

Standoff in City Light Revolt

BY DON TEWKESBURY

P-I Labor Writer

A full-scale workers' revolt aimed at overthrowing City Light Superintendent Gordon Vickery was urged here yesterday at a 12-hour meeting of about 800 dissidents who have walked off their jobs since Tuesday.

Encouraged by the defections of about 100 more of City Light's work force yesterday, the protesters agreed to continue their spontaneous walkout over the Easter weekend and another mass meeting will be held Monday morning at the Seattle Center.

At the end of the fourth day of the confrontation, none of the demands of City Light workers had been met.

And there was no indication that Vickery would be fired by Mayor Wes Uhlman, or that Vickery had any intention of quitting under fire.

Councilwoman Jeanette Williams, meanwhile, failed in her daylong attempt to arbitrate the matter between Uhlman and a seven-member committee from the loosely organized group of dissidents.

She succeeded only in extracting a letter from Uhlman which the committee did not read to its huge, waiting audience in the Center last night — indicating that it was because the letter was addressed to John Starcevic, business representative for Electrical Workers Union Local 77.

The workers are seeking a "universal" appeal to enlistees in the cause and have been rejecting all union links.

The mayor's office said the letter was addressed to the union leader because the city is legally bound to bargain with Starcevic rather than the workers-at-large.

In the letter, Uhlman had agreed to review the proposed suspensions of two foremen and review the disciplinary code — but not fire Vickery.

It was far short of continuing demands that have been made by the protesters.

A pep rally atmosphere prevailed earlier in the day in the Center as the protesters reiterated the previous day's list of five demands and cheered each new announcement of further walkouts — mostly by clerical help at City Light.

A big ovation greeted the 9 a.m. news that three

cashiers had walked off their jobs at the downtown City Light building.

The ill-defined goals and fluctuating demands apparent over the past four days obviously had become concentrated yesterday into a single demand for one "cure-all" solution:

The removal of Vickery from his job.

Another new proposal, which was approved by the assembly yesterday, called for the initiation of a petition drive aimed at having a three-member elected commission set policy for City Light and hire the superintendent.

A motion also was introduced that the City Council "review the political appointment" of Vickery.

Another resolution was passed to ask the City



—P-I Photo by Tom Broucett

CITY LIGHT EMPLOYEES JAMMED INTO THE SNOQUALMIE ROOM AT THE SEATTLE CENTER FOR AN ALL-DAY MASS MEETING TO PLAN STRATEGY

The Workers vs. Gordon Vickery

Vickery Target

BY WALTER EVANS

Five City Light employees yesterday leveled charges that Gordon Vickery, City Light superintendent, was a dictator who had driven morale to its lowest point in 23 years.

Vickery denied the charges, and said he had tried to work with the existing organization despite his mandate to make changes.

Elton O'Dell, appliance service foreman; Norm Sivesind, power dispatcher; Lyle Ellefson, engineer; and Floyd Boone, senior foreman in the meter section, met with The Post-Intelligencer.

Ellefson, speaking for the group, said: "John Nelson (former superintendent) backed the crews. Vickery says: 'I'll

look into it and take disciplinary action.' We've lost our dignity."

"We feel we have to have morale as well as discipline," O'Dell said. "We object to the military way the discipline is carried out."

"I just don't think that man (Vickery) knows what's going on in the field."

Boone said the men involved in the present disciplinary action, which prompted a walkout of City Light employees, could "give reasonable explanations for their actions," he added to discipline.

He added: "We've had so many rules that you can't work a day without breaking some of them."

O'Dell added that the disciplined foremen were

"given jobs on their qualifications, then when they made a decision, they were disciplined."

"We'd like some room to work in," Ellefson said. "I used to be proud of my work. Now I feel I'm a second- or third-class citizen. Vickery doesn't leave room for you to be a man."

Ellefson added that Vickery had brought in people from the outside of City Light who are management — rather than an engineer oriented. This, he said, would lead eventually to a fall off in City Light efficiency.

Vickery, apprised of the employees' complaint, said it "is obvious that with the strike we have a morale problem."

"But," he said, "I have a petition from some employees supporting my

stand. Probably 80, — maybe 90 per cent — of the calls we get from the public are investigated and proved untrue."

"I just give the call to the immediate supervisor and ask him to report back to me in the majority of cases the complaint is invalid."

"I don't keep a special file of complaints. I'd have to check to see if the supervisors did so."

Vickery said he had put in several systems to provide for employee input in suggestions — something that was not available to City Light employees before he became superintendent.

"My door is always open," he said. "Anyone can come and see me. I'll act when I get a complaint from a worker."

"The dignity of the individual has not been stepped on. Now I won't say some people haven't been chewed out."

"When they talk about stealing time or money — charges I've made — I'm talking about documented cases."

"I came here with a mandate to make changes. I have made them. Some of the changes I have made have been resisted. I had some suggestions to make a 'blood bath' and get rid of a lot of the people here. I've tried to work with the system, fitting the engineers into the program."

"I'm willing to let an objective committee come in and do a broad study of the job I've done for the past two years. ... I'll stand on that."

From Page A-1

Council to establish a board of appeals to review all of management's disciplinary actions.

Walkout leaders, who were initially spurred by the proposed three-day suspensions of two overhead linemen foremen, also maintained all their Thursday demands.

Those included rewriting the disciplinary code, with employee input; removal of the threatened suspensions and probation involving the two foremen; no retaliation against walkout participants; and the removal of Vickery.

During the day, it was obvious that the superintendent had become the prime target of the dissidents' wrath.

Nearly all of the angry verbal volleys were aimed at Vickery personally — with his ouster viewed by the protesters as the most desirable, quickest, all-encompassing answer to achieving all of the other goals and demands.

Meanwhile, the drive for additional participants to join in the protest was encountering mild success.

"The aim is to get everyone out of City Light building," said the walkout leaders, who asked members of the audience to enlist participation by their co-workers in the accounting and billing department and even the supervisory personnel.

City Light officials admitted yesterday that fewer people were working than the previous day — indicating that a number of clerical workers on two floors of the downtown City Light building had succumbed during the morning to the siren call of dissidents at Seattle Center.

"I can only guess that it might be as many as 100," a spokesman said.

Another 500 workers presumably were still on their jobs at City Light yesterday, although management said it could produce no accurate figures for either the total work force or the number of walkout participants, because of the unknown number of ordinary absences of sickleaves.

Though the first 200 participants in the unscheduled work stoppage were nearly all members of Electrical Workers Union Local 77, the walkout leaders claimed yesterday that 22 per cent of the audience were new from outside of Local 77.

It's not the union anymore, it's City Light personnel," a worker boasted to the audience.

The protesters also announced that they had received some verbal and written support from the police, fire and water departments.

History of Coffee Break Case

BY DON TEWKESBURY
P-I Labor Writer

It began with a coffee break.

When two Seattle City Light foremen were suspended for "goofing off" during that break, 300 of their fellow workers walked away from their jobs — and pay — to protest what they call the "last straw" of arbitrary discipline.

What's more, they believe the account of the coffee break incident told by relief line crew foreman Arnold Schroeder, a 14½-year veteran of the utility.

Suspended for three days and placed on probation with Schroeder, the crew from the same incident was Robert Whitlow, who has worked as an overhead lineman and foreman at City Light nearly 34 years.

Whitlow is due to retire June 1.

According to Schroeder, the crew finished working at 4:05 p.m. in an alley between 16th and 17th Avenues Southwest at Southwest Trenton Street.

He said the rules allow a 15-minute coffee break "whenever appropriate" during the afternoon, and the crew had not yet had a coffee break and did not want to remain blocking the alley with their equipment.

"I drove to a City Light sub station near 22nd Avenue Southwest and Delridge Way, Schroeder said. They arrived there at 4:15, had coffee and left at 4:30, he said.

The crew arrived at the City Light building at 4th and Spokane Street at 4:45 and their scheduled shift ended at 4:50, according to Schroeder.

The foremen were subsequently advised by City Light officials that a citizen, who operates a business a block from the substation, had called City Light to say the trucks had been parked 30 minutes at the station.

Schroeder said it has been his experience that "no matter where you park the truck, the public is going to wonder why it's there."

Under a set of penalties published March 21 to correspond to what City Light officials say have been a long-standing list of infractions, the two men were placed on probation for two years in conjunction with infraction number 8.12.

That involves: "Violations of City Charter, Civil Service Rules, Dept. Policies or rules or specific directives not listed in the Department Policy Manual."

Schroeder reported knowing all about that set of infractions and the establishment of the stipulated penalties for each.

However, he does not "recall ever seeing" the memorandum (a specific directive not listed in the Department Policy Manual) which he admits "we violated."

That memorandum to foremen and other men in charge (dated May 7, 1970) states:

"When you have completed your work for the day, you are to go directly to your headquarters at normal speed; do not remain parked on job site, do not drive in a circuitous route, do not drive in at a low speed, do not go elsewhere to park."

City Light Supl. Gordon Vickery said yesterday that Schroeder and Whitlow "were accused of improperly utilizing crew time on the basis of citizen complaints received by the Lighting Department."

"An investigation of the citizen allegations indicated that, in fact, Mr. Whitlow and Mr. Schroeder, after finishing a job late in the afternoon, took their crews to a secluded location and did nothing for 20 minutes or more until close to quitting time."

"It is well understood that it is impractical to begin a major job when only an hour or so is left in the working day."

"Mr. Whitlow was reprimanded for a similar offense in 1952."

Vickery noted the existence of the 1970 memorandum from general overhead supervisor W. S. Linscott and another (dated Oct. 29, 1973 from Wall and Sicker, assistant director of the distribution division) indicating that a foreman is responsible for the efficient use of crew and crew time.

"On the strength of these documents, Mr. Sicker and Mr. Ken Hunich (director of the distribution division) recommended suspension for three days of Schroeder and Whitlow."

"To date these suspension orders have not been signed."

When the sympathy walkout occurred, Vickery agreed to hold the action in abeyance and said he would discuss the matter further, but only if the dissidents returned to their jobs first.

Vickery also says that Electrical Workers Union Local 77 was given a chance to help write the disputed disci-

plinary code but did not take the opportunity.

He said there had been an informal agreement with Local 77 in January that written disciplinary regulations were needed. The local, plus the Joint Crafts Council and Local 17 of the Professional and Technical Engineers Union were invited to help formulate rules, he reported.

The other unions participated but Local 77 dropped out after the first meetings and made no response when a copy of the proposed code finally was circulated, Vickery said.

McDougal, a walkout leader, Al McDougal said a union representative attended two meetings but was told the sessions were "informal, not democratic."

McDougal said the union made no response to the drafted code because it was not received until April 3, although it was designated as having taken effect March 21.

The protesters, mostly from Local 77, want — among other demands — to have the disciplinary code rewritten, with employee representation.

"No one can work a full day without violating one of the rules, if you wish to enforce it strictly," one worker contended.

This includes Vickery himself, according to the walkout leaders, who charged yesterday that Vickery used offensive language in conjunction with the suspension.

Vickery would be due 100 days on probation if there was strict enforcement of a rule against "any act or language which adversely affects morale," according to one of the dissenters.

Among other potential probationary periods for generally-worried infractions are:

- 120 days "when there is evidence of misunderstanding and the employee has not attained personal 2500" (Employ Department relations are not adversely affected).
- Two years for "acts which discriminate against any employee because of race, sex, color, marital status, religion, national origin or age."
- 100 days for "conscious misconduct" which adversely affects or reflects unfavorably on the Department.
- 30 days for "personal ineffectiveness, poor appearance, disagreeable habits."