

Tacoma General Strike cont

the Metal Trades Council, uniting upwards of 20 smaller craft unions involved in the shipyard for joint negotiations.

Federal ship contracts were overseen by the temporary "Emergency Fleet Corporation," which refused to authorize raises during the war itself. In the aftermath of victory, some shipyards were willing to budge. Charles Piez, the EFC's general manager, overruled them. He threatened to cut the contracts of those yards that agreed to pay more. Facing intense political intransigence, the Metal Trades Council struck in late January. 10-15,000 Tacoma workers joined 25-30,000 Metal Trades workers in Seattle on the picket line. Shipyard workers in both cities needed each other's support to meaningfully shut down the local yards.

The Tacoma Metal Trades Council soon proposed other unions in the city join them in what they saw as a make-or-break moment for the local labor movement. The Metal Trades had rapidly grown to become the largest force in organized labor, with the massive labor force of the shipyards comprising perhaps 40% of the local union membership. Victory would cement labor power in a burgeoning new industry, while defeat would set the labor movement back years. Seattle's Metal Trades Council echoed their Tacoma neighbors in calling for a General Strike the following day.

The idea of a General Strike idea was already on some minds. San Francisco labor leader Tom Mooney was facing the death penalty for what many believed to be a frame-up. Rank-and-file agitation across the country sought to organize a nationwide General Strike with the political goal of freeing Mooney. Local unions had already been preparing for such a possibility in December, and dozens of Puget Sound delegates traveled to a Chicago convention to confer with thousands of delegates from other cities. The move for a local General Strike to support the Metal Trades circulated while these local labor notables were away. Tacoma unions opened up the strike vote to their membership. Returns available in the archives of the Pierce County Labor Council indicate that almost 70% of members voted in favor, though support was much higher among the metal trades.

February 6 was the chosen date. Tacoma, as well as striking unions from Aberdeen, planned to walk-out early in the morning but delayed the start until 10am to line-up with Seattle. The ranks of Metal Trades strikers were doubled by reinforcements from all the local unions. Streetcar operators and carpenters to barbers and candy makers all withheld their labor. For several days, unions essentially took over running the limited remaining functions of their cities. They organized canteens to feed the people, labor guards to defend them and break up conflicts, and issued selective passes for any work that needed to carry-on.

Seattle, Mayor Ole Hanson spent significant city funds arming middle and upper-class men to oppose the strike, and later went on a national tour capitalizing on his reputation as a successful counter-revolutionist. Tacoma's mayor Crockett M. Riddell was apparently more restrained in vocally opposing the strike. Yet armed opposition in the form of Army regulars posted with machine guns at key intersections materialized in the streets of both cities. Secretary of Defense Newton Baker ordered the 13th Infantry Division to deploy troops. The sight of troops from nearby Fort Lewis apparently had a chilling effect on the strikers in Tacoma, who called off their strike a day before Seattle.

The radical labor currents of 1919 did not immediately fade into the night. Despite failing to win the shipyard raises, local unions felt they had momentum for months afterwards and radicals retained prominent posts for several years. The reaction eventually rose in backlash, though; the shipyard contracts were eventually canceled despite employer victory on the raise issue, throwing thousands out of work. Yet 1919 would not be the last General Strike; in 1934 waterfront workers up and down the west coast shut down cities to finally win recognition for longshore unions. Many old-hands were still present from the strike 15 years prior.



SEE INSIDE: Rad Benefit Shows + More
From All 'Round the Sound

TACOMAS 1919 GENERAL STRIKE

A SHORT HISTORY

Sabotage Noise presents a short historical account by our friends with the Historical Seditions Zine Distro. They publish and reprint vital texts on radical and marginalized history and can be found tabling everywhere from Anarchist Book Fairs to punk shows to pride events. More at historicalseditions.noblogs.org

Local labor history nerds are intimately familiar with 1919, the year Seattle's unions all joined a General Strike from February 6 to 11. Far less known is that the "Seattle General Strike" was not confined to Seattle-proper. Workers in cities such as Aberdeen, Renton, and Everett struck or took action in solidarity. Most importantly, the unions of Tacoma were intimately involved in the conflict. Seattle's unions likely would not have considered such dramatic action without support from their southern sister city.

Yet Tacoma's General Strike has long been outshone by Seattle's star. The intimate minutiae of the strike in Seattle are detailed in scholarly and popular literature that could fill a bookshelf. Seattle's strikers were even memorialized in an 80s rock opera, *Seattle 1919*. By contrast, combing these various books and articles produces perhaps a couple pages of compiled information about events in Tacoma. In highlighting Tacoma's role in the region's first general strike, we hope to illustrate that radical organizing needs to look beyond the narrow boundaries of the marquee attention-grabbing cities.

Seattle and Tacoma both served as hubs for migratory labor and regional industry. Prior to and during World War I, Washington State hosted intense labor conflict. Workers often circulated through rural mining and logging towns, heavily exploited by an endless chain of labor contractors. Traveling "wobblies," members of the radical Industrial Workers of the World, found sympathetic ears for their agitation. The region was rocked by major strikes, including a statewide 1917 lumber strike and a longshore strike through much of 1916. The latter highlighted a profound weakness of many mainstream labor unions: their adherence to white supremacy. In aftermath some unions listened to their more radical voices and moved to ease segregationist restrictions, beginning to welcoming black members or allying with existing Japanese unions.

The Salish Sea was long home to wooden shipbuilding, but massive wartime federal investment spurred the creation of a new steel shipbuilding industry. Thousands of formerly migratory laborers, many wobblies among them, left rural jobsites for opportunities in the city. 40-50,000 laborers soon plied the Puget Sound shipyards. In both Tacoma and Seattle, shipyard workers were organized into

Cont.

FOOD SHOWS + BENEFITS

OLYMPIA

The Mortuary

@olymortuary

EVERY Thursday 6-8pm - People's Cafe Open Mic free/ donation coffee + tea by Wobbly Cup

Cooperative Cafe~~

EVERY 1st Sunday 1:30-4:30pm - Prisoner Letter

Writing Night (Jan 5, Feb 2)~~

Dec 14 7pm - Acapulco Lips + locals

Dec 18 4pm - Queerstrice: A Night of Music and

Comedy

Dec 21 6pm - Big Loud Solstice Spectacular

Anarchist Breakfast + Clinic Defense every friday
9am-noon @ Legion and Adams

BREMERTON

People's Exchange
(639 Callow Ave)

@peoples_exchange

EVERY Sunday 6pm - Queer Meetup~~

Every 4th Wednesday 2-4:30pm -
Harm Reduction Kit Making~~

The Charleston

@thecharleston333
(333 N Callow Ave)

Jan 18 - Benefit for West Seattle
Mudual Aid ft. Chin Up / Dead
Streets + MORE **!!

SEATTLE

Left Bank Books

@leftbankbookscollective
(92 Pike St)

Dec 11 7:30-11pm - Tetsuo: The Iron Man screening~~

Dec 15 6:30pm - Maggots and Men film screening~~

Dec 19 7:30-10pm - Neptune Frost film screening~~

Pipsqueak

@pipsqueak.seattle
(173 16th Ave)

EVERY 1st Sunday 3-5pm - Prisoner Letter Writing~~ Jan
5, Feb 2)

EVERY Wednesday 6-9pm - Queer/Trans Art Jam~~

EVERY 3rd Monday 7-9pm - Pipsqueak community
dinner (Dec 16, Jan 20)~~ Bring utensils, plate/bowl,

and mask

Seattle Anarchist Chess Club @seattleacclub

Dec 21 3-6pm - Chess night @ Couth Buzzard Bookstore
(8310 Greenwood Ave N, Seattle)

TACOMA

The Gravel Pit

@gravelpittacoma

Indoor show season, see Insta
for upcoming events

Solidarity Center
(1220 S 23rd St)

BOOKING: hilltopsolidarity@
proton.me

Bi-weekly - Feed the People
w/ Black Panther Party~~

NEED HELP BOOKING A BENEFIT SHOW?

WANT TO LIST YOUR COOL SHOW OR BENEFIT EVENT FOR MUTUAL
AID - LABOR SOLIDARITY - PRISONER SUPPORT - GENERAL ANARCHY?

CONTACT **SABOTAGE NOISE PRODUCTIONS!**

EMAIL: sabotagenoiseproductions@proton.me



@sabotagenoiseproductions

KEY

!! = SNP Hosted

** = NOTAFLOF

~~ - Free Entry

This zine
posted
monthly!



Kitsap County-Based Mutual Aid Benefit Show Booking

