

Mehaffey Presses For Pay Raise

DIFFICULT TO LIVE ON PAY

Accion presents the following excerpts from the testimony of General Mehaffey before the House Appropriations Committee on January 20, 1948 for the interests of its readers:

General Mehaffey: "...we have, for example... an entirely unsatisfactory housing condition in the Canal Zone. The housing for Silver employees is in bad physical condition, and I am absolutely certain that it cannot be maintained so as to stand up for another 15 years."

Cong. Norrell: "I think this Government has shown, or has tried, at least, to show the Panamanians that we are their friends, but if they are not going to lease us the bases to adequately protect the Panama Canal, I do not know how the other members of the committee may feel, but I do not feel that this government is justified in doing any more than keeping up normal maintenance until we go somewhere and dig a canal and have adequate bases for the protection of the same."

Con. Mahon: "I am not arguing for or against that treaty (treaty between US and RP., 1936) because that is not the issue before the committee, but I did feel that the record should show that, in my opinion, if all the facts were to be considered there would be two sides to this case as is usually true when any issue arises, and which is the right side perhaps history will tell."

Gen. Mehaffey: "...we have under study the revision of the cash relief system which now applies to the native employees of the Panama Canal. There are many superannuated or disabled silver employees who have worked perhaps 35 or more years for the Panama Canal or the PRR and are now being retired on a maximum of \$25.00, and it is practically impossible for these old people to go into Panama, rent a room of some kind, and live on as little as \$25.00 per month."

Cong. Engel: "You will recall that I was down there in 1946, and at that time, I felt there was justification for your recommendation and I also felt that the pay of the silver employees was low."

Gen. Mehaffey: "...the average pay of the silver employees is very low. It is in the neighborhood of \$70 per month. The increase in their pay since before the war have been relatively small. The cost of living, of course, has gone up tremendously, and I feel, from a very careful examination of this problem, that is extremely difficult for our silver employees to live on the pay which they are now getting and that some modest increase is necessary to prevent actual suffering."

Organize the Unorganized

Funds For "Silver" Housing Slashed

As critical as is the need for new housing, the House of Representatives slashed \$1,400,000 from the budget for expanded "silver" housing. Also cut was \$2,000,000 for "gold" housing.

When the Local was notified of the action taken on the budget, pictures and factual information was immediately gathered and rushed to Thomas Richardson, International Vice-President, in Wash. Brother Richardson expects to open some Congressional eyes by relating startling facts on "silver" housing.

He has received pictures of various "silver" quarters on the Canal Zone.

The bachelor quarters in Red Tank, for instance, houses 48 occupants. For the use of these, men there are, 4 toilets, 2 crude showers, and 2 sinks. Thus there is one toilet for every 12 men, 1 shower for every 24 men, and 1 sink for every 24 men. Some of the bachelors do their own cooking; consequently, every morning there is a bottleneck at the sinks with long lines waiting to wash themselves, obtain water for cooking, and wash eating utensils. The four toilets have had no seats for many months. Across the street from the bachelor quarters sits the squat, ugly "Titanic". This structure was so named by its earliest occupants because it is the largest building housing "silver" employees in the Canal Zone. It was built in 1906 and first used as a hospital. Today 288 occupants are crowded within its rat-infested and termite-eaten walls. The rooms are small and cramped barely large enough to allow an assemblage of three persons. The passage ways are wide enough to admit only one person. If you wish to pass someone approaching you, you have to bury yourself in the wall. There are 24 toilets (none with seats) and 24 showers - an average of one for every 12 persons. There are no wash basins unless one wishes to dignify the broken down, iron kitchen sink by that name.

The dirt and rat droppings in the ceilings have become so accumulated during the past 42 years that a jolt in the apartment overhead will send flakes of filth streaming in the room beneath. More than one person has awakened in the morning to find himself literally covered with debris from the ceiling.

The residents report that the building is a bug collector's paradise and has several species that could interest Zoos. It is not uncommon to find cockroaches, termites, rats, worms, and several varieties of snakes.

The \$1,400,000 would go a long way in wiping out slums like the "Titanic".

\$1,300,000 More For "Silver" Pay

The Canal-Railroad budget for 1948-49 has passed the House and is now before the committee in Congress. An analysis of the budget reveals "interesting" facts for the "silver" employees.

Next year's budget provides approximately \$1,300,000 more for "silver" roll pay than the present appropriation. The total payroll for approximately 16,000 "silver" employees is \$15,480,000. This compares with a payroll of \$22,000,000 for the 5500 "gold" employees of the Canal Zone. Thus the budget provides for an average annual "silver" wage of \$950 as contrasted with the "gold" wage of \$4600.

Testimony brought out the fact that the cost of transiting ship through the Canal was actually higher than the toll rates. This in effect means that the Panama Canal appropriation is actually subsidizing are not contributing their share. Consequently, active consideration is now being given to raising the toll rates. The following exchange between General Mehaffey and members of the House Appropriations Committee is interesting in this regard:

Cong. Engel: "Can you give the committee any idea as to what the percentage of increase (operating expenses) has been since 1938?"

General Mehaffey: It is about 79%.

Cong. Mahon: It just seems so obvious to me that the rates (toll rates for ships transiting Canal) should be raised that I want to explore the possibility of doing it rather rapidly."

STEP BOLDLY

(Continued from page 1)

tears to the construction of the Panama Canal." Explaining how they had to face the rigors of disease, dynamite blasts, and land-slides, he passionately praised their valor during the Construction Period and their loyalty during the two World Wars. He declared, "so-called 'silver' employees during two World Wars have slugged it out side by side with sincere loyalty to the U.S.A. against all enemies."

Touching the hard task the Panama Canal West Indian Employees Association had laid before them, he stated, "That Labor Organization did a wonderful job in ameliorating the conditions of the so-called 'silver' workers. The success depended chiefly on the sympathetic feeling of the Governor, which made progress slow. For instance, our negotiations for higher education for our children took sixteen years to bear fruit. The then Supt. of Schools flatly stated that he was diametrically opposed to higher education for children of the 'silver' employees."

Bro. Lewis pointed out the coming of the CIO to the Isthmus, its success and its necessity.

Back Pay Asked In Navy Case

Most Local 713 members will remember the case of Brother Hendricks, a Navy employee who was discharged unjustifiably. Failing to obtain his reinstatement after exhausting all grievance steps in the Canal Zone, the Union took his case to the Secretary of the Navy who ordered his reinstatement.

Since Brother Hendricks was out of a job for weeks, the Union attempted to secure pay for the period he was discharged. The case went all the way up to the Comptroller General in Washington who ruled that an employee cannot receive compensation for time he did not actually work.

Since this seems so clearly unjust and since workers in the United States invariably receive retroactive pay when reinstated after an unfair discharge, this whole matter is being appealed by UPW-CIO in the courts. Recently, the union brought a test case, entitled *Witner vs. United States* in the court of the claims. If this case is won, such employees as Brother Hendricks will reap the benefits.

Quotable Quote

"Most intelligent Americans today have grave doubts not only about the Un-American Activities Committee's methods, but even about its standing under the Constitution. It is time for American scientists to speak out and designate the Thomas Committee for what it is: the enemy not only of American freedom but of American science."

—Max Lerner.

He spoke in particular of the setting up of the grievance procedure, the successful accomplishment of the union in protecting the Panamanians with the right to take Civil Service Examinations, the setting up of a Classification system, UPW-CIO's testimony to the Langer Committee for higher wages, and the Resolution adopted by the International Executive Board on February 9th.

The speaker praised several Canal Authorities, saying, "...I have been in contact with some Great Americans, Governors, Executives, Heads of Departments, Supervisors and others. I know their feeling towards the so-called 'silver' employees... they are sincere, always were and still are... they share with us the joy of a hope for better conditions. Today I salute them. Others have by blind prejudice contributed much to the detriment of the so-called 'silver' employee, and this is directly chargeable at their door."

In concluding the Cristobal's Chapter Chairman pleaded with the workers to "Let us clasp hands and step boldly into the future with Faith in God, Fidelity to the Governments of the Republic of Panama and the U.S.A. and the Solidarity towards Local 713, UPW-CIO."

The Union Depends On You

You can't afford
To stay out —

Resolution By Cristobal Chapter

The following resolution was passed unanimously by the 1,000 members present at the Cristobal Chapter meeting on March 12th: WHEREAS: The Cristobal Chapter of Local 713, UPW-CIO, is fully conscious of the obligation under which we are subjected by the laws of the United States and the Republic of Panama; and

WHEREAS: The Cristobal Chapter, a branch, of Local 713, has adhered to the principles of true democracy, of which the United States and Panama are world-wide exponents; and,

WHEREAS: Local 713 and all its chapters having maintained an OPEN POLICY of doing business, and are also firmly determined to continue this policy through out the life of Local 713; and,

WHEREAS: Minority groups of the community, with brazen assumption of leadership are strenuously endeavoring to disrupt the operations of Local 713; and

WHEREAS: The loyalty records in the Canal Zone, in Panama and in Wash., D.C. stand as a strong testament of the tendency of the "so-called" silver employee, come what may, to defend with bood life and limb if necessary the American traditions of democracy and fair-play against all subversive "aims" or otherwise; therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the Cristobal Chapter representing its parent body, Local 713, stands ready to oppose the enemies of the United States and Republic of Panama; and be it

RESOLVED: That we of Local 7713 UPW-CIO are determined with the continued approval of the United States and Panama not to be confused nor discouraged by the attacks of adverse opinions on our efforts to better the wages of the underpaid employee and to improve his working conditions, and be it further

RESOLVED: That the Cristobal Chapter, representing a membership of over five thousand, stands solidly behind the Local Executive Board.

Evering Saves the Day For Bush-Cutter

Brother Eric Francis, an employee of the Building Division in Cristobal, was working with some painters who were attempting to rig scaffold. They complained that some high weeds and bushes prevented them from placing the scaffolds, and Brother Francis started to cut the bushes.

The foreman caught him with the machete and promptly suspended him for five days. Brothers Francis brought his case to Organizer Evering. Evering contacted the foreman and supervisor and after a visit to the scene of the bushcutting, it was established that Brother Francis was merely performing his duty. The suspension was lifted. The Union will continue to strive to see that our members are given as much consideration as the bushes.