

Troubled times at the port



Anchorage Daily News/Monte Paulsen

Union pickets scream at passing trucks driven by non-union drivers carrying goods from a barge chartered by Anchorage

Cold Storage that arrived at the Port of Anchorage Friday. The union is striking the wholesale firm.



Anchorage Daily News/Jim Lavrakas

Spraying a stream of water before them, a team of police officers heads towards a group of pickets, trying to disperse them.

The Anchorage Times, Sunday, November 1, 1981

Cold Storage: business unhurt

Teamsters claim strike harms firm

by Ellis E. Conklin
Times Writer

For more than four months, Teamsters Union Local 959 has battled Anchorage Cold Storage hoping to apply enough economic pressure to force the wholesale firm to negotiate a new contract with its 115 striking employees.

However, Cold Storage officials say the Teamsters' strike has had no harmful economic impact — that profits are high and business is as usual.

John Odom, general manager of Anchorage Cold Storage, said the strike has had no harmful effect on Cold Storage's ability to serve its clients. In fact, Odom said the company is making more money than ever before.

Odom said Cold Storage has adjusted well to the strike. "We were operating normally within a week" of the June 29 strike date, he said, adding that "people came down for jobs and were lined up down the street" within a few days after the strike began.

"It's terrific now," he said. "The people we have are happy to be working. They're very cooperative." Odom also said the Teamster-induced consumer boycott against such products as Coca Cola, Dr. Pepper and Miller Beer has failed to work. "Coke syrup sales are way up and so is Miller Beer," he said.

And as far as Carrs supermarkets' decision to join the Teamster boycott, Odom said, "People are just going to other places. There's been no profit loss. We're just doing more business elsewhere."

Teamster officials say Odom's contentions are wrong — that the large wholesale business is suffering, but can't admit it.

Said one Teamster spokesman: "Of course their going to say every- (See ODOM, page A-2)

Odom

(Continued from page A-1) thing is fine. But their losing big bucks and they know it."

The Teamsters say they have hit Odom where it hurts most — in the pocketbook.

A Teamster official, who asked that his name not be used, said he has figures from monitoring various grocery and liquor stores in town showing Odom's business has plummeted by 55 percent since the strike began. He said Cold Storage lost \$1.1 million during a six-week period.

"Talk to some of the old man's friends and they'll tell you he's hurting," he said.

The widely different claims by both sides in the well-publicized labor dispute serve to illustrate another point: the chances of settling the strike between the state's most powerful union and Milton Odom, the hardnosed millionaire owner of Anchorage Cold Storage, appear as remote as Jesse Carr's reigning over the city's chamber of commerce.

Neither side has budged an inch since 115 Cold Storage employees walked off their jobs June 29. There hasn't been a single negotiating session since the strike began. And none is scheduled.

Nearly 85 of the drivers, butchers, warehousemen, forklift operators and salesmen who went on strike are still on the picket lines today. They get \$280 to \$300 a week in strike relief benefits from the Teamsters. Those that aren't on the picket lines have found other jobs to keep themselves above water.

Some of those on the picket lines found themselves doused with water Friday evening when 80 longshoremen and Teamster pickets clashed with Anchorage police at the Port of Anchorage. Police hosed down pickets who tried to block the movement of Cold Storage cargo from a leased barge to a Cold Storage warehouse.

By Friday's episode, say Teamster and Cold Storage officials, the labor battle had transcended wages, working conditions or more fringe benefits. It has become a matter of pride and ego, an all-out struggle between Teamsters Local 959 and its leader Carr, and Milton Odom.

Odom has refused to sit down with Carr, saying any negotiations will be handled by his labor representative, Donworth Taylor & Associates, a labor consulting firm based in Seattle. Carr, whose union has had a contract with Odom for 26 years, has said that's unacceptable and that Odom must personally sit down at the bargaining table.

The Teamsters believe Odom has no intention of bargaining in good faith. They say the 74-year-old Odom is stubborn enough and rich enough to hold out against the Teamsters indefinitely.

Said one Teamster official: "Milt Odom has the money to keep this going on forever. What he really wants is to dissolve the union and he'll spend whatever it takes to do just that."

Doug Kenyon, a salesman at Cold Storage for more than five years before he joined the picket lines, said Odom has always "wanted us to walk. He tried to freeze us out. He never wanted a contract. And he's got the money to do whatever he wants."

Odom's personal worth has been estimated at figures ranging from \$20 million to \$150 million. A Fortune Magazine article several months ago placed him among the 50 wealthiest men on the West Coast.

Since the strike began, Odom has spent a small fortune, say Teamster officials, on leasing barges to haul his supplies, on hiring and training new employees and on convincing local distributors that he is winning the confrontation with the Teamsters.

Said Teamster spokesman Dean Berg: "It was evident from the beginning that they wanted to force a stalemate. He (Odom) wants to freeze out the union."

Milt Odom, who has been in the wholesale business here for nearly 40 years, was elk hunting in Eastern Washington this past week and could not be reached for comment.

Kenyon, who monitors Safeway among other stores to register the impact the strike is having on Cold Storage, said the wholesale firm has failed to keep its clients in supplies. He points to what he says is the dwindling supply of Coca Cola, Diet 7-Up, Dr. Pepper, and other soft drinks on the shelves.

A Safeway liquor store manager said she is out of 40 different liquor products which come from Cold Storage. "Some weeks it comes in. Other weeks it doesn't," she said.

John Odom denies that, saying products are coming in steadily from outside and that the company is experiencing few problems with its supply lines.

"That's ridiculous for him to say that," Kenyon said. "Those products he's bringing in on those barges are freezing because the vans aren't insulated."

Jack Diamond, who challenged Carr for leadership of the Teamsters earlier this year, said the "talk on the street is that the strike has been lost." Diamond said many Teamster members have complained that Carr should never have insisted that Odom appear at the negotiating table and that the Teamster boss called the strike "to get more money in the Teamster Trust Fund."

"When you have 5,000 members (of out 12,000 in the union here) not working, they are hurting," Diamond said.

Local 959's total assets, excluding the various trusts, dropped from \$10.6 million to \$8.9 million last year, according to records filed with the U.S. Department of Labor.

Berg said the strike has had no harmful financial impact on the Teamsters union and that the 115 striking employees at Cold Storage do not represent much money in the trust fund.

Berg said he suspects that Odom's reluctance to negotiate a contract stems from his desire to wage a test case against the Teamsters.

"You can't legally say you want to be non-union," he said. "But by negotiating in good faith and then hiring scabs, Odom can, after a year, go to the National Labor Relations Board and say the Teamsters haven't bargained in good faith and then the board can order a new election."

"All it takes is the money to make it that year," Berg said. "And (Milt) Odom has the money."

John Odom declined to say whether his father's intentions were to eliminate the union. "My main point is that we're not going to have somebody else run this business."

Meanwhile, the strike continues with no end in sight. Morale on the picket lines, said Berg, is good. "They absolutely feel they're right and it galls them that big money is more important than the working man."

The Anchorage Times

U.S.P.S. 025000

Published every afternoon Monday through Friday and every Saturday and Sunday morning except certain holidays by the Anchorage Times Publishing Co., 520 W. Fourth Ave., Anchorage, Alaska 99501. Mail subscriptions, including postage, per month in Alaska: Daily \$8.25, Sunday \$4.75.

Second class postage paid at Anchorage, Alaska, and at additional mailing offices.

© 1981 The Anchorage Times
Represented nationally by
Branham/Newspaper Sales
Volume 67 No. 303

PISTACHIOS
EXTRA JUMBO NATURAL
5 Lbs. \$34.00

Send check or money order to: 3840 Young Street Box #2
Anchorage, AK 99504
We ship C.O.D. call 277-4949