

Debt Moratorium The Solution To San Francisco Strike Deadlock

California State Assemblyman Ken Meade told reporters at the U.S. Labor Party's city hall press conference on April 2 here that Congressman Ron Dellums (D-Cal) would soon introduce debt moratorium legislation into the U.S. Congress. Meade indicated that Dellums' move would provide federal backup for the debt moratorium and Emergency Employment Act legislation which he declared was the solution to the five-day near general strike in San Francisco.

Speaking at a picket line of striking municipal craft unions at city hall, the Oakland Assemblyman said: "I'm here at this picket line because the debt moratorium and Emergency Employment Act legislation which I have introduced into the California Assembly will solve the immediate crisis here in San Francisco and ultimately the world economic collapse."

The strike of 1900 municipal skilled craft unions began when the Board of Supervisors tried to put into effect "Proposition B," a law passed in the fraudulent November, 1975 election which would deny skilled municipal pay scales parity with those of private industry. When the Board of Supervisors announced that it would put the resulting 20 per cent wage cut for city skilled workers into law on April 1, skilled unions walked out. City workers of the Service Employees International Union and other unions who had been tricked into accepting a miserable 3-5 per cent wage increase through lies about the cost of their package, voted overwhelmingly to honor skilled craft picket lines. City transit remains shutdown, schools are barely operating, and long-shore workers have already refused to unload one picketed ship.

The U.S. Labor Party press conference, which issued a call to expand the near general strike around debt moratorium-EEA demands, represents a crucial turning point in the San Francisco situation. While the Labor Party's press conference was in progress, five leading area trade unionists who had or were about to commit themselves to attend were summoned to a special meeting. Immediately following this meeting, the Board of Supervisors offered to abandon its position that the wage cut was "voter-mandated law," and accepted the trade unions' offer to negotiate with a mediator, naming former mayor George Christopher. Following the KABL radio broadcast of the Meade statement, yesterday Mayor George Moscone declared on TV that it was conceivable that the Board of Supervisors might now be willing to declare a "state of emergency," the step necessary for the Board to change its own offer in the negotiations.

Strike For Debt Moratorium

Following hard on the Teamster national victory (see page 1), and announced Teamster support for the craft workers, the San Francisco general strike has the potential political muscle to force California to become the first state to make the debt moratorium law. If the Board of Supervisors backs down to stop a political strike for debt moratorium, the strikers will be granted their demands.

The situation is already regarded as so serious that Congressional intervention is underway with longtime Moscone associates Phil and John Burton (D-Calif) flying back to San Francisco April 2 to meet with the striking unions. While Burton was on route, his aide called the U.S. Labor Party for details on the USLP press conference where Meade was to appear, volunteering that Burton's office had discussed debt moratorium legislation with Congressman Dellums as well as with Meade and would do so with Congressman Herman Badillo (D-NY).

The pressure for state and Congressional action for debt moratorium will be upped today. The U.S. Labor Party is mass distributing a strike bulletin headlined: "Meade Debt Moratorium Bill Will Abrogate Proposition B." Meade's debt moratorium bill outlaws any state action which causes wage levels to fall below August 1971 real wage levels in manufacturing, mining, and transportation. If Meade's bill is passed now, not only would Proposition B be outlawed but every municipal contract agreed upon on March 31 would be reopened and declared illegal.

The U.S. Labor Party strategy is being piped into Central Labor Council union leaders, including international Longshore and Warehouse Workers Union head Harry Bridges and Teamster leaders who have been meeting in general strike strategy sessions continuously. Indicating the political climate in the city, police officers briefed on the strategy today responded by mapping out for the Labor Party the best church sites for distribution of the strike bulletin.

At the official opening of negotiations yesterday, USLP candidates Pat Dolbeare and Nick Benton walked in and presented all parties with copies of the Meade bill. The intervention and a 30-second interview with Dolbeare was aired on CBS-TV 11 o'clock news, as the commentator reported that debt moratorium would dissolve the dilemma between higher taxes and pay cuts in the city.