

Justice Finally Prevails at Avondale

Avondale, Louisiana, shipyard workers will soon have the union they voted for in 1993. It took the sale of the shipyard to Litton Industries, Inc., to break the bitter antiunion campaign of firings, harassment, intimidation and legal maneuvering by Avondale management.

Throughout the historic six-and-a-half year struggle, the shipyard workers showed unwavering solidarity in their determination to have a union. That determination was displayed dramatically when the new owner agreed to card-check recognition. With one year allowed to sign up 2,100 for a majority, far more than that signed union cards in less than two weeks.


For the IBEW, this triumph means an addition of about 800 workers to the membership roster in the Fifth District. "James Anderson held together a safety committee of over 200 Avondale volunteer organizers who endured tremendous stress and exhibited incredible patience during this long campaign—and that's a victory in itself," said Gil Bateman, Director of the IBEW Government Department. Anderson is an IBEW International Representative in the Fifth District.

Formerly an independent, publicly-owned facility under the infamous union-hater Al Bossier, Avondale was purchased in August by Litton Industries, Inc., owner of Ingalls Shipyard in Pascagoula, Mississippi. IBEW Local Union 733 has represented more than 1,300 electrical-electronic workers at Ingalls in Pascagoula for decades, and the AFL-CIO Metal Trades Department has represented the remainder of the 10,000 employees in the work force since 1940. By early November 1999, the union and Litton managers agreed to use best efforts to resolve all outstanding NLRB and OSHA charges. The company also agreed to neutrality regarding union representation, and signature gathering began for card check recognition.

Shipyard workers lined up, often dozens deep, to sign union petitions

carried by their coworkers. On November 30, Litton Industries, Inc. recognized the union. The final step in this process is certification by the NLRB in early 2000.

The IBEW commitment to Avondale workers was shared by the many unions of the Metal Trades Department, AFL-CIO, including the Painters, Boilermakers, Plumbers and Pipefitters, Iron Workers, Carpenters, Operating Engineers, Sheet Metal Workers, Machinists, Asbestos Workers and Laborers.

For years, workers at Avondale endured dangerous working conditions and below industry wage rates with little dignity and respect for the work they performed. (See the June 1998, "Updates on Labor Struggles" and November 1998, "IBEW Currents," of the *IBEW Journal*.) Avondale was the only non-union facility among the nation's six big shipyards and had the worst health and safety record of any U.S. shipyard receiving Navy contracts. "The story of the Avondale workers is an inspiration to workers everywhere to take a stand for their rights and a voice at the bargaining table," Bateman said. 



From left to right are Litton Avondale VOC members John Caciabauda, Jorge Martinez, Todd Terrington, Kevin Doris, Moses Coleman, Jr., Clarence Smith, Jr., Andre C. Rodrigue, Sr., George Debelis, Sr., Merland Farria, James P. Page and International Representative James J. Anderson (center).