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The TraPac incident proved that our employers are more concerned with productivity and profit than security and safety.

By James Spinosa
ILWU Internationally President

The container explosion at the Port of Los Angeles April 28 shattered any notion that we have security or safety in U.S. ports. This container’s abbreviated voyage over highways, through port gates and nearly onto a ship broke almost every security and safety protocol, from the Department of Transportation and the Maritime Transportation Security Act (MTSA) and the new Coast Guard regulations. Only its columns with the false designation of hazardous material and treated as such.

The seven months after the container was driven over interstate highways to the terminal without a hazardous materials placard, a violation of Dept. of Transportation regulations. The driver most likely was not licensed to haul hazardous materials, but we may never know for certain. The terminal has no record of the driver, though it allowed him entrance. A TraPac superintendent dismissed the union’s concerns about the failure to check the driver’s identification with the less than reassuring comment that they didn’t bother with such formalities anymore, because half the truckers’ licenses are phony anyway.

In the past, an FAA container was sent to the trouble-winning facility without a placard, the driver couldn’t be located. If the employers and the government don’t heed the wake-up call in this explosion, we fear much worse catastrophes to come.
By Steve Stallone and Marcia Rein

In less than a minute on April 28, a container exploding in the Port of Los Angeles exposed all the threats the Congressional hearings, government agency regulations and industry press hand-wringer on port security have never effectively addressed.

“Doing the container violated nearly every rule of shipping that could be violated, from how it was packed to being transported without proper warnings to being waved through the gate without necessary information or inspection,” said Dave Arian, president of longshore Local 13.

The container, bound for Micronesia and about to be loaded aboard the Micronesian Heritage at the Trans Pacific Container Service Corp. (TraPac) terminal, had been packed and shipped by a private party. It slid through the gate even though it lacked a proper seal and manifest. It was closed with only a padlock, supposedly a violation of terminal rules, and its contents were described in the FAK, or “freight of all kinds,” a category no longer allowed for imports under post-Sept. 11 security regulations and previously required to be inspected if exported.

An ILWU longshoreworker, Robert Vargas, was dragging the container to the crane around 1:30 p.m. when the can exploded in front of its top, sides and back doors and scattering its contents across the terminal enclosed with yellow tape. “If those doors had faced the opposite way, Vargas wouldn’t be here today,” said Local 63 Business Agent Gilbert Fernandez, who also hurried down the aisle, said Local 63 Business Agent Joe Mascola. “But prior to even knowing what caused the explosion, they were ordering people back to work. They had no concern for the people on the docks.”

The supervisor was still letting in trucks with loads. Though work had stopped on the Micronesian Heritage, the ship docked next to it at the terminal was still being worked. Arian, Mascola and Fernandez told the TraPac supervisor the ILWU wanted the remaining 31 containers slotted for the Heritage to be inspected and wanted the gates closed until the area could be secured. TraPac refused, so the union pulled the members off the terminal on a health and safety beef.

Arbitrator David Miller arrived at TraPac around 5 p.m. The employers were claiming the action was an illegal work stoppage, but Miller ruled it was a legitimate health and safety complaint and that the workers should be paid for the full shift. He also ruled that all 31 of the remaining containers must be inspected before being loaded.

TraPac was unable to get the proper government authorities out to the terminal for the inspections immediately, so no work was done that evening. The union wanted a Labor Relations Committee meeting with the employers at 6:00 the next morning to try to agree on how to operate that day and to work out an evacuation plan in case of any more accidents. But the employers refused to meet until 9:00 and then only wanted to discuss the casuals’ refusal to take jobs that day. The employers again accused the union of stopping work illegally, a charge the local denied.

“We just informed the casuals about the situation and that the employers had taken no action to secure the terminals,” Arian said. “They decided themselves not to go to work, mostly because the driver of the casuals with the exploding can was a casual.”

An emergency joint meeting of the executive boards of Locals 63 and 63 and former’s Local 91 at noon that day drew more than 2,000 members to the heads of the Los Angeles and Long Beach Port Police, the Los Angeles Police Dept., the State Port Police, the TraPac ships as well as their own officers.

“We have asked the Pacific Maritime Association to immediately implement four procedures we believe will remedy some of the problems facing our communities,” Arian said. Containers must be checked completely at the terminal gates and empty spaces must be opened; containers with questionable documentation must be segregated for more thorough inspection; every port should immediately implement an evacuation plan and begin regular security drills, he said.

After two meetings with the PMA, the employers agreed to begin the security drills and work on the evacuation plans, but they are still stalling on the inspections and documentation.

“The union is also asking each agency involved to do a complete review of the incident,” Peyton said. “We saw violations of Dept. of Transportation, Customs, and Marine Transportation Security Act regulations as well as our contract.”

“This one container shows how far backwards we’ve gone since 9-11,” he said. “The safety of our members and our communities is at risk.”

Oakland—Some 500 demonstrators returned to the Oakland docks April 7, marking the one-year anniversary of the Oakland Police attack on anti-war protestors, longshore workers and the right to dissent. The protestors first gathered outside the Alameda County Courthouse in downtown Oakland for a rally, then reassembled at the West Oakland BART station before marching to “safety beef.” Longshore workers kept their distance from the demonstrators and the employers didn’t order any workers dispatched. The action had an effect larger than intended the port was shut down for the entire second shift.

Two weeks later, Alameda County Deputy District Attorney Julie Dungar surprised the 25 people arrested after last year’s protest by suddenly dropping all the pending charges against them. Judge Don Clay’s Superior Court hearing room erupted in cheers April 22 as defendants hugged each other in relief at the end of a year-long ordeal that saw injured protestors falsely charged. Police fired rubber bullets, beanbags filled with metal shot and wooden pellets at demonstrators who were peacefully picketing AFL and SSA picketing the BART station, and days later, April 7, 2003, for their roles in the Iraq war. SSA snagged a no-bid contract to run the Oakland Bay Bridge’s Iran Ferry, which left for Iran’s Qarqar, early in the war. APL gets more than $18 million per year in subsidies to subsidize workers.”

The ILWU longshore workers returned to the Oakland docks April 7, marking the one-year anniversary of the protest that ended with police shooting demonstrators and injuring protestors falsely charged. Police fired rubber bullets, beanbags filled with metal shot and wooden pellets at demonstrators who were peacefully picketing AFL and SSA picketing the BART station, and days later, April 7, 2003, for their roles in the Iraq war. SSA snagged a no-bid contract to run the Oakland Bay Bridge’s Iran Ferry, which left for Iran’s Qarqar, early in the war. APL gets more than $18 million per year in subsidies to subsidize workers.

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**ILWU storms Capitol Hill**

By Lindsay McLaughlin  
ILWU Legislative Director

Over the last week in April 2004, ILWU President James Spinosa, the other titled Officers and the Coast Committee led 45 rank-and-file members in Washington, D.C. at the 2004 ILWU Legislative Conference. The purpose of the conference was to build political power, to recruit grassroots activists to influence the direction of the country and to move the port debate in on Capitol Hill. The ILWU delegates visited more than 60 members of Congress to discuss four key issues:

- Implementing real port security, including a program to inspect empty containers;
- Defeating the Central American Free Trade Agreement and the subsequent Free Trade Agreement of the Americas;
- Combating the Administration's support for outsourcing American jobs; and
- Passing the Employee Free Choice Act to guarantee workers the right to organize free of the debilitating obstacles employers now raise.

President Spinosa set the tone of the conference on the opening night. "We will work hard, we will make progress, and we will let Capitol Hill know that the ILWU is here," Spinosa said. "We all know, however, that to make real progress for working families we are going to have to go to home, get involved and get George W. Bush out of office."

"This was the fifth and largest ILWU legislative conference—and the first to include such a full representation of warehouse members. Delegates from the warehouse division, the IBU and a security guards' local joined those from the longshore division." We sent a diversity of members from both Local 142 and the mainland," Vice President Wesley Furtado said. "We shared our issues and concerns and it worked well."

An impressive list of speakers and panelists addressed the ILWU delegates, including House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA); Rep. Patrick Kennedy (D-MA); John Millender-McDonald (D-CA); John Kerry's deputy political campaign director, David Billy; Presidential candidate Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-OH); and Rep. George Miller (D-CA), chair of the Democratic Caucus and the highest ranking Democrat on the House Labor Committee.

"Our job this year is to throw George Bush out of town." Miller said, "It is crunch time. There has never been a more dangerous time in our history, with this administration destroying the wage base, gutting protections for workers, shipping jobs overseas, cutting health care benefits and undermining pensions. We have to fight the threat to them—like you did during the longshore lockout in 2002."

Below is a synopsis of ILWU's key lobbying issues:

**PORT SECURITY**

The Maritime Transportation Security Act of 2004 includes a provision requiring the Dept. of Homeland Security to study the practices and protocols for empty containers at U.S. ports. Sen. Daniel Inouye (D-HI) wants empty containers entering a port facility to be inspected.

"Empty containers pose a threat today," he said. "I am concerned that by waiting for a report and the publication of recommendations on how to improve handling of empty containers, we will provide an open window of opportunity for those who seek to do us harm."

Inouye vowed to send a letter to Homeland Security signed by many of his colleagues as possible requesting a clarification of the policy on empty containers. The ILWU agrees with Sen. Inouye and contends that all containers should get some type of security check, which should include inspecting container seals and opening containers marked “empty” to ensure they do not contain contraband, terrorist weapons or even people.

Rep. Rob Filner is working on a similar letter to Homeland Security signed from members of the House of Representatives. ILWU delegates asked members to sign on.

Additionally, ILWU delegates gave Congress members fact sheets on the ILWU’s more comprehensive port security policy, which includes the enforcement of current regulations regarding the seals of checks. (The explosion that rocked the Los Angeles TraPac terminal while the ILWU was lobbying in D.C. underscored the urgency of this concern. See pages 2 and 3.)

Terminal operators have lobbed their friends in the Bush Administration to ensure seals would not be inspected when containers enter by sea. The terminal operators say we can refer to the CAFTA, which is in Indonesia, and other governments to perform security checks on containers prior to their voyage to America. Containers from abroad must have a security check by American clerks after they have been offloaded.

The ILWU fact sheet included a plea for Congress to fund port security. Prior to this year, the Bush Administration’s budget proposed nothing for port security. This year the Administration proposed $46 million for port security nationwide. The U.S. Coast Guard has estimated that it would take $7.4 billion to adequately secure U.S. ports.

**CENTRAL AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT**

ILWU delegates lobbied to defeat the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). They asked members of Congress to commit to vote against the agreement. CAFTA is a trade agreement negotiated between the United States and five Central American countries: Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua. The Administration subsequently negotiated a similar agreement to include the Dominican Republic in CAFTA.

ILWU delegates explained why Congress should vote down this free trade agreement. First and foremost, CAFTA directly threatens ILWU jobs. CAFTA places 146,000 sugar producing, refining and shipping jobs in jeopardy—many of them good union jobs. At least 1,000 ILWU jobs tied to the sugar industry could be lost if CAFTA goes into effect. ILWU sugar jobs would be the first to go, because the Hawaii sugar industry must pay millions of dollars to the West Coast for refining. Other ILWU agricultural jobs may also be in jeopardy if CAFTA is passed. The agreement will eliminate the tariff on fresh pineapples from Costa Rica where labor standards do not come close to meeting the high standards set in Hawaii where ILWU members work.

Secondly CAFTA undermines worker rights. It contains no meaningful labor and environmental standards. It only encourages countries to enforce their own laws. In Central America, where laws fall far below international standards and governments and employers actively oppose unions, this agreement will encourage rampant workers’ rights violations to continue.

CAFTA will clear the way for the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) that would include every country in Central America, South America and the Caribbean, except Cuba. The FTAA, as currently written, would destroy jobs, encourage privatization, increase corporate control and worsen inequality throughout the hemisphere.

The ILWU delegates told members of Congress there are better ways to trade with other countries. A fair trade agreement would include:
would affect workers making between overtime pay from American workers. about the Bush efforts to take away earning as little as $23,660. weaken the overtime eligibility rules take overtime pay away from thou- town shortly after the Bush adminis- LABOR STANDARDS • Respect for core workers’ rights, the environment and human rights; • Protection for industries hit by sudden import surges and unfair trade practices; • Regulation of big business to pro- protect consumers, workers and the environment; • Protection from privatization and support for such key public servic- es as health care, education and utilities; • A fair system of immigration rules that protects the rights of all immigrant workers; • Sound financial regulation, debt relief and development assistance for poor countries so they can grow and invest in human needs; and • Meaningful access to and input on trade negotiations and dispute set- tlement processes for workers and the public. LABOR STANDARDS The ILWU delegates arrived in town shortly after the Bush adminis- tration issued final rules that would take overtime pay away from thou- sands of working Americans. The Bush rule contains proposals that weaken the overtime eligibility rules and deny overtime pay to workers earning as little as $23,660. Many ILWU delegates attended a House Education and Workforce Committee hearing to learn more about the Bush efforts to take away overtime pay from American workers. Delegates learned that Bush was lying when he denied the new rules would affect workers making between $23,000 and $100,000. The admin- istration denied overtime to claims adjusters, computer network profes- sionals, Internet workers, database administrators, journalists, mortgage loan officers, funeral directors and embalmers. Additionally, the admin- istration would deny overtime to any worker designated as a “team leader.” ILWU delegates lobbied for an amendment to the rules proposed by Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA) that would retroactively repeal any portion of the final Bush overtime regulation that restricts eligibility. If the administra- tion truly believes its new rules do not strip workers of overtime rights, it should have no reason to oppose the Harkin amendment. The Harkin amendment would not repeal any portion of the final regulation that expands coverage for low-income workers. Shortly after the delegates left the Conference, the Senate considered the Harkin amendment and passed it with 52 votes. Four Republicans crossed the aisle to vote with Democrats to protect overtime pay, including Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-MA) that would retroactively repeal any portion of the final Bush overtime regulation that restric- ts eligibility. If the administration truly believes its new rules do not strip workers of overtime rights, it should have no reason to oppose the Harkin amendment. The Harkin amendment would not repeal any portion of the final regulation that expands coverage for low-income workers. • Protection from privatization and support for such key public servic- es as health care, education and utilities; • A fair system of immigration rules that protects the rights of all immigrant workers; • Sound financial regulation, debt relief and development assistance for poor countries so they can grow and invest in human needs; and • Meaningful access to and input on trade negotiations and dispute set- tlement processes for workers and the public. WASHINGTON REPORT Continued the list your local number and registration number to track participation rates. Political Action Fund are not tax deductible. The International officers and the Coast Committee are asking all members to donate $50 each to the fund. All contri- butions to the Political Action Fund and manpower for the ILWU program to send rank- and-file ILWU members to states where ILWU-endorsed Presidential candidate John Kerry is locked in a competitive race with the current occupant of the Oval Office. “We need to raise a million dol- lars to help those who want to help decide the election,” said ILWU Secretary-Treasurer Willie Adams. “We have got to give money and we have got to put our resources in places that we have never put money in our lifetime to change the course of history.” The conference itself was also a step in building the unity the ILWU will need to face the fight ahead. “Seeing all the sectors of the union, from pineapple to longshore to Powell’s Books, lobbying together on our issues made the conference a huge success,” said International Vice President Bob McEnaney.
The rich get richer and the rest get less

By Jack Rasmus

Do you feel like you’re working harder, longer hours, and still can’t keep up with rising taxes, mass layoffs, prices, utility bills, ballooning medical expenses and the accelerating pace of paying for your kids’ education?

Well, you’re not alone. You’re part of the American worker company of tens of millions of American workers today on the same economic treadmill, having to walk faster and faster just to stay in the same place, or unable even to keep up with the pace due to unemployment, loss of benefits or wage cuts.

How would you like to be making $200,000 a year today after 25 years on the job? Well, if you started with the pay of an average worker 25 years ago that’s what you’d be making today— if you got the same kind of raises that CEOs of American companies got for the past 25 years. The average compensation of a CEO in 1980 was about 40 times that of the average worker in his company. Today it is more than 500 times. If your pay had kept pace with his, you would be making more than $200,000 this year. Of course, that didn’t happen, did it? So let’s see what really happened to the average American worker’s pay over the past 25 years of the Reagan-Bush economic regime.

STAGNATING WORKERS’ WAGES

In 1979 the American worker’s average hourly wage was equal to $15.74 a hour in 2003 dollars. By 1989 it had reached only $16.63 per hour. That’s a gain of only 0.7 cents a year for the entire Reagan decade.

But wait, things get worse. By 1995 it had risen to $16.71, showing virtually no gain whatever over the six years between 1989 and 1995. During the “Great Boom years” between 1989 and 2000 it rose briefly to $18.33 per hour. In other words, from 1995 to 2000 it was the most recent Bush recession, the American worker’s average wages increased by only 8.6 percent over a period per hour per year. Nearly all of that came in the five so-called boom years of 1995 to 1999, the most of which had lost once again in the last three years. And that includes all workers, even those with college degrees.

The picture is worse for workers who had no college degree. That’s more than 100 million workers, or 72.1 percent of the workforce. For them there was no boom of 1995-2000 whatsoever. The average real hourly wages were at the end of 2000 than they were in 1979. And since 2000 their wages have continued to slide further.

THE GREAT PRODUCTIVITY SWINDLE

Management is always quick to say in contracts negotiations, “Give us more hours and we’ll pass the savings on to you”. And at such time, if you were Bush II, you would promise “a new economy”.

But the real picture today is one of unprecedented stall of productivity growth. As one source has put it, “In 2000 a CEO earned in one workday [there are 260 in a year] than what the average worker earned in 52 weeks. In 1965, by contrast, it took a CEO two weeks to earn a worker’s annual pay”.

THE FALLING MINIMUM WAGE

One of the more shameful legalistic forms of the past decade has been what has been allowed to happen to American workers at the lower end of the pay scales spectrum. While the outsourcing and offshoring of union jobs with high pay and good benefits has thinned the ranks of unionized workers, those at the lower end have been suffering their own severe hardship.

We are talking here about more than 10 million American workers who earn the minimum wage. (Contrary to corporate propaganda, only 28 percent of those getting paid minimum wage are teenagers. Most are single women or men who head households.) The minimum wage in America reached its high point in terms of real buying power in the late 1960s, and thereafter went into a deep and steady free fall, declining more than 29 percent in buying power during the 1980s. In the early and mid 1990s the decline was slowed somewhat by modest increases in the minimum wage legislated by Congress, but it has accelerated again since the last increase in the federal minimum wage was given in 1996, now almost a decade ago.

In terms of 2001 dollars, the minimum wage in 1979 was worth $6.55. It fell to $4.62 in 1989, rose modestly in the early and mid-1990s, but in 2003 was equivalent to only $4.94 an hour. The minimum wage is 21.4 percent of what a worker would be making in 1965. In 2000, the minimum wage legislated by Congress, but it has accelerated again since the last increase in the federal minimum wage was given in 1996, now almost a decade ago.

THE WORKING LONGER AND HARDER

The overall picture is abundantly clear: real average hourly wages of more than 100 million American workers are less today than 25 years ago; real wages of college-educated workers have risen only modestly in the late 1990s and fallen since under Bush II; and real wages of the 10 million lowest paid workers have declined more than 21 percent.

Given this, one might ask how the American worker and her family survived the last quarter century under Reagan and Bush? The answer is by working longer hours—individually and as a family unit— and by taking on more and more household debt—both instead of hourly wage gains.

Let’s look at hours worked: The American worker not only works more hours in a year than his counterpart in other industrialized nations, but is the only worker in the 13 major industrialized countries whose hours per week paid per year have actually increased since 1979. Workers in all the other industrialized countries have enjoyed an actual decrease in the total hours worked per year in a comparable period.

For example, there are approximately 2,080 hours of work in a year. In 1979 the average American worker was working 1,905 hours out of the possible 2,080. But by 1998 he or she was now working 1,652 a year. That’s an increase of 61 hours. In contrast, a worker in Germany saw his or her working hours decline from 1,764 to 1,652, a worker in France went from 1,813 to 1,634, and in Japan a worker went from 1,821 to 1,737. The picture is similar in all the other industrialized countries recently surveyed.

As a family unit, while real wages of male workers as heads of households in the U.S. have fallen, the American family has worked more, and the rest get less.

Given these trends of longer hours worked, it is not surprising that Bush and corporate America are intent today on reducing overtime pay. After making sure hourly wages haven’t risen for more than two decades, Bush and corporate America have recently come up with new rules to cut overtime pay for 8 million workers. Their other wage stagnation initiative is to continue to make any increase in the minimum wage; continuing pressure to make workers pay more in health benefits, co-pays and deductibles; and promoting more offshoring of American jobs. For example, instead of offering a new home to longshore workers, there’s the additional Bush goal of eliminating industrial unions bargaining with them with local agreements. If Bush gets re-elected, expect a new Bush-corporate offensive on all these fronts.

Jack Rasmus is the chair of the San Francisco Bay Area local chapter 3 of the National Writers Union, IAW 1981, AFL-CIO, and a long-time member of the Dramatists Guild. Rasmus has a Ph.D. in Political Economy.
Federal lawsuit filed to overturn the Miami Model

by Tom Price

The National Lawyers Guild filed an anti-FTAA action to file a federal lawsuit March 25 in an attempt to turn back new, preemptively violent police tactics like the ones used in Miami, Florida last year. In that Nov. 17-21 demonstration several ILWU members joined tens of thousands protesting the Free Trade Area of the Americas trade deal. Peaceful marchers, including pensioners and widows, faced some of the most vigorous police repression in a generation. Beatings were widespread and arrests were by the hundreds.

Miami’s mayor, Manuel Diaz, called the tactics “a model for home-land defense” and expressed his fears for American pensioners and widows, faced some of the most vigorous police repression in a generation. Beatings were widespread and arrests were by the hundreds.

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The suit “is brought to challenge the dropping of all charges against demonstrators. The AFL-CIO, its member unions and hundreds of workers spent months organizing anti-FTAA protests last year in Miami. After working out march routes and permits with the police, thousands of unionists converged on Miami Nov. 17-21 for a perfectly legal expression of their right to dissent.

But it was not to be. On the way in unionists were blocked by police. Later police attacked workers on permitted parade routes. AFL-CIO President John Sweeney witnessed police violence personally, and was hopping mad.

“The Miami police violated virtually every agreement,” he said in a Nov. 26, 2003 press release. “They blocked access to the rally and march for buses and individuals; deployed tanks and scores of officers in riot gear in front of the rally entrance; denied march organizers access to water, signs, and toilets; and pointed guns and verbally abused those seeking guidance from the police. Peaceful protestors were swept up in police cordons, shot at with rubber bullets and pepper spray, arrested and mistreated while in police custody. The level of police presence and their aggressive stance was leagues beyond what was warranted.”

Sweeney went to Florida Gov. Jeb Bush and U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft Dec. 3 asking for independent investigations into police conduct. He demanded prosecution of those responsible, the resignation of Miami Police Chief John Timoney, the dropping of all charges against peaceful protestors and assurances such violations would never again occur.

United Steelworkers of America President Leo Gerard filed a letter Nov. 24 to key Congressional leaders asking for the firing of Miami Police Chief John Timoney and the dropping of all charges against demonstrators.

“It is condemnable enough that a massive police state was unleashed in Miami—paid for weapons and training with Iraq dollars. An even worse development is that all the other cities thinking of using the Miami model for their local elections have now bought into it. How can we hope to build democracy in Iraq while using mass violence to dismantle it here at home?”

Gerard also called for a Congressional investigation into the use of federal money for police violence. “To do less would be to endorse homeland repression in the name of homeland security,” he said.

Several unions, including SEIU and UNITE, also called for a Congressional investigation into the police mismanagement.

The USWA is trying to make sure the issue, especially Police Chief Timoney’s role in the violent repression, remains visible.

“We plan on keeping Timoney from getting future jobs, like at the Democratic National Convention in Boston this summer,” said USWA spokesman Gary Hubbard. “We have so far kept it blocked.”

Since then union workers have joined the National Lawyers Guild lawsuit and the AFL-CIO has cooperated with attorneys in gathering evidence for future lawsuits. AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Richard Trumka testified on police misconduct before the Miami local civilian investigative panels. He laid the responsibility for the violence on police leaders at a Dec. 16, 2003 hearing.

“I blame top police officials for failing to develop a clear plan for guaranteeing public safety while respecting our rights,” Trumka said. “I blame police management for putting more effort into fomenting needless fear and hysteria than in preparing for a peaceful protest, ensuring coordination and building morale for their hard-working officers.”

At another hearing on March 1 Trumka refuted a prior Miami Police Dept. three-hour presentation, complete with a slickly produced video, that claimed the AFL-CIO, in cahoots with “anarchists,” was responsible for the violence.

“We are still preparing and gathering evidence for a lawsuit,” AFL-CIO campaign coordinator Debbie Dion told The Dispatcher. “We’re keeping the pressure and heat on the best we can.”

Tom Price

Labor responds to ‘Miami Model’

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Tom Price
INTRODUCTION BY HARVEY SCHWARTZ

This is the second in a series featuring ILWU veterans of the “Old Left.” Much has been published about the government’s many failed attempts to prove that Harry Bridges was a Communist Party (CP) member. Far less has been written about people like Jack Olsen, the subject of this month’s article. Jack Olsen worked on the San Francisco waterfront in the 1930s. During the next decade he served Local 6 as a business agent and as publicity and education director. Here he highlights the Old Left’s contributions to the ILWU and offers a rare inside view of how the CP operated within American unions at the time and why it was effective in changing the political landscape and inspiring young union idealists. Here he also emphasizes how the CP fought for Black workers before World War II.

In the early 1930s the employers excluded Olsen from warehouse jobs because of his politics. Under severe duress at the time, Local 6 was unable to overcome this, despite the ILWU’s tradition of sheltering victims of discrimination. Olsen found employment as a Typographical Union Local 21 printer. In 1974 he became the first director of Labor Studies at the City College of San Francisco.

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JACK OLSEN

EDITED BY HARVEY SCHWARTZ, CURATOR, ILWU ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

When I was one year old I was brought to the U.S. from Russia, where I was born in 1911. Like most Russian Jewish immigrants of that time, my parents came here to escape the increase of anti-Semitism and oppression in Czarist Russia following out of the 1905 Revolution. When that first Russian uprising was defeated, the Czar’s government made the Jews the scapegoat for its problems. My parents settled in New Jersey, but soon moved to Philadelphia where my father became the recording secretary of the local broom and brush makers’ union. Like many people of his generation, my father was excited by the Russian Revolution of 1917. He was ambivalent, because he was not a revolutionary. But he was pleased that the Czar had been overthrown. He used to say the Russian Revolution and the Bolsheviks turned working people could become the heads of governments.

Around 1920 we moved to Alden, a little town in upstate New York. My father got involved in the famous Sacco and Vanzetti case. That was my first introduction to radical politics. Sacco and Vanzetti were Italian-born anarchists who were accused of murdering two men in a Woolworth’s store. I made $15 for a six-day week, 10 hours a day, and the job only lasted through Christmas. I decided I couldn’t help my parents in L.A. I figured I might as well see if I could do something else. So in 1930 I took off and came up to San Francisco.

I liked the kind of people I met in the Communist movement up here. The L.A. movement I knew was concentrated in the Jewish enclave at Boyle Heights. The people there had come from big cities like New York and Chicago, and I was a country boy. I felt more at home with the seamen and the unemployed kids I met in San Francisco. Since I was fairly well dressed, which counted then, I managed to pick up odd jobs. I worked a little as a dishwasher and truck driver. Sometimes I even got a few days on the waterfront. None of this was enough to make a living, but I did better than most.

In 1932 I was elected state secretary of the YCL by the CP State Committee. I’d like to say this was because I was a brilliant guy, but actually it was the movement, which was growing, grabbed anybody who was energetic and willing. I’m designating it a little. I was a bit more vocal than some and had done a little more reading.

State secretary was supposed to be a full-time job. The CP YCL made a distinction between full-timers and everyone else. Or else you’d be sleeping in the freezers! YCL decided if you’d put up $5 a week, but the stipulation was that I had to raise the $5 myself. Sometimes I got it, sometimes I didn’t.

My primary concern as state secretary was building the Party via local organizations—putting out handbills, holding street meetings, conducting campaigns. There were nine or ten places around San Francisco where we could get large crowds. Even the Salvation Army held regular meetings on Sundays. It depended on how loud a voice you had, how good a speaker you were. I once spoke about the YCL’s opposition to war, and after the meeting was over I was told that I had done a good job, I was doing my best to make everyone standing around to hear you. We’d always pass the hat. Sometimes there was anything left after you paid for leaflets you had some money to work with.

The whole thrust of the Communist movement, of course, was to claim to be the party of the working class. The idea was to provide leadership. Because there was a long history of militancy among longshoremen and seamen, the CP focused much of its energy on the waterfront. You were ashamed of yourself if you didn’t hold at least one street meeting on the waterfront each month, if not every week.

When the 1934 strike came along it was the biggest thing in every radical’s life. My role was outside support. Whatever we could do as an organization, we did. We went out on the picket lines and helped around the soup kitchen. After the strike, the CP encouraged people like me to get more active in the unions.

Lots of young radicals—many of them Communists, not me—went to war after you paid for leaflets. That made it easier for young radicals to get in.

In 1938, when I was 25, I felt I was getting too old for YCL youth activities. I joined the regular CP and decided to see what full-time work I could get. I’d already done quite a bit of casual waterfront work. I recall pushing a hand truck loaded with five or six sacks of coffee that weighed 110 to 120 pounds each. The docks were not well maintained, and you were always hitting ruts and bumps. You’d tear your guts up trying to keep the load from getting dumped.

By this time I knew my way around the warehouse locals hiring halls. I got dispatched to a job at U.S. Steel, stayed a year and got my book as a full union member. In late 1937 or ‘38 U.S. Steel moved off the waterfront and decided to switch jobs and got on at Merchants Ice and Cold Storage. Merchants Ice was hard physical work, but I was 25 and not a kid’s job. What I also didn’t mind was working in the freezers, which used to bother a lot of guys. I guess we were too weak to stand up much. Also, they wouldn’t take you in the ice houses.

In those days the CP set up Party clubs on an industry-by-industry basis. There were warehousemen’s, seamen’s and longshoremen’s clubs. Each club had its own officers and its own delegates to the CP.

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For example, had a Communist club come to a meet-

ing, we used to meet and first take up politi-
cal issues before the anti-fascist cause in the Spanish Civil War. The CP had an election campaign and an ongoing legal defense.

Second, there was always discuss-

ion and action in the union. Did we have the strength to introduce a resolu-
tion? What should our demands be when our union con-
tracts expired? The Communist group almost always com-
manded discussion on the question of union leadership. Should I be a candidate for a particular spot, like negotiating com-
mittee or local executive board member? Who

should we support for this office, whether Communist or not?

These preliminary discussions were a tremendous help to us when we went to the general union meeting. In effect each club functioned as a Communist caucus.

to get things done we tried to get official back-
ing. In the ILWU, which had a long history of

to the union, the officers were relatively easy to get to access to. Generally there were three or four CP

members who were liaisons. We'd go see the presi-
dent of Local 6, the business agent and the stew-
dards to try to line up support. There was always strategy to consider. Could we get a resolution that would ultimately go before a general union meeting introduced through the execu-
tive board? Could we get one of the officers to sign it so it didn't come just from the Communists?

We might draft the resolution so it suited the officials. When it came time for the union meeting, we'd get our guys lined up on the floor behind the microphones to speak for the resolution. Or somebody on the offi-
cers' platform would speak for it. There were varying

approaches.

The ILWU consistently took positions that were left of where other unions were. I think the Communist clubs made a difference here. The pres-

ence of Communists helped put Local 6 miles ahead of the rest of the labor movement in things like opening up to Black members even before World War II. But we also had to think about our limits. For example, there was a Communist club come to a meet-
ingsroom, and said, "We want an endorsement of the Soviet Union," we would have had our ass ripped off.

I joined the Local 6 Publicity Committee, helped with a big organizing drive at the Lathrop army depot near Stockton in the late 1930s, spoke out at union meetings all the time and got the reputation of being a red-hot. During the major 1938 warehouse

lockout in San Francisco I was down at the union hall and out on the picket lines every chance I got. Several CP people felt I ought to bid for leadership. The guys in the ice houses were pressuring me to run too. So in 1939 I ran for business agent and got elected. I took office in 1940.

The local put a lot of pressure against that sort of thing in 1939-1940 and the Com-

munists made an extra effort issue of it. You can point to many things about the Communist movement that aren't so honorable, but its early insistence on racial equality and its idea that Blacks and Whites should unite was one of the most honorable things it did.

I went into the Army in 1944, during World War II, and got discharged in late 1945. The next year the union asked me to become the full-time director of the Local 6 Education and Publicity Department. In 1946 the local had the money for such a program. It had 15,000 members. I'd helped develop the Local 6 publications and other public utility work before I went into the Army. This was right up my alley.

As Director I was in charge of our monthly Local 6 Bulletin, got out press releases and strike public-

ity in each division put out its own mimeographed publication, and set up classes, theater groups, sports teams and social activities. This was a job that could have taken two or three more people, but I got a lot of rank-and-file help. By 1948 we had 18,000 members. We were a thriving, jumping local. I worked my ass off, but it was an exciting, fun time.

I was still active in the CP. I don't think I would have gotten the public utility and education job without Party support. The CP was then a pretty powerful influence in Local 6. People used to come to it for election campaign support who were not even Communists. I think the Communists here in San Francisco played a real role in who got elected. CP support was something everybody went after, including people who were in opposition to the Party.

There was an awful lot of support for the Left in the union up through the Henry Wallace Progressive Party campaign for the American presidency in 1948. The Communists supported Wallace, who ran on a platform that opposed the coming of the Cold War.

The Wallace campaign generated a lot of broad enthusiasm in Local 6. We had a committee of 200 and they weren't all Communists. Unfortunately, the support for Wallace disappeared when election day came.

On the heels of the election came the long and costly 1949 Local 6 warehouse strike that had mixed results. The next year Dave Beck, the Teamsters Union president, poured a million dol-

ars into a raid on the local. He was able to lure away some of our business agents and dispatchers. They went on his payroll and led the attack against us, saying we were unpatriotic. Basically the attack was straight red-baiting.

At the beginning of the Teamster raid the guys who went to work for Beck were still not out in the open. They would come to our meetings, which became very stormy, and say that the local would get rid of the Communists. Ironically, some of those guys had supported Wallace earlier on. Of course, when I was in the CP I was a USP and we did not have any dealings with them, and because I was handling publicity and education, I was one of their main targets.

To defend against this, the local leadership sug-

ggested that I resign, and I did. The local was begin-

ning to have financial problems anyway. But that wasn't the only beginning. Shortly thereafter these guys, who were still an internal Local 6 group, put out an election handbook. I took it to a typewriter and typed it. They proved that it was typed in the Teamsters Local 680 office. That brought the whole thing out into the open. These guys also put out a leaflet that said, "Who is Olshansky?" It implied that I was a Russian agent of Stalin.

When the crisis came the Black membership of the local was solidarity at our side. They knew the job the ILWU had done in opening up to them. Young people like LeRoy King and Curtis McClain came to the fore. We put LeRoy on as an organizer to try to beat the attack back. When the actual raid started the internal Local 6 group took a hike and estab-
lished Teamsters Local 12. Then came the campaign to save our houses from being taken over by them.

Immediately after the raid started the Local 6 officers told me, “Get your ass back on the job. We need publicity.” We conducted an intensive camp-

aigainst the raid with posters and weekly bul-

letins. In the last analysis the Teamsters were only able to take away 250 San Francisco members. But it was a very turbulent period and when the whole thing was finished, the local was broke. We had to do away with the Publicity and Education Department.

I went back to work after that, but I had a hell of a time getting jobs. I'd walk into a shop and they'd say, “Olsen, we'd be glad to have you.” But there was a rule that an employer could lay you off anytime in your first 90 days. So 24 hours later I'd get laid off. [During the McCarthy era in the early 1950s employers routinely banned political dissi-

dents.] This was also the beginning of the closing of various shops. I couldn't make a living. I had to find work outside of Local 6.

About 1951, '52 I left the CP. I felt the Party had lost its viability as an American working-class force. There was an exodus from the ILWU. The CP clubs too. This was the period of the start of the disintegration of the entire American Communist movement. It was unable to react properly to events or to provide leadership.

But in the beginning the Communists in the ILWU had been a part of the building of the union, and they had been accepted. They influenced people on the leadership and the union meeting level. Down through the years, too, the ILWU has been a refuge for radicals who were run out of every place else. As a result of the policy of the ILWU to protect everybody regardless of political affiliation, many were able to get work, to stay, and to influence the membership.

Thus the Communists had enough of a pres-

ence and enough personal contact to talk to the other workers and bring up issues in the ware-

houses and shops. They set a tone and they got a lot of things done because they weren't afraid to raise the question of why the ILWU was always a radical organization.
Next time you poke through the shrink-wrap on a package of Maruchan Instant Lunch, stop and think. The guys who made that wrap might’ve belonged to ILWU Warehouse Local 26. They might’ve been among the 100 gutsy Local 26 members who struck for two weeks in March after American Expansion Products (AEP) made them a contract offer they had to refuse.

“These members put a lot on the line,” said Local 26 President Luisa Gratz, who served as spokesperson for the negotiating committee. “They very courageously stood up for what they thought was right.”

Pulling together after years of divisions and apathy, the AEP workers fought off the company’s demands for take-backs and scored some modest gains.

The Chino, California branch of multinational AEP makes and ships bags for dry-cleaners and supermarkets, trash bags, industrial-strength wrap for pallettes and shrink-wrap for fresh produce and packaged foods. Maruchan is one of its main clients.

The company’s modern machines have the packers doing twice as much work as they did when local 26 was formed 23 years ago, shop steward Jesus Vazquez said. The work is hard, but until recently his co-workers didn’t like to fight the heavy load and low pay.

“We were very disorganized and no one would do anything,” he said.

Then new Local 26 Vice President/Business Agent Rick Cortinas came on the scene. A 32-year ILWU veteran, Cortinas had been chief steward at Pacific Coast Recyling before taking over as BA last summer.

Cortinas started meeting with all the shifts. (AEP works people 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. and 11 p.m. to 11 a.m., with three days on, four off, four on, three off.) He ran the meetings in Spanish, the first language for some 80 percent of the workers. He brought together workers from shipping and manufacturing, who had no communication before.

“They began understanding their needs and wants are the same,” Cortinas said.

“We went through the contract an article or two at a time,” he said. “I advised them to make a paper trail when the supervisors see you doing this, they’ll take you seriously.”

In January the focus turned to new contract proposals. People wanted more pay, maintenance of health benefits and a pension plan. The members decided to send Vazquez, Shipping and Receiving shop steward Larry Fernandez and Chief Steward Sal Rosario to the negotiating table along with Gratz and Cortinas.

AEP hired a union-busting law firm that was looking for a fight. Talks were scheduled to start Feb. 19, but management stalled till the 24th and didn’t come in with a proposal till March 1.

“That offer was a joke,” Vazquez said. The company wanted to take away two holidays and impose three pages of management rights, including language that would keep people from calling their stewards. They put only pennies on the wage line.

The next day, all the workers turned out for meetings at the VFW hall near the plant. They voted 99-1 to reject the offer and strike. Local 26 gave management the required 72-hour strike notice.

At 7 p.m. March 5, AEP gave their last, best and final offer. Cortinas and the negotiating committee activated the phone tree. By 10:30 p.m. every member who wasn’t working had arrived at the plant parking lot. They voted unanimously to start the strike. Shouts broke out.

“What do we want? Respect! When? Now!” they yelled. Everyone who was still working walked off at 11 p.m. and joined the line.

The members held that line round the clock at the manufacturing plant and 12 hours a day at shipping. At first the picket teams followed their 12-hour work shifts. Later they broke down into six-hour segments.

“We were too scattered. We had some who were late on the shift, they were confined to a 12-foot easement by the road. Management took up a picket every 50 yards, so the pickets once—unintentionally—giving some relief from the hot sun. When the plant manager came in and out, the pickets would yell, ‘More pennies!’ but that was as rowdy as they got. No 90-26 members scabbled and no scabs went to work. When people showed up in response to employer papers, they were asked to explain what was going on, and point out the shop down the road that was hiring.

“We turned them away with kindness,” Cortinas said.

The employer came back with a new offer March 19. As soon as she heard about it, 20-odd ILWU Local 400 members walked the line.

The company’s modern machines had dropped its concession demands, offered a substantial bonus in the first year and better hourly rates in the second and third years. As unanimously as they decided to strike, the members voted to accept the offer and sign back to work.

The two-week strike also brought benefits beyond the contract package. The workers were more aware now of fighting for the things we need,” Vazquez said. “We will be more organized for our next contract.”

After an eight-day strike, media- tion and the three-for-one federal legisla- tion, masters, mates and engineers who operate Vancouver-area tugs returned to work March 24 with a tentative three-year agreement.

The strike, by 800 members of the Canadian Merchant Service Guild, affected 60 percent of area tugs and cut the number of containerships calls to the port by half.

The Guild walked out when the company would not budge on its pay and benefit offer. The company had made no new offers to the workers in months, previous offers had been made on scores of local issues. More than 95 percent of the members voted to accept the company’s last offer, and 95 percent of them turned it down, according to Guild Secretary- Treasurer Ken Rombough. Canadian law requires a separate strike vote, and 86.8 percent voted for the strike.

Negotiations proceeded with the help of a federal mediator.

“There were a number of other issues that were important that we weren’t successful on,” Herbert said. “But once they threw all the money on the table, the mediator threw up his arms and said ‘I’m not going to deal with that part of it.’

Gulf members—officers on the tugs ILWU Canada’s Marine Section Local 400 members serve on as crew members. They generally bargain with the same employers.

Local 400 members rejected the Guild’s picket line and ILWU longshore workers brought coffee and doughnuts to the line in support.

The members are now on the pact as we go to press and the tally won’t be final until June 9. People expect Local 400 and the Seafarers workers to work a fairly complicated ratification process,” Herbert said. “We went through 16 ratifications, so it will take them a little bit longer to get back because they go to sea for two or three weeks at a time.”

“We’re probably talking to the company’s lawyers right now,” she said for Local 400. Its contract with the Council of Marine Carriers, the employer association, runs out next October. The local expects to begin hard bargaining after its caucus May 10.

“We have always done ‘me too’ agreements in this industry, and this we don’t do anything different,” said Local 400 President Terry Engler said. According to Herbert, the guild got 2.5 percent for the first nine months, three percent for the next three months and three percent for each of the last two years. They also won increases in their benefits. Canadian workers have a national healthcare plan, so most local issues never reach the bargaining table. The contract’s package fills in the gaps, including vacation, pension plan, including eye and dental care, drug payments and long-term disability.

Local 400’s main problem is with the tug company Seapan International, the largest tug company in the world and Canada’s largest tug company.

The union filed for a common- employer status in May 2001 with the Canadian Industrial Relations Board to maintain jurisdiction on its tug operations. It’s now going to the Seafarers International Union after its 1999 buyout of a number of small tug companies that had SIU crews, but since they were now doing Local 400 work they should belong to Local 400, Engler said.

The company, however, sent more work to the SIU-crewed boats and left Local 400 workers on the beach. The board took the employer’s side and ruled March 19 for keeping both companies as separate locals. Local 400 will have to work it out with the employer and each other.

Traditional jurisprudence in Canada is that employers want one union representing workers and they almost always get it,” Engler said. “This time they wanted two and they got it. The board can order a repre- sentation election or it can choose which union will remain. With Seapan they didn’t even give us a vote.”

The board was persuaded by the arguments of the employer’s counsel to keep both unions, Engler said.

Prior to the merger Local 400 had four or five boats working continuously in the harbor and two ship docking vessels. Now there’s only one docking vessel.

“Gulf strike is any example, the employers don’t want another job action. A coalition of B.C. business leaders claimed the Guild cost the provincial economy $62 million a day, according to the Journal of Commerce. The guild said it had announced plans to double container capacity over the next year and they will need good labor relations.”

“We’re going to the company and giving them a proposal that they should sign back to work,” Engler said. “If they give us our work back, they won’t have a dispute. If the employers will come back to work, the company. They’ve given away our work and they are expanding that. If they don’t, then Local 400 could lose the work we have.”

—Marcy Rein

STRIKE ENDS FOR CANADIAN TUG OFFICERS, TALKS BEGIN FOR LOCAL 400

—Tom Price

ARTICLE 10 • APRIL 2004

10 • THE DISPATCHER

PLASTICS STRIKE BRINGS REAL GAINS

AROUND THE UNION

Local 26 members walked the line 24/7 for two weeks and beat back AEP’s demands for take-backs.

—Curtis Gates

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STRIKE ENDS FOR CANADIAN TUG OFFICERS, TALKS BEGIN FOR LOCAL 400

—Tom Price
April 2004

ILWU Canada convention stresses political action and solidarity

by Tom Price

ILWU Canada packed four days of union democracy into its 2004 Convention beginning March 30, and the union came away with new commitments to political action, solidarity and internationalism. The 28th Convention, 18th Biennial in Surrey, B.C. provided a working session for setting policies and goals and a forum for officers and delegates to discuss the issues of the day, each with a recurring theme on the need for political action. To that end, members announced their candidacy for office in elections to be held in late April.

OFFICER REPORTS

ILWU Canada President Tom O'Neill warned about the growing threat to civil liberties and workers' rights promoted under the guise of national security. "The need for the antiterrorism legislation that along with C-36 makes up Canada's Patriot Act, puts unionists at risk of being designated as terrorist organizations because of their advocacy for workers and political action," he said.

"Bill C-36 was used to override the Charter of Rights (Canada's Bill of Rights) in the courts. The RCMP (the federal police) to raid the home and office of an Ontarian Citizen reporter," the B.C. Federation of Labour organizer Rupert. The convention also voted a one-time $5 per member assessment to host the coastal Washington Pacific Coast Action Convention in 2005.

"Political action will have to become a bigger part not only of ILWU Canada's but of that of the locals' and of the members' lives," he said. "The B.C. Federation of Labour's political arm must begin to do its job. We will contribute to a $1.5 million fund the B.C. Fed. is putting into political action. The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) will also put up $1.5 million." The convention voted to raise the annual political assessment by one dollar, to $4.

The convention also reported on mutual support with affiliated unions. The Grain Services Union and the Retail Wholesale Department Store Union of Saskatchewan, among other unions, instrumental in establishing the Labour Issues Campaign that helped save the provincial government, he said. ILWU Canada helped B.C.'s Wholesale Retailers' Union to organize and win by one third of the vote.

"We will aid the ILWU in organizing in education with people on the ground and cost sharing. The ILWU now has a seat on the CLC's Executive Committee and will sit in the CLC's Women's Committee. The ILWU is also committed to supporting the B.C. Federation of Labour's Canadian Maritime Labor Council (CMCL) to opposing the bill that will destroy Canadian Maritime unions or the right to bargain. ILWU endorsing the resolution to support the ILWU's sister union's political action. They are doing things we cannot do easily in Canada," Adams said.

RESOLUTIONS AND POLICIES

Delegates debated and approved a resolution giving the Women's Committee an additional vote on all motions before the convention. Each local may send a delegate to the Women's Committee and that committee can send one delegate to the convention.

"Prime Minister Paul Martin's 'corporate' approach to rebuilding Iraq" through privatization while he ignores the worker's needs. The convention also voted a one-time $5 per member assessment to host the coastal Washington Pacific Coast Action Convention in 2005.

"While we are doing things and saying things to the International are going to work on organizing. They are doing things we cannot do easily in Canada," Adams said.

"They're on fire over there. They're organizing. They are fighting things we are fighting in Canada. We're going to hit them where they hurt them," he said.

"We're going to hit the Hill and the lobby hard."

Adams and Wenzl spent many hours with the Canadian sisters and brothers sharing successes, problems and solutions.

"I talked to the younger people at [longshore] Local 502," Adams said. "They're on fire out there. They're organizing. They are fighting things we are fighting in Canada. We're going to hit them where they hurt them."

"Wenzl received a standing ovation when he spoke of ILWU cross-border solidarity."

"I want to publicly acknowledge the vital role ILWU Canada played in our historic 2002 contract negotiations," Wenzl said. "Solidarity was crucial to our success. You were there for us, and we will be there for you."

"The ILWU was a group of shippers and they were talking about how they would get around the troubles during the 2002 negotiations," Wenzl said. "And they said, 'Yeah, we could do it through the Panama Canal and British Columbia.' We didn't do any thing, but just smiled among ourselves because we knew the solidarity of our sisters and brothers. They weren't going to get any cargo through British Columbia."

Wenzl pointed to a common struggle in this year's election in English-speaking, Pacific countries.

"Workers in the U.S. and Canada have to take our governments back," he said, "because the rich people have it and they're taking tax cuts for themselves. It's time to give it back to the workers who built the U.S. and Canada and are paying for it."

"That, you have Mr. Martin, Australia has Mr. Howard, and we have a Mr. Harper. They will all be defeated this year when labor rises up and takes back our countries.""
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Chittagong dockers gather global backing

"Fees of privatization in Bangladesh drew tens of thousands of dockers to their seven-year fight against Stevedoring Services of America (SSA) at the National Convention of Brother Chittagong, Save the Country," held March 18. The event brought more than 1,000 Bangladeshi unionists and activists to Chittagong, along with invited guests from Pakistan, India, France and the United States.

Shariat Ullah, general secretary of the Chittagong Port Workers Union, opened the convention with a detailed account of the protracted struggle by the dockworkers to save their port and their jobs from SSA’s privatization scheme. SSA is the same company that led the employer offensive against the ILWU during the 2002 longshore contract struggle and got a $4.8 million contract from the Bush administration to operate the port of Umm Qasr in Iraq.

SSA is trying to build a half-billion-dollar mega-terminal on the Karnaphuli River just downstream from the public Port of Chittagong, where 50,000 longshore workers and their families make a living. Its location would block much of the public port’s traffic and its huge capacity would siphon most of the public port’s work. The notoriously anti-union SSA would not likely abide by the wages and working standards of the unionized Chittagong dockers, effectively destroying the jobs and livelihoods of all those who depend on the economic activity of Bangladesh’s only deepwater port.

Si Khulshidullah, convener of the Save Oil, Gas, Port, and Power (from privatization) National Committee, also addressed the gathering and placed the struggle of the portworkers in the context of the nationwide effort to defend and preserve all public services and enterprises placed on the chopping block by the government at the behest of the IMF and World Bank. Chittagong Mayor A.B.M. Mohiuddin Chowdhury highlighted the opening session with his review and denunciation of SSA, its many maneuvers to take the Port of Chittagong, and the system it represents.

"I salute the presence at our National Convention of Brother Clarence Thomas from the ILWU in the United States," Chowdhury said. "I want to thank him for everything he is doing for our city. I salute him as a representative of the American working class, which I do not confuse with the American administration and system. I condemn that system. The United States today wishes to control the port of Chittagong so that they can control our entire sub-continent. They have taken over Afghanistan and Iraq. And they want more. They conquer countries in order to destroy them."

Thomas, who represented ILWU longshore Local 10 at the convention, recounted the bitter struggles waged by the longshore workers in the U.S. against SSA. He told the Bangladeshi workers, "Your struggle is our struggle, just like our struggle is your struggle."

Thomas noted that SSA is seeking to do the same thing to portworkers in Chittagong that it has attempted to do to longshore workers in the U.S. He went on to talk about the March 20th antiwar demonstrations around the world and the fight of the New York dockworkers in the Port of Oakland 25 years ago, who were facing charges after police attacked their peaceful picket of SSA in an antiwar protest on the Oakland docks April 7, 2003. Convention delegates gave Thomas a standing ovation.

At the close of the convention, the delegates unanimously approved the Final Declaration prepared by the convention conveners and presented to the gathering by Taffazul Hussain, president of the Bangladesh National Workers Federation.

The statement detailed the convention’s opposition to privatization of the port and other national resources, especially when that gives control of public resources to foreign multinational corporations.

"The port of Chittagong is the life- line of the country. This is the only active seaport," the Declaration read in part. "If the port is taken over by the foreign ownership, the whole country as its hinterland will go under the foreign rule. Chittagong is the center of all economic activities of the country; if it goes at the foreign hand, the whole country will be subjugated. "As such to save our oil, gas and railway from privatization means saving the very existence of Bangladesh," the Declaration continued. "We must save Bangladesh and for that we issue this clarion call to support our cause to all the organizations, trade unions and individuals to all those who are committed to upholding democracy, human and workers’ rights. In spite of our political differences and diversified views, we are sure to build a joint resistance against the aggressor to save every inch of our motherland."

The people of Chittagong are still battling SSA and its U.S. government sponsors to save their port and their city. In the aftermath of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Mayor Chowdhury is particularly concerned that an SSA terminal alongside the port of Chittagong could be used as a military facility by the U.S. to control the entire region.

(See Port of Chittagong article begins on page 14)

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A CONFERENCE ON THE HISTORY & TRADITIONS OF THE LONGSHORE DIVISION

September 26-30, 2004
Palm Springs, California

Sponsored by the Longshore Division Coast Committee

Planned by: Coast Education Committee

Coordinated by: Gene Vrana, ILWU Director of Educational Services.

Sessions at the conference will include speakers, panel discussions, and multi-media presentations on:

Harry Bridges, Working Conditions, & Maritime Labor in the early years 1900-1932
• Labor Unity 1934-2004—ILWU, CIO, AFL-CIO • Rank & File Democracy—Traditions & Trends • Social Justice Unionism—How and why the ILWU has been so politically progressive • How the Longshore Division Works: From a Caucus to a Division • The Longshore experience in Hawaii, Alaska, Canada • Fighting for Jurisdiction I: The March Inland—How the origins, objectives, and strategies of the original March Inland compare to the current needs of the Division to grow, organize, and support non-longshore organizing drives • Fighting for Jurisdiction II: The New March Inland—Pacific Coast Trends in Marine Cargo Handling • Contract Crossroads—The changes, gains, and challenges in pivotal contract years 1934-2004 • Political Action—ILWU traditions of electoral and legislative action on the national, state, local level • International trends in ports, longshore employment and unionization • International Solidarity 1934-2004

Additional information and applications will be mailed to all longshore, clerks’, and walking bosses’ locals in June, and will also be posted on the ILWU website (www.lwvu.org). Priority consideration will be given to members who have already demonstrated their commitment to action through their participation in the Longshore Division’s Area Contract Workshops and political action conferences in 2003 and 2004.

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It has been ten years since NAFTA codified a new set of rules for trade among the United States and its immediate neighbors to the north and south. Hailed by post-Keynesian economists as the road to a prosperous global capital regimes. Recent academics have been overcome by the need for families to bring in goods and services, workers in each country have been discovering they have more in common than they used to. "Children of NAFTA" reveals what's happening below the radar screen, where workers have begun to act on the basis of their newfound shared interests.

Children of NAFTA isn't all in what Bacon reports but also in the images recorded by his camera. Adhering to a classical black-and-white socialist documentary approach, Bacon's rigorous, uncropped wide-angle photographs make no bones about his pro-worker biases. A single glance tells us that you can see this not only in what Bacon reports, and round-heeled unions affiliated with Mexico's corrupt official labor federations. These conditions make the maquiladoras an inviting locale for transnational corporations seeking cheap labor and uninterrupted production.

Bacon details many thwarted efforts by maquila workers to organize independent unions. Fearful of losing international investment—especially when their economy is struggling—Mexican authorities collude with the local managers of foreign companies and the official union confederations to keep their enterprises closed to independent unions and fair union elections. Such practices come with the cost of serious health and safety violations inside workplaces, and often tragically dangerous environmental damage to the surroundings and the people attempting to live in them. Bacon documents the spectacular failure of appeals by Mexican and American allies through NAFTA's administrative machinery, even in the most egregious instances.

"Children of NAFTA" isn't all about Mexico. Soon after workers at the Friction auto parts plant in Irvine, California, protested the treatment of the company's workers in Mexico, their union local was notified that Friction was shutting its doors for the last time. Supervisors told them, "This is what you get for what you've done." The company officially denied any retaliatory motive. Bacon also takes us through a number of other case studies north of the border, including more cheerful episodes like the Nebraska meatpacking plant successfully organized by its mostly Mexican immigrant workforce with the support of local churches and community groups.

An optimist, Bacon finds NAFTA's silver lining in heightened cross-border solidarity efforts. In one of these, cooperation with U.S. activists helped maquila workers to form an independent union. At Kuk Dong, a modern Korean-owned garment factory in Atlixco, abusive supervisors yelled at and hit the workers, many of whom were as young as fourteen. Workers couldn't eat the cafeteria food, which ranged from merely bad to putrid, with worms in the meat (shades of Sergio Eisenstein's "Battleship Potemkin"). Protests and retaliations escalated until the young workers occupied the factory on January 9, 2001. It took days before strikers were removed by chihuahua-policing.

Even then the workers didn't admit defeat. Regrouping, they contacted worker support groups and student anti-sweatshop organizations in the U.S. The latter pressured Nike, one of Kuk Dong's largest customers, to honor the company's own code of conduct. When the Kuk Dong workers formally established their own independent union, the company agreed to recognize it, eventually signing a union contract.

"Children of NAFTA" is a real contribution to our understanding of the changing human face of the economy. Bacon's perspective and on-the-ground research lead to the conclusion that efforts by workers themselves to find solutions to their problems—by reaching out to their counterparts on either side of the increasingly porous border—offer more hope than does NAFTA's toothless enforcement machinery for resisting predatory neo-liberal economic policies. Capital ignores borders. "Children of NAFTA" shows that, in defense of their own interests, workers need to erase the dotted lines as well. Indeed, they are already beginning to do so. Fred Glass serves as Communications Director for the California Federation of Teachers and teaches Labor Studies at City College of San Francisco.

Children of NAFTA


Reviewed by Fred Glass

Children of NAFTA

4 young worker pulls plastic parts from a plastic molding machine which will be assembled into coathangers for the garment industry, in the Tijuana maquiladora of Plasticos Bajacal. Workers tried unsuccessfully to organize an independent, democratic union there in cooperation with U.S. activists helped maquila workers to form an independent union. At Kuk Dong, a modern Korean-owned garment factory in Atlixco, abusive supervisors yelled at and hit the workers, many of whom were as young as fourteen. Workers couldn’t eat the cafeteria food, which ranged from merely bad to putrid, with worms in the meat (shades of Sergei Eisenstein’s "Battleship Potemkin"). Protests and retaliations escalated until the young workers occupied the factory on January 9, 2001. It took days before strikers were removed by chihuahua-policing.

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for the benefit of their shareholders, the human beings that do the work for them haven’t fared nearly so well.

Take, for instance, Honorina Lopez, who works in the onion fields of the Mexicali Valley with other members of her family. Bacon describes her activities: "Her hands are very quick. She lines up eight or nine onions, strings them out on their roots and tails. Then she knocks the dirt off, puts a rubber band around them, and adds the bunch to those already in the box beside her. She’s too shy to say more than her name, but she’s obviously proud to be able to perform a task at which her brother Rigoberto, at thirteen, working near her, already excels." Honorina is six. The company she works for, Muranaka Farms, shut down operations near Oxnard and Coachella in southern California and moved to Mexico after NAFTA passed, setting up one of many "maquilas in the fields."

Child labor is as illegal in Mexico as it is in the United States. That doesn’t prevent 3,000 kids under the age of fourteen from working in the Mexicali Valley’s green onion harvest. The Mexican government estimates that between 800,000 and 2.5 million children work instead of attending school throughout Mexico.

Not all of these truancies can be laid at the doorstep of NAFTA. But the treaty has, according to Bacon, encouraged the need for families to bring children to work as their traditional economies have been overcome by cheap labor and uninterrupted production. In battles to change the living and working conditions at the bottom of society. Today’s journalism environment is defined by an ever-shrinking number of giant media conglomerates disillusioned to pursue hard news, let alone social justice reporting.

This makes Bacon’s achievement in "Children of NAFTA" all the more remarkable. His book originated in articles he wrote for mainstream publications as well as union newsletters about the people working in the new economy. (Full disclosure: some of his articles were written for union publications I edited.) In his travels Bacon found that as globalization transformed production and distribution of goods and services, workers in each country have been discovering they have more in common than they used to. "Children of NAFTA" reveals what’s happening below the media radar screen, where workers have begun to act on the basis of their new-found shared interests.

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New faces at the ILWU recovery programs

By Tom Price

The ILWU in the U.S. and Canada, together with the employers, provide a drug and alcohol recovery program for workers to help them rebuild their lives and return to work. The benefit may also cover spouses and dependent children.

Recently George Cobbs, the Coast Director, and Daniel Borsheim, the Washington State representative, retired from their posts at the U.S. longshore Alcohol and Drug Recovery Program (ADRP). They have stepped up to fill their places. In Canada, Ted Greweit replaced Bill Bloor and Carol Seward to head the Longshore locals of the Employee Assistance Program.

Cobbs stepped down Jan. 6 after 24 years of ADRP service and 38 years in local 10. ADRP directors chose Jackie Cummings, who has been the ADRP representative in Southern California since 1987, to take his post. Donnie Schwendeman replaced Daniel Borsheim in Seattle and Norm McLeod will take on Cobbs’ duties as Northern California representative.

Greweit joined longshore Local 500 in 1967 and had been in the industry for 13 years before leaving last 10 years as a linesman, and provided holiday relief for his predecessor for several years.

Jim Copp remains as the Columbia River, Oregon Coast ADRP rep and Alphonse Greweit as the Northern California rep for warehouse Local 6 and 17.

Cummings, who has been the ADRP director since 2001, said he will continue to support the program in his capacity as the ILWU’s Employee Assistance Program representative.

“When longshore members see McLeod, it’s not like seeing the dentist or some guy in a white coat. He’s been Local 10 member since 1969.”

“Many of the people in Local 10 already know me because I trained them when I was the tractor driver and lift instructor,” he said. “I was an Employee Assistance Program coordinator in Local 10, and we took care of the families of the one worker who did the other down and up the Coast for that position. We were George Cobbs’ eyes and ears.”

EAP reps are like union stewards, except they don’t represent the workers. They represent the employer to work or to themselves. The reps pass out literature on recovery and education to help people with recovery problems. When a person is ready, they recommend treatment options. Cummings said the program is successful because it reconciles the worker with his or her job and family.

For Schwendeman, ADRP is an ideal job.

“The dream combination two things: I have one, being the ILWU and its members, and the other, the field of substance abuse and the recovery from it,” Schwendeman said. “That’s what my education is in, and I will continue it.”

Schwendeman will graduate in June from Highline Community College and give a keynote address. The 11-year member of longshore Local 19 made the first team on the All-USA Academic Team this year. He looks forward to putting his studies in work and psychology to good use in his new duties.

“A lot of members aren’t aware of the ADRP benefit, how it functions separately from the regular health benefits and how it is administered,” Schwendeman said. “My first challenge is to get out there and educate the membership as to what they’re entitled to and how easy it is to have it initiated.”

Some members fear the employ- ers might retaliate if they enter the program, but the ADRP supports it, Cummings said.

“People have never been penal- ized by PMA for seeking help,” she said. “I’d say that 80 percent of the time PMA doesn’t know that our members are getting help, because they haven’t involved the employer by getting in trouble at work.”

Cummings knows the tasks ahead of her.

“My job is to ensure the program remains the highly respected work- place model it is in the industry, and that we can negotiate high-quality treatment for our members,” she said. “We also have to make the mem- bership aware of their benefits, including coverage for adolescents.”

The 24-year-old ADRP provides literature at longshore halls and its representatives actively seek out people who want help. The Dispatcher recovery programs add addresses and phone numbers on its back page in every edition. But it takes an indi- vidual’s commitment to recovery for it to work.

“The door only opens when you’re ready to open it,” McLeod said.

Longshore retired, deceased and survivors

RECENT RETIREES:
Local 4—Ronald Mullane, Loren Bray, Jeff Ramsey; Local 50—Robert Stannus; Local 6—Sargon, Richard Knebel, Eugene Bailey; Local 9—Alfredmino, Walter; Local 10—Gerald E. Brown, Donald Lail; Local 12—Raymond Hakala, Robert Gaston, Robert Mack; Local 13—Harold Pyatte; Local 14—Joyce, John Ragni, Edward Peterson; Local 17—Charles Halyarup Jr.; Local 18—Michael McNamara; Local 24—Marlin Ramsey; Local 27—Clifford Rooflessau; Larry Breitbach, Rodney Getchell; Local 29—Joe E. Moreno; Local 32—Richard Borsheim, Harold Pyatte; Local 34—John H. Carter, Murray L. Martin, Victor Vidalino, Donald Conner, Anthony Boydzid, Edmond Robertson, Richard Abruzzo, David Cofresi, Ernesto Grissom, Robert M. Metgar, Jack Zenke; Local 23—Ann, John Knoth (Dorothea), Carl Plitz (Elmer); Local 25—Valerie, John Knoth (Joyce), John Knoth (Donna), Patrick Stanton (Ann), James Robinson (Syndy), Milton Cummings; Local 27—Charles Halyarup Jr./Jack Block.

DECEASED:
Local 1—Charles Halyarup Jr./Jack Block.

DECEASED SURVIVORS:
Local 4—Robert Knebel, Richard E. McDonald, Allen Robbins; Local 8—Robert Terry, Jimmy Sutherland, Daniel L. Davis; Local 12—Raymond Roper, Howard B. Byers, Richard Heidal, Robert K. Stephens, Robert Goebel, Arden, Thomas D. Davis, Marcy, Street, Townes, Natasha Massey, Kara Evans, Sarah; Local 19—Charles Halyarup Jr./Jack Block.

DECEASED SURVIVORS:
Local 4—Richard J. Merrick.

DECEASED SURVIVORS:
Local 5—Glennis Weygandt; Local 10—Helen Pedersen, Frances Olivera, Margaret Forni, Mohal James, Antonio Campania, Helen W. Johnson, Florence Culbertson, Gladys Ting; Local 12—Edna Hamlin, Naomi Bailey, Arnold Harris, Lola Martin, Noveidin Madison; Local 13—Lomie Tellinh, Helen Iacono, Mary Shortridge, Margaret Van Mulligan, Louise Crowder, Eula Loftis, Maria Hurtado, Ida Murray, Mary Rio, Theresa Aluvae, Margaret Phillips, Frances Oro, Virginia Gibbin, Gloria Pendleton, Doris Vaughn; Local 19—Ruth Ward, Martin L. Smith, Lovetta King, Jessie Kennedy; Local 23—Bonnie Baydo, Esther Shelleberg, Maureta Bergman; Local 24—Elize Johnson, Gertrude Jones, Maxine McCormack; Local 25—Norma Rollow; Local 26—Vivian Stevens; Local 34—Hildred Hanelt, Gladys Lighten, Merle Miner, Mathilda Scaletta, Ann Dawson, Jacquelyn Kierman; Local 50—Erena Cordor; Local 54—Vernon Patzer, Opal Jones, Juanita Lafaete, Margaret M. Thompson; Local 60—Sillian Ogors, Margaret Seeley; Local 91—Catherine Jensen, Dorothy Dysche, Agnes Pahland; Local 92—Bernice Larson, Adella Thornton; Local 94—Sarah Salem, Mildred Thwaits; Local 98—Paulette Prock.

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DECEASED:
Local 1—Charles Halyarup Jr. (Georgia); Local 8—William Anderson (Ann), John Knoth (Dorothea), Carl Plitz (Ann); Local 17—Charles Halyarup Jr. (Jack); Local 24—Marlin Ramsey, Chester Colton, John Knoth, Richard Abruzzo, Thomas D. Davis, Marcy, Street, Townes, Natasha Massey, Kara Evans, Sarah; Local 29—Manecina, Walter D. Wilson, Robert Trador, Harold Copeland; Local 27—Clifford Rooflessau, Larry Breitbach, Rodney Getchell, Local 29—Joe E. Moreno; Local 32—Richard Borsheim, Harold Pyatte; Local 34—John H. Carter, Murray L. Martin, Victor Vidalino, Donald Conner, Anthony Boydzid, Edmond Robertson, Richard Abruzzo, David Cofresi, Ernesto Grissom, Robert M. Metgar, Jack Zenke; Local 23—Ann, John Knoth (Dorothea), Carl Plitz (Elmer); Local 25—Valerie, John Knoth (Joyce), John Knoth (Donna), Patrick Stanton (Ann), James Robinson (Syndy), Milton Cummings; Local 27—Charles Halyarup Jr./Jack Block.

DECEASED:
Local 4—Richard J. Merrick.
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