

Story begins on page 6



By Eric Wolfe

## SACRAMENTO MUNICIPAL UTILITY DISTRICT: A LOCAL 1245 RETROSPECTIVE

The night SMUD took over from PG&E, SMUD troubleman Leonard Williams took the first call for trouble: it was from SMUD's own office. (Photo: Eric Wolfe)



Leonard Williams remembers well the night SMUD took over Sacramento's electric system from Pacific Gas and Electric.

The transfer was scheduled to take place at the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve, January 1, 1947. Some PG&E workers, including Williams, had hired on with SMUD a month earlier to help with the transition.

"I was a troubleman," Williams recalls. "We were over here ready to go to work when SMUD took over at midnight."

Williams didn't have to wait long for trouble.

"The first call we got was a SMUD call—their own office," Williams relates with a chuckle. "Down at the California Fruit building where they had set up their office. They had one of the old panels in there and it blew up. They started to work, then boom, they blew their fuses."



Above, Sam Hart, SMUD groundman at work in the late 1940s or early 1950s. At left, electricians work in the vault in the downtown network area. (Photos courtesy of Sacramento Municipal Utility District)

## SACRAMENTO MUNICIPAL UTILITY DISTRICT: A LOCAL 1245 RETROSPECTIVE



At left, SMUD linemen Tom Thompson (left) and Norm Ficker at work in 1956. Working on the same crew was Archie Horton. Below, SMUD crew members at work in 1954. (Photo courtesy of Sacramento Municipal Utility District)



What could any self-respecting troubleman do?

"We got a red tag hung on it," Williams remembers. "Made them very unhappy. Had the city condemn the board. First call."

SMUD managers knew they had a challenge on their hands when they took over PG&E's electric distribution operations in the Sacramento area. But without a crystal ball, there was no way they could know just how big that challenge would prove to be.

The physical system itself was in poor condition and poorly integrated. It included a jumbled assortment of distribution voltages: 2200, 2300, 2400, 4160, and 4800 volts. An independent distribution system acquired from hop ranches ran at 6,900 volts.

Some equipment dated

back to 1895. On the first day of January, 1947, SMUD found itself in possession of an antique—and with a backlog of 3,000 applications for service.

During the first decade of operation, through 1956, the number of electric customers would double. Peak demand would increase 228 percent. Distribution substations would grow in number from 24 to 96.

Bringing the electric distribution system—and Sacramento County itself—fully into the 20th Century was a big job.

A job for linemen.

### Losing its grip

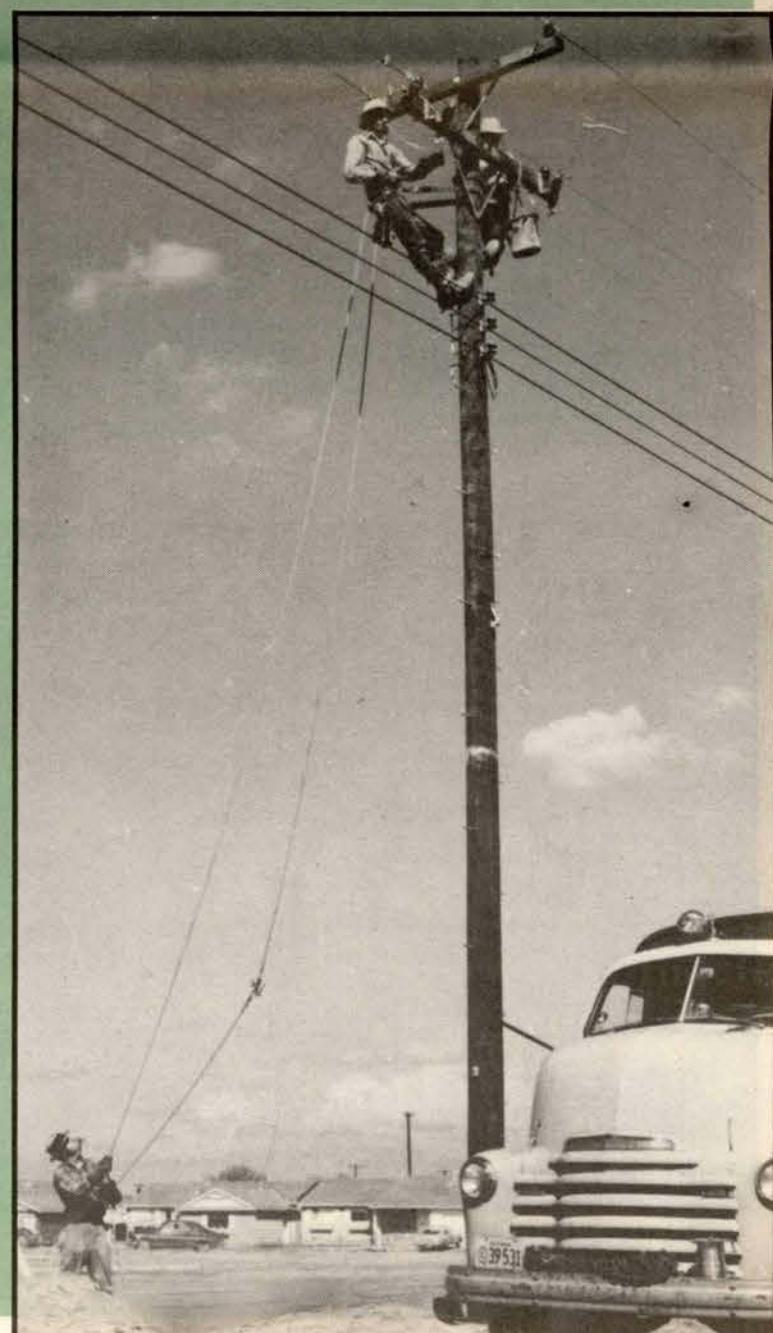
If the system was in bad shape, it was because PG&E had had little incentive to maintain it.

PG&E first began to lose

*See NEXT PAGE*

**During the first decade of operation, through 1956, the number of electric customers would double. Peak demand would increase 228 percent. Distribution substations would grow in number from 24 to 96.**

SMUD crew installs new busses on a line into new subdivision in 1956. (Photo courtesy of Sacramento Municipal Utility District)



## SACRAMENTO MUNICIPAL UTILITY DISTRICT: A LOCAL 1245 RETROSPECTIVE

### From PAGE SEVEN

its grip on the Sacramento electric franchise on July 2, 1923, when Sacramento citizens voted 6,378 to 978 to create the Sacramento Municipal Utility District.

Public ownership of utilities was not a new issue, of course. In the 1890s, the People's Party, a national political uprising of farmers and workers, called for public ownership of America's utilities, railroads and banks. Commonly known as Populists, the People's Party peaked in 1894 when it captured several governorships and many seats in Congress. The Populists fell into decline in 1896, after the defeat of People's Party presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan.

### Dream persists

But the dream of public ownership of utilities persisted into the new century, spurred by dissatisfaction with high rates, poor service, and a general distrust of giant corporate monopolies, which some private utilities were in the process of becoming.

### Acknowledgment

"...For the People: the Story of the Sacramento Municipal Utility District", by Ruth Sutherland Ward, is a source for some of the data in this article.

The creation of SMUD in 1923 was a local expression of that Populist tradition: SMUD's founders sought to put the area's water and power resources under the control of the people. To do so, they knew they had to acquire the electric distribution systems of PG&E and Great Western Power Co.—the existing suppliers of light and power in the District.

PG&E fought the takeover tooth and nail.

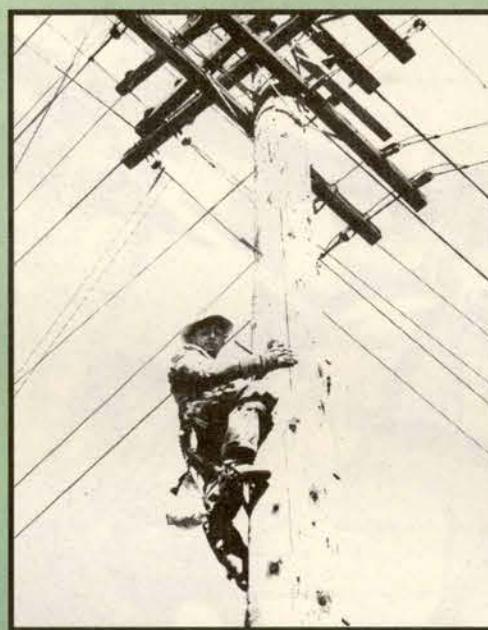
Before SMUD could acquire PG&E's property through the process of eminent domain, the state Railroad Commission had to determine the compensation to which PG&E would be entitled. In 1934, and again in 1938, SMUD directors pressed their case with petitions to the state Railroad Commission.

Acting on the 1938 petition, the Railroad Commission in 1942 finally set a monetary award for PG&E's properties. PG&E rejected it.

SMUD followed with a condemnation suit in 1943, which SMUD won in Superior Court in 1945. PG&E appealed.

A year later, the judgment was affirmed in the Third District Court of Appeals. Finally, on March 21, 1946, the California Supreme Court put the

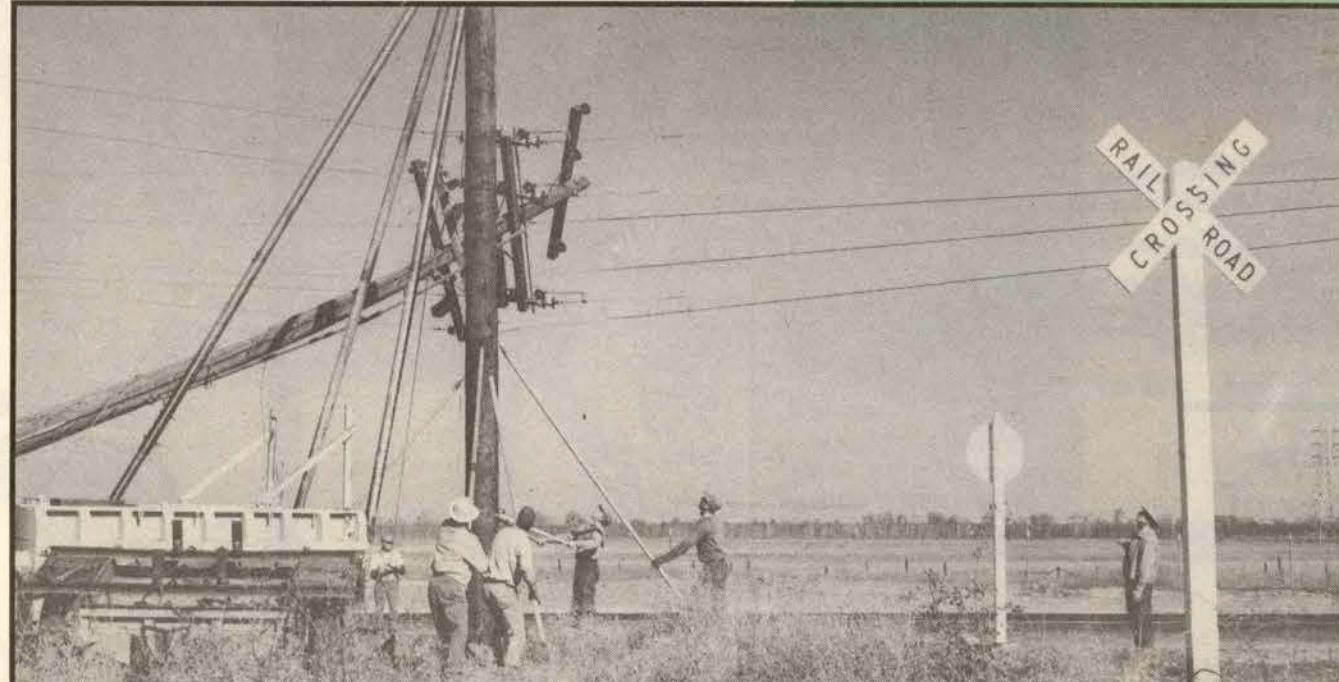
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SMUD lineman, possibly Norm Rieshus, at work in 1954. (Photo courtesy of Sacramento Municipal Utility District)



SMUD line crew in the late 1940s or early 1950s. Man kneeling on ground may be Jim Howard. (Photo courtesy of Sacramento Municipal Utility District)

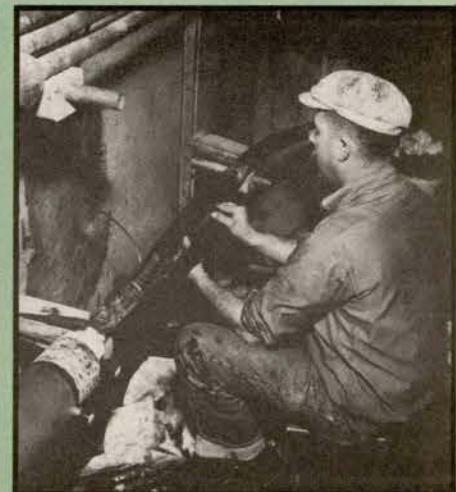


SMUD line crew in 1940s or 1950s. (Photo courtesy of Elmer Klassen)

## SACRAMENTO MUNICIPAL UTILITY DISTRICT: A LOCAL 1245 RETROSPECTIVE



SMUD linemen, left, framing a KPF switch on the ground in a 1956 photo. Jess Tweety is standing. The man kneeling is Earl (last name unknown). At right, an unidentified SMUD employee at work in the late 1940s or early 1950s. (Photo courtesy of Sacramento Municipal Utility District)



matter to rest by denying PG&E's petition for further review.

Through all the years of litigation, PG&E had let its Sacramento system fall into a state of disrepair. When SMUD took over in 1947, it was up to men like Leonard Williams to begin putting the system back together again.

### Recruiting talent

SMUD advertised far and wide to recruit a labor force for its newly-acquired electric system. But many of its new employees were PG&E workers in Sacramento who simply crossed over to the new owner when SMUD took control.

Although upper management at PG&E and SMUD had been locked in a decades-long battle for ownership of the system, a more cooperative relationship prevailed among the workers.

"When we came over, SMUD had no hammers, no testers no rubber glove bags. We didn't have very many rubber gloves," Williams recalls.

"When we left, my superintendent down at PG&E says, 'Here's a hammer, here's a rubber glove bag, here's a tester.' I still got the tester that says PG&E on it. We took them with us... We were friends with the people over there."

PG&E did, in fact, agree to let SMUD have access to some PG&E office, garage and warehouse facilities during the first 18 months after the buyout. PG&E also agreed to sell or lease spare construction equipment, service trucks, tools, materials and supplies. And PG&E agreed to help the District in securing experienced personnel.

Nonetheless, there were

times during the transition when the two employers competed for workers. PG&E was finding places for its employees elsewhere in the PG&E system, presumably trying to hang on to some of the company's talent. SMUD hoped to keep some of those same people in Sacramento.

Elmer Klassen, for example.

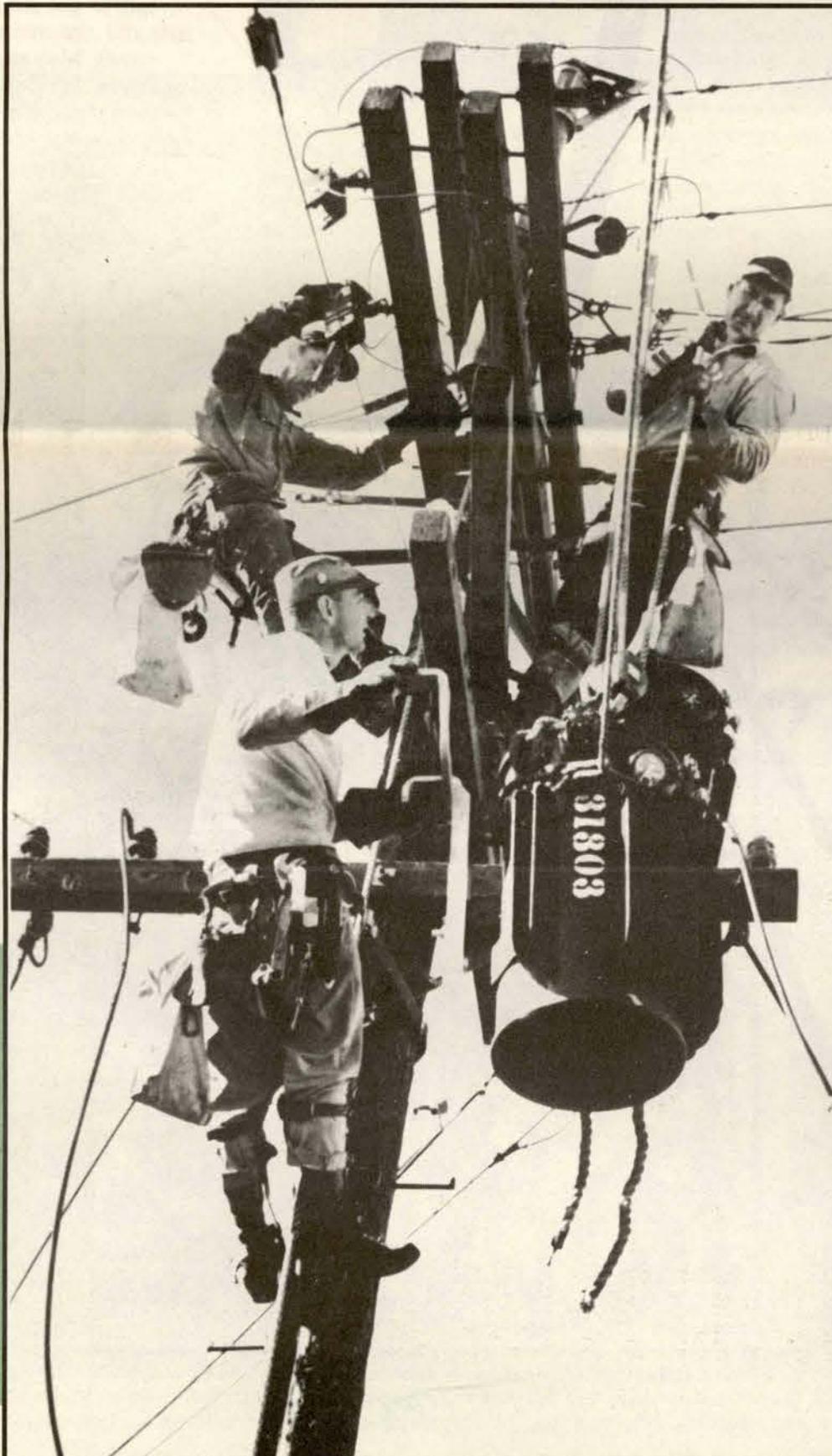
### Having to choose

In late 1946, when SMUD was nearly ready to take over the system, Klassen had been a PG&E lineman in Sacramento for about a year. The PG&E general foreman asked Klassen if he'd be interested in staying on with PG&E. Klassen was agreeable, but he didn't want to turn down a possible job with SMUD unless he was assured that PG&E really had a job for him.

The PG&E general foreman was supposed to confirm the job with Klassen by Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving came and went with no word from PG&E.

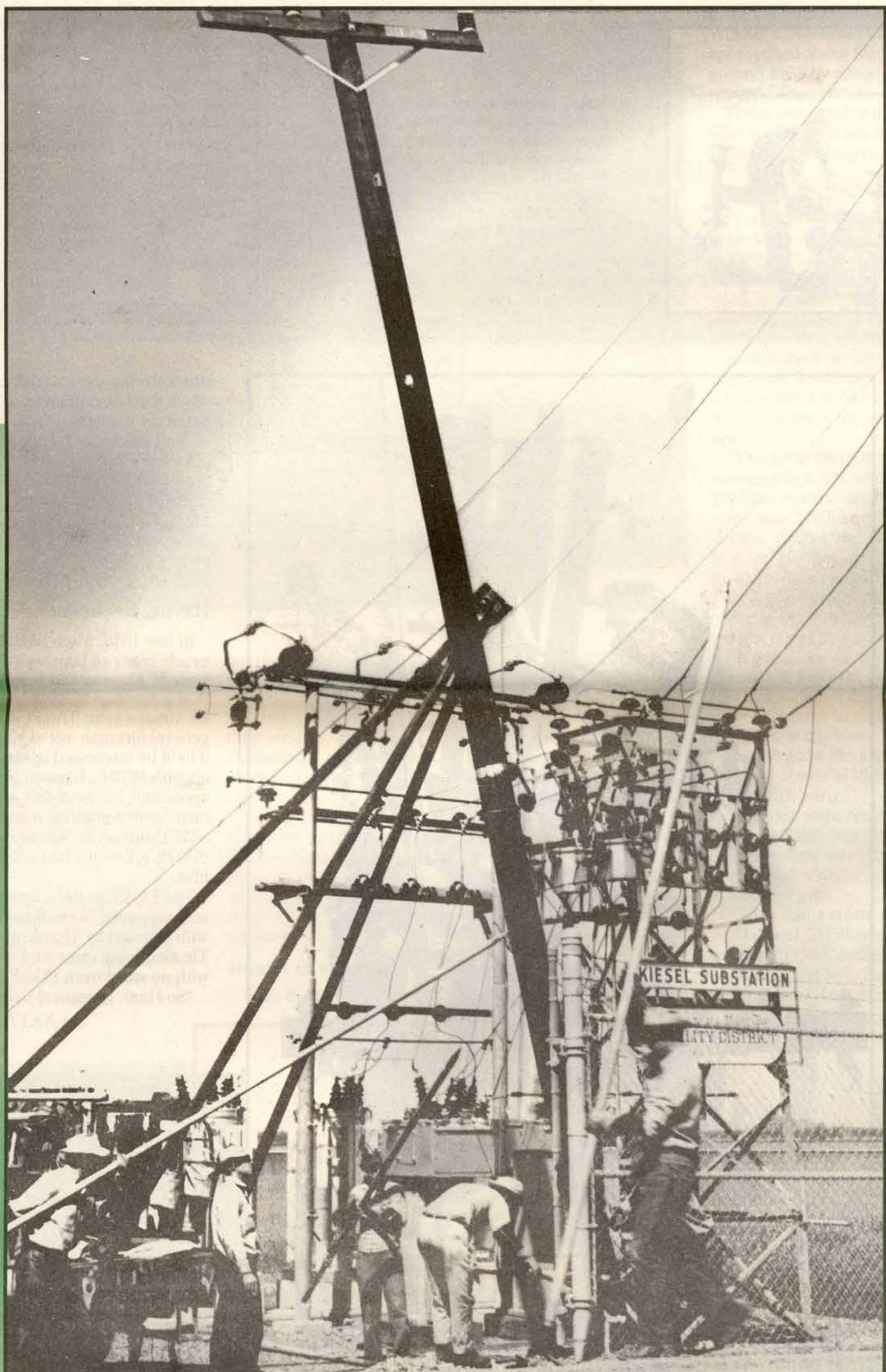
"So Hank [Baumer] from

*See NEXT PAGE*



SMUD linemen, from left, Archie Horton, Doug Skinner and Norm Ficker at work. Foreman was Elmer Klassen. 1950s. (Photo courtesy of Sacramento Municipal Utility District)

## SACRAMENTO MUNICIPAL UTILITY DISTRICT: A LOCAL 1245 RETROSPECTIVE



Linemen in 1956 set a pole with a rigid boom, which were in use before hydraulic booms were available. The rigid boom "had to be put together each time you wanted to use it," recalls Archie Horton. "Once it was down in the hole we used pike poles to make sure it was straight." Horton adds: "It'd pinch your fingers sometimes." (Photo courtesy of Sacramento Municipal Utility District)

### From PAGE NINE

"SMUD came by," Klassen recalls, "and he said, 'Hey, what are you going to do? You going to stay with PG&E or are you going to come with me?'"

"I said, 'Well, Hank, it looks to me like I'm going to go with you because Harry was supposed to notify me by Thanksgiving whether he wanted me or not for sure and he hasn't said anything about it.'"

When the PG&E general foreman learned that Klassen was now planning to go over to SMUD he came running. As Klassen recalls it:

"He said, 'Elmer, what in the world are you going to do, let us down?' And I said, 'No, Harry, you told me you'd let me know for sure [by Thanksgiving].'

"Oh yes," he said, "I did, didn't I? Well, we want you. You



SMUD employee Bob Burkle at work in the late 1940s or early 1950s. (Photo courtesy of Sacramento Municipal Utility District)



George Moore (left) and in the late 1940s or e Sacramento Municipal U

*From PAGE NINE*

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"Oh yes," he said, "I did, didn't I? Well, we want you. You

can tell Hank to go peddle his apples. You stay with us.'

"I said, 'OK, as long as I have a job.' Then Hank, he come along and said, 'I hear you went and let me down again.'"

However, this time Klassen's mind was made up. He stayed with PG&E. The contest was over. Almost.

A year later, Klassen changed his mind one last time. In December of 1947 he paid a visit to Hank Baumer and hired on at SMUD.

#### **"Slim" Ambrose**

Not all of SMUD's new recruits came directly from PG&E, however.

In 1948, while SMUD was still actively gathering its labor pool, Kenneth "Slim" Ambrose was working for PT&T, the local telephone company. A storm, not a SMUD recruiter, con-

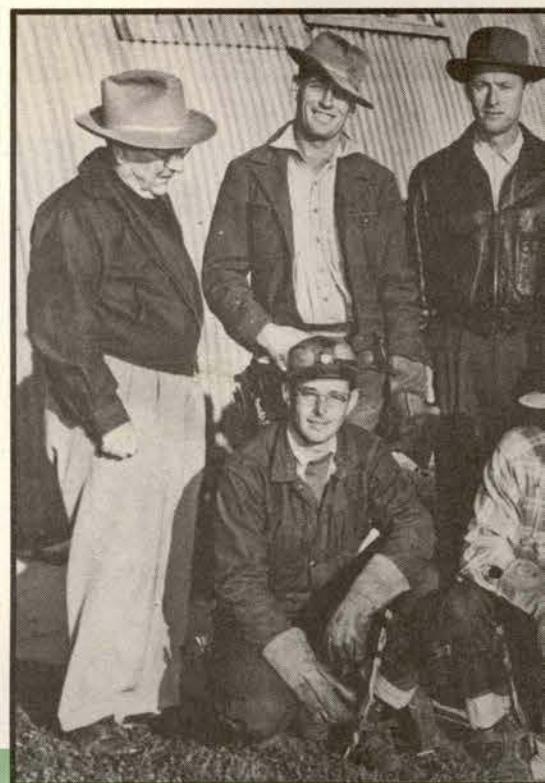
vinced Ambrose to give the new public utility a try.

"They had a big storm up in the mountains," Ambrose recalls, "and a big old snowplow went down over Donner summit and he hit the equalizing guy... It took down about twenty poles down the hill and twenty poles uphill. All those poles were down. Every one of them sonofaguns."

"So, we gathered all our stuff and jumped in the back of a line truck and away we went.

"We got up to Truckee about three o'clock in the morning. At six o'clock in the morning we were back on the top of that damn Donner summit. Oh, that sonofabitch was cold! Every time you would touch anything metal with your leather gloves, it'd freeze. You'd just pick off little pieces of leather.

*See NEXT PAGE*



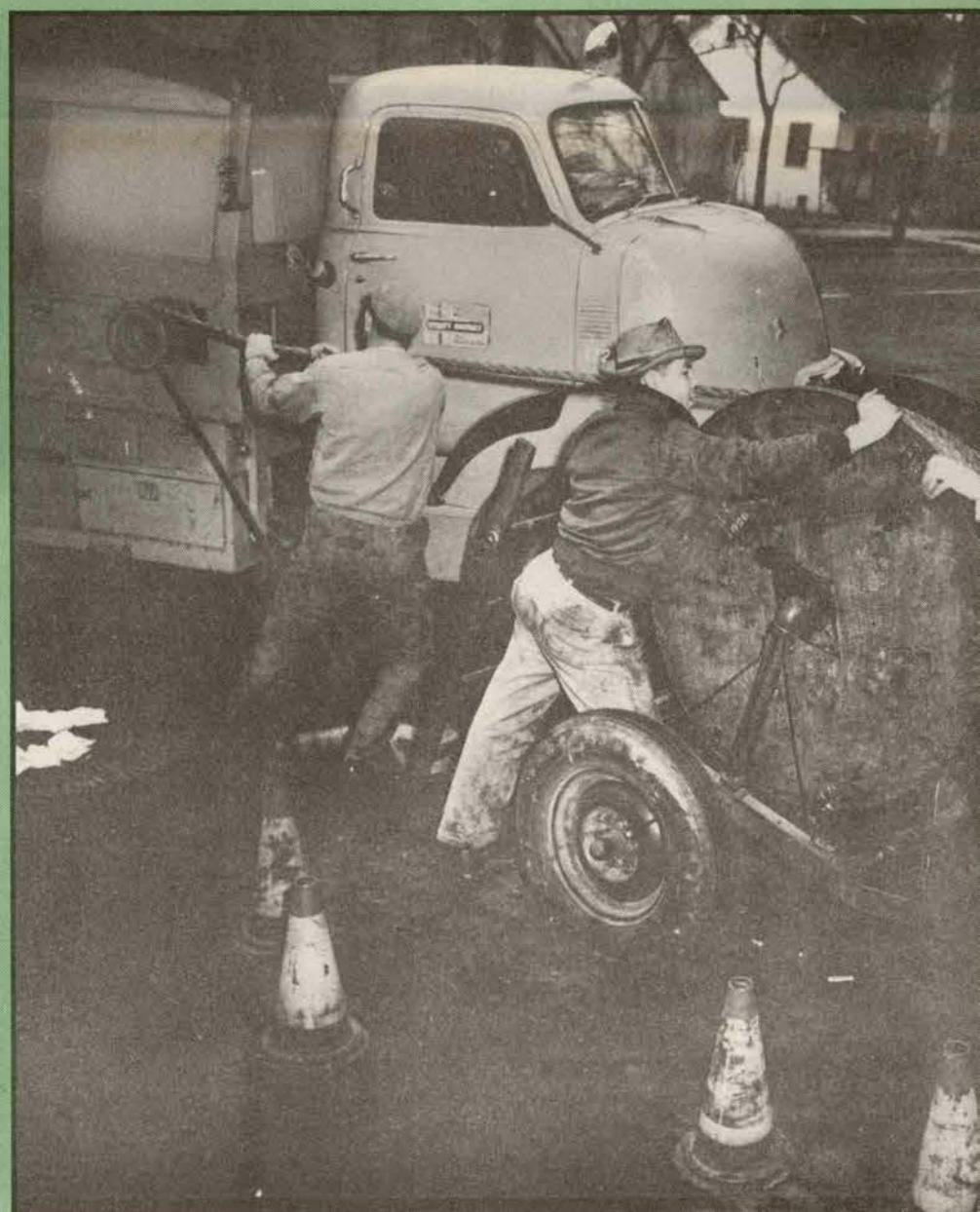
Sacramento Municipal Utility District apprenticeship class, 1948. From left, standing: Chester Baumer, apprentice; John Lund, assistant general manager; Firth, apprentice; Hank Baumer, general manager; Bill Dickinson, apprentice; and Archie Horton.



SMUD employee Bob Burkle at work in the late 1940s or early 1950s. (Photo courtesy of Sacramento Municipal Utility District)



George Moore (left) and unidentified employee at work in the late 1940s or early 1950s. (Photo courtesy of Sacramento Municipal Utility District)



A SMUD network crew pulls in conductor sometime in the late 1940s or early 1950s. Man on right may be Everett Handy. Man on left is unidentified. (Photo courtesy of Sacramento Municipal Utility District)

in tell Hank to go peddle his poles. You stay with us.' I said, 'OK, as long as I have a job.' Then Hank, he come along and said, 'I hear you went and let me down again.'

However, this time Klassen's word was made up. He stayed with PG&E. The contest was over. Almost.

A year later, Klassen changed his mind one last time. In December of 1947 he paid a visit to Hank Baumer and hired on with SMUD.

#### "Slim" Ambrose

Not all of SMUD's new recruits came directly from PG&E, however.

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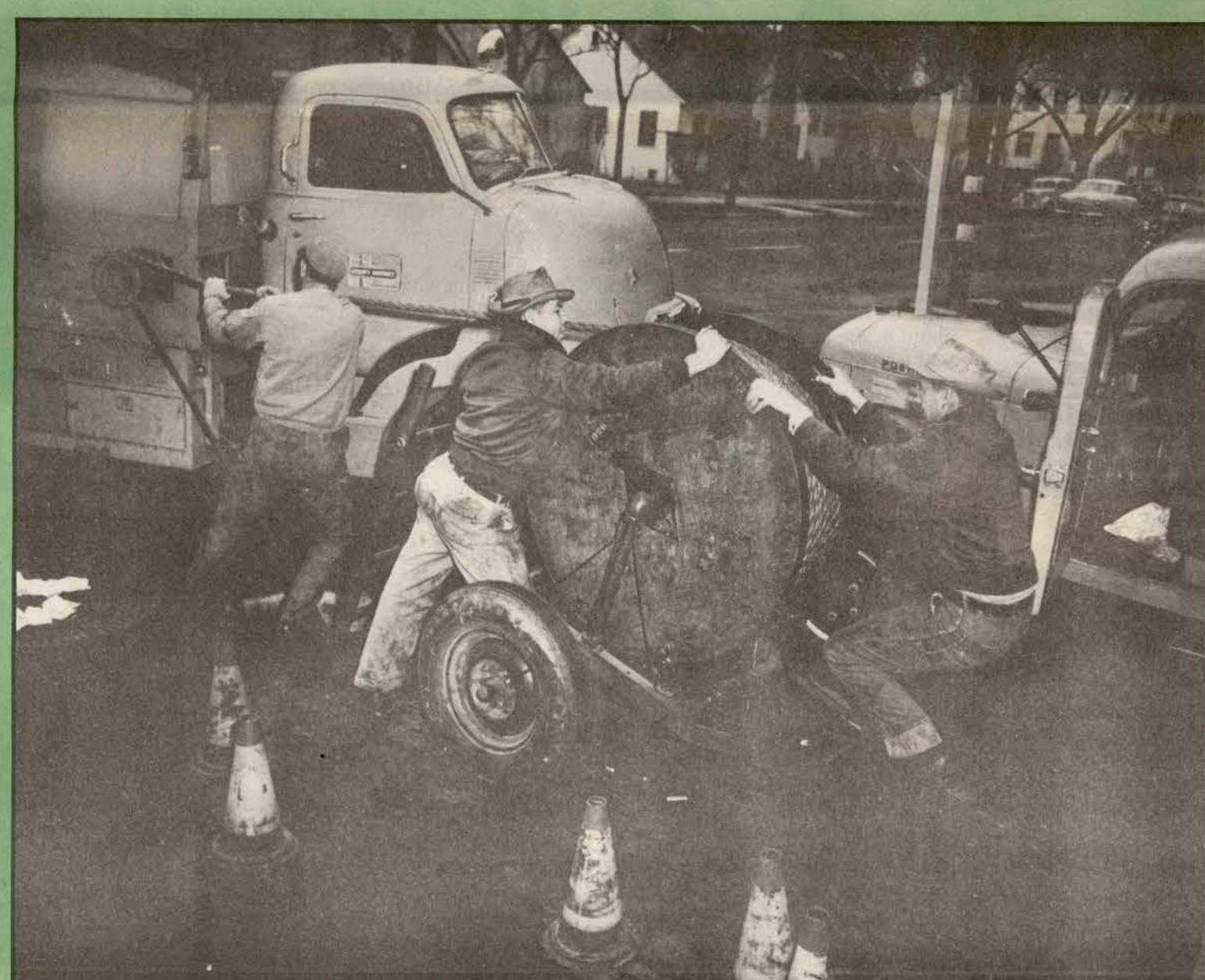
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*See NEXT PAGE*



Sacramento Municipal Utility District apprentices in front of Quonset Hut building at 59th and R, from left, standing: Chester Barr, assistant general foreman; Frank Boyle, apprentice; John Lund, assistant general foreman; Archie Horton, apprentice; Leroy Firth, apprentice; Hank Baumer, general foreman. From left, kneeling: Dick Ewing, apprentice; Bill Dickinson, apprentice; Walt Frei, apprentice. 1951. (Photo courtesy of Archie Horton)



A SMUD network crew pulls in conductor sometime in the late 1940s or early 1950s. In the middle is Bob Burkle. The man on right may be Everett Handy. Man on left is unidentified. (Photo courtesy of Sacramento Municipal Utility District)



In the late 1940s  
Sacramento Municipal



Unidentified employee at work  
early 1950s. (Photo courtesy of  
Sacramento Municipal Utility District)

## SACRAMENTO MUNICIPAL UTILITY DISTRICT: A LOCAL 1245 RETROSPECTIVE



SMUD meter tester Frank Kovacs at work in 1956. (Photo courtesy Sacramento Municipal Utility District)

### From PAGE ELEVEN

"We were on that job, I think, two weeks. We had to pull the old stuff and highline the poles down there and set the sonofaguns. So we got that all fixed up."

"Well, we figured we was going to go home. It was Christmas. And they said, 'No. What you're going to do, you're going to go re-vamp the line between Truckee and Tahoe City.'

"Now it was still winter. Us poor bastards were up there on that line. After we

got that job fixed up, I said the hell with that noise. You can bust your ass up on that hill, you know, then they send us on a little chickenshit job for eleven miles in Truckee and Tahoe City.

"I says, that's not going to happen to old Ambrose. And the more I thought about it, the madder I got. So I told the wife, 'I'm going down to see Hank Baumer.'

### Bonds of solidarity

With the likes of Leonard

Williams, Elmer Klassen and Slim Ambrose, SMUD was getting more than experienced linemen. These were linemen in the union mold, men who believed in standing up for their rights. They understood that the union was a valuable vehicle for achieving what they wanted.

Leonard Williams originally hired on at PG&E on Feb. 13, 1938, three years before IBEW Local 1245 was even chartered. But other IBEW locals had a few members on the

property at that time and Williams remembers being approached about the union around 1939 by a man named Glenn Larson.

There were plenty of reasons to want a union at PG&E in those days.

### No overtime pay

"You'd go out on overtime, but you didn't get paid overtime," Leonard recalls. "You stayed 'til the job was done. If there was a storm, you kept going. No supper."

And there were other problems. It was an era when utilities believed they virtually owned the workers.

"You go in there in the morning to work, where PG&E's electric department was," Williams recalls. "If they had some trouble and they had enough linemen at 7:30, they'd say, 'Load it on, we're going to take you out, we got to get this going.'

"It got so we all stood across the street at the tavern and watched the clock. Three minutes to eight we run for our truck—we wouldn't go in the yard because if we did they put us to work early."

Linemen were resourceful in devising ways to improve their working conditions without jeopardizing their jobs.

"They had a storm down in Oakland," Williams recalls. "PG&E pulled us out of here to help them down there. Here we are,

far as you can see, poles down and what have you. But an hour-and-a-half past quitting time we all wave at each other and come down off the poles and take our tools off: we're ready to go out. There was no way we could work the next five hours to get the lines working. We're ready to eat."

Williams re-enacts the confrontation they provoked:

"Boss would say, 'Put your tools on and go back there.'

"I'm here ready and willing to do the work, I just can't cut it. I'm too hungry."

Williams and his co-workers used the same tech-



Elmer Klassen, working as a lineman for Kansas Gas & Electric in the early 1940s, is checked out by his boss, Jerry Williams. (Photo courtesy Elmer Klassen)

Tree trimmers for the Sacramento Municipal Utility District in 1957. (Courtesy Sacramento Municipal Utility District)



## SACRAMENTO MUNICIPAL UTILITY DISTRICT: A LOCAL 1245 RETROSPECTIVE

nique when the boss tried to get one lineman up a pole to work primary. Williams, remembering the scene, cups his hands and calls out:

"I'm up here ready and willing to do the work, I just can't cut it by myself."

"You'd never refuse to work—they'd fire you," Williams explains.

But it was this sort of collective action that created bonds of solidarity between workers and, says Williams, "helped bring on Local 1245."

### "The Penguin"

Elmer Klassen got his union schooling in Kansas.

He had been working on a Kansas farm when he was offered a job in 1936 on a line gang for Kansas Gas and Electric in Wichita.

By 1941 he had worked his way up to journeyman lineman for KG&E in Newton, a few miles north of Wichita. He remembers going with a few of his fellow union-minded linemen to talk with the boss about their wages. Soon they found themselves summoned to a meeting in Wichita with the line superintendent, a man named Montague.

"So we went over, wondering what was going on. And he came in. He was a great big old... We called him "the Penguin." Big old beer-belly on him, you know. He never would smile.

"He said, 'I understand that you guys are grumbling about wanting more money up here. Let me put it to you this way: Every morning, there's guys sitting at my office door wanting a job—better electrical engineers than you guys are linemen. You guys can take it from there.'

"In other words," explains Klassen, "if we didn't like it, we could quit."

However, Klassen later got his revenge on the Penguin. A fellow union sympathizer told him about a big powder plant being constructed in Chattanooga, Tenn. To get work there, all they had to do was immediately notify IBEW Local 271 in Wichita-

a building trades local—that they wanted the work.

"That was Thursday night and we were going to leave Friday morning," Klassen says. "So I called up the line superintendent at Newton. I said, 'I want to quit and I'm going to Chattanooga...right now.'

"Oh, man," he said, "you're kind of putting me in a bind."

"That's when I told him. I said, 'Well, maybe you can have Monty send you up one of them men from Wichita, one of them electrical engineers he's got lining up in front of his door

each morning.'"

After coming to SMUD at the end of 1947, it didn't take long for Klassen to become involved in Local 1245. To hear him tell it, it wasn't entirely voluntary.

"They had a big meeting," Klassen recalls, and the union business agent "was giving out what he had done in the way of assignments and he was telling about the stewards. He had made half a dozen stewards.

"And I thought: Whew, I got by this. I won't get assigned to none of that stuff.

"But then he said, 'And

the chief steward over all of them I'm going to make it Elmer Klassen.'

Klassen shakes his head ruefully. "And I'm there thinking, 'Oh no, oh no.'"

Within about six months Klassen was chairman of the unit. The recording secretary was Slim Ambrose, who also was elected to what is today known as the Local 1245 Advisory Council.

### Not much of a crowd

Klassen and Ambrose agree that the unit wasn't as spirited as it ought to

*See NEXT PAGE*

## Local 1245



**1941-1991**

Celebrating 50 years  
of union

**"We decided to get a little more action out of that local union, to get some more attendance... We made up a deal where we would serve them sandwiches and beer--two bits apiece, We had Limburger cheese and salami and everything. Oh man, I'll tell you--it got the attendance up."**

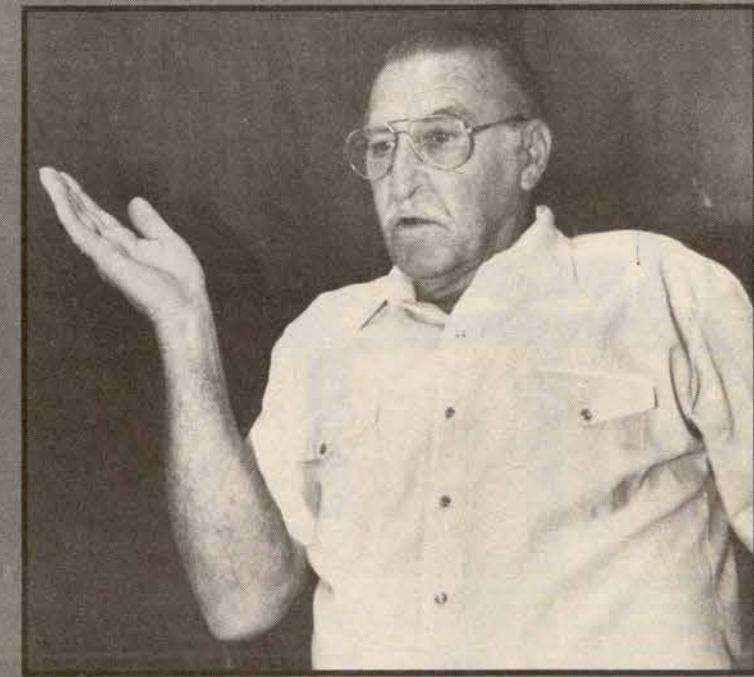
*Elmer Klassen  
former unit chairman,  
Local 1245 SMUD unit*



(Photo: Eric Wolfe)

**"I think every year it got easier for the lineman. All your tools were furnished right down to your gloves, everything. Your rain suit was furnished. I can't think of a damned thing you had to buy. And the working conditions: you had rest periods, you had your meals."**

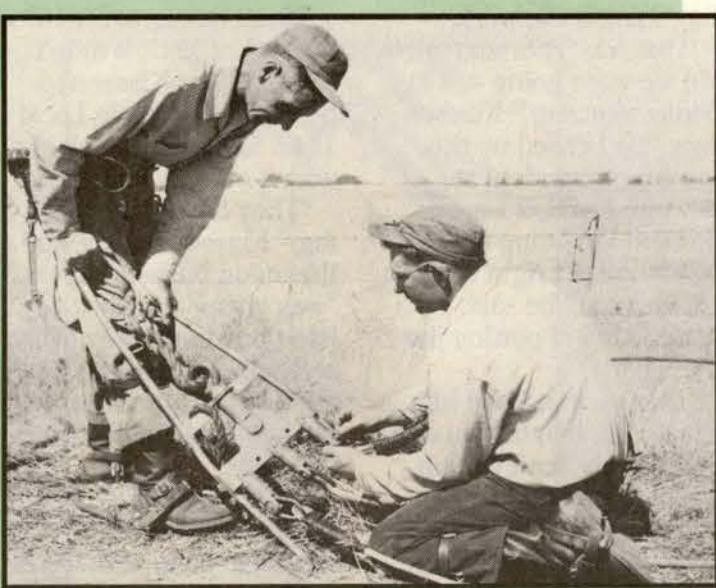
*Kenneth "Slim" Ambrose  
former unit recording secretary,  
Local 1245 SMUD unit*



(Photo: Eric Wolfe)

## SACRAMENTO MUNICIPAL UTILITY DISTRICT: A LOCAL 1245 RETROSPECTIVE

SMUD employees, right, at work in late 1940s or early 1950s. Below, a scene from the SMUD warehouse in late 1940s or early 1950s. In the foreground is Frenchie (full name unknown), who worked as a groundman before going to work at the warehouse. The crane operator is Jess Miller. (Photos courtesy of Sacramento Municipal Utility District)



*From PAGE THIRTEEN*  
have been.

"We weren't getting much of a crowd coming out at night," Klassen recalls. "We decided to get a little more action out of that local union, to get some more attendance."

"Between the two of us we made up a deal where we would serve them sandwiches and beer—two bits apiece, wasn't it?" Klassen asks.

"Something like that," Ambrose agrees.

"We had Limburger cheese and salami and everything. Oh man, I'll tell you," says Klassen. "It got the attendance up."

Ambrose and Klassen both served stints on the union's negotiating team during the early 1950s. At that time the union was fighting for many of the things that SMUD linemen today take for granted—like decent gloves and the opportunity to enjoy a hot meal.

"They did have gloves" back in the early '50s, Ambrose is quick to note. "Canvas-backed."

"Yeah, we got those old Jack and Jerry—leather front and canvas back," says Klassen, remembering along with Ambrose. "And boy, after a rain guys would come in, you know, and say, 'Look at them gloves. I can't wear them.' And they were throwing them away and getting new ones."

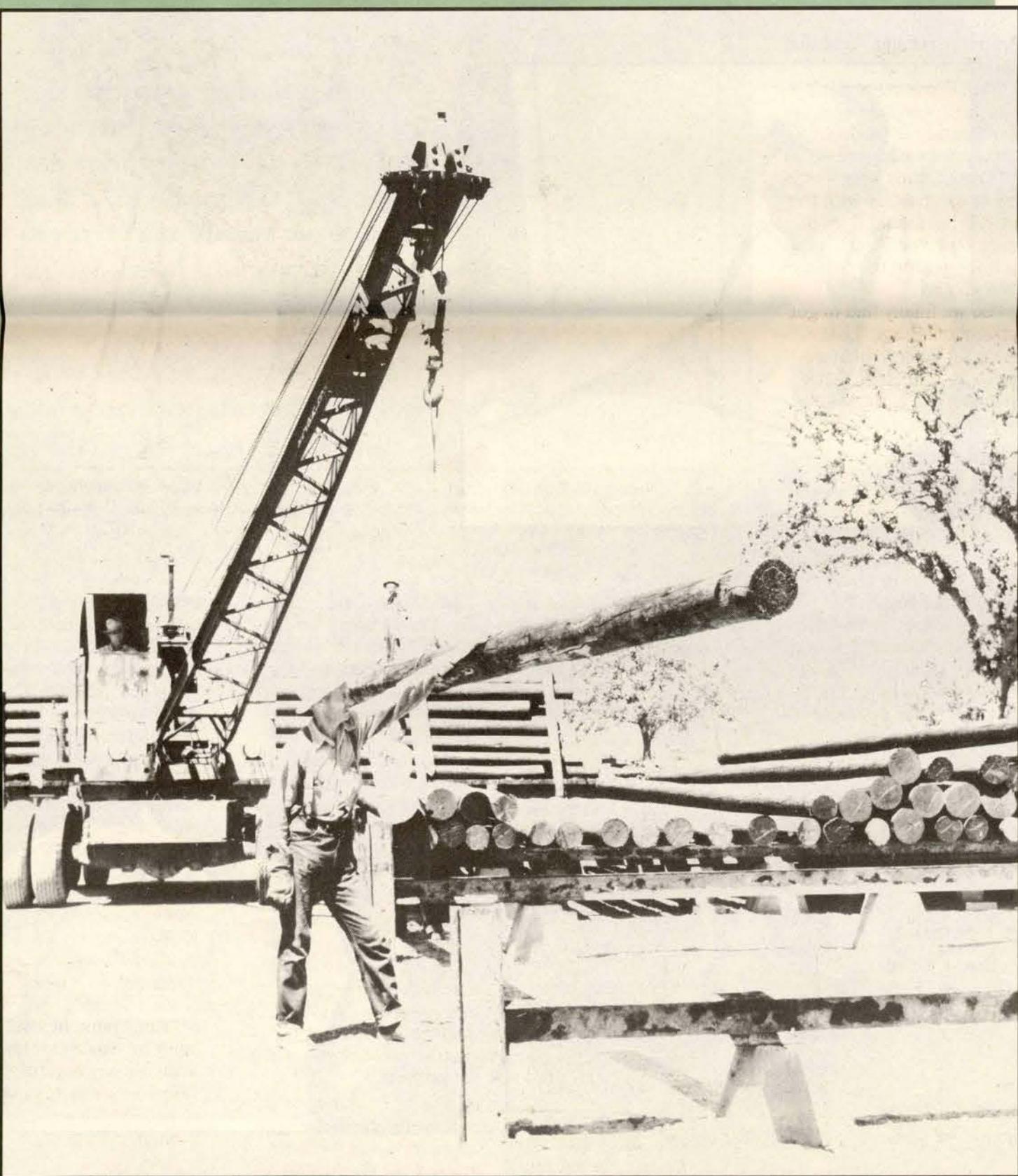
"We'd go out in a rain-storm and we'd take whole boxes," says Ambrose.

The gloves were provided by the District, Klassen acknowledges, "but they weren't worth nothing. Anyway, I still kept after them with our negotiating committee. We finally managed to get leather gloves out of them, regular Koontz gloves."

### "Not worth shooting"

Ambrose remembers another problem linemen faced in that era: "There were no rest periods."

"Like we'd have a storm," Klassen explains, "would last two or three days. They'd call a crew out and they'd just leave that crew working for the whole



## SACRAMENTO MUNICIPAL UTILITY DISTRICT: A LOCAL 1245 RETROSPECTIVE

period. And that would be, sometimes, three days and three nights, see. And, boy, after that you aren't worth shooting, so we decided that they got to give us a rest period."

"And then," Klassen continues, "we were always negotiating for the price of meals. They were going to send us out and give us cold-cut sandwiches. We kept a'battling until they had to give us an hour to eat, [time] to go into a restaurant and eat."

"We got up to where they had to feed us every four hours," Klassen adds. "Which for some of these guys who always ordered a steak, why, they got pretty well built up."

Another negotiating victory was the addition of a second grunt to a light crew.

"Used to have only one," says Klassen. "We'd have two linemen, truck driver, and a foreman and one grunt. We said this was unsafe to have that kind of work without an extra man. And we got two grunts on there. That irritated a lot of personnel," Klassen recalls.

### "Economic action"

As with any negotiations, the possibility of a strike strengthened the union's hand at the bargaining table.

"Of course, we had to threaten economic action. We had to do that," Ambrose recalls. "Every time we had to threaten economic action. We didn't say we were going to strike, it was just 'economic action.'"

**"A lot of [management] people at that time had been union members all their life. So they knew the circumstances [people work under] and they'd do everything they could to avoid grievances."**

*Archie Horton,  
retired line superintendent  
and former union member*

Ambrose remembers one bargaining session with SMUD General Manager James E. McCaffrey at a SMUD office located at 21st and K in Sacramento.

"Old McCaffrey said, 'Well, tell you what, you guys, you go to dinner and you come back and we'll meet at seven o'clock and you tell us just exactly what's the minimum you'll take.'

"So we says fine. So we went to dinner. Come back and I think it was ninety-six dollars—we told him, we said, 'Ninety-six dollars minimum for journeyman lineman.'

"No trouble. He said OK," Ambrose recalls. "And that was his negotiation."

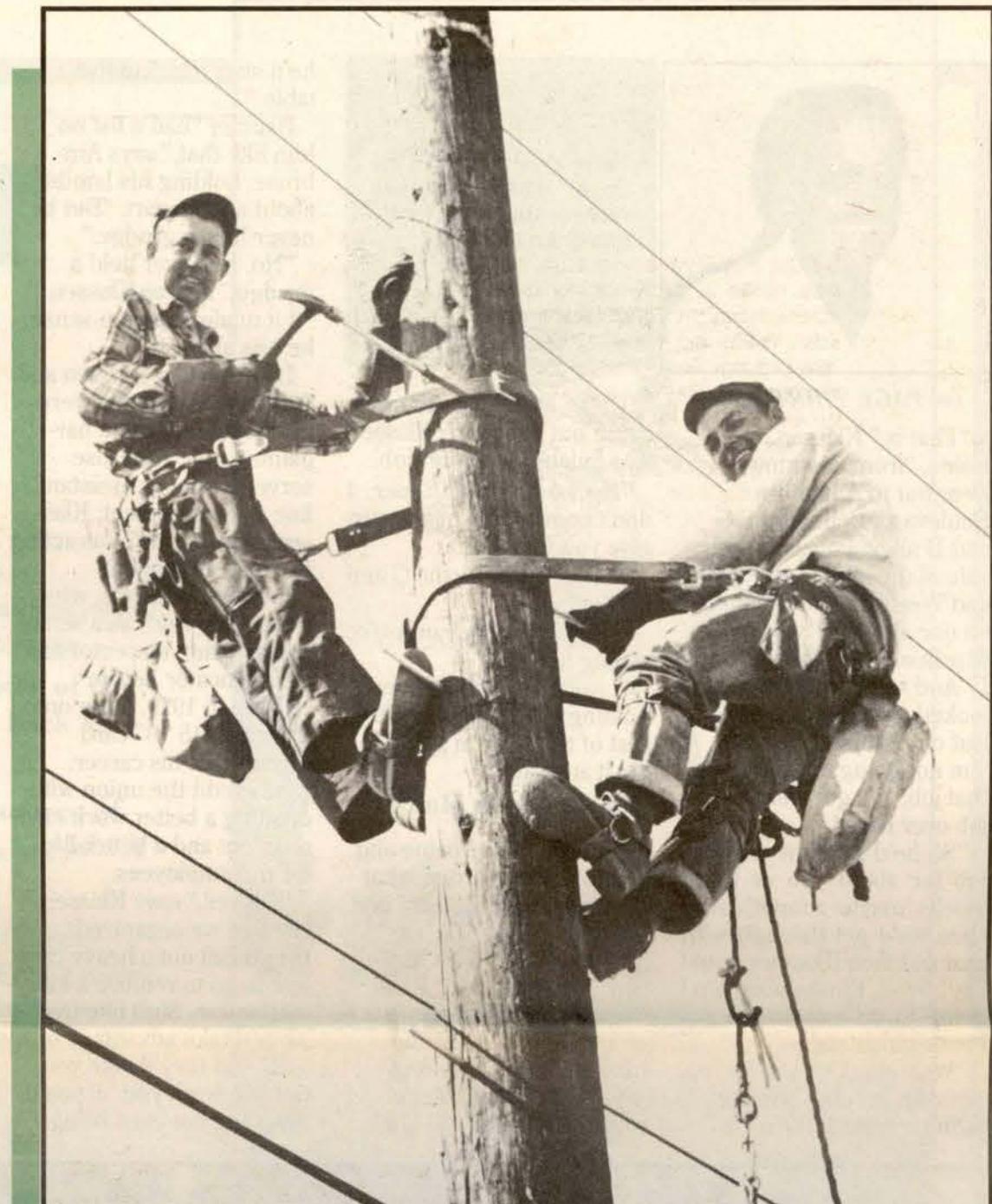
SMUD management had one sure way of getting under the skin of union negotiators, says Klassen.

"Our officials here would try to compare us with the PG&E linemen. 'They'd say, 'Well, the PG&E men are not getting the benefits that you are.'

"So we finally had to get up and tell them, 'Listen, we don't want to hear no more about PG&E. Let's just deal with us and you fellows.'"

### Mutual respect

Although contract negotiations could produce some tense moments between labor and management, there was also a substantial degree of mutual respect between union workers and management personnel at SMUD. This was due in part to the fact that many managers



SMUD lineman Bob Malicoat (left), who later became superintendent of underground, is shown here working in the late 1940s or early 1950s. The other lineman is unidentified. (Photo courtesy of Sacramento Municipal Utility District)

themselves at one time had worked as linemen and carried union cards.

Men like Hank Baumer, Smiley Barnes and John Lund "were all union mem-

bers at one time," recalls Archie Horton, who came to SMUD in 1950 as an apprentice lineman, made journeyman in 1954, and eventually became line superintendent.

People who came up through the ranks made the best managers, in Horton's opinion.

"A lot of the people at that time had been union members all their life. So they knew the circumstances [people work under] and they'd do everything they could to avoid grievances," says Horton. "Anytime you have people unhappy, you've created yourself a lot of problems."

Work became something of a living theater, where managers and workers played out their roles,

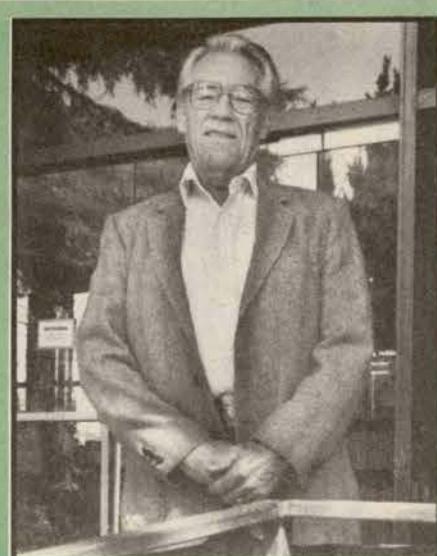
where relationships were defined in the course of the day-to-day jobs, where mutual trust was sometimes created and sometimes undermined. Sometimes those work relationships could take on a comic air.

Klassen remembers jockeying with Baumer over rebuilding the G and H alley.

"Oh, I'll tell you, you get in some messes there," Klassen recalls. "You see, that's old construction down there. A lot of it's old Great Western."

"And Hank, he come out after he was about through with his job, and he'd say, 'Well, let me see, I got the G and H alley here to rebuild.'

*See NEXT PAGE*



(Photo: Eric Wolfe)

## SACRAMENTO MUNICIPAL UTILITY DISTRICT: A LOCAL 1245 RETROSPECTIVE



Perry Zimmerman is the Local 1245 business representative currently assigned to SMUD.

on PAGE THIRTEEN

"That is," Klassen explains, "from downtown clear out to Alhambra Boulevard. Rebuild the G and H alley. Poles on each side of the alley, and PG&E and Western construction on one side and two circuits of primary on each side."

"And we drove to that and looked at it a time or two. But old Baumer, he said, 'I'm not going to give you that job. I've got another job over here.'

"So he'd give me another job for about two or three weeks, maybe a month. And then we'd get through with that and then [Baumer would say] 'Well, Elmer, what am I going to do with you? I got the G and H alley.'

"We'd shudder, you know," Klassen recalls, smiling. "I didn't want that durn job."

Then one day Baumer came out to where Klassen was finishing another job.

"He said, 'Well, Elmer, I don't know what I'm going to give you for a job.'

"I said, 'Give me the G and H alley.'

"He said, 'You mean you're asking for that?'

"I said, 'I don't want you holding it over my head the rest of my life. I'm going to get it anyway.'

### Tangling with Hank

Confrontations came and went. People learned what they could expect from one another.

"I'll tell you," says Klassen, "I tangled with Hank. We were banging our fists on the table and getting mad and old Hank would say, 'Well, if you can get mad, I can get mad.' Then

he'd start banging the table."

Baumer "had a fist on him like that," says Ambrose, holding his hands about a foot apart. "But he never held a grudge."

"No, he never held a grudge," agrees Klassen. "If it made common sense, he was all for it."

Like Horton, Klassen and Ambrose eventually were promoted out of the bargaining unit. Ambrose served a stint as assistant line superintendent; Klassen retired in 1974 as acting line superintendent.

Leonard Williams, who went on to work as a senior construction inspector and a fault locator before retiring in 1979, hung onto a Local 1245 "B" card throughout his career.

All credit the union with creating a better work environment and a better life for the employees.

"Oh yes," says Klassen. "Before we organized they'd call out a heavy crew just to go to remove a kite off the line. Stuff like that. They'd take advantage of you. And they'd take you out and work you 'til you'd drop and not even bring

you a cold sandwich. They said, 'You hired out here to work; let's work.' That's the way they were. There was no heart at all. No compassion."

"I think every year it got easier for the lineman," says Ambrose. "All your tools were furnished right down to your gloves, everything. Your rain suit was furnished. I can't think of a damned thing you had to buy. And the working conditions: you had rest periods, you had your meals."

### Good people

Even as managers, these are men who remembered where they came from.

"My heart has always been with the lineman," says Klassen. "I always did think that he got the brunt of all the line work, you know. He took quite a beating—weatherwise, customerwise, and supervisory, and everybody was always on the lineman. So my heart's always been with the lineman. They're good people."

"I remember one time in early SMUD days," Klassen continues, "I had a crew

out here by Fair Oaks. We were working in an easement back in there and it started raining. A fellow came out of a house there and he said, 'What are you fellows doing in the rain? You don't work in the rain, do you?'

"I said, 'Not unless it's an emergency.'

"He said, 'Well, where do you get out of the rain?'

"I said, 'Well, we'll get in the back of that truck, find an old garage or something.'

"So a little later he came out and he said, 'You know, my wife and I are going to town, we'll be gone all day. If you fellows have got to get in out of the rain, here's the key to the house.'

"He gave me a key to the house. And he said the wife set out a coffeepot there and we could make coffee and make ourselves to home."

"We appreciated it. We even took our boots off," Klassen says, smiling. "Set them out on the front porch and went in there barefooted. People were like that. They liked the linemen."



Slim Ambrose (middle) with his "100 percent" union crew at SMUD, which included Denver Goodwin, Charlie Baird, Dick McCuliffe, Bill Painter, Ed Bland, Mark Reeder, Darrell Cook and Bob Ross. (Photo courtesy of Kenneth Ambrose)

## BUSH'S FREE-TRADE FAST TRACK



## 'Free trade' pact poses threat to US workers

**A**s summer turned to fall, members of Congress began to voice reservations about the direction of the US-Mexico free trade negotiations now that the Bush administration has been given sweeping powers to shape the agreement under the so-called fast track authority.

Their concerns are over what impact a wide-open trading arrangement between the United States, Canada and Mexico would have on American employment and living standards.

And they have reason to be concerned, according to a study sponsored by the National Planning Association, which warns that a poorly-crafted trade pact "could worsen the US trade deficit, resulting in long-term downward pressures on the dollar and US living standards."

Although President Bush promised Congress an unprecedented role in the trade discussions, cooperation from the administration has been lacking.

As a result, House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) and Rep. Sander

Levin (D-Mich.) have asked congressional investigators for in-depth data on the negotiations. Among their prime concerns are what impact a trade accord would have on wage and employment levels in certain US industries and on Mexican environmental and safety standards.

Gephardt has repeatedly called for the creation of a congressional trade office to provide data that the administration has been unwilling to provide.

Similar concerns on the trade talks were raised by Reps. Don J. Pease (D-Ohio), Jim Moody (D-Wis.) and Byron Dorgan (D-ND) in a letter to Bush.

"If a balanced North American Free Trade Agreement worthy of congressional approval is to be negotiated," they wrote, "it will require... congressional input into the substantive give-and-take of the negotiations."

Other members of congress also have protested the administration's failure to provide hard information on how the negotiations will affect US workers and businesses.

*(The AFL-CIO News contributed to this report)*

## Outside Line pin dinner honors long-time members

## 40 YEARS

George Dickinson (right) is recognized by Business Manager Jack McNally for 40 years of service in Local 1245. (Photos: Bobby Blair)



## 35 YEARS

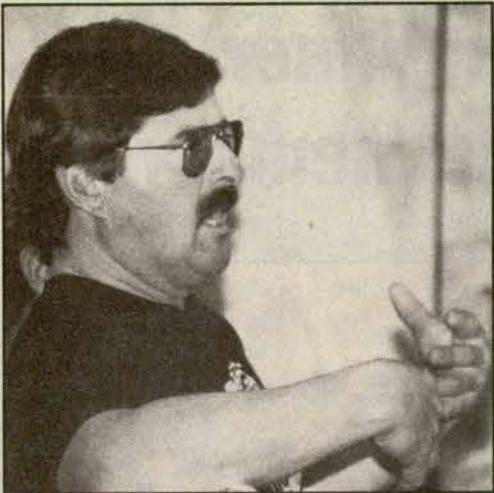
Honored by Business Manager Jack McNally for 35 years of service to the union are (from left): James H. Hagge, McNally, A. G. "Tube" Dudley, Manny Daniels, Herb Finkenzeller, James L. Woulfe, Joseph Foster, Jerry T. Edwards, John A. Nicolen, and Robert A. Lemen.



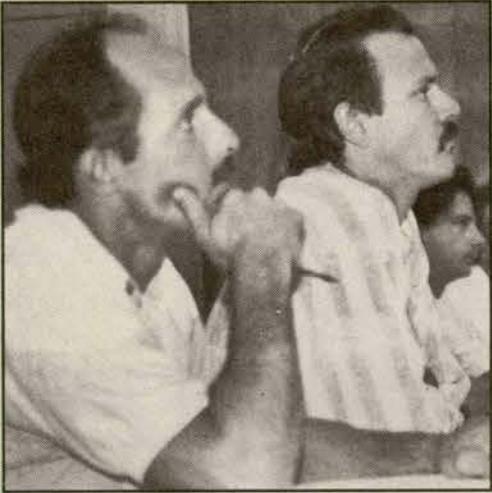
## 30 YEARS

Recognized by Business Manager Jack McNally (right) for their service to the union are James D. Carter (left) and Joe Grubisic.

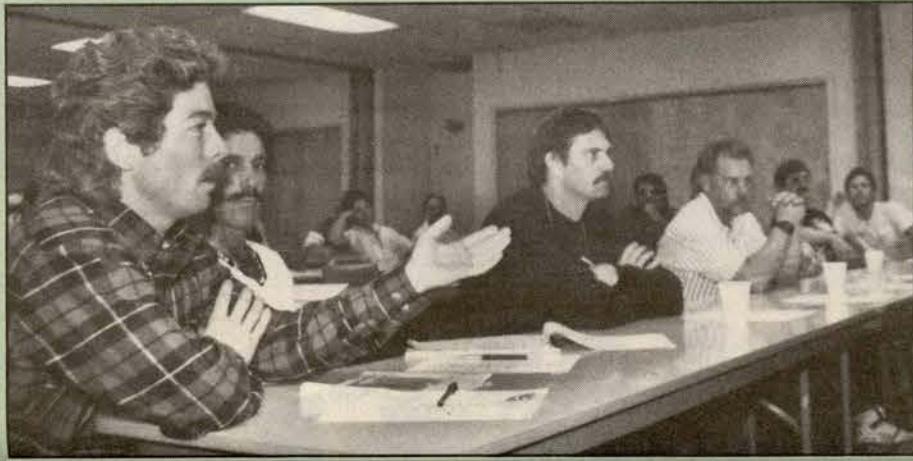
## TREE TRIMMERS



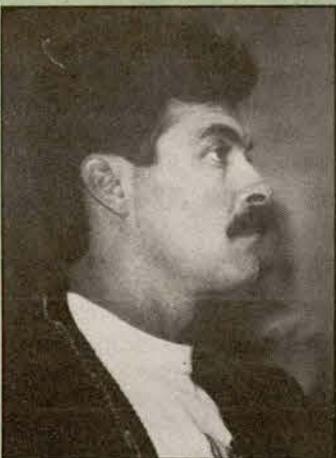
David Chapton, working foreman for Davey Tree, asks a question.



Seminar participants. (Photos: Eric Wolfe)



Skip Ginsburg, second from left, looks on as Scott Safford makes a point.



Abel Sanchez



Ramon Gomez (left) and Carlos Novoa.



Tree trimmers listen to opening remarks by Business Manager Jack McNally.

## Tree trimmers conference

### From PAGE ONE

ord \$8.2 million for the cost of fighting the fire.

But there is another way that utilities can try to save money in their tree-trimming operations: getting lower bids from tree-trimming contractors.

At PG&E, for example, recent changes in bidding procedures have resulted in more aggressive bidding. Non-union contractors, because they are not bound by union wage agreements, have turned the bidding process into a cutthroat affair.

### Hidden costs

However, as any consumer knows, cheap isn't necessarily cheap if quality is sacrificed. The same principle applies in tree-trimming, where low bids by non-union contractors may carry hidden costs.

One such cost is an increased risk of on-the-job injury or death resulting from a poorly-trained workforce.

Although all tree contractors are required to have state-approved training programs for their employees, the quality of these programs varies widely. Workers Compensation records make it easy to tell the good ones from the bad ones.

The State of California, through its Workers Compensation programs, assigns each employer a rating that determines how much the employer must pay into the Workers Compensation insurance fund. An employer begins with a base rate, which in the tree trimming industry is currently \$37.03 for every

\$100 of payroll.

That rate goes up, or down, based on the number of claims that are filed against a particular employer over the previous four years.

The two union contractors currently working PG&E properties—Davey Tree Surgery Company and Asplundh Tree Expert Company—currently pay less than 100 percent of the base rate because of their good safety records.

Arbor Tree, a leading scab contractor, currently pays 150 percent of the base rate, reflecting its exceedingly poor safety record.

These costs do not simply disappear. Because the base rate for Workers Compensation is periodically adjusted to reflect the overall industry accident record, Arbor's accidents eventually show up as higher rates for all tree contractors. Those costs must be reflected in the tree contractors' bids, which translate into higher costs for the contracting utilities.

Ultimately those costs find their way back to the utilities' customers: the ratepayers.

But Workers Compensation statistics are more than just figures in the cost-benefit analysis of some utility accountant squirreled away in a dark basement office. The statistics reflect the experiences of real people.

People like William John Sinczewski.

### Fell 80 feet

While working for Arbor Tree last year, Sinczewski fell 80 feet to his death while attempting to cut limbs from a pine tree near Kyburz.

## Tree Trimmers Conference Roster

Ray Banfill  
Dave Chapton  
Terry W. Dollar  
Clark Douhan  
Jeff Easley  
Bill Elliott  
Trevor Evans  
Alan Finocchio  
Skip Ginsburg  
Ramon Gomez  
Manuel Hernandez  
Gerald R. Horner  
Tim Johnson  
John Kenney  
David Lehman

Mark E. Linley  
Steve Montgomery  
Carlos Novoa  
Rafael Olivarez  
Frank Ortha  
Sandy Peterson  
Glenn Rakis  
Scott Safford  
Abel Sanchez  
Robert Svedeen  
Steve Swegle  
Jim Travis  
Delbert Wilshusen  
Richard Young

## TREE TRIMMERS

State regulations require that a tree trimmer must have 18 months experience in a certified tree program before he or she can trim unsupervised around power lines. If not certified, the trimmer must be under the direct supervision of someone who is certified.

A newspaper account of Sinczewski's death reports that "a friend" who was cutting with Sinczewski had walked away from the site only a few minutes before the accident. Even if this "friend" was a certified tree trimmer, he clearly was not directly supervising Sinczewski at the time of the accident.

Sinczewski had only 2 months and 19 days experience. He fell to his death because he cut his own safety line with a chain-saw, hardly the act of an experienced tree trimmer.

"He should never have been up in that tree in the first place," said Orville Owen, Local 1245 assistant business manager.

### Old-fashioned organizing

Local 1245 has responded to the encroachment of non-union contractors in much the same way that IBEW nationwide has responded to the rise of scab contractors in the building trades: with a good old-fashioned organizing campaign.

**"We need to be the best at what we do and that will make us competitive."**

*Jack McNally,  
business manager*

When scab contractors pay dirt wages, no legitimate contractor can compete. By organizing scab contractors and winning a decent contract for their employees, the union makes it necessary for all contractors to play on a level playing field.

During the September seminar for tree trimmers, McNally reviewed the union's protracted campaign to organize Arbor Tree.

It began in 1988, when Local 1245 petitioned the National Labor Relations Board for a union representation election at Arbor.

However, like unions everywhere in the 1980s, Local 1245 was faced with an employer who refused to abide by the spirit and letter of the nation's labor laws, and with a federal agency that refused to enforce those laws in a timely manner.

When Arbor challenged

the makeup of the bargaining unit, McNally repeatedly wrote to the NLRB urging a speedy decision so that an election could be held. Ultimately the NLRB affirmed the union's position on the makeup of the bargaining unit, but it did not reach this decision until March of 1989, nine months after the union originally filed its petition for an election.

Arbor appealed the NLRB's decision. Three months later the appeal was denied and an election was held, a full year after the original petition was filed.

Despite a sizeable turnover in Arbor's employees during the course of that year, the union still won the election and on June 15 the NLRB certified Local 1245 as the exclusive collective bargaining representative for Arbor Tree employees.

For over two years the union has attempted to negotiate a contract with Arbor. Arbor has responded with a barrage of stalling tactics that have made a mockery of the nation's labor laws, including cancelled meetings, unrealistic and incomplete proposals, and a general refusal to bargain in good faith.

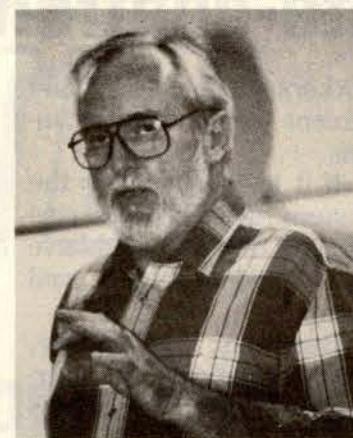
Arbor's tactics have prompted the union to file five separate charges with the NLRB.

Today, nearly 3 1/2 years after initially petitioning for an election, the union still has no contract with Arbor.

Meanwhile, PG&E has resumed negotiations with Arbor on extending their agreement.

### No surrender

Despite the obstacles they face, union tree trimmers are a long way from surrendering to the non-union forces.



lyptus overhang, or you've got a burning willow through the secondaries and six to eight feet through the primaries with no way to get a bucket to it."

In those situations, said Travis, "It's just you and that tree. When you come out of that tree you've got power. That's tree power."

That same sense of personal power can be transformed, through unity, into an even greater power, Travis said.

"The union starts with each one guy. You come down, you say 'I'll do this work for pride, but I also want my money.'

"What you do by yourself is one guy. When you have the company against a one and only guy, you're in a world of hurt. What you've got to do is organize."

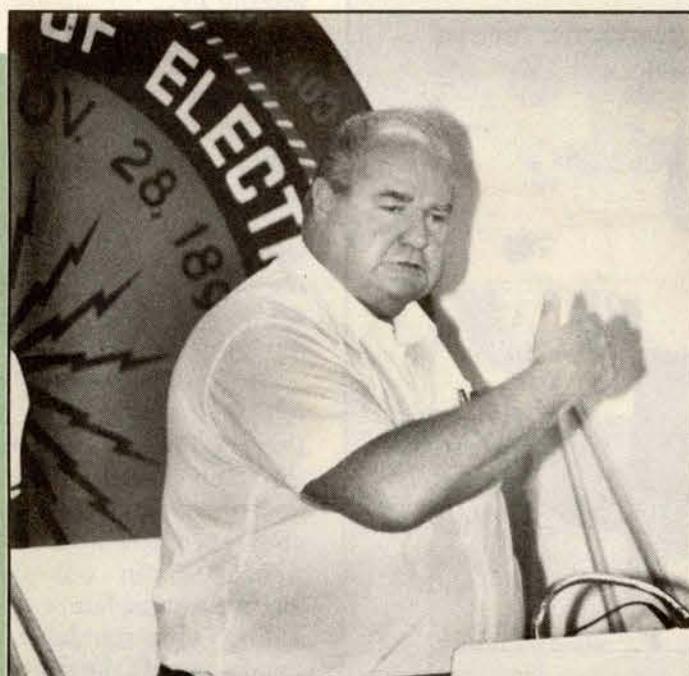
### "We've got some juice"

"With Local 1245 we've got some juice," Travis declared, noting that the union had poured over a quarter-million dollars into the effort to organize Arbor Tree.

Travis, who played a key role in that organizing effort, acknowledged that organizing is difficult in the tree industry, which has high employee turn-over.

"The best way we can keep union power is to inform and educate," said Travis.

"It's like real life: not everything is resolved in one day. It takes persistence. What we do is, we take it right onto the job everyday. Talking to new guys and trying to keep our tree power going for our own good."



Assistant Business Manager Orville Owen urges members to maintain solidarity in the face of continuing challenges from nonunion contractors. (Photo: Eric Wolfe)

They understand that if union contractors are driven out of the business, the only work remaining will be with scab contractors who pay less money, care less about safety, and give workers no voice on the job.

Speakers at the union's September seminar outlined two key elements in the battle to defend living standards for tree trimmers.

The first element, stressed by Business Manager McNally, is providing high quality work.

"We need to be the best at what we do," McNally told seminar participants, "and that will make us competitive."

### "Tree power"

The second element is something that Jim Travis, a union tree trimmer and a member of the Local 1245 Advisory Council, referred to as "tree power."

"It's when you're in those difficult situations," Travis told the tree trimmers assembled for the union seminar, the men who share his craft.

"You know what I'm talking about. It's when you're in a dead digger pine hanging over 60 KV, or a huge euca-

**"The best way we can keep union power is to inform and educate. It's like real life: not everything is resolved in one day. It takes persistence. What we do is, we take it right onto the job everyday. Talking to new guys and trying to keep our tree power going. . ."**

*Jim Travis, tree trimmer*

# How corporate-controlled media covers (up) labor news

By Richard J. Perry

During the 1960s and 70s, Ben Franklin covered the mid-Atlantic region for the New York Times, specializing in solid labor reporting. Then the '80s dawned. The country got a new leader in Ronald Reagan, and Ben got a new bureau chief who summoned Ben to his office to offer this advice: "Don't dull up my paper with labor stories," he said.

Media coverage of labor has never been anything to cheer about, but the Reagan years brought about a near eclipse. For the past decade, the lives of working people—those who make our economy and society run—have been routinely ignored by the media.

Columnists like to write that unions have lost touch with working people. The truth is, the media in this country have lost touch with working people.

This was confirmed in a study by a non-profit group called Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting. It was conducted by Jonathan Tasini, a journalist who covers labor issues for Business Week and the New York Times.

The study showed that network news programs in 1989 devoted less than three percent of their coverage to

workers issues. Only one percent was devoted to unions.

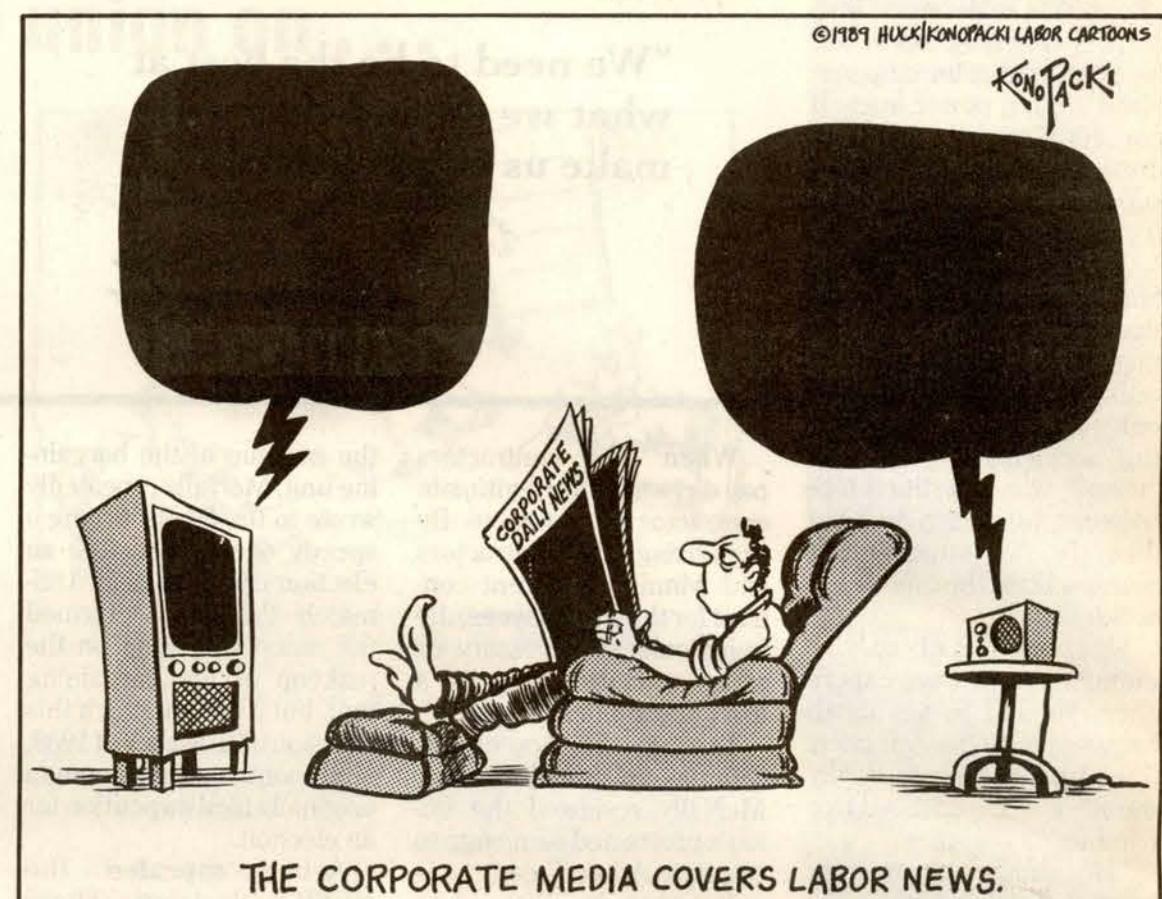
If it hadn't been for the Eastern Airlines strike, coverage of unions would have been "undetectable," said Tasini.

Business, meanwhile, gets tremendous TV coverage. On public TV, there's Wall Street Week. Commercial television offers the US Chamber of Commerce its own program, It's Your Business. Until "We Do the Work" recently began to break through this barrier with appearances on a few public TV stations, there were no national labor programs.

Newspapers are really great—they assign the labor beat, if they have one-to-the business department. That's like having the Republicans cover Democrats!

We have a whole generation of reporters who got through grade school, high school, college and graduate school without ever learning anything about unions. The labor reporter assigned by the Wall Street Journal to cover the mine workers' Pittston strike had never heard of John L. Lewis!

Remember when the auto workers lost a bid to represent workers at the Nissan



THE CORPORATE MEDIA COVERS LABOR NEWS.

plant in Smyrna, Tenn.? The New York Times ran a front-page story. Tasini asks: "Where do you suppose the story would have run if the union had won?"

No worker was ever ABC-TV's "Person of the Week". Workers are never interviewed as "experts", even though they know the most about safety and health is-

sues being discussed.

Unions are never given credit for their leadership in family and social issues that have a positive impact on an entire nation.

What effect does this have on our society?

For one, we are culturally poorer because the deeds and struggles of workers are withheld from public con-

sciousness. Decades ago, workers were extolled for their contributions to the community. Today, they are ignored.

Workers, as individuals, know what their daily experiences are like. When those realities are not reflected on the nightly news or morning newspaper, it only increases the level of alienation.

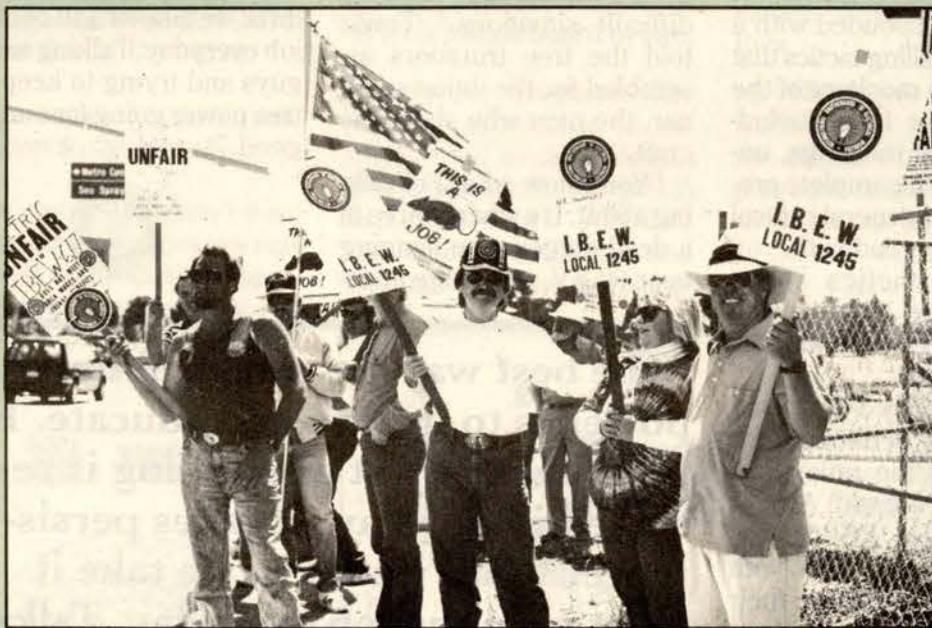
People spend half their waking lives on the job; yet the media treat work as if it were just a fleeting moment in the day.

The prime victims are young workers who know nothing of how unions can enrich their lives. All they know about unions is what they read in newspapers or see on TV. Which means they don't know anything.

Anti-union employers exploit that ignorance with threats, harassment and intimidation.

The result is that many young people will never have a chance to join a union. They face a numbing future of stagnating living standards, and our country will be the poorer for it.

(Richard J. Perry is secretary-treasurer, Union Label and Service Trades Dept., AFL-CIO)



**SOLIDARITY**  
Picketing Summerhill Construction in solidarity with union construction workers at the Emerald Bay jobsite in Foster City, Ca., are Local 1245 members (carrying Local 1245 signs, from left) Steve Fain, Barbara Fain, and Bob Quinn. Pictured right, picketing same job site, is Local 1245 member Leo Tablizo. These four Local 1245 members took a day of vacation time in order to take a turn on the picketline in support of fellow unionists. (Photo: Landis Marttila)

