

## **TURLOCK IRRIGATION DISTRICT EMPLOYEES MEET IN A SHOW OF STRENGTH**

In a major show of strength, about one-third of the unionized workforce packed a large meeting hall in Turlock on March 27 after the Turlock Irrigation District blocked progress in contract negotiations.

"Our priorities are trying to get improvements in your pension plan ... and trying to get relief on growing health care costs," IBEW Local 1245 Business Rep. Lynne Morel told the assembled employees. "We want to get the District to change the way they calculate health care benefits."

Rich Lane, chair of the Local 1245 unit at Turlock, urged employees to express their concerns about these issues to their supervisors.

"When we speak with a common voice, they're going to convey that up to their boss. That's where the bottleneck is," Lane said. "Also, talk to others. Share information so you're all armed with the facts."

The unions declared an impasse in the negotiations after mediation failed to produce any significant movement by the District.

"I'm looking for you guys to start making a stand, because we've done all we can (at the bargaining table)," Employee Association President Brad Arnold told the assembled members.



**Rich Lane, Local 1245 Unit Chair at TID**



**IBEW Local 1245 bargaining committee member Ken Gross urges unity.**

Union members are especially upset by outsized salary hikes for TID management. Over the past five years, 142 management employees have received bonuses averaging \$478,000 a year, including a whopping \$688,000 budgeted for management bonuses in 2008.

But these are not ordinary bonuses—they are folded into the managers' base salary. "Every time they get a raise it compounds their salary. We're talking about a lot of money," one member said from the floor during the meeting.

## Big Table, Little Table

Bargaining with the District had its comic aspects, despite the serious issues at stake.

At the start of negotiations, the District met at the “big table” with both unions. When the unions put up stiff resistance to the District’s bargaining position, the District decided it wanted to split up the union delegation and meet with each union separately at the “little table,” as it was called. The unions went along with this procedure, too, said Morel.

“But we stayed united and continued to communicate with each other. The District couldn’t split us apart,” Morel said.

When its “small table” strategy failed, the District said it wanted to shift back to the big table, as if switching tactics might somehow distract the employees from their deep-seated concerns about pensions and health care.

Lane, the IBEW unit chair, urged members of both unions to put in for an hour or two of vacation time in order to attend a meeting of the TID Board of Directors on April 8.

“The board needs to see the faces of people who are being denied parity with other employers,” Lane said.

Fred Klingel, business representative for Operating Engineers Local 3, which bargains on behalf of the TID Employee Association, told union members that the District had the resources to make improvements at the bargaining table.

“Money is coming into this District—don’t let them fool you,” he said. “Stick it out. Don’t give up.”

Arnold, of the Employees Association, urged the union members to “help us win this battle for our livelihoods, for our benefits... You are highly skilled and highly motivated. This company needs you.”

It appeared that these appeals for solidarity were landing on receptive ears. With well over 100 employees in attendance, only one or two slipped out early. When the meeting ended, most union members stayed on to greet each other in an atmosphere that bordered on the festive, and lined up to sign petitions to the District.



**Bradley Arnold, President, TID Employees Association**



**IBEW bargaining committee members Aaron Baker, left, and Rick Brenes**



**Fred Klingel, Operating Engineers Local 3**

