

Joseph R. Radish
Transcript from 5/8/07
A North American Labor Assembly on Climate Crisis
UFT, New York City

It's simply not fair. I've got to follow Mr. Ringo. That was a great speech! Thank you, thank you very much.

The issue of global warming, to be honest with you, I don't know that much about it other than I did see that Al Gore movie. It's just something that's kind of foreign to me. I'm not an environmentalist; I'm a labor guy.

What I can tell you is what's going on in the West Coast in the ports, what the situation is, and what our game plan is. That's what I'm going to do. I've already shared that a little bit with the previous group we had. Let me explain what's happening.

First of all, the ILWU, who I represent as the Vice President, represents all the longshoremen in every port on the West Coast. That's Seattle all the way down through San Francisco through Los Angeles to San Diego. We represent all the workers under one master contract.

For several years now, it has become a big issue in the port and particularly in Los Angeles, the pollution issue. Pollution levels in Los Angeles and Long Beach have gotten to such a point. They've had studies come out recently showing that people who live around the communities of the port are showing higher rates of asthma, higher rates of cancer. If those people are getting sick, then ours are as well because we're on the front lines with this stuff everyday.

A couple of years ago the unions said "enough's enough, we need to make a statement, we need to do something about this." We came out publicly, and we announced our Saving Lives Campaign. We were calling for the shipping lines and the stevedoring companies in the ports to clean up their act. Specifically, our campaign was targeting the ships, the big international

ships that come in and out of the ports of the West Coast, to reduce their emissions by at least 20 percent in 4 years.

This was a real difficult thing to do. I don't know how much you guys know about international shipping, but there are no regulations that put restrictions on ships because this is a foreign concept. They don't belong to the US. They don't belong anywhere, and they're just out there. Nobody can regulate ship emissions.

I'll back up even further. In Los Angeles, the number one emitter, the number one polluter in the basin is the port itself. The number one source of pollution is the ships. We felt that our contribution in this whole pollution question, our cleaning up pollution, would be for us to put pressure on the shipping lines to try to get them to reduce their emissions. We came out with our campaign announcing that we want these guys to reduce their emissions. We started taking steps to put pressure on the shipping lines, and lo and behold it really worked!

Last year, Maersk, the biggest shipper in the US, announced that it's going to start using low sulfur fuel in its engines. APL soon followed, so it was a really positive thing. Now how that plays into what we're talking about right now, we're talking about building coalitions, building alliances, not only here in the US but also globally.

Part of our strategy of our campaign was this: first, start with the longshoremen on the West Coast. We're going to start our program by educating ourselves first. That's what we did. First we started in Los Angeles; we made it an issue. We went to Portland; we made it an issue. San Francisco, Seattle, Tacoma; everybody got on board to start to understand first the importance of cleaning up the ports and second, to start taking actual concrete steps and putting pressure on the shipping lines.

So first we educated ourselves first in the West Coast, and then our next step was to try to educate our brothers on the East Coast, which was the ILA, which we're actually doing right now. Then we wanted to talk to our alliance of unions internationally. Through groups like the ITF and the IDC, we've talked to many other longshore unions throughout the world on

what we were doing, and how it was important to them to pretty much do the same thing as we were doing, not only for their own health and safety, but also for the health and safety of their communities. We went out and really actively promoted this program, and we've been fairly successful so far. I just wanted to share that with you.

There's a couple of types of speakers. There's someone like Jerome, who is very, very charismatic, a great speaker. And then myself, I'm more of a strategist. I like to get out there and make strategy and kind of make things happen. That's what we're doing on the West Coast. I hope that was helpful for you guys. It's great to be here. Last year was really a small group, and I did not even prepare for this. I was expecting five tables full of people. I get up and this is what I get. I get up and have to follow Jerome.

Thank you very much.