

Teamster strike halts operations

by Jeff Berliner
Times Writer

The strike by Teamster Local 959 against Sea-Land has spread to a half-dozen Seattle-based unions, halting the firm's shipping operations there and preventing boats from leaving Washington for Alaska, according to James Sand, a lawyer with the National Labor Relations Board.

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Since four Sea-Land vessels bring more than half of all consumer goods to the state in three weekly dockings at the Port of Anchorage, shortages could begin appearing in stores if the strike is not ended soon.

Sand said a partial settlement was reached Wednesday and an end to the strike may be in sight. In the partial agreement, the company has promised to turn over its cargo to union truck drivers.

Although the dispute has focused on Sea-Land's use of trucking firms paying less than the union wage scale, the company decision to switch to Teamster truckers has failed to halt the strike.

The Teamsters are now asking Sea-Land to pay back wages for about a year, and the union is also asking Sea-Land to pay damages for what it claims is Sea-Land's failure to live up to a trucking agreement.

A shipload of consumer goods on the containership Portland has been unable to leave the Port of Seattle, but Sea-Land has told officials at the Port of Anchorage that they expect the ship to leave Seattle tonight and arrive here Monday — two days after its scheduled arrival.

On board are perishable products, including meat, fruits and vegetables. However, the company often ships unripe produce expecting it to ripen in the 95 hours it takes the boat to sail from Seattle to Anchorage.

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Dispute

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The state's biggest grocer, Carr's Quality Centers, will not suffer any shortages since it has everything shipped on Sea-Land's competitor, Totem Ocean Trailer Express, according to Bob Klein, Carr's vice president. However, Safeway and Proctors both depend on Sea-Land to bring groceries up from Seattle.

Sea-Land customers have been contacting TOTE, and Wednesday night a TOTE vessel left Seattle bound for Anchorage with a full load, according to a company spokesman, who said TOTE vessels are not usually full in winter.

Discussions in the labor dispute now center on placing an undisclosed amount of cash in an escrow account while the company and the union continue to negotiate the back pay aspects of a settlement.

All this has been closely monitored by the NLRB, which first accused the Teamsters of an illegal secondary boycott aimed — not at Sea-Land — but at non-union trucking operations. A federal judge overruled the NLRB and found in the Teamsters' favor — agreeing that the Teamsters' real gripe lay with Sea-Land and centered over an agreement between the two.

That agreement was made at the time Sea-Land began phasing out its trucking operation more than two years ago. The NLRB is considering appealing the court ruling.

Sand also said a settlement is likely "since it is obvious that the legal course is going to take a long time."

The Teamsters have now demanded full documentation of all Sea-Land trucking operations from the time the company ended its own trucking operation up until the point Sea-Land agreed to resume sending cargo over the road in the hands of Teamster drivers, Sand said.

That demand has not been resolved, he added, noting that Sea-Land brings 1,100 containers into Alaska every week. Each one is loaded onto a truck and hauled somewhere in the state — often by different trucking outfits. And this has been going on for 80 to 90 weeks.

That's a lot of documentation to produce, said Sand. And it could represent a lot of back wages and damages if the Teamsters continue to tie an end to the strike to a cash settlement with Sea-Land.

Meanwhile, Sea-Land management has unloaded two vessels that have docked in Anchorage since the strike began. The other two ships in Sea-Land's Alaskan fleet are tied up in Seattle unable to leave.

One of the ships is loaded and ready to sail for Alaska, but the Masters, Mates and Pilots union has refused to man the tugs and pilot the boat out of port.

The other vessel cannot even be loaded, according to Sand, because Teamsters control the flow of cargo in and out of the port and all work has halted.

Joining the Alaska Teamster strike or honoring the picket lines are two other Seattle-based Teamster unions, two Longshore unions representing cargo checkers and longshoremen, and the union representing machinists and operating engineers.

With the major dispute between

Sea-Land and the Teamsters apparently resolved and the dispute "narrowed to back pay," Sand said "the employer is asking us to see the union's unwillingness to end the strike."

Sea-Land is again alleging that the Teamsters are trying to bully the company into ending its agreement to carry goods to Anchorage

Cold Storage — the state's biggest wholesale beverage distributor which the Teamsters struck more than a year ago. The Teamsters deny the strike against Sea-Land is aimed at Anchorage Cold Storage.

Sand said the NLRB has asked for documentation from both sides on the Anchorage Cold Storage charges and denials.

Friday, October 29, 1982



Anchorage Daily News/Tom Smith

A teamster picket keeps warm inside her car at the Port of Anchorage Thursday.

Sea-Land rivals move to fill void

By STEVE SEPLOCHA
Daily News business editor

Competitors of strike-bound Sea-Land Service Inc. Thursday discounted any potential supply problems in the state as a result of the strike by Teamsters Union Local 959.

A spokesman for Totem Ocean Trailer Express (TOTE) said his company and others have the capacity to move all the goods needed to prevent shortages and sharp price increases.

Meanwhile, Alaska Hydro-Train, announced it will increase its Seattle to Whittier barge capacity by 50 rail cars a week beginning next week.

Mike Cazalet, manager of Alaska Hydro-Train, said his company is prepared to add still another 50 rail cars a week should the need arise.

In Seattle, 30 containers of perishable goods and priority medical supplies that had been loaded on the Sea-Land container ship Portland prior to closing of the dock Wednesday, were returned to customers.

The union and company remained at impasse on the issues. A management spokesman

said the company agreement to neutralize all grievances was still in effect even though the union had rejected the offer. Union spokesmen were unavailable for comment.

Whether cargo carriers who compete with Sea-Land can prevent shortages and price increases remained unclear.

Everett Trout, vice president for operations of TOTE, insisted that consumers need not worry about supplies. He said that a combination of factors would prevent problems.

A portion of the demand can be met by space already available on competing carriers, he said. Trout added that additional space will occur as customers voluntarily delay shipment of non-essential items. Finally, he said, he was certain that customers would cooperate in setting priorities should the need arise.

Cazalet agreed with the overall assessment by Trout and said his company's added capacity would further alleviate any potential problem.

Should Alaska Hydro-Train increase to its full capacity it would still only be able to

handle about 250 additional containers a week.

That would leave about 400 containers that would have to be absorbed by TOTE and four or five other carriers since the shutdown has stranded about 650 containers a week. The 400 containers are equivalent to one-and-a-half Sea-Land shiploads a weeks.

All carrier companies contacted indicated they are receiving a great many more inquiries about service since the strike began. However, they agreed that the business people who have contacted them have not expressed any panic over supply problems.

The strike was called, Teamsters say, because Sea-Land backed down on a deal and allowed some customers to pay drivers less than union scale.

Sources close to Sea-Land management, however, have said the strike is a reprisal for the company's handling of goods destined for Anchorage Cold Storage — a wholesaler and distributor also being struck by Teamsters. Union officials have denied any connection between the two strikes.

The Anchorage Times, Tuesday, November 2, 1982

Sea-Land braces for blue Christmas

by Jeff Berliner
Times Writer

The four Sea-Land vessels which bring half of all goods to Alaska are being put in dry dock and the company is bracing itself for a long, "indefinite" strike — a strike which could last beyond Christmas.

As many as 750 workers employed in the company's Alaskan shipping business are now off the job, according to Sea-Land. That

includes 140 crewmen from the four ships, 100 Alaskan workers and up to 500 Seattle-area workers. The total includes blue- and white-collar employees and workers affiliated with a half-dozen unions in Alaska and Seattle.

Already the effects of the strike are being felt all along the West Coast:

- Alaska Safeway stores are suffering shortages of milk, produce and dry goods.

- Areas served exclusively by Sea-Land — Kodiak, Cordova and the Aleutian Islands — are seeking an emergency ruling from the National Labor Relations Board to forestall the possibility of critical shortages.

- The strike which has idled as many as 750 workers in Alaska and Washington has spread to Oakland, Calif., where Teamsters Local 70 abruptly ended its own contract talks and went on strike after

Alaska Teamster boss Jesse Carr paid a visit, according to sources.

- The supply of Christmas goods for the holiday buying season is in jeopardy, according to Sea-Land.

Christmas goods may not make it to Alaskan stores in time for the holiday buying season unless shippers book space on barges almost immediately or send Christmas gifts by air freight, predicted Sea-Land's Alaska manager, Jim

Davis. Davis said his company is normally busy at this time of year bringing Christmas supplies to Alaska along with food and routine consumer goods.

Eight Safeway stores in Anchorage and Fairbanks had shortages of milk, produce and dry groceries this weekend, according to Safeway district manager Bob Breager.

Shortages were not as bad as

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they might have been because Safeway had 84,000 pounds of meat, cheese and eggs flown into Alaska at double the cost of shipping by Sea-Land, said Breager. He said Safeway will "swallow" the extra cost.

Teamster complaints that Sea-Land was using non-union truckers to haul goods to market have been answered by Sea-Land's turning to union drivers, according to both the company and the NLRB. They describe the Teamster grievance as having been "neutralized."

Although Sea-Land has always used union drivers to haul cargo from the port, sometimes a second non-union trucker will "re-spot" the goods — deliver cargo to market from the warehouse or distribution point where the union driver left the goods.

However, that has not stopped the strike. Teamsters now say they want several hundred thousand documents — dating back to January 1981 — to calculate back pay the Teamsters say Sea-Land owes for paying drivers less than union scale wages, said NLRB lawyer James Sand.

He said Sea-Land has agreed to place tens of thousands of dollars in an escrow account while negotiators resolve the dispute. This has not stopped the strike either.

And there are no negotiations going on and none are planned. Carr has told Sea-Land that the union has a "broader" grievance, according to the NLRB.

This has prompted a probe into whether the Teamster strike is designed to punish Sea-Land for shipping Anchorage Cold Storage cargo. The Teamsters have been waging a long, bitter and unsuccessful strike against Anchorage Cold Storage for more than 16 months.