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Blind workers strike, ask for pay increase, benefits

LUBBOCK (AP) — Fifteen workers at the Southwest Lighthouse for the Blind are walking a picket line outside the facility, demanding they be paid the same wages as their co-workers who do not have vision problems.

The workshop employees went on strike last week after they were told they would have to pay \$65 a month for health care insurance.

The striking workers are asking that all blind workers be given the \$3.35-an-hour minimum wage earned by sighted employees instead of the present \$2.05 wage which is only a percentage of the minimum wage.

They also want the company to pay for health insurance for employees who have vision problems instead of requiring the employees to pay the monthly insurance fees.

"I think it's about time for some changes to be made," said Teresa Wiggins, 28, who picketed outside the Lighthouse Monday morning.

"I've been here since 1984 and there's hardly anything here for the blind. We need better opportunities."

The 15 workers who left their workshop jobs last week also want assurances that their jobs and pay won't be affected by the walkout after they return to the job.

Wiggins grosses \$320 a month, an amount supplemented by a small Social Security check.

But her rent alone is \$320 a month and she has a seeing-eye dog for whom she must pay.

"Some of (the workers) also pay \$20 a month for transportation in the Lighthouse van," said William Harmon, a former workshop employee and president of the Lubbock Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind.

"They would be losing \$85 a month out of a \$320-a-month income" with the health insurance fee requirement that would affect the blind workers.

Dick Edlund of the Kansas City, Kan., office of the National Federation of the Blind told the Lubbock *Avalanche-Journal* that under federal law, blind workers can be paid only 25 percent of wages paid to non-blind workers.

The Lighthouse, which provides jobs for blind people, is under federal contract to produce military hel-

met pads and chin straps.

The facility's director, Dale Odom, declined to comment on the walkout or whether the strike would affect the Lighthouse's ability to fulfill the military contract depending on how long the walkout stays in effect.

Meanwhile, picketers are circulating union cards from the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 577 and have been talking to a

representative from the union.

If a majority of Lighthouse workers sign the cards, the Teamsters could ask the National Labor Relations Board to approve an election of Lighthouse workers to decide on union membership, said John Stinson, assistant business representative of the Teamsters local.

The NLRB approval would ensure a successful union organizing attempt.

Officials: Disaster may make orphans

RAMSTEIN, West Germany (AP) — The death toll in the worst crash at an air show rose to 49 Tuesday, and officials feared some children hospitalized with severe burns had been orphaned because no one inquired about them.

The Pentagon said six Americans were among those killed when three Italian jets collided Sunday at the U.S. Air Base in Ramstein, one hurtling into the crowd in flames.

West German officials said two people died of burns Tuesday, raising their death toll to 49. They said 14 had been identified, including the three Italian pilots. None of the 14 was a U.S. citizen.

Chief Pentagon spokesman Dan Howard said the latest U.S. count put the number of confirmed fatalities at 40, including six Americans, four Germans, three Italians and 27 people of unknown nationality. Of the six Americans, two were active-duty military personnel, three were dependents and one is unknown, Howard said.

The Defense Department was trying to resolve its conflicts in the casualty counts, he said.

The latest Pentagon count also showed 363 individuals injured, of whom 41 were Americans and 322 were Germans, Howard said.

Four U.S. burn victims were flown to the Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas, for further

treatment. Surgeons and other medical staff took nearly an hour to move the blanket-covered patient from a military ambulance onto a 141 U.S. Air Force transport plane.

The West German *Bild* newspaper said three children were hospitalized with serious burns but no one inquired about them, leading to speculation their parents had been killed in the accident.

In Udine, Italy, the commander of the Italian stunt-flying team that the team's soloist, Lt. Col. Nutarelli, had caused the crash when he reached the point where jets intersected too soon and too

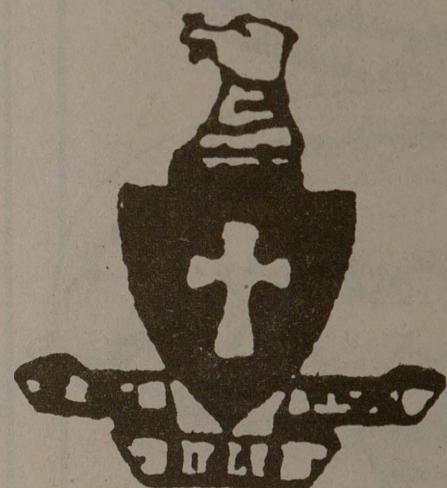
Lt. Col. Diego Raineri, who was coordinating the team's maneuvers from a control tower when the collision occurred, spoke to reporters shortly before the remains of three pilots killed in the crash arrived home. About 2,000 people were at the airport when the jets arrived.

In downtown Ramstein, about 100 members of the leftist Green Party and their supporters took to a vigil Tuesday evening. They pressed shock over the accident, called for a permanent ban on military air shows.

Authorities said they were deluged with pleas from people seeking information on family members.

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