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I want to reassure all ILWU members covered by the longshore plan that their pension is very solid. By James Spinoso ILWU International President

R ecently the news has been filled with stories about union-negotiated pensions going bust. People have labored for a company for their whole working career believing their loyalty and commitment would be rewarded with a comfortable retirement and spousal support. And then the company pulls some legal scam in bankruptcy court and all those dreams are shattered. It’s incomprehensible and reprehensible. In this atmosphere I wasn’t surprised that several ILWU members recently approached me asking about the security of our pensions. I was glad they were concerned and I figured they weren’t the only ones wanting an update. I want to give you assurances, but I also want to issue warnings, tell you what your union is doing to protect your pension and alert you to what you can do.

The ILWU negotiates many contracts throughout the industries we represent with various pension plans and different degrees of risk. The main kind of pension facing problems in corporate bankruptcies and contract negotiations these days are “defined benefit pensions.” In this kind of pension—like the ILWU longshore pension plan and the Northern California Master Freight contract that covers some ILWU Local 6 and 17 warehouse workers—the union and the employer negotiate a specific amount of money a retiree gets each month, usually based on the number of years the worker has been employed by the company. The employer is required by law to set aside a certain amount of money each year, based on what the eventual benefit will be, and put it into an investment fund so it will be there when the retirement benefit is needed. The employer is also legally required to contribute a certain amount of money each year to the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC), a government agency charged with insuring workers’ pensions, as an insurance policy in case problems arise in the future with the company’s financing.

There are two kinds of defined benefit pensions—multi-employer plans, where, like in our longshore plan and the Northern California Master Freight contract, different companies band together and create one plan for all their workers, and single employer plans, where one company assumes all the payments and risks.

I want to assure all ILWU members covered by the longshore plan that their pension is very solid. This is true for several reasons. First, as a multi-employer plan, should any of the almost 80 companies in the Pacific Maritime Association employer group go bankrupt, the remaining ones are bound by the contract to cover the financial obligations. And as long as world trade continues, our industry and employers will likely remain profitable. The ILWU Coast Committee also acts as equal trustees with the PMA, always keeping a close watch on the fund and its investments.

Also, in 2002 the longshore negotiators agreed to a funding schedule that was approved by the PBGC—which, as the plan’s insurer, has an interest in making sure it is solvent.

Other non-longshore ILWU members who have single employer pension plans could face more risks. If their employer should go broke, either through changes in their industry or even simple bad management, they could face employer attempts to bail out of their pension payment obligations. And if they then need to turn to the PBGC for help and insuring their monthly retirement checks, they may find trouble. The PBGC’s single employer insurance fund is itself in debt, having recently been stuck picking up the bill on numerous large pension debts left behind by bankrupt steel and airline companies, among others. In many cases the PBGC insurance limits have resulted in workers receiving only a portion of what they have been promised.

Currently, Republicans have legislation in Congress which, in typical Orwellian fashion they call the “Pension Protection Act of 2005,” but actually would put pensions further at risk. Provisions in the multi-employer section of the legislation could affect the carefully negotiated and PBGC-approved longshore funding requirement and affect future bargaining. The section affecting single employer plans has many defects. It has a provision that would prohibit paying any future plant closing benefits, including those already negotiated, no matter how well funded the pension plan is. It would also prohibit benefit improvements, even simple updates just to keep up with wage growth, if the plan’s funding falls below 80 percent. If the funding falls below 60 percent all benefit accruals cease and cannot be restarted until the funding level is back up to 80 percent. These provisions put workers at risk of having their employer manipulate the plan and intention- ally trigger a benefit accrual freeze or a ban on benefit increases by simply failing to uży adequate. These and many other provisions in the bill make workers’ retirement less secure.

All 27 Republican members of the House of Representatives Education and Workforce Committee voted for the bill, while all 22 Democrats voted “present” (abstention) in protest of the lack of information on how it would affect employer contributions to pension plans and how it would deal with the PBGC’s shortfall. Now the Republican plan is to send it to the House Ways and Means Committee to fold it into one bill with Bush’s Social Security privatization proposal and try to sell it as comprehensive retirement reform. They figure they may be able to “peel off” some Democrats reluctant to vote down the pension protection and get them to pass some form of Social Security privatization. It’s a cynical and descripable move, but probably the only chance the Republicans have to pass a program nearly 70 percent of the American people oppose—even after months of it being the top sales pitch of Bush’s domestic agenda.

As these legal maneuvers show, nothing is inviolable—not the best written contract language or the most righteous laws. We must always remain alert and vigilant. Right now we need all our members to write their Congressional representatives opposing both the Pension Protection Act and the Republican attempt to link Social Security privatization to it.

In closing, let me reiterate that the ILWU Longshore pension is secure and stable. The fact that we have so many large, multi-national companies contributing to the trust fund, employers and covering each other, and that your officers as Trustees of the fund review it in depth monthly, makes it probably the most secure pension in the country.
Longshore gets Alaska cruise work back

By Todd Iverson

A 67-member delegation of ILWU members descended on Whittier, Alaska June 8 to press Carnival Cruise Lines to go back to using local longshore labor in the loading and unloading of passenger baggage in the cruise ships that dock there.

At a demonstration, along with several of ILWU Alaska longshore members, met at 10 a.m. in Anchorage at the Inter-Continental Hotel the day before to learn about the issues and discuss the game plan. A half-dozen volunteers were to help assist the local longshore force in the unloading of the vessel Spirit with the shift beginning at 3 p.m. The maximum was high enough to take these living-wage, American-based jobs back from the foreign crew members but not enough to take this delegation when the protest began at 1:30 a.m. Carnival personnel were overwhelmed by the strong showing of support, but still would not allow longshore workers aboard the vessel the day two longshore workers were locked out of view by low-lying clouds. A constant cold wind and persistent light rain kept the delegators warm enough to continue their protest but didn’t allow them on board ship to unload the baggage to the dock. When the gang then refused to take the bag-gage on the dock, wanting all the baggage just as some of it, Southeast Stevedoring locked out the ILWU. For the next five hours, superintendents from Southeast Stevedoring and crew members of the Spirit worked the forklifts and handled the bags.

Meanwhile dozens of ILWU mem-bers, despite a ceaseless biting wind, protested in the parking lot with signs stating that the company had broken the ILWU contract so we can provide saving American jobs and retaining American jobs. For a few hours the mood became disheartening as the])),

The following week, Carnival and Southeast Stevedoring agreed to accept an ILWU deal, agreeing to save American jobs and retaining work for the ILWU.

The arrested members were taken to Anchorage, booked and cited and released later that night on $500 bail each. The day’s protest was the lead on the evening news in Anchorage and the next day’s paper.

The best part of being arrested, "we are not going to let you do this to us," said ILWU Alaska President Carl Norman. "We finally convinced them that it was in their best interest to return that work to U.S. citizens. Without the technology, we fear we will not have a roadway, including Michael Kennedy of Local 23 member Don Faker said "We were there trying to make a point, and when the passengers got off the bus, we had to show that protecting our jobs was worth being arrest-ed," Local 23 member Don Faker said after being released from jail.

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Dismantling retirement benefits: The latest scam

June 2005

Corporate America wants a fully privatized retirement system. It wants Bush’s private investment accounts for Social Security, which will allow banks and financial institutions to get their hands on workers’ pay- roll taxes. And it wants to convert defined benefit pension plans into hybrid “Cash Balance” 401(k)-like pension plans, which allow companies to get out from under the liability of having to guarantee levels of benefit payments for their workers. Linking and integrating the redefined of defined benefits pensions and Social Security together may well prove a faster way to get both.

—Jack Rasmus
National Writers Union, UAW 1981, AFL-CIO


Dismantling retirement benefits: The latest scam

U.S. corporations today are intent on radically restructuring the whole retirement system in America. The twin pillars of that system—defined benefit pensions and Social Security as two distinct and separate retirement systems—are now under simultaneous attack.

Unlike in the past when corporate strategy was to singly attack benefit pension plans and Social Security as two distinct and separate retirement systems, they are now unified into a skewed approach to rolling back workers’ retirement benefits is emerging. The associated change in pension plans and Social Security are about to be linked, integrated and rolled into one corporate lobbying and legislative effort.

Despite Bush’s barmaining the corporate community-of-interest, his proposals to reform Social Security by privatizing it with “Private Investment Accounts,” public opinion polls show Americans are not buying Bush’s phony claim that adding such accounts to Social Security will not make the crisis worse.

Bush’s plans for Social Security reform are unworkable. And the big banks and financial institutions destined to reap billions of dollars from the Bush plan are<formula>corrupting</formula> Bush. Republicans in Congress and corporate interests are schemes to save the Social Security privatization plan by linking it to the crisis in defined benefit pension plans. In fact, late January Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives moved a pension bill, the Pension Protection Act, which is the first priority of the Administration’s Workforce Committee. But instead of sending the bill to the floor of the House, it is being sent to the House Ways and Means Committee, where its chairman, William Thomas (R-CA) plans to integrate it with the Administration’s proposal for Social Security privatization. The two bills will be presented as one proposal for comprehensive restructuring of retirement programs in general. By integrating the two approaches, corporate interests can more effectively concentrate their lobbying efforts to further privatize both systems and to transform both even faster into privatized, personal, 401(k)-like investment accounts.

Moreover, integrating both pension and Social Security reform provides Bush and corporate interests a further tactical advantage. It will make it difficult for Democrats to continue their current strategy of refusing to discuss Private Investment Accounts for Social Security if saving defined benefit pension plans is also on the discussion table. Democrats may be forced to consider, and perhaps even vote for, elements of Bush’s Social Security plan in order to have a voice in saving defined benefit pension plans.

One coordinated corporate lobbying effort

The Wall St. Journal recently noted: “The pension bill has such broad support that without it, the Ways and Means panel’s Social Security proposals would have little chance of being passed by the full House, business lobbyists say.”

Corporate America wants a fully privatized retirement system. It wants Bush’s private investment accounts for Social Security, which will allow banks and financial institutions to get their hands on workers’ payroll taxes. And it wants to convert defined benefit pension plans into hybrid “Cash Balance” 401(k)-like pension plans, which allow companies to get out from under the liability of having to guarantee levels of benefit payments for their workers. Linking and integrating the redefined of defined benefits pensions and Social Security together may well prove a faster way to get both.

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Iraqi unionists fight two-headed occupation

by William Adams
ILWU International Secretary-Treasurer

P articipated in a U.S. labor delegation to Vietnam from May 14-21, 2005. We met with Vietnamese unionists at 14 different workplaces over the course of five days. We also hosted four work sites, and visited historic sites in Hanoi.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the end of what is called “the War” in Vietnam, not the “Vietnam War.” Ten years ago, the U.S. government reestablished formal relations with Vietnam. And although trade between the two countries is growing rapidly and the exchange between our countries continues daily, we still do not have formal relations between our labor movements.

In fact, the ILWU is the only union in the U.S. to have maintained relations with our counterpart in Vietnam, the Vietnamese Maritime Union. The Vietnamese Maritime Union met with us during our visit in Vietnam, and they also sent a delegation to participate in the recent Second Pacific Rim Mining and Maritime seminar hosted by the ILWU in Long Beach last March.

The purpose of our labor delegation was to strengthen communication and exchange between unions and workers in Vietnam and the U.S., and to strengthen labor education so that unions and workers can learn from one another. In an era of globalization, this is more important now than ever. The delegation included May Chen, National Vice-President of UNITE-HERE; David Bacon, Director, UCLA Labor Center; Chau Nhat Binh, Deputy Director of the VGLC of the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor; Elaine Bernard, director of the Harvard Trade Union Program; Munsato, director of the Queens College Labor Center, and Kent Wong, director of the UCLA Labor Center.

Vietnam is a youthful country. Their baby boom occurred after 1975, so 65 percent of the population is under 30. You can feel the youthfulness on the streets of Vietnam. The economy has changed from a state-run system to a mixed economy with a vibrant free market. In the past decade, foreign investment has increased dramatically.

These changes have also brought new challenges for Vietnamese unions. Although union density is very high in the state-run sector, in the private sector it is much lower. VIHW is now addressing the need to organize in the private sector, and to negotiate collective bargaining agreements. They have a goal to organize one million new workers in the coming years.

On paper labor laws in Vietnam favor the unions. Within six months, employers are required to negotiate the union. Within a year, they are required to negotiate a contract. Unfortunately, however, the law is not always enforced.

In Hanoi we visited a garment factory and saw workers under terrible conditions, including an on-site child-care facility for the workers. We met with the union leaders, none of whom were women. In fact, the head of the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor, Tran Thanh Tien, is the only woman in the highest position in the workers’ movement.

We also toured a railway facility that has built many of the trains now used to transport passengers and goods throughout the country. In Ha Tay province, we visited a motorcycle parts plant that was privately owned, one of many in the growing market economy. In Quang Ninh province in north-east Vietnam, we stayed at a hotel that has built many of the trains now used to transport passengers and goods throughout the country. In Ha Tay province, we visited a motorcycle parts plant that was privately owned, one of many in the growing market economy.

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Workers and unions in Vietnam are fighting for the same things we are: decent wages, improved working conditions, and a strong labor rights in Iraq at the same time that we strive to reverse the erosion of labor rights over the past decades. The United States and elsewhere around the world where they are threatened.”

Suarez told, with obvious grief, the story of his son who was killed after stepping on a cluster bomb in Iraq.”

The ILWU went on record with a resolution to follow the military occupation.”

“We see privatization as an attempt to impose a permanent economic occupation,” the ILWU said.

One privatization attempt hit close to home for the ILWU: Servicing Services of America is a no-bid contract to privatize the Iraqi port of Um Qasr even before the invasion, as Local 8 President Leal Sundet pointed out when the Iraqis came.

“We have a goal to organize one million new workers in the coming years.”

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Sundet said, “Our future and your future are locked together. We do the same work and have the same enemies—George Bush and the multinational corporations whose only allegiance is money.”

The U.S. labor delegation issued a joint statement at the end of the tour calling for an end to the occupation, opposing privatization and highlighting the importance of the labor movements in both countries. The bedrock of a democratic society is a free, strong and democratic labor movement.”

The ILWU, the Pensioners’ Club and Ladies of Locals 13, 63 and 94, as well as the ILWU Coast Committeeman hosted a luncheon that drew more than 70 people from the Bay Area as part of a 25-city tour of the U.S. from May 14-21.

In an era of globalization, this is more important now than ever. The delegation included May Chen, National Vice-President of UNITE-HERE from San Francisco, Tho Do, National Vice-President of UNITE-HERE from New York, Elaine Bernard, director of the Harvard Trade Union Program, Munsato, director of the Queens College Labor Center, and Kent Wong, director of the UCLA Labor Center.

The ILWU welcomed Fateh Abbood Umara, a dock worker who worked at ILWU’s Long Beach terminal for nearly 25 years. The ILWU requested Abbood to speak at the ILWU’s General Board meeting [March/April 2005] the laborers who have kept organizing to confront the abuses. (See story page 6-7.)

Most recently, Iraqi unions have stepped up the fight against privatization.

“The second front of the war will be against privatization,” Juma’a said. “We see privatization as an attempt to impose a permanent economic occupation,” the ILWU said.

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BASRA, IRAQ (6/29/05) — Originally organized under the British in the early 1920s, the Iraqi oil union has always been the heart of the country’s labor movement.

“Our country’s two biggest strikes, in 1946 and 1952, were organized by oil workers,” Jafar Abous Unar, general secretary of the newly reorganized General Union of Oil Employees (GUOE), told officers and members of the ILWU during a visit to the West Coast by himself and Hassan Juma’a Awd, the union’s president.

Today it is again Iraq’s largest, most powerful labor organization, with 23,000 members in southern Iraq. Together with other two labor federations and a handful of independent professional associations, the labor movement is now the biggest institution in Iraqi civil society.

From the very first day of the occupation, Iraqi labor has had to operate in illegal conditions, which has produced a militant and fighting movement, especially in oil. That spirit was evident on the morning of April 9, 2003, the day the US/ British invasion started. Workers at Basra’s huge, dilapidated oil refinery knew it might come at any moment. Nevertheless, no one expected American tanks when they suddenly pulled up at the gate.

“We were coming out early, at the end of our shift, and there was the American army,” recalled Farouk Arbat, one of the plant’s firemen. “We were ready to say, ‘Hello.’”

Instead of greeting the workers and acting like their liberators, however, the soldiers trained guns on them. The head of the fire department made the mistake of questioning the troops, and was ordered to lie face down on the ground.

“Abduritha was absolutely shocked,” Arbat recalled. “He was going home. Why should he lie down? But he did as he was ordered. Then an American put his foot on his back. So we started fighting with the soldiers with our fists, because we didn’t want to lie facedown on the ground.

“We were asked if we had weapons. ‘No, we have none,’ we said. ‘Then why do you fight?’ ‘Because,’ we said, ‘you have carried a heavily armed British military escort.’

“At first there were only 100 of us, but workers began coming down off the platform. Some took their shirts off and told the troops, ‘Shoot us.’ Others lay down on the ground.

“About 40 of the workers went under the tankers, brandishing cigarette lighters. They announced that if the soldiers fired, they would set the tankers on fire.

“The soldiers, mostly sons of workers themselves, did not fire. Instead, negotiations began between the tankers’ director and the occupation authorities in Basra. By the end of the day the workers had their pay. Within a week, everyone at the refinery rejoined, and the oil union in Basra was reborn.

ORGANIZING FOR JOBS

Like other unions in Iraq’s state-owned enterprises, the oil union has had to function as an illegal organization. That hasn’t kept unions from organizing to successfully challenge the occupation, however. In fact, the first big fight over the US/ British ERP program came within a few months of the confrontation at the Basra refinery gate.

KBR, a subsidiary of the oil services giant Halliburton, lost some of the corporate camp followers arriving in the wake of the troops. KBR was given a no-bid contract to put out war-caused damage. Former workers, it was later revealed, had been in the door; its presence spread rapidly. Within weeks, it had taken over the financial functions of Basra’s civil administration. Workers, in turn, refused to get paid, had to take their time sheets to local KBR offices for approval. Those who had fled the advancing troops had to get company permission to return to their jobs.

Then KBR claimed the work of reconstructing wells, pipelines and other oil facilities, and hired a Kuwaiti contractor, Al Khoorafi, to bring in a foreign workforce. Meanwhile, the company used its presence in the oil fields to try to hire drilling rig workers away from the Iraqi Drilling Company, a national enterprise. Despite promises of higher wages, few took the job. Nevertheless, Iraqi oil workers were outraged. With unemployment hovering at 70 percent, they saw a clear threat to their jobs.

“In two days we didn’t move,” said Farouk Sadiq, a union leader and teacher at Basra’s Oil Institute. “We refused to pump a single drop until they left. We said we wanted them to leave by peaceful means—otherwise we would have had another language to speak with them. Other workers in Basra refused to work too, and the American authority saw we could affect what really matters to them. It was independence day for oil labor.”

KBR did leave the oil districts, and closed their offices in Basra.

In December the union challenged the wage orders of Paul Bremer, civilian administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority, threatening to strike again if wages were lowered. This time, the oil minister caved in without a work stoppage.

Eventually, the bottom two wage grades were abolished in the oil industry, bringing the base wage up to about $85 per month.

The GUOE then helped workers organize their own union in the power generating plants. Hashimia Mohsen al Hussein was elected president, the first woman to head a national union in Iraq. In 2004, union leaders from the Najafiyah, Haartha and Al Zubair electrical generating stations, where workers mounted a wildcat strike, succeeded in getting the ministry to return to the old scale. Last June the union organized large demonstrations to protest government decisions to hire more foreign workers, instead of firing the KBR contractors and replacing the industry’s own employees. The problem persists.

“We will confront them if they don’t stop,” Mohsen warned. “Many Basra workers have already agreed to join us in a general strike.”

On the ground in southern Iraq a new labor movement is being born. Some unions, like the oil workers, are independent. Others, like those for Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU). They all cooperate in confronting the occupation’s economic policies for keeping wages low, subcontracting jobs and privatizing major industrial enterprises.

In May the GUOE organized a conference at the cultural center of the oil industry in downtown Basra under a banner calling on Iraqis “To revive the public sector and build an Iraqi free of privatization.” Bringing together union leaders from rigs and refineries, economists from Basra University, representatives of the IFTU and political parties from the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq to Iraq’s Communists, the conference sought to forge a consensus to resist oil privatization.

The public sector economy of Iraq is one of the symbols of the achievement of Iraqis since the revolution of July 4th, 1958,” the conference statement declared.

According to oil industry analystGreg Muttitt, who attended the conference representing the British organization Platform, a non-governmental organization concerned with issues of globalization, it is unlikely that oil reserves themselves would be sold, or that a foreign company or government would be given a concession like the one the British held for over three decades. Other than the U.S., no other country permits those forms of ownership.

“More likely, Iraq’s debt will be used to force...
The government to sign production-sharing agreements with the multi-nationals,” Mutti said.

Such agreements would allow a foreign company to extract the oil, sell it to pay itself for the costs of extraction—by its own calculation—and split the remainder of the income with the government.

Iraq's government would be locked into long-term, disadvantageous agreements, in which it would lose control over most decisions regarding oil exploitation, pricing, income and jobs. Oil workers would likely suffer massive layoffs and lose their leverage over production. Juma’a Awad stressed that without the oil income, Iraq will be unable to rebuild from the war.

“Oil is the first step in jump-starting the economy,” he said. “We don’t want to pay the cost of globalization.”

While rank-and-file workers are unfamiliar with the details of production-sharing agreements, they are suspicious of privatization, despite the carrot of modernization used by its defenders to make it attractive. In the Basra refinery, senior fireman Abdul Faisal Jaleel criticizes Saddam Hussein’s long failure to invest in modern technology, or even spare parts, and said workers paid the price.

“We’ve been like the camel that carries gold, but is given thorns to eat.” Nevertheless, he said, foreign ownership is not the answer. “We reject foreign investment. We want to keep our own oil revenues and use them to develop our country with our hands.”

Unions are suspicious of Iraq’s elite political class, returning from exile and enameled with the idea of establishing a market economy. But they recognize that the government only nominally holds the power to make these economic decisions, and that the corporate class, particularly from Washington and London, is the key player. This is just one reason why all Iraqi unions call for an end to the occupation and the cancellation of the country’s foreign debt.

They don’t agree on timing or method. The GUOE calls for immediate withdrawal of foreign troops. The IFTU says an elected Iraqi government should use UN resolution 1545 to ask them to leave. The Federation of Workers’ Councils and Unions of Iraq (FWCUI), Iraq’s other main labor federation, says that the occupation must be shown to support security. But Abood Umara, head of the FWCUI, says the economic plan of the occupation would bring Iraq back to the early 1950s, before oil was nationalized and Iraq was ruled by the British behind the facade of a native monarchy.

UNIONS AS TARGET OF TERROR AND TROOPS

The occupation, however, is not their only enemy. In Basra, Ali Khafid, a leader of the IFTU-affiliated union at Baghdad’s Al Daura oil refinery, was walking home with his young children when gunmen ran up and shot him. Less than a week later, armed men gunned down Ahmed Adris Abbas in Baghdad’s Martyrs’ Square. Abbas was an activist in the Communications Union, another IFTU affiliate.

The murder of the two followed the torture and assassination of Hadi Saleh, the IFTU’s international secretary, in Baghdad Jan. 4.

Aboud Umara refers to them all as “our leaders” despite the fact that the GUOE is not part of the IFTU, and condemns terrorism and assassinations. He adds that a bomb was found in the car of a GUOE member earlier this year, fortunately before it was detonated, and that Hassan Juma’a’s Awad has received death threats.

Last fall, armed insurgents attacked freight trains, killing four workers in November, and beating and kidnapping others a month later. Service was suspended between Basra and Baghdad after workers threatened to strike over lack of security.

They say they’re being blamed for helping the occupation by doing their jobs, although the trains don’t carry military goods.

“It’s [a risk for all] civil society organizations, including trade unions,” Saleh explained at a meeting of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions in Japan in December, just before his murder. Trade unionists, both teachers and engineers, kill them under the notion that they are collaborating with a state created by Americans, so by definition those are collaborators and legitimate targets.

Attacks come from the government and U.S. occupation forces alike. In Baghdad’s Transportation and Communication workers were thrown out of their office in the city’s central bus station in December 2003 by U.S. soldiers, who then arrested members of the IFTU executive board. Qasim Hadi, general secretary of the Union of the Unemployed (part of the IFTU executive board. Qasim Hadi, general secretary of the Union of the Unemployed (part of the IFTU, and condemns terrorism and assassinations.

Murder, in the broader context of anti-union violence, IFTU leaders are probably singled out as a response to the union’s position on the January elections, another issue on which Iraqi unions disagree.

“The IFTU supports democratic principles,” explained Ghasab Hassan, head of the IFTU’s Railway and Aviation Union. “And one of those principles is elections. So we supported them.”

The IFTU, like other Iraqi labor federations, has close relations with a set of political parties, in its case the Iraqi Communist Party (with two ministers in the current government), the Iraqi National Accord of outgoing Prime Minister Iesal al Allawi and a party of Arab nationalists.

The FWCUI condemned the balloting. “Its purpose was to impose the American project on Iraq, and give legitimacy to the government imposed by the occupying coalition,” President Falah Alwan said.

The FWCUI is allied with the small Workers Communist Party of Iraq. The oil union, which took no position on the election, is independent both of other union federations and of political parties.

LOOKING FOR A NEW IRAQ

While Iraq’s new unions see different methods and timing for getting rid of the occupation, all agree it should go as soon as possible. But they are not only some of the occupation’s main critics on the ground—they also uphold a vision of an alternative future that has inspired progressive Iraqis for decades. Labor’s veterans remember the heady days of the 1958 revolution, when organizing unions, breaking up the big estates and building public housing for the urban poor were not just dreams, but government policy. Oil was eventually nationalized, and before Saddam Hussein’s wars, the revenue was used to build universities, hospitals, and big government-owned factories.

In the U.S., where people know little of Iraqi history, that vision is unknown. Yet millions of Iraqis have a long record of supporting progressive ideas and paid for their ideals with death and prison.

Unions, women’s rights advocates, teachers, journalists and members of progressive political parties see Iraq as a peaceful country, with a government committed to social justice, using its oil wealth to give common people a decent chance at life.

Whether they have a real opportunity to develop a progressive, democratic future depends on more than their efforts alone. Creating the political space needed by Iraqi civil society also depends on the actions of an anti-war constituency in the U.S. Six Iraqi trade unionists, from the GUOE, IFTU and FWCUI, toured 25 U.S. cities for two weeks in June, to help their union counterparts understand the cost of the war in a new way (see story page 6). They all called on U.S. labor to press the U.S. government to end the occupation.

“U.S. Labor Against the War, which brings together anti-war forces in U.S. unions and organized the Iraqis’ visit, is waging a fight within the AFL-CIO to win a call for the withdrawal of U.S. troops.

The ILWU was the first union in the AFL-CIO to adopt such a position, and was followed by other major AFL-CIO affiliates, including SEIU, CWA, AFSCME, Graphic Communications, Mailhandlers (part of the Laborers), and numerous state, district and local bodies.

U.SLAW has campaigned for Congressional action to end the ban on Iraqi unions, and raised money to help them survive.

“International cooperation,” U.SLAW coordinator Gene Bruskin said, “can provide significant political muscle to change U.S. policy, both on war and privatization, and help those forces in Iraq which want a progressive and democratic future.”
ILWU Reading List

Over the years, several books have been written about the ILWU. The following list, compiled by ILWU Director of Educational Services Gene Verna, details the author, title, publisher, price, main subject or theme, and availability of the books. There are also other publications about the ILWU can also be read at the ILWU Library.


Bulcke, Germain. Longshore Leader and ILWU-FMA Arbitrator. Bancroft Library, Regional Oral History Office, University of California at Berkeley, 1984. The oral history and anecdotal account of Bulcke's San Francisco career as a member and officer of the ILWU. University libraries.

Fairley, Lincoln. Facing Mechanization: The West Coast Longshore Plan. Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California at Los Angeles, 1980. A thorough compilation of histories of local auxiliaries and bookstores, or from the publisher.


Selvin, David F. A Terrible Anger: The 1934 Waterfront Strike in Portland, Oregon. Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California at Los Angeles, in 1978). The only comprehensive narrative history of the strike. Watch The Dispatcher for ordering information.


William, David. The Union Makes Us Strong: Radicals, Unions, and Workers on the Columbia River Waterfront. Cambridge University Press, 1996 ($59.95, cloth; $13.95, paper). A sociologist blends history, interviews, and analysis into the best description and appraisal yet written about the strengths, traditions and problems of the ILWU on the waterfront since the 1930s. Available from the ILWU library at a significant discount—watch The Dispatcher for details.


Red scare was terrorist threat of the 1950s

Reviewed by Harvey Schwartz
Curator, ILWU Oral History Collection and Sam Kapel Historian, Labor Archives and Research Center, S.F. State University.


D id you like Howard Zinn’s “A People’s History of the United States”? If so, you are going to love the new book by Jack Rasmus. “The War at Home” is a highly readable, informative and useful collection of essays about how workers and working classes fared under the shadow of anti-communism in the United States. The book is well-edited by a trio of historians (and friends of the ILWU) steeped in the topic: writer, labor historian Bob Cherry, political historian Bill Issel, and Kerry Taylor, an editor of the monthly labor journaling R. papers at Stanford University.

The essays are culled from a recent annual conference of the Southwest Labor Studies Association, and together they effectively answer the questions the editors seek to address about McCarthyism: What was the real extent of political oppression? How did the editors and contributors to this book imagine resistance? To what degree were workers and their unions and communities harmed by repression? What kind of support for anti-communism in the labor movement itself and in working-class communities existed? Were there different experiences in various geographical regions?

While admirably fulfilling their own aims in exposing anti-communism in the 1950s, the editors and contributors have also helped illuminate the fact that the attacks on free speech and union organizing were part of a much broader and more ominous attack on civil liberties and working class organizing and political activity in general. Equally important, they raise factors to consider such as the impact of religion and national origin when trying to understand why workers so often support the prevailing (and conservative) government and corporate view of world events, which in turn can suggest new ways to create effective progressive coalitions in today’s political climate.

“American Labor in the Cold War” chapter, is a highlight of this collection. It’s a study of how McCarthyism affected unions and radicals, and radicals participated in at its peak loco level through its years. In many important ways it expands upon themes explored in other essays, and gives the general subject, including “Left Out: Reds and Red unions, by Judith Shear, and “Repression” by Morrie Zolin, and Ann Fagan Ginger’s “The Cold War Against Labor.”

The essays generally look beyond the Communist Party as the usual lightning rod of narrative and analysis, and instead look at other, less often discussed, but equally important dimensions of that exacting science with rigor and often support the prevailing (and conservative) government and corporate view of world events, which in turn can suggest new ways to create effective progressive coalitions in today’s political climate.

Researchers and policy makers are going to love the new book by Jack Rasmus, but not everyone will. The War at Home is not driven by any Stephen A.好吧, 我会尽我所能帮助你。
Docker art on the internet

by Tom Price

The website Laborarts.org displays the artifacts of labor history—the murals, union buttons, paintings, photos, leaflets and sheet music. The ILWU features prominently in this virtual art museum. Paintings and watercolors by James Grasso and Pole deLappe currently hanging at the ILWU International headquarters in San Francisco were digitalized and loaded onto the site, along with photos from the ILWU library. At the request of the AFL-CIO, ILWU International President Jim Spinosa appointed Gene Vrana, Director of Educational Services and Librarian, to coordinate a project to get ILWU art online.

Oakland-born longshoreman James Grasso painted realistic pictures of life on the waterfront in the mid-1950s. His pictures show the history of the union from the early days of the shape-up to the union hiring hall and the 1948 strike.

Grasso served in the Marines in WWII, studied art in California, Rome and Florence, and worked on the docks in the early 1950s. At the time, he later wrote, he was active in “various political organizations, peace and civil rights groups—but most, if not all, were based on The Attorney General’s subservient list, so I guess they’re best not mentioned.” Pole deLappe was only 18 when she walked the line in the 1934 dockers’ strike in San Francisco. She raised money for union families, drew cartoons for the Mine Workers Industrial Union’s newsletter Fo’c’le Head and was arrested on the line for vagrancy. She was also known for her ability to holler loudly from the back of the ship to keep the strike going.

A few months after the strike the union commissioned her to paint eight maritime workers’ portraits for a mural. The mural was never completed and the watercolors languished in storage for 60 years. She recently donated them to the ILWU. One of her inspirations in painting the men came from seeing public murals in Mexico painted by people like Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, whom she worked with in San Francisco as a young art student.

“It was moving and beautiful to see people saying ‘this is our history, this is our life,’” she told The Dispatcher in a 2003 interview.

Otto Hagel shot photos of ordinary people for Time, Life, Fortune and other magazines during the Depression. Hagel and his wife Meith were part of a progressive movement of photographers and artists in the 1930s and 1940s who, like Otto, were sometimes blacklisted for their politics.

Hagel’s photos appear in two books co-published by the ILWU: “Maritime and Shipyards: A Pictorial of the Maritime Industry” and “Men and Machines: A Story About Longshoring on the West Coast Waterfront.”

Hagel’s 1959 photo of Harry Bridges addressing the membership and pictures of life on the docks are included in the laborarts.org site.

Another of those artists whose realism transcended into a powerful humanism was photographer Dorothea Lange. Her images of ordinary people caught up in the class war called the Great Depression humanized these people to the point where they looked like family or neighbors, which they often were.

She took pictures Japanese people imprisoned as “enemy aliens” during WWII. One of these, unfortunately not in this exhibit, is of longshore Local 19’s Karl Yoneda, who was interned at Manzanar before joining the U.S. Army. His quiet dignity personalized Japanese people in a period of severe racism. Lange’s contribution to this exhibit includes an unflattering picture of Harry dated May Day, 1934, and a shot of two longshoremen.

To see it yourself, go to www.laborarts.org. Click on “Exhibits” at the top, then click on “Art from the waterfront” for the paintings or “Images from the waterfront” for the photos. Most libraries have free internet access.

Celebrate Labor Day weekend with a salute to longshoreman and labor organizer Harry Bridges

At a Special Screening of

“From Wharf Rats to Lords of the Docks”

The story of Harry Bridges and the ILWU.

Narrated by Elliott Gould and Ed Asner with a soundtrack by Jackson Browne, Arlo Guthrie and others.

The special screening will be held simultaneously in San Pedro, San Francisco, Portland and Seattle Sunday, September 4 beginning at 7:00 pm

All tickets are $10 All ILWU pensioners (including spouses) are invited to come as our guests, i.e., free.

San Pedro
Grand Warner Theater
478 West 6th Street

Tickets available at:
The Harry Bridges Institute Community Labor Center, 350 West Fifth Street Suite 209
San Pedro, CA 90731
Open Monday-Thursday 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
310-831-2397
Or email at sdinfo@harrybridges.com

Portland
The Guild Theater
829 SW 9th Avenue
Portland, OR 97205
Tickets – 503-228-5047

San Francisco
Palace of Fine Arts Theater
3301 Lyon Street S.F., CA 94123
For advanced tickets please telephone City Box Office at (415) 392-4600 - after July 15. Tickets are available at the box office the day of performance. For VIP Reception information please phone 415-971-7291 or e-mail chrishelward@subibiglobal.net.

Harry Bridges and the ILWU are invited to come as our guests, i.e., free.

Seattle
The Meany Theater is located on the west edge of the University of Washington campus, just minutes from the NE 45th Street exit off I-5.

Limited covered parking is available for a fee underneath the theater in the Central Parking Garage located at 15th Avenue NE at 41st Street.

Other paid parking is designated by stripes on the map.

Tickets: 206-257-9838

ILWU International Vice President Bob McElrath (right) received a special signed poster from warehouse, retail and allied workers Local 5 Vice President James Dexter at the local’s May membership meeting.

“We wanted to thank Bob for all the help he gave us in our last contract negotiations,” Local 5 President Kristi Lovato said. Local 5 member Scott Ryan designed the “Powell’s Shanty Town of Books” poster, a take-off on Powell’s “City of Books” promotion. “Shanty Town” draws in lurid detail “the future quality of life for the average Powell’s worker without our union and a fair contract.”

Members of the bargaining team and internal organizing committee signed the poster—all the people Bob worked closely with at the table and rabble-rousing in the house,” Lovato said.

The agreement signed in late March 2004 preserved affordable health care, provided modest wage increases and gave the union stronger language to protect people on the job. It was the second contract between Local 5 and Powell’s, the largest independent bookstore in the U.S.

You can help Local 5 thrive by going through its Web site (ilwulocal5.com) to buy books online from Powell’s. See the box on page 8 for instructions.
Hawaii member wins scholarship

George Walsh: ‘unfriendly witness’

by Tom Price

The ILWU and longshore Local 10 lost one of its legends when George Walsh died May 25. He was born of immigrant parents 94 years ago in New York and grew up in a walk-up flat in the Bronx. They weren’t a rich family, but they had classical music records, there were books to read and he was surrounded by the cultural excitement of the city, according to his son Michael, a former warehouse Local 6 member.

“He enjoyed reading and poetry, but mostly of all, sports,” Michael Walsh said. “Coming of age in the Great Depression meant that families struggled to make ends meet, and the dreams of college and professional life seemed impossible. But after high school, he found work teaching sports to the tough street kids in a New York settlement house.”

Hawaii member wins scholarship

by Tom Price

Shop steward Zonette Tam had been working for 10 years toward a nursing degree while balancing her job and family life. Then on May 31 the ILWU Local 142 member received the news—she had won an AFL-CIO Union Plus Scholarship. As a worker who helped organize her shop into the ILWU, the win was especially sweet.

“I had been on a career path to get a LPN [Licensed Practical Nurse] degree, but I got accepted into the nursing program at Univ. of Hawaii at Manoa and now this scholarship puts me over the top,” Tam said. “I can go over the top,” Tam said. “I can go for my RN and a bachelor’s degree.”

“At the same time George’s future wife Nadia was growing up in San Francisco. She lived on Potrero Hill and her mother and stepfather worked in the South of Market Street factories.

“She had exceptional reading and writing skills, but the Depression made leaving home and finding work a top priority,” Michael said. She and some friends decided to strike out for New York, and she found a job working in a summer camp.

“My father was the camp’s Sports Director, and they instantly fell in love,” Michael said. “They lived together in New York. Low-rent apartments with orange crate bookcases, potluck dinners and rent parties to raise enough money to keep the landlord at bay. Nadia kept talking about San Francisco, and in 1935 she had enough money to buy bus tickets. Just two young people, holding hands and watching America roll by outside the bus window.”

George began work on the San Francisco waterfront as an International Longshoremen’s Association docker the following year. Two years before the IWA Pacific Coast District became the ILWU, Nadia worked as a secretary for the telegrapher’s union and would later become Harry Bridges’ secretary. George was involved in the 1936-37 maritime strike and during that time he organized a Christmas party for the kids. He wrote a postcard on a poster explaining the strike to the kids.

“It’s a long story, but it means this: All the big ships that go down to Los Angeles, up to Seattle, over to China and around to New York can’t sail unless the maritime workers are willing to run the ships and load and unload the cargo,” it read.

Walsh also organized children’s camps such as the 1937 Maritime Children’s Camp.

He was a hard-working longshoreman for nearly 40 years and was also the U.S. Attorney General’s office branded him an “unfriendly witness” in the frame-up of Harry Bridges, on whom the government tried to prove was a Communist and have him deported back to Australia. Walsh had refused to talk to the grand jury that indicted his brothers, and supported his Bridges, Robertson and Schmidt Defense Committee.

Walsh said the real target of the government’s attacks was the ILWU itself. The Jan. 29, 1949 issue of The Dispatcher reported Walsh’s statement about San Francisco, and in 1945 he had enough money to buy bus tickets. Just two young people, holding hands and watching America roll by outside the bus window.”

The ILWU and longshore Local 10 lost one of its legends when George Walsh died May 25. He was born of immigrant parents 94 years ago in New York and grew up in a walk-up flat in the Bronx.

T

Walsh continued.

“Sure, the workers of the ILWU, must at once take up the fight for better conditions or see the forces of reaction gain control of American labor,” he said. “He said the government, through its stoolpigeons and agents within our unions, will stoop to any depths to carry outwitch hunts for the employers…The only crime Harry ever committed was to organize workers and lead them in their struggle for [better] conditions and self-respect. That is the reason the Dept. of Justice is out to get Bridges.”

The government spent 21 years between 1934 and 1955 trying to deport or jail Bridges. For 12 of those years Bridges faced actual trials. He was also credited working the ILWU rank and file and defending their union, and he was finally cleared of all charges in 1955.

Walsh retired to California Secretary of State on the Independent Progressive Party ticket in 1950. He got 309,000 votes on a platform supporting State Fair Employment Practices laws, unemployment relief and adequate pensions. He was against loyalty oaths, witch hunts and the Cold War. The government spent 21 years between 1934 and 1955 trying to deport or jail Bridges. For 12 of those years Bridges faced actual trials. He was also credited working the ILWU rank and file and defending their union, and he was finally cleared of all charges in 1955.

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**Books and videos about the ILWU are available from the union’s library at discounted prices!**

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- **The Big Strike** by Mike Quin: the classic partisan account of the 1934 strike. **$6.50**
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