The International Longshore and Warehouse Union has approximately 42,000 members in over 60 local unions in the states of California, Washington, Oregon, Alaska and Hawaii. An additional 3,500 members belong to the Inlandboatmen’s Union of the Pacific, which constitutes the Union’s Marine Division. Another 14,000 members belong to the autonomous ILWU Canadian Area.

The organization of the ILWU began in 1934 when it was the Pacific Coast District of the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA), with headquarters in New York. The ILA was affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL), which was identified with conservative politics and an approach to organizing narrowly focused on skilled craft workers.

The membership of the Pacific Coast District voted to disaffiliate from the ILA in the summer of 1937, and formed itself into the ILWU as an independent union. The new union soon affiliated with the militant Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)—based primarily in the newer mass production industries like auto, steel and rubber—which sought to unionize all the workers in an industry, skilled and unskilled, into one union for maximum unity and strength. This approach was known as industrial unionism.
THE INTERNATIONAL UNION

The ILWU’s internal structure was put in place by delegates to the Union’s first International Convention in 1938, and later modified by the 1945 Convention. The highest governing body of the Union is the International Convention, which, since 1985, meets every three years. The Convention is made up of delegates elected by direct rank-and-file vote in each local or affiliate.

The Convention has the authority to adopt resolutions and statements of policy on political, economic, and other issues, and to amend the International Constitution which, according to the Preamble, serves to “guide our conduct and protect our democracy within the union” by defining the rights and responsibilities of ILWU members, local unions, International Officers, affiliates, and decision making bodies such as the International Convention and Executive Board.

International Officers and members of the International Executive Board are nominated at the Convention and elected later in direct rank-and-file vote by secret ballot. At the present time there are four such officers (an International President, two Vice Presidents, and a Secretary-Treasurer) who run the day-to-day affairs of the Union and supervise the staff. The Titled Officers also make up the National Organizing Committee, which coordinates and administers funds and personnel used in organizing activities throughout the Union.

The International Executive Board, which meets at least three times a year, is the highest governing body of the Union between conventions. The Board has the authority to take all actions necessary to implement the provisions of the Convention and the decisions of the Convention delegates, including any necessary adjustments in the budget.

ILWU INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

The “International” of the ILWU is made up of the Titled Officers, field staff, professional staff, and clerical workers. The International coordinates the many constituencies of the ILWU: divisions, regions, locals, and industrial/occupational groupings. In practice, the International centralizes and consolidates the knowledge and experience of the membership—primarily as expressed in delegated bodies such as caucuses, conventions, district councils and the International Executive Board—and brings that collective wisdom to bear on contract administration, organizing, and the implementation of policy.

Since 1945, the principles underlying the role of the International have been service to the locals and strengthening unity between the many parts of the Union. The current concept of the role of the International derives from the post-World War II era when the ILWU came into its organizational maturity as an international union with a solid foundation in many industries beyond its base in long-shoring. Between 1945 and 1949 the International Convention authorized reorganization of the International into a departmental structure to better serve the membership. Division of work into departments such as Administration, Publicity, Research and Education, and Organizing, allowed for effective use of the International’s resources and personnel and a more timely response to requests for assistance from the locals and the rank and file. In each department, staff and clerical workers are assigned to work under the direction of International Officers. Duplication of effort is minimized, and it is easier to identify and fulfill organizational priorities.

These changes were accompanied by other innovations in 1945 to more effectively represent the needs and interests of the ILWU on a national and international level, such as the creation of the Washington Office in the nation’s capital. To more effectively represent the International Union in local areas, and to coordinate the implementation of ILWU policy and programs, particularly in the realm of organizing and political action, the Union also put in place a field staff of organizers and International Representatives under the supervision of Regional Directors, all of whom work under the direction of the Titled Officers.

Areas of work since 1945, with only slight modification, have been:

- Publicity/The Dispatcher
- Research/Education/Health and Safety
- Political Action
- Administration/Finances
- Organizing/Field Services
- Operating under constitutional limits on executive authority, the departments do not and cannot impose policy or programs on the locals. Local autonomy in this context means that the locals are responsible for requesting and making use of International services, and for implementing ILWU programs.

In relation to organizing, for example, the collective wisdom through the 1980s was that rank and file were the most effective organizers, and that the most successful organizing campaigns were those involving the mobilization of an entire local. In this framework, the development of staff services to supplement and complement the work of the Titled Officers was not to take the place of organizing efforts by locals and the rank and file, but to make local activity more effective through efficient allocation of the International’s resources in response to local requests for assistance—and through coordination with other locals and regions.

THE LOCAL UNIONS

Each local has its own constituency, which guarantees democratic procedures, controlled by the rank and file, and spells out the duties of the various officers and commit-
the Caucus then elects from among contract negotiations and develop a
Oregon and Washington.
three-year terms by members of the Committeemen," who are elected for two additional members called "Coast
International President and Vice
tions of Longshore Division policy.
and procedures, and discusses ques-
tary, has been the Longshore Division,
its own Area officers and have their
port industries. Members elect their
stitutions and bylaws.
affairs based on the IBU's own con-
ern of the Pacific Coast Contract.
The Marine Division also includes
the Marine Division of the ILWU
workers in Hawaii ports are not normally paid to the Longshore Division. They are mem-
and negotiators and file. However, if the membership
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Greenwich, Connecticut. In 2000, by Convention
pensioners in the life of the
ILWU whose members receive life-
status of the "autonomous affiliate" of the
Association. In 2000, by Convention
Pacific Coast Pensioners Association,
are chartered under the ILWU
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resolution in 2000 to estab-
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area of the ILWU's geographical juris-
Congress as fraternal
Auxiliaries and the PCPA are seated
vote in ILWU International elections
ILWU are generally set by the consti-
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different locals throughout the Islands,
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1950s from the militant cannery and
was entirely male, women family
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Contract.
I. A Union is built on its members. The strength, understanding and unity of the membership can determine the union’s course and its advancements. The members who work, who make up the union and pay its dues can best determine their own destiny. If the facts are honestly presented to the members in the ranks, they will best judge what should be done and how it should be done. In brief, it is the membership of the union which is the best judge of its own welfare; not the officers, not the employers, not the politicians and the fair weather friends of labor.

Above all, this approach is based on the conviction that given the truth and an opportunity to determine their own course of action, the rank and file in 99 cases out of 100 will take the right path in their own interests and in the interests of all the people.

II. Labor unity is at all times the key for a successful economic advancement. Anything that detracts from labor unity hurts all labor. Any group of workers which decides to put itself above other workers through craft unionism or through cozy deals at the expense of others will in the long run gain but little and inevitably will lose both its substance and its friends.

No matter how difficult the going, a union must fight in every possible way to advance the principle of labor unity.

III. Workers are indivisible. There can be no discrimination because of race, color, creed, national origin, religious or political belief. Any division among the workers can help no one but the employers. Discrimination of worker against worker is suicide. Discrimination is a weapon of the bosses. Its entire history is proof that it has served no other purpose than to pit worker against worker to their own destruction.

IV. “To help any worker in distress” must be a daily guide in the life of every trade union and its individual members. Labor solidarity means just that. Unions have to accept the fact that the solidarity of labor stands above all else, including even the so-called sanctity of the contract. We cannot adopt for ourselves the policies of union leaders who insist that because they have a contract, their members are compelled to perform work even behind a picket line.

Every picket line must be respected as though it were our own.

V. Any union, if it is to fulfill its appointed task, must put aside all internal differences and issues to combine for the common cause of advancing the welfare of the membership. No union can successfully fulfill its purpose in life if it allows itself to be distracted by any issue which causes division in its ranks and undermines the unity which all labor must have in the face of the employer.

VI. The days are long gone when a union can consider dealing with single employers. The powerful financial interests of the country are bound together in every conceivable type of united organization to promote their own welfare and to resist the demands of labor. Labor can no more win with the ancient weapons of taking on a single employer in industry any more than it can hope to win through the worn-out dream of withholding its skill until an employer sues for peace. The employers of this country are part of a well-organized, carefully coordinated, effective fighting machine. They can be met only on equal terms, which requires industry-wide bargaining and the most extensive economic strength of organized labor.

VII. Just as water flows to its lowest level, so do wages if the bulk of the workers are left unorganized. The day of craft unionism – the aristocracy of labor – was over when mass production and modern methods were introduced. To organize the unorganized must be a cardinal principle of any union worth its salt; and to accomplish this is not merely in the interest of the unorganized, it is for the benefit of the organized as well.

VIII. The basic aspiration and desires of the workers throughout the world are the same. Workers are workers the world over. International solidarity, particularly to maritime workers, is essential to their protection and a guarantee of reserve economic power in times of strife.

IX. A new type of unionism is called for which does not confine its ambitions and demands only to wages. Conditions of work, security of employment and adequate provisions for the workers and their families in times of need are of equal, if not greater importance, than the hourly wage.

X. Jurisdictional warfare and jurisdictional raiding must be outlawed by labor itself. Nothing can do as much damage to the ranks of labor and to the principle of labor unity and solidarity as jurisdictional bickering and raiding among unions. Both public support and strike victories are jeopardized by jurisdictional warfare.

This code for rank and file unionism is implemented by the membership’s participation in organization, negotiations, strike machinery, contract enforcement and every other aspect of union life. Thus, its discipline springs out of participation, conviction and the right of the membership to decide its own course of action. The above principles and steps to implement them, and an informed and alert membership make the union what it is.

The ILWU Constitution: Article III, Objectives

The objectives of the organization are:

1. First, to unite in one organization, regardless of religion, race, creed, color, sex, political affiliation or nationality, all workers with-in the jurisdiction of this International.

2. Second, to maintain and improve the wages, hours and working conditions for all of its members without discrimination;

3. Third, to educate the membership of this organization in the history of the American labor movement and in present day labor problems and tactics;

4. Fourth, to secure legislation in the interests of labor and to oppose anti-union legislation.