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Outsource Bush’s job

By James Spinoso
ILWU International President

News reports and entire books have been written recently detailing the unbelievable statements coming out of the mouth of George W. Bush, from the politically motivated lies to the laughably absurd gaffes. But rarely have any of his pronouncements fused both those elements so seamlessly as his recent declaration that outsourcing American jobs is good for the national economy and American workers. Employers save so much money outsourcing, Bush argues, that they will be able to expand their operations and eventually hire more American workers.

Try explaining that logic to the people standing in the unemployment lines, or to the laid-off mother whose new job doesn’t have health insurance when her kids get sick, or the family of a Midwest industrial worker that just lost their home. Economic theoreticians never seem to be able to figure out cruelty and suffering into their calculations.

But working people see it, we feel it and we have to endure and struggle to overcome it. Sometimes we are more successful than others, but the scares of those experiences expose truths we can never forget, deny or ignore no matter how much the Bush public relations flacks spin, speculate and obscure.

ILWU members are all too familiar with the “benefits” of outsourcing. Once our brothers and sisters toiling in Hawaii’s big sugar and pineapple industries fought, struck and won the best agricultural work contracts in the world, the corporate ag companies took off for more exploitable labor in Thailand and the Philippines. Warehouse workers face 70 percent unemployment, forcing them to work for the low wage scales imposed by the occupiers who in turn leave the local population with miserable living conditions. Iraqi workers face 70 percent unemployment, forcing them to work for the low wage scales imposed by the occupiers who in turn leave the local population with miserable living conditions. Iraqi workers face 70 percent unemployment, forcing them to work for the low wage scales imposed by the occupiers who in turn leave the local population with miserable living conditions.

Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction, the ones we were shown U.S. intelligence satellite photos of the ones that were an imminent danger requiring pre-emptive war, turn out to not exist. The real and higher costs of the Bush pro-pharmaceutical company Medicare bill were withheld by the Bush administration until Congress passed it. And new revelations suggest Bush ignored numerous warnings of imminent terrorist attacks by his own advisors before Sept. 11, 2001. His credibility has been blown out of the water.

Not since the Supreme Court installed him as president has Bush been so vulnerable. We must take this moment to drive an electoral stake through his political heart once and for all. That this is the program of the ILWU—the democratically elected delegates to our International Convention last year voted to make Bush’s defeat the number one priority of our union.

Even though all the polls show Bush is most vulnerable on domestic issues like the economy and jobs, he continues to trump the same failed policies as if no one is noticing that jobs continue to disappear, wages continue to drop and corporate profits continue to increase at a record pace. Fortunately for the entire American labor movement that has dedicated itself to the cause of laying off Bush, he keeps stepping in it knee-high and sticking his foot in his mouth.

But it’s not just on domestic issues that Bush is making missteps and misstatements. Even in his foreign policy, in his war on terrorism and his war in Iraq, in those issues that he planned to base his reelection campaign on, he is floundering. 1 year after the invasion of Iraq, the occupation of that country continues to be a bloody mess, with Americans and Iraqis dying in larger numbers than in the war itself. Billions of American taxpayer dollars are being spent there, using up resources so desperately needed in this country.

All the while Bush’s corporate buddies are gaining billion-dollar, no-bid contracts and then are getting caught overcharging the government. The Iraqi infrastructure American bombs destroyed a year ago still hasn’t been rebuilt by the American contractors, leaving the local population with miserable living conditions. Iraqi workers face 70 percent unemployment, forcing them to work for the low wage scales imposed by the occupiers who in turn enforces Saddam Hussein’s old law banning union organizing.

No wonder the conflict continues to escalate and Bush’s plan to hand over power to some form of Iraqi self-rule by June 30 looks less and less like an exit strategy and more and more like an election ploy.

Meanwhile, the evidence of the lies popping up his poli- cies ples up, showing a pattern of deception and a strategy of deceit.

The democratically elected delegates to our International Convention last year voted to make Bush’s defeat the number one priority of our union.
**ILWU Local 5 signs new deal**

Local 5 signs new deal at last year's convention. "I want to give credit to everyone," said Analyst Woodard said the convention. "This was a collective effort."

The same spirit of unity showed in members' response to contract negotiations. The Local renegotiated the master warehouse contract last year, along with agreements at 12 other houses. Maintenance of health benefits proved the sticking point all around.

Members at Feralloy, C&H Sugar, Unisource and the California State Automobile Assn. rejected their employers' "last, best and final offers" and prepared to strike, as did those covered by the master contract. But by standing firm, they avoided having to walk out. Though they took some hits, they managed to protect retirees and in most cases avoid out-of-pocket payments on health premiums.

The Local saw seven houses shut down last year and got notice that two more will close soon. Nationwide Paper, Bay Sheats and Premier Rolling Door couldn't compete with cheaper products from bigger firms, Sierra said.

"Our members are getting left behind the race to the bottom," he said. The closures hit around 320 members.

The chill wind out of Washington blew away the Local 6 contract with Menzies at San Jose Airport. Menzies provides baggage-handling and cleaning services at nine airports around the country. When a group of Menzies workerspetitioned the National Labor Relations Board to organize in 2002, the NLRB decided that all Menzies workers should fall under the Railway Labor Act (RLA), meaning their work is considered so important to national security their collective bargaining rights are restricted. This not only wrecked the drive, but voided all the local contracts. Amusingly, the Local 6 contract with airlines at the Oakland Airport, throwing about 120 Local 6 members out of work.

The urgent need for regime change at home dominated the remarks of all the invited guests at the Local 6's annual convention in Portland, Oregon. And the remarks of the local officers as well. ILWU International Secretary-Treasurer Willie Adams, Co-Committeeman Joe Wenzel, Local 10 President Henry Graham, Local 34 President Richard Cavalli, Local 17 Secretary-Treasurer Jack Wyatt, Sr., California AFL-CIO Executive Secretary-Treasurer Art Cavalli, Local 7 President and Teamsters Port Division head Chuck Mack all drove home the need for political involvement.

"Political decisions will determine our effectiveness and our very survival," Mack said. "We have to organize this year as never before to change the direction this country is going."
ILWU testifies at Senate hearing on port security

By Lindsay McLaughlin
ILWU Legislative Director

Several weeks ago in the southeastern Israel Port of Ashdod two suicide bombers infiltrated the port, killing 10 workers at a machine shop and injuring another 20. Currently, the Israeli government is investigating how the terrorists got into the country, including the possibility they hid in a container when it was shipped. As access. Investigators are looking into whether the real targets of the terrorists were chemical facilities within the port that could have killed hundreds of innocent people.

The U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation held a hearing on a state of American maritime security on March 24, 2004. Mike Mitre, the Longshore Division’s Director of Port Security, testified for the ILWU. The Committee wanted to know whether West Coast ports had made progress in their inspections of containers. If the incident in Israel could happen here, Mitre testified that real port security has not been achieved, and in some respects, U.S. ports are less secure than they were prior to the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Mitre testified that, for example, most marine terminals have not initiated any methods to check on containers when containers enter a marine facility. The Coast Guard has issued rules requiring terminals to check seals when containers enter a facility and whether they are empty. But the terminal operators have not complied, and have erroneously insisted that they do not have to comply until their security plans are approved by the Coast Guard. Some terminal operators have stated containers are used the practice of verifying seals before and in months after Sept. 11, 2001.

Mitre emphasized the importance of checking the outside container seal. He said operators should immedi- ately alert the port facility that the container may have been tampered with. This alerts terminal employees to inspect. A systematic check of container seals also provides authorities with a record of who is responsible for placing the seal on any container that may be used for a terrorist purpose.

Seal checks are vital to our national security. Lloyd’s List reported in 2003 that seals found on a foreign flag ship La Tour Feb. 9, 2002 at the Port of New York/New Jersey after the Coast Guard noticed a “safety seal appeared to differ from the one on the box when it was loaded.” Port workers are prepared to perform security checks on the containers, but have been hampered by terminal operators who have moved in cargo quickly and profitably than in taking the time to properly inspect.

Some terminal operators have suggested that technology such as cameras or software (B-LA) was quoted in the Orange County Register as saying, “Stopping seal checks is definitely a matter of concern.” Los Angeles Port Captain Peter Neffinger told the Register, “I know terminals see security as inconvenient and costly, and it’s hard to gauge a best return on any investment, but after July 1, we will prosecute any violations. It’s part of the new cost of doing business.” At the hearing Mitre criticized the lack of regulations on the treatment of empty containers. There should be no disagreement over the need for an inspection and verification concerning containers marked as empty, he said. The fact that marine terminal operators routinely conduct inspections of empty containers in the past as a regular part of their security program to verify the absence of harmful contents and to detect and deter possible terrorist attacks, only adds to the viability of this procedure.

Mitre strongly urged the Coast Guard to mandate the inspection of empty containers. If there ever was to be an attack using an “empty” container to transport and stage explosives or chemical or biological agents, this would be the ideal manner to destroy it. With the level and manner of intelligence gathering and the sophisticated techniques used by various organizations, nothing should be left to chance.

Sen. John Breaux (D-LA) asked the other panelists to respond to Mitre’s assertion that empty containers pose a threat to national security. But the industry representative did not directly answer why they should not be inspected, mostly because there is no reasonable response. Mitre’s written testimony said it best: “When there is a conflict between national security and the port security program to verify the absence of harmful contents and to detect and deter possible terrorist attacks, only adds to the viability of this procedure.”

Mr. Mitre spoke to the Senate Committee about the need to devise a “West Coast scenario” so that America could continue to move goods in the event of a terrorist attack. Mitre and his fellow legislative action committee member Peter Peyton have been looking at this issue and urging policymakers to plan for such an event. These Legislative Action Committee members are also looking at how we can build infra- structure for moving goods in a way that meets the security needs of our ports.

In this testimony before the Senate Committee is only one step the ILWU has recently taken to raise the urgent need for port security before the nation’s policymakers. ILWU International President James (Jim) Spinosa wrote to Coast Guard Admiral Larry Hereth March 15, 2004 to urge the Coast Guard to take effective action to compel marine terminal operators to immediately implement and maintain adequate security measures in accordance with the Maritime Transportation Security Act.

Out of frustration that terminal operators were shirking their duties to institute comprehensive security measures to keep port workers and communities safe, Spinosa asked the Coast Guard to issue a directive that all security measures for handling cargo should be implemented now without delay. Employers are relying on a technical final compliance date of July 1, 2004 in the Coast Guard regulatory structure for moving goods. The Coast Guard requires terminal operators to put in place cargo security programs before the security plan is approved.

Further, Spinosa wrote, “Common sense would indicate that waiting until July 1, 2004 to institute nec- essary port security measures actual- ly could heighten the threat of potential terrorism during this waiting peri- od.” Terminal operators know what they need to do to maintain our ports safe for more secure and they need to do it now.

The ILWU has enlisted allies in the effort to get real port security. At the March meeting of the unions affiliated with the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO, the ILWU introduced a resolution entitled “Real Port Security Needed.” It passed unanimously. The resolution called for the TTD to advocate real seaport security measures before the Coast Guard, the Bureau of Customs and Border Control, the Transportation Security Administration and other agencies with jurisdiction over sea- port security. The TTD will inform members of Congress on the state of seaport security and support addi- tional legislation if necessary to ensure the rights of seaport workers. The TTD will also work to inform the gen- eral public and the media about the need to secure seaports.

The ILWU will hold its legislative conference the week of April 26, 2004. Obtaining real port security will be a major issue for the ILWU, said President Spinosa to help by writing your member of Congress and letting them know that terminal operators should be living up to their responsi- bility and implementing security measures for handling cargo. This is a matter of true security for port work- ers and the port communities where ILWU families live.

ILWU Political Action Fund

The ILWU Political Action Fund has a goal of raising more than $500,000 for the union’s work on the November 2004 elections and for contributions to pro-worker candidates’ campaigns. The International officers and the Coast Committee are asking all members to donate $50 each to the fund. All contri- butions are voluntary, not part of your dues or a condition of your membership. You can give more or less than the officers suggest—all contri- butions are valued—and there are no reprisals for giving less or not partici- pating in the union’s political activities. Contributions to the ILWU Political Action Fund are not tax deductible.

To satisfy federal election laws, please include with your check your name, address, occupation and employer. The ILWU International wants you to list your local number and registration number. Retirees are not eligible to donate to the ILWU PAF. They should make dona- tions to the Pacific Coast Pensioners Association or other pensioner groups.

Donations should be sent to:
ILWU-PAF
1188 Franklin St., 4th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94109
Checks should be payable to: ILWU-PAF.
C hieving chanting pandemonium broke out as the ILWU Drill Team stepped smartly into the UFCW mass meeting March 14. Around 900 members of nine Northern California locals had converged on the ILWU longshore Local 10 hall. Their banners ringed the balcony and their noise rattled the rafter as they joined the yell raised by the Drill Team and their own chant team. “UFC-Double-U! Safeway, we’re coming through!” they bellowed.

The energy unleashed at that opening carried through the rest of the day in a way that was part pep-rally, part planning meeting for the upcoming Northern California grocery contract campaign. Starting from the bitter end of the Southern California struggle just two weeks before, the members at the meeting vowed to learn its lessons and hold the line.

“Southern California began the war of 2004, and we’re going to win it!” said Local 839 Shop steward Dorothy Smith.

After only five months on the picket lines, the 70,000 UFCW members in Southern California voted up a three-year contract marked by sharp cuts in wages and benefits for new hires. Current employees will see their wages stay flat, their pensions go down and their health care premiums go up, although they held off the premium increase until the last year of the deal.

Watching the Southern California strike and lockout unfold, nine locals formed the Bay Area UFCW Contract last October. They represent nearly 50,000 workers at Safeway, Albertsons, Ralphs, Cala, Raley’s and several independent stores. Eight of the locals—101, 120, 1179, 373R, 428, 648, 839 and 870—sign on to a master contract that expires Sept. 11, 2004. The union expects talks to begin mid-June. Sacramento-area Local 398 bargains alone. Its agreement expires July 17.

Each coalition local hired an organizer then convened to plan and began the mass meeting months ago, with help in the last weeks from the California Labor Federation and the AFL-CIO Western Region. They all know what they’re up against.

“Every faith tradition shares a commitment to justice,” said Local 870’s Diane Pwee. “Now they want to take away health care and pensions, because rich people like Safeway CEO Steve Burd want to get richer. We built this country. We built this industry. Why should we take a hit because he wants more? When is enough enough?”

The organizers recognized the delegations from their locals, who stood amid more cheers and yells. And the crowd roared for Southern California strike veteran Mike DiLeo, and the representatives who’d come from locals all over the U.S. and Canada—from Washington State, Michigan, Hawaii, Kentucky and Calgary, Canada.

Over lunch, breakout groups of about 30 people discussed shop-floor and public strategies for the coming months. When the rank-and-file vigorously enforced their contract on the job, the employer will know they mean business—so the sessions began with a review of members’ rights under the contract and the National Labor Relations Act.

“We’re making sure people know the ins and outs of their contract,” said Local 648 President Mary Chambers.

Rev. Carol Been spoke to each group and encouraged people to sign up for outreach to clergy and congregations in their communities.

“Every faith tradition shares a commitment to justice,” she said. “That gives you powerful allies in getting your message to the public.”

After lunch, the meeting re-convened for a skit put on by members of Locals 648 and 1199 that envisioned a successful campaign—starting with apathetic and fearful workers in a captive audience meeting and ending with a group of members badgering Steve Burd till he gave up the fight. The audience boomed, cheered and rose up on cue. By the end they were on their feet yelling and ready for the brief rally that wound up the day.

At the rally speakers from the broader labor movement pledged solidarity and support, including California Labor Federation Executive Secretary-Treasurer Art Pulaski. AFL-CIO Western Region Field Mobilization Coordinator Lisa Hoyos, San Francisco Central Labor Council head Walter Johnson and ILWU Local 10’s Trent Willis. Even though members of the ILWU longshore division have excellent health benefits, they’re still backing the UFCW fight, Willis said.

“There’s no way the ILWU is going to sit back and watch workers be persecuted,” he said. “Every worker in this country is at risk and everyone deserves health care.”

Pulaski reminded the crowd that the fight for health care will extend to the ballot box this fall. The California legislature passed SB-2 last session, requiring employers that don’t offer health insurance to pay into a state fund for uninsured workers. But big retail interests funded an initiative that would repeal the measure—so labor will need to get out the vote to defend its gains.

As the rally ended, members streamed out of the Local 10 parking lot for a march around the Safeway across the street. And if they happened to look up when they filed past the back of the store, they’d’ve seen a few Bay Area activists on the roof with home-made banners.

“Safeway: Don’t Destroy Workers’ Healthcare” read one. “Our Fight is On!” read the other.

To stay updated on the Northern California grocery workers’ campaign, go to www.bayareacollaboration.org.

ILWU FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE GROCERY WORKERS

The Harry Bridges Institute established the Adopt-A-UFCW-Family program Dec. 29, 2003 to help the striking and locked-out grocery workers in Southern California. The HI’s first official fundraising announcements were made in the Jan. 12, 2004 stop-work meetings of ILWU Locals 13, 63 and 94. The list below documents all the financial contributions from ILWU affiliates and members the HI and The Dispatcher have been able to track. Many other individual contributions were sent directly to the UFCW.

ILWU International – $5,000.00
ILWU Local 63 – $25,000.00 per month for three months totaling $75,000.00
ILWU Local 63 – rank and file $8,217.00
ILWU Local 63 – $100,000.00 directly to the UFCW for 272 families for healthcare
ILWU Local 13 – rank and file $38,534.91
ILWU Local 94 – $100.00 per member assessment totaling $30,638.00 (an additional $30,000.00 will come in next week)
ILWU Local 13 – $100,000.00 directly to the UFCW for 272 families for healthcare
ILWU Local 13 – rank and file $38,534.91
ILWU Local 94 – $100.00 per member assessment totaling $30,638.00
ILWU Credit Union – $5,000.00
ILWU Local 21 general fund – $1,200.00
ILWU Local 63 Office Clerical Unit – $10,000.00 sent to UFCW trust for healthcare
ILWU Local 63 Office Clerical rank and file – $300.00
ILWU Southern California Pensioners Group – $5,000.00
ILWU Local 10 – $500.00
ILWU Local 46 – $10,000.00
ILWU Local 54 – $2,000.00
ILWU Local 34 – $5,000.00
ILWU Local 91 – $1,000.00
ILWU Local 21 general fund – $100.00
ILWU Local 19 rank and file – $700.00
ILWU Local 63 – $1,000.00
ILWU Local 8 – $500
ILWU Local 40 $1,520
ILWU Local 6 – $3179.64
ILWU Ladies Auxiliary #8 – $200.00
ILWU Local 13 – $100,000.00 directly to the UFCW for 272 families for healthcare

The March 14 mobilization ended with a quick, loud march across the Safeway across the street from the ILWU Local 10 hall. After a fiery morning rally, Northern California UFCW members broke into work groups and dove into the details of their contract campaign.
Another Bush lie: tax cuts for jobs

By Jack Rasmus

During the three years of the Bush administration, more than 3 million jobs in the U.S. have disappeared, battered, disappeared, dismantled, vanished. Not since the early years of the Great Depression of the 1930s has America experienced three consecutive years of net job destruction. Nor has any president since Roosevelt ever faced the prospect of leaving office with the economy having fewer jobs than when he entered.

The Bush recession began in March 2001 and was declared officially over in November 2001, six months later. Two major tax cuts, plus a series of additional corporate tax breaks (in addition to the $1.3 trillion tax cut passed in 2001 and 2003—tax cuts worth $2.1 trillion—80 percent of which went directly to benefit those with incomes over $147,000 a year.

American workers were promised at the time that these tax cuts were the answer to economic recovery and would create new jobs once again. It was Ronald Reagan’s old “trickle-down economics” argument, brought out of the closet, dusted off once more, prepared for public consumption—but larger than ever before. Even a trickle of that, a worker might argue, could produce significant improvements in jobs or wages. And that’s not counting some share of the tax cut as well. But let’s look at the see these two—tax cuts and jobs—and how workers fared under George W. Bush the past three years.

To begin with, 84 percent of all taxpayers have incomes below $75,000, but only 15 percent of this working class, the largest part of which earn between $40,000 and $50,000, and many other less, could afford the 2001 tax cut in 2003 for the vast majority of workers in the $40-$50,000 range. Among workers in the $50-$75,000 range, only $553.

In both cases that’s less than one percent with Bush’s tax cuts half of all income tax payers had their taxes cut by less than $100. On the other hand, those with annual incomes of more than $1 million received an average tax cut of $10 million, a tax cut of $40-another 10 percent of their annual income. So much for the benefits for workers from the tax cuts.

SLIGHT OF HAND: THE JOBLESS RECOVERY

In early 2001 the President’s Council of Economic Advisors (CEA) announced that if the first round of Bush’s $2.1 trillion tax cuts for the rich were passed quickly, it would result in the creation of 500,000 additional jobs by the end of 2002, all due to the tax cut alone.

On that basis, once again, in February 2001 the President’s CEA assured that the adoption of a second round of Bush’s tax cuts would add another 1.8 million jobs to the 500,000 already promised. That made total 1.8 million new jobs for the period, just to stay even. Instead, it actually lost 360,000. That’s in addition to the 1.8 million new workers entering the economy, for a total shortfall of more than 180,000 jobs a month.

THE LAST SIX MONTHS: THE DISAPPEARING JOBS TRICK

The grand predictions and assurances from Bush and his spokespeople about jobs have been no more accurate in the last six months than they were in 2003 or during the last three years. Since Bush’s trumpeting last October of the 8.2 percent surge in economic growth and promise of massive job creation, jobs have been created at a rate of around 60,000 a month on average. That’s about 90,000 a month short of the 150,000 minimum jobs needed every month just to absorb new workers entering the labor force. Even the brief surge in jobs that accompanied the 8.2 percent growth rate never came close, in the best months of job creation last October-November, to reaching the 150,000 minimum per month needed for net job creation. And after that brief period last fall, job growth has been downhill since then.

If the government committed just $440 billion of the $2.1 trillion tax cuts directly to job creation, it would produce a total of nearly 9 million new jobs, each paying $50,000 a year. The $8.2 million unem- ployed would be eliminated.

The wealth in America with incomes over $1 million has been receiving their 80 percent share of the $2.1 trillion tax cut pie. But the American worker is yet to see the promised jobs.

IMPACT ON WAGES AND PROFITS

While Bush’s tax-cuts-for-the-rich solution has failed to produce jobs, it has succeeded in reducing wages. For the year 2003 aggregate wage and salary income has fallen by 0.7 percent. Bush’s cut-tax-for-the-rich program has proved, for workers at least, to be the equivalent of economic snake oil. But it’s more like manna from heaven.

From 2001 through 2003 a total of 58.6 million workers in the U.S. were laid off at some point and about 55 million rehired or were newly hired somewhere. Jobs that were created in the last three years were often not of the same quality as those that disappeared. In addition to lower pay and benefits, they were often tempo- rary, part-time, contract basis jobs. Various studies show those laid off during this period, and then rehired, went to new jobs that typically paid 30-35 percent less in wages and bene- fits. A similar study by the Economic Policy Institute in Washington D.C. estimated new hires were earning an average of $14.65 an hour, whereas lost jobs were paying $14.92. The dif- ferential is even greater when med- ical and other benefits are added.

And companies are clearly pok- etering the difference. According to recent government data, corporate profits were up 30 percent in the July-September 2003 period com- pared to the same period in 2002, the largest year-over-year growth in profits in 19 years and reaching an annual rate of more than $1 trillion dollars for the first time in history. Forecasts are for another 15 percent gain in profits in 2004. That’s a 5.4 percent raise in just two years.

A lion’s share of the above profits surge accrued to those companies in the U.S. aggressively engaging in moving American jobs offshore. For example, TV business news commen-
Union continues the fight for worker safety

by Tom Price

President Bush has his way there could be something else to command this Workers Memorial Day—April 28. It is the 30th end of federal safety enforcement. Since assuming office in 2001, the Bush administration has eroded the enforcement powers of the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA), and there might be more to come.

OSHA cutbacks are life-threatening for dockers. The Safety Committee is trying to eliminate hexavalent chrome from dockside diesel emissions. There has been no progress on emissions of ammonia vapor when containers or cranes fall onto a truck below, killing the driver. The employer also refused to put speedometers on yard trucks so we can know their speed," said Miranda. The employer also refused to put speedometers on yard trucks so we can know their speed,

Workers Memorial Day
April 28, 2004

STOP KILLING FOR PROFIT

Workers Memorial Day
April 28, 2004

We want the crane to work at a slow motion while carrying people, an emergency stop button and tie points on the beam so we can attach safety lines directly to it," Freese said. "They did agree we should have anchor points on the beam to connect our safety lines to. This doesn’t make it a rule, but it would be a recommendation to OSHA.

"We have been lobbying hard for the container chassis safety inspections," Miranda said. "The employer also refused to put speedometers on yard trucks so we can know their speed."

Public opinion also contributed to the organizing wins of the 1930s and 1940s, Cobble said. The powerful message then was that if the labor movement was strong, so the entire country would be strong," Cobble said. People viewed labor as "representing the social good."

"We have to make organizing campaigns more effective and global, and we have to have organizing committees that are more representative by race and gender," Brownfinger said. "Unions will fail if they only see women workers as a pressure group to be accommodated."

Labor scholars say unions can win with women

By Mark Gruenberg

PAI Staff Writer

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The nation’s unions and labor scholars say productive organizing methods and tactics to take advantage of their higher success rates among women workers, two prominent labor scholars say. Speaking at a Feb. 6 forum at the AFL-CIO’s Capper-Cobble and Cornell labor studies professor Karen Bronfenbrenner pointed out the need to organize female workers in the 1930s and 1940s still work today. Organizing drives often target groups of women workers among their male counterparts, they added, but union organizers may often treat them as "women only" issues.

"We can’t ignore the fact that organizing women will be a majority of union members." These included a nationwide strike by 900,000 at the beginning of the 1930s to 3 million by the end of the 1940s, and there were successful, large, female-led strikes, she noted.

These included a nationwide strike in 1947 by 230,000 female telephone operators—members of what became the Communications Workers of America (CWA)—and strikes by the United Electrical Workers (UE) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). UE shut down 78 General Electric and Westinghouse plants in 1946 by demanding equal pay for equal work, Cobble noted.

By Karen Rose and Susan Oppenheimer

Women already hold a majority in unions such as the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). Yet most union organizing campaigns, reflecting the long dominance of union hierarchy, are geared towards organizing men in male-dominated professions and those who are members of them fail, Bronfenbrenner added.

To change that imbalance in organizing women, labor scholars say unions must use different tactics and emphasize different issues. Winning unions need to know who their target audience is, and what are the key issues facing female workers—share several approaches, she said. These unions:• Hire and train organizers who are a match for the unit being targeted. • Use community pressure to leverage the employer inside and outside the workplace and emphasize personal one-on-one contact in both the workplace and the community.

• Build and empower rank-and-file leadership committees with an ownership role in organizing drives. • Focus on issues that resonate with the workers, not necessarily pay, but respect on the job, job security and issues such as work rules and flexible hours. Many successful unions start strong in bargaining and setting bargaining goals even before winning the organizing drive.

So far, unions have resisted putting speedometers on yard trucks so we can know their speed."

"We have to make organizing campaigns more aggressive and global, and we have to have organizing committees that are more representative by race and gender," Brownfinger said. "Unions will fail if they only see women workers as a pressure group to be accommodated."

But American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) dominates the other two...
Keith Eickman

I quit one WPA job to attend the 1939 American Youth Congress (AYC) in New York. The YCL in Santa Clara had formed a local Youth Council (YCL) in 1937. There was discussion about the YCL, and a member of the YCL in Santa Clara had formed a local Youth Civilian Conservation Corps (CIO). The CIO was formed in 1933 to provide work for young people so they could go to school and get jobs. It had a certain amount of influence in the United States until World War II. Attending the AYC meeting, I think, shows how I always did work of a broader nature than just being a member of the YCL.

That is, I always tried to work with other people. I wanted social betterment for it own sake, but also I had the idea that by doing this we really were developing some concept of the revolution. I thought the revolution was just around the corner. I remember a friend who said, “You know what? The revolution is going to be within two weeks.” We were very young at the time. But I was always very cautious in my analysis. I said, “I don’t think so, I think it will take five years.” So I gave what you’d consider the very conservative estimate! He was the real radical. Well, the revolution didn’t happen in two weeks, and it didn’t happen in five years, either.

Although I was rather naïve in my mid-20s, I did have certain questions. In 1939 the Nazi-Soviet Pact caused me some anguish. That was when the Russian Communists signed a non-aggression treaty with Germany that allowed Hitler to start World War II without fear of Soviet interference. But I was able to overcome my anguish because I believed that the Soviet Union knew best. That is what I was told by the CP I’d gone to confession and received the answer I wanted to hear.

In 1940 I went to work for Westinghouse in San Francisco as a Burroughs operator. But I really didn’t like office work. In August 1941 I decided to get into the warehouse industry, where they were hiring. The United States wasn’t in World War II yet, but the work situation was improving because of increased defense spending. In the building where I was employed there were some Local 6 members. They were making more money than I was as a Burroughs operator. I thought, “This is ridiculous!” I quit my job, went down to the hiring hall on Clay Street and got on at Zellerbach Paper company.

In those days the warehouse industry was not mechanized at all. Zellerbach had enormous cartons of paper, 30 by 42 inches, and they weighed an awful lot. Everything had to be 

Keith Eickman

The ‘Old Left’ and the union: Keith Eickman - Volume I

I am the focus of this month’s article. Eickman shared the youthful idealism as well as the eventual disappointment experienced by many people who were members of the CP between the 1930s and the 1950s. His testimony, laced with self-reflection and humor, portrays the Party’s role in some pivotal events in Local 6 history.

Eickman’s life-long dedication to social justice and to the ILWU has been extraordinary. When he celebrated his 90th birthday in late 2003 he could look back on 60 years of service to the Warehouse Division. He is still president of the West Bay Local 6 Pensioners Club.

Introduction by Harvey Schwartz

Keith Eickman

Edited by Harvey Schwartz, Curator, ILWU Oral History Collection

I was born in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada in October 1913. My parents got divorced, and I usually stayed with my mother, but in 1930 I came to San Francisco to live with my father. I’ve been here most of my life since then. I went to Mission High School in the City my last two years and graduated in 1932 right in the midst of the Great Depression. Millions of people were unemployed. My father worked for the Pacific Gas and Electric company. He never lost his job, but his pay was reduced. It took me two years to get work myself. I finally got a job in 1934 running a Burroughs bookkeeping machine at the Rosenberg Dried Fruit Company in Santa Clara, California.

With so many people out of work I was convinced there was something wrong with the system. I was looking for something that would give me answers to the problems of society and life. Then I met a young man who was a member of the Communist Party. We became friends, and I began to attend the meetings of the Communist Party. They were members of the Young Communist League (YCL) in Santa Clara County. The YCL was the junior section of the American Communist Party (CP). I recall being impressed with the YCL slogan, “Life with a purpose.”

I joined the YCL in January 1936 and became quite active. There were some romantic tendencies about the YCL. I was joining an organization that was against the capitalist system. The Communists wanted to replace capitalism with socialism, which promised to divide the wealth of society among the people. I wanted social betterment for it own sake, but also I had the idea that by doing this we really were developing some concept of the revolution. I thought the revolution was just around the corner. I remember a friend who said, “You know what? The revolution is going to be within two weeks.” We were very young at the time. But I was always very cautious in my analysis. I said, “I don’t think so, I think it will take five years.” So I gave what you’d consider the very conservative estimate! He was the real radical. Well, the revolution didn’t happen in two weeks, and it didn’t happen in five years, either.

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Local 6

TORY PROJECT

and the union: Eickman of the Local 6

people wanted a third party. Only afterwards did I
realize that although there were lots of people at
Wallace rallies in Northern California, in respect to
the whole population, there weren’t that many.
When the actual vote came and Wallace did poorly,
I was enormously surprised.

As the steward at Zellerbach I used to bug peo-
ple an awful lot about Wallace. The day before the
election I went around to everyone in the plant and
said, “Tomorrow you’ll all be going to vote and vote
for Wallace.” A bunch of workers were sitting there.
I guess by then they were fed up with my enthusi-
asm and my insistence that I knew what they
were going to do. One of the old Italian men
said, “You’re going to vote for Wallace. We’re going
to vote for Truman.” I said, “But Local 6 has
ergebnisse Wallace and you’re obligated to support
the position of the local.” He said, “Pack the local
and fuck Wallace. We’re going to vote for Truman.
Don’t bother us anymore.” I’ve had a lot of lessons in my life, but that was
one of the most devastating things that ever hap-
pened to me. Really thought all the people in that
plant were going to vote for Wallace because I
wanted to believe it. After that I began to examine
everything I was doing in regard to political issues
and my relationship with people. I think I really
began to grow up from that time onward.

In 1949 we had our famous warehouse strike in
San Francisco that lasted over 100 days. By then I
had been elected chairman of the stewards’ council.
During the strike I was secretary of the strike com-
mitee. Those of us who were in the CP made some
mistakes in that strike. One of them is that we
made the People’s World (PW), the CP newspaper,
the official organ of the union.

This was a mistake because the majority of the
members of the union didn’t read the PW and didn’t
want to read it anymore, and the number of papers you could sell at
meetings was very, very small. We brought the PW
around on the picket lines, too. The members would
throw them in the garbage can. They didn’t want
the strike to have some political aspect to it.

There was a certain amount of antagonism
among some of the members of the union over the
PW. That, plus the endorsement of Wallace, laid the
basis for a group that was organizing for the
Teamsters union to try to take over Local 6. Three
or four Local 6 business agents in the West Bay (San
Francisco) went over to the Teamsters and set up
this rival Teamsters Local 12. This was close to
when the CIO purged the ILWU, too, and another
little group emerged in Local 6 that wanted a CIO
takeover.

We did lose some members to the Teamsters, but
the primary problem was that there was constant
fighting within the local. It was like a civil war.
After the Korean War started in 1950, some people
wanted to end the strike and act on the Teamsters
meetings. When anyone who was considered a
Communist got up to speak, they would chant,
“Communist! Communist! Communist!” The local
was being torn apart. It survived, but after this
role of the CP within the union disintegrated, or at
least diminished. The CP just didn’t have the same
influence within the local anymore.

I stayed in the CP until I was expelled in 1955 on
the grounds of “white chauvinism.” At the very
time that Joe McCarthy was carrying on outside the
Party, there was a tremendous purge within the CP.
They purged anyone who said anything that could
possibly be considered the slightest bit questionable.
It became a hysteria within the CP. I had an argu-
ment on the floor of the stewards’ council with a
Black Local 6 leader who is still one of my friends.
The motion we were considering was not that impor-
tant, but the Party leaders felt this was an example
of white chauvinism and they expelled me.

They probably did me a favor. I am extraor-
dinary devoted to concepts and organizations. It
would have been difficult for me to voluntarily sep-
arate myself from the CP because of my history
within it, my background and the people I knew,
even after Nikita Khruschev’s revelations of “the
crimes of the Stalin era” in 1956. But they took the
decision out of my hands.

Local 6’s opposition to the Teamsters contin-
ued into the mid-1950s. This was not doing us any
good. We were spending too much blasting the
Teamsters, and they were blasting us. You don’t
really build an organization on negative action like
that. Then Louis Goldblatt, the ILWU International secretay-treasurer, started the con-
cept of the Teamsters and the ILWU working
in Northern California warehouse negoti-
ations. This was a wise and sensible decision that
helped both of us from the latter 1950s onward.

In the mid-1960s I remained very active in the
stewards’ council and on negotiating committees.
I ran for business agent in late 1957, won a close race
and ended up serving from 1958 to 1970. Those
years included a lot of the Vietnam War, which
the union opposed. At the same time we supported the
battle for integration. I was never the big hero, but
I played my part in those activities.

I became Local 6 secretary-treasurer in 1970
and was unopposed for re-election three times.
But when I ran for president in 1977 the CP put every
effort they possibly could into backing their own
candidate against me. Evidently it was important to
the Party to have enough influence to gain the presi-
dency of Local 6. Yet I got 51 percent of the vote
and won against three other candidates.

Understand that I don’t want to indicate in any
way that I regret my period in the CP. It had an
important impact on my life. The Party gave me an
understanding of the class relationship of society.
It gave me a political attitude that made me different
from any of the officers in the union who didn’t have
that background. I don’t think they understood poli-
tics to the same degree. I would not want to belong
to a CP that belongs to an organization in which the decisions are all made
from above. Still, my life in the Party laid the basis
for whatever role I played in Local 6.

March 2004

THE DISPATCHER • 9

Local 6

San Francisco Mayor George Moscone appointed Eickman to the city’s Parks Commission in 1977.

Storied in A place
The daughters of Tugboat Annie

Story and Photos by Maria Brooks

Working men look to John Henry and Paul Bunyan and a list of other heroes. But what about working women? Who mirrors their lives in American lore?

One stands out. She goes by the name of Tugboat Annie.

Annie is an industrial worker, a working stiff, and for the most part she is alone in the world. No other blue-collar heroine has endured as long in popular culture as this husky mariner of the Puget Sound.

Tugboat Annie Brennan worked as senior captain of a deep sea tug and towing operation in a mythical town that resembled Tacoma. She was a big lady, built like a fire plug. When she darted from tug to pier, buildings quaked and pilings quivered. Her ample girth was maintained by a diet of pork chops, mash potatoes and pan-cakes.

The public met this unconventional woman in 1931 in the pages of The Saturday Evening Post. Tugboat Annie was created by writer Norman Reilly Raine, who sailed in his youth as an ordinary seaman. Annie’s heroes are described in 75 stories spanning 30 years. Hollywood made movies about her and Ronald Reagan starred in one of them. In the 1950s Tugboat Annie re-surfaced in a television sitcom.

Defying all feminine stereotypes, Annie touched America’s heart. And Annie’s got plenty of attitude. “When Hollywood made its first tugboat pictures, women were invisible in maritime. She created the concept for ‘Tugboat Annie.’”

In real life Thea Foss was very different from Annie. A motherly Norwegian, Foss was a sharp business woman and a good cook. But the Foss sons gave Raine story ideas on describing their tugboat operations around the Puget Sound. Raine used their anecdotes in his story lines. He credited Thea Foss as the model for Tugboat Annie. But in actuality, Annie’s character sprang fully formed from the writer’s imagination. With his creation, Raine gave a nod to working women everywhere.

In the stories Tugboat Annie faces down all kinds of riff-raff. Some of these low-lives are shipowners. She outwits con-men and swindlers. She gets little help from her male cohorts. She must prove her mettle over and over again. “Not much has changed in that regard,” says Marina Socchitano, San Francisco Bay Regional Director of the Inlandboatmen’s Union. “Annie works twice as hard as the guys. She’s a super achiever, but even so, she’s constantly suspect for being a woman.”

Amelia Earhart was a master mariner, but there’s one thing she’s not. She’s not a sexual being. Apparently the public could accept a woman as a skilled seafarer, but they drew the line on sex. She is sexually neutral, even undesirable. She “waddles.” She’s often compared to ungainly animals. “We’re told she looks like a hippopotamus or a ‘baffled’ rhinoceros. She may beat men at their own game, but the price she pays is her womanliness.”

In the stories Annie’s toughness on the seas captured the imagination of the most popular magazine in America. The Saturday Evening Post was the largest funeral ever seen. Foss was posthumously honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Annie got plenty of attitude. Tangle with her and you’re in for a rough ride. But she’s smart and resourceful. She’s brazen and smart and reads maritime law. She’s a seasoned skilled seafarer, but they drew the line at sex. Apparently the public felt nervous that Tugboat Annie might be perceived as a lesbian. The film flopped.

“It’s interesting as a woman, how you have to change your whole image, your public image, to get things done,” says Melissa Parker, a tugboat owner and operator on San Francisco Bay. Women may change their image, but they rarely move into a man’s world unnoticed.

“They feel everyone’s watching you,” remembers Pinto of her early days on the bay. “I didn’t want to screw up because it would mean ‘the Girl’ screwed up.”

Pinto worked her way up from deckhand to captain. On the bay surprisingly few women drive tugboats. Pinto, a union member represented by Masters, Mates and Pilots (MMP), is the only one who works steadily.

“I don’t see a lot of women doing this,” she says. “The wages haven’t kept up with the cost of living. You’re on call 24 hours a day. Women who come out of maritime academies go right on to ships, not many come on to tugs.”

There’s not much glamour in driving tugs. Deckhands embrace the culture of the fo’c’sle. Tug captains often work their way up the “hawsepipe,” shunning prestigious maritime academies. Pride comes from having learned your craft the hard way.

“I felt I had to prove myself,” says Pinto. “The lines are really heavy. I could throw them up on the bits, like the other guys did. But they’d yell at me, ‘You’re not strong enough to work on deck!’ So I’d lift weights. By working on deck, I got stronger. The moment I showed up on the boat, till work on deck!’ So I’d lift weights. By working on deck, I got stronger. The moment I showed up on the boat, till

At 45 Jean Pinto shares little in common with her fictional counterpart, Tugboat Annie. As a young woman Pinto sailed in New England with her family. She was athletic and adventure-some. For a short time she attended a Quaker college. Dropping out of school, she turned to work on tugs. For a time she worked for Amnesty International, feeling a need to do something meaningful. Frustrated in her pursuit of music, she returned to the Bay Area to look for a job.

Pinto hoped to make a living on the water, but at that time women were invisible in maritime. She creat-
ed her own job. She started painting and repairing pleasure boats. While working, she watched the runty tugboats pushing and prodding around the bay.

"I wanted to do that," she says.

There was no welcoming mat for women. Companies resisted hiring them, unions offered little or no support.

"Without affirmative action it would have been difficult to get this job," Pinto says. "I'd have had no legal recourse if I had been denied access."

Women sued for the right to work. In Pinto's case she had an ally in her employer. Oscar Neimeth owned a family towing operation on San Francisco Bay. He had daughters.

"I saw that Jeannie really worked hard," he remembers. "Why not give her a chance?"

Feeling stymied is a theme in the lives of seafaring women. For Tugboat Annie it was no different. In every story, somebody trips her, tries to sabotage her best efforts. Often the adversary is the system itself.

Tugboat Annie was sidelined during WWII when Raine, working in Hollywood, didn't send stories to the magazine. At the end of the war Annie appeared again in The Saturday Evening Post. Her fans were anxious to know how she spent the war.

They meet up with her on the Puget Sound. Annie is outraged.

She's been rebuffed by the Navy.

"I asked the Navy to take me," yells Tugboat Annie. "Me, who knows ships and the sea like the inside of me hat. 'Ye're a woman,' they says."

Later in the story, she discovers that the women are being recruited into the WAVES, so she applies again. She's rejected again.

"You're too old," they say."

relates Annie disdainfully.

Operator Parker experienced a variation on Annie's lament. "They tell me, 'You're too young. You don't have the experience,'" she says from the deck of the tug, Nokomis.

"Some companies say they'd rather have guys of any age than hire a woman," Parker says. "This attitude is still out there, but it's not out in the open. It's still a fight to work."

Parker graduated from Maine Maritime Academy. She looks younger than her 30 years. Her long chestnut hair hangs in a pony tail. "I love tinkering around the engine room," she says. "I enjoy working on boat engines, taking them apart, repairing them, trouble shooting."

She holds a third mate's license and is also a member of MMP. Her first jobs were on tankers. She noticed the tugs assisting the ships and fell in love. Tugboats became a passion.

Six months ago Parker gave birth to Mary Rose. Motherhood adds another dimension to the problems of a seafarer. The first snag is unemployment. When it became obvious that Parker was pregnant, she lost her operator's job. After Mary Rose was born, Parker's job prospects became more problematic. She's a single mother.

In the last couple of months Parker has put the baby in a basket and climbed into the wheel house.

"I've done a few jobs since she was born. One of them was 12 hours, the other 32," she says.

Parker is nursing Mary Rose, but when the baby grows older, she hopes to find child care, although it won't be easy.

"If I hire somebody to watch my daughter for six hours, and go to a job and find out I've got to work 12 or 32 hours more, I've got to inform my child care provider. 'Oh, it's not six hours you need to watch my daugh- ter, it's 32,'" she says. "People don't put up with that."

Mary Rose has been toned off and out tugboats all her short life. She plays with toy tugboats in her bath and sleeps with a stuffed tugboat by her side. A good-natured baby, she seems delighted by the churning of diesel motors.

Before Mary Rose was born, Parker bought a WWII tugboat she plucked from the scrap heap. In its prime the old tug, Nokomis, tried vainly to squash the fires of Pearl Harbor after the attack. Nokomis had been neglected for years, left to rot in the mud flats in San Francisco. Parker bought her at auction for 50 bucks.

"I thought a piece of history like this needs to be preserved. It's too important to end up in the scrap pile," says Parker.

She believes the engines on Nokomis will fire up once more after a little tinkering.

"Nokomis has a diesel electric plant," she says. "I've worked on diesel tugs on the bay, but diesel electric is a completely new kind of plant to learn. It's cool!"

Mary Rose squeals in her carrier on deck as she eyes sea gulls. Nearby Parker inspects chipped paint in the galley. Not long after saving Nokomis, Parker heard of another WWII tug in distress. This one was named Wenonah and her engines actually were working. Last week Parker and a group of supporters piloted the old tug from Newport Beach in Southern California up the Pacific Coast to berth her next to Nokomis.

"Once we've restored the Nokomis to her WWII state, we'll offer educational programs on her," she says.

Parker plans for her tugs to assist the historic Liberty and Victory ships in San Francisco Bay. She'll offer to carry ashes of fallen veterans to their burial at sea. Parker formed a non-profit organization to maintain her boats and calls it "The Historic Tugboat, Education and Restoration Society."

"I'm currently trying to buy a charter business," she says picking up a wrench from the floor plates. "I'm wheeling and dealing and talking creative financing with a bank this afternoon." Glancing at Mary Rose, she adds, "As long as I'm the boss, she can come with me wherever I go."

Across the bay in the Oakland, Captain Pinto readsies for work. She'll be assisting a mammoth container ship down the Estuary. She and the ship's pilot will work together in a call and response duet. For a while, Pinto studied to become a pilot herself.

Brushing her blonde hair from her face she says, "I think I've shown other women it's possible to have a career on the water." For years Pinto
This is a gem of a book about a larger than life, small-town, working-class hero by the name of Julia Ruuttila. Telling her own story through a compelling oral history interview with historian and writer Sandy Polishuk, Ruuttila’s life in the Pacific Northwest reveals a great deal about the lives of activist radical women who have often been compelled to sacrifice or compromise their personal lives in order to act out their political beliefs and participate in the turbulent struggles of militant left-wing organizations and unions.

Most of her tale is set in Oregon and along the Columbia River—and much of her adult life was in support of and in service to the ILWU. But the issues and events that marked her tireless dedication to the cause of workers and their unions as an organizer and a journalist (including decades as a correspondent for The Dispatcher) have a universal appeal that will move and inform unionists and their allies just as much.

This larger appeal is made possible through effective editing and fact-checking by Polishuk, and her superlative ability to repeatedly set the historical context for the twists and turns of Ruuttila’s life, often by way of intriguing narratives that are clearly and concisely written in a style that is simple, descriptive and dramatic.

In a statement that echoes descriptions of many left-wing women, Ruuttila, Polishuk writes, “was one in which political beliefs—working class solidarity and antiracism—were primary to the working of her whole mind and body.” Yet it is a great credit to Polishuk’s skills as an interviewer—and to Ruuttila’s general willingness to talk—how Ruuttila’s general willingness to talk—how open and honest about her—life that the reader can feel, humming beneath this extraordinarily personal life, the tension of domestic violence, failed marriages, botched abortions and recurring depression.

This same tension between the personal and the political has been described elsewhere in the life stories of radical activists Elaine Black Yousouf (“The Red Angel”), Dorothy Healy Remmers (“Dorothy Healy Remmers”), and Peggy Dennis (“The Autohagiography of an American Communist”). But unlike these women, Ruuttila never belonged to the Communist Party. Her family roots were in the Wobblies (the Industrial Workers of the World) when she was young. She learned early on an independent brand of radicalism and anti-fascism.

As with other portions of her journey, Ruuttila’s life centered around the Portland waterfront, in the camps and mills and other mass production industries in the thirties and forties. She said that in commonrooms they won them, and we were no longer timber beasts, sawmill stiffs, and waterfront harrummers. We were the people who loaded the ships and sailed them, who made the head rolls turn and the green chains travel. We were the waterers of the world. Without us there would be no world.

After World War II, Ruuttila’s life centered around the Portland waterfront, which she covered as a journalist for left and labor publications, and also as secretary to ILWU International Representative Matt Meehan (who had previously been the union’s International Secretary-Treasurer). The period when she apparently came closest to unifying her political and personal goals began in 1951 when she married then-ILWU Astoria warehouse Local 18 (as opposed to now Sacramento waterfront Local 18) activist and Communist Party stalwart Oscar Ruuttila and moved to live with him in Astoria, Oregon. There she began her decades of devotion to helping the ILWU’s Auxiliary, working the local union’s “Auxiliary clubs” (that had been racially intrenched, progressive political force, first in Astoria and then in Portland where she relocated in 1965 after Oscar’s death.

As with other portions of her journey, Ruuttila’s experience in the Auxiliaries includes anecdotes and observations that help the reader understand the nuts and bolts of those activities, not just the big events. Her writings also helped readers of The Dispatcher better understand politics and the ILWU in the Columbia River and Puget Sound areas. All in all she wrote for The Dispatcher for more than 40 years—first as aileen Cronin then as Kathleen Ruuttila.

She died in 1991 in Alaska, where she had moved after a series of disabling illnesses to live with her grandson. Somewhere along the line, perhaps during this latter period of her life, she wrote her own fitting epitaph: “Died as she lived, shouting the system down.”

To order “Sticking to the Union” By mail:
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STICKING TO THE UNION: An Oral History of the Life and Times of Julia Ruuttila
By Sandy Polishuk.

Reviewed by Gene Vrana, ILWU Director of Educational Services & Libraries.

MAY IS MEDICAL, DENTAL CHOICE MONTH

Active and retired longshore families in the ports where members have a choice can change medical and dental plans during the open enrollment period May 1 to May 31, 2004. The change will be effective July 1, 2004. San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Portland/Vancouver active and retired longshore workers may change dental plans in the month of May for coverage effective July 1, 2004. In addition to the May open enrollment period, members may change their health coverage once at any time during the Plan Year (July 1–June 30).

The July 1, 2002 Memorandum of Understanding between the ILWU and PMA provides that new registrants in the ports where members have a choice of medical plans shall be assigned Kaiser HMO Plan or Group Health Cooperative HMO Plan for the first 18 months of registration. After 18 months, those registrants who have qualified for continued eligibility under Mid-Year/Annual Review hours requirement will have a choice of dental plans. New registrants in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Portland/Vancouver and Washington will have a choice of dental plans on the first of the month following registration, and may change dental plans during the Open Enrollment period and one additional time during the Plan Year.

MEDICAL CHOICE: The medical plan choice is between Kaiser Foundation Health Plan and the ILWU-PMA Coastwide Indemnity Plan for Southern California Locals 13, 26, 29, 63 and 84, Northern California Locals 10, 18, 34 (San Francisco), 34 (Stockton), 54, 75 and 91; and Oregon/Columbia River Locals 4, 8, 40, and 92. In the Washington State area, the choices for Locals 19, 3, 52, 47, and 98 are Group Health Cooperative and the ILWU-PMA Coastwide Indemnity Plan.

DENTAL PLANS: For Los Angeles Locals, dental choice is between Delta Dental Plan and the Delta, Sensa, Simon and Suygayana group plan. For San Francisco Locals, dental choice is between Delta Dental Plan, City Center Dental and Naismyth group plan. For Portland/Vancouver Locals dental choice is between Blue Cross of Oregon Dentacare, Oregon Kaiser Dental Plan and Oregon/Washington Dental Service. For Washington Locals dental choice is between Washington Dental Service and Dental Health Services.

Information on the dental plans, and Kaiser and Group Health Cooperative medical plans, and forms to change plans can be obtained at the Locals and the ILWU-PMA Benefit Plans office. The ILWU-PMA Coastwide Indemnity Plan description booklet is under preparation and will be furnished as soon as it is available.

All enrollment cards must be completed and submitted to the Benefit Plans office by May 31, 2004 for the change to be effective July 1.
By David Bacon

Longshore workers in the U.S. took another step closer to Iraq's dockworkers in March, when Henry Graham, president of ILWU longshore Local 10, sent a letter to workers in Umm Qasr. Graham's letter was inspired by reports coming from Iraq that workers on the docks of the country's largest port have begun to organize a union, and have already faced the firing of union supporters.

"We salute you for your bravery," Graham wrote. "We want you to know that we face some violations of your rights. Workers everywhere have the right to form unions. It is the only way we can win better pay, better conditions, protect our jobs, and secure our future."

Since the U.S. occupation began, Iraqi dockworkers have been receiving the same emergency salaries—$6 a day—decreed by the U.S. occupation authority for all Iraqi public sector workers. Iraqi dockworkers are employed by the port authority, a government enterprise.

When the occupation started, however, their income dropped because their regular wage deduction was terminated. All Iraqi Port Authority workers had been paid two percent of their regular pay in undeclared, unloaded fees. The loading fee per container was $150 with two ships docking per week, unload approximating 140,000 containers a week.

Then in October, the occupation authority announced a new salary schedule, in which workers' wages would be paid in Iraqi dinars instead of dollars. The new wage was a great loss in income, and workers began organizing as a result.

Following the Iraqi revolution of 1958, which overthrew the monarchy and threw out the British, 1,000 longshore workers labored on Umm Qasr docks. In the heydays of Arab nationalism, however, they still had no guarantees for their rights and jobs. At first, subcontracting companies were allowed to hire dockers in a daily shapayat. Finally, workers, with the help of the Sadr Mosque, insisted on their recognition for their union, they demanded and won a hiring system under their control and a daily guaranteed wage, whether or not there was a ship at the dock to work.

These achievements are still remembered by older workers, and form a backdrop to the current effort to reorganize unions on Umm Qasr docks. Nevertheless, they seem like a distant dream. Life in Umm Qasr has changed completely for the people on the piers. A decade-long war with Iran was followed by Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and a 12 years of sanctions, and finally a new invasion and occupation, have all taken their toll. Dock work in the shambles, although the basic infrastructure is still in place.

Umm Qasr is an object lesson in the privatization of Iraq. Its fate will have a profound effect on the way in which any future Iraqi government will be able to control the country's economy. By the same token, the jobs, the standard of living and the labor rights of the port's dockworkers will be a bellweather for the fate of hundreds of other industries in formerly state-owned enterprises throughout Iraq's economy.

The free trade ideologies of the Bush administration see the occupation of Iraq as a beachhead into the Middle East and South Asia. Their first objective is the transformation of the state-dominated economy of what was once one of the region's wealthiest, and most industrialized countries into a free-market, free-trade economy.

This massive introduction of a free enterprise began even before the invasion, with the granting of the first contracts for servicing the military and building its bases. Those were followed by others for rebuilding the infrastructure of the country itself, destroyed by war and sanctions. But this transformation is not limited simply to reconstruction contracts. The pre-existing economy of Iraq is set to be transformed as well, as the state-run enterprises market to one based on ownership by transnational corporations, sending their profits out of the country. To the extent that the workers continue to control the profits, they will be able to control the country's economy. By the same token, the jobs, the standard of living and the labor rights of the port's dockworkers will be a bellweather for the fate of hundreds of other industries in formerly state-owned enterprises throughout Iraq's economy.

This article includes important information reported by Eva Jaccoud: "Dockworkers in Iraq during December and January on behalf of Occupation Watch."
T
he many-faceted play “Fire on Pier 32” takes its title from a famous San Francisco Workers strike. Worker demands for an organized voice on the waterfront during the crisis of the Great Depression led longshoremen to burn their company union contract books, the infamous “black books,” on San Francisco’s Pier 32 in 1932.

This collective act of defiance was pivotal in the history of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) and the larger American labor movement.

The blue books were concrete representations of the slave-like conditions imposed upon working people. Their burning was a mass act of rebellion that posed larger questions of the union shop, of how jobs were to be allocated, (the workers’ demand for a union-controlled hiring hall), of pay and working conditions, as well as bigger social and political questions.

There was no turning back for the genuine workers who organized this waterfront bonfire. Their lives were now committed to the concept of democratic industrial unionism by and for the workers, and they now survived only through solidarity and struggles that built their union. Their direct action and the actions of others around the country during the 1930s breathed life into a near moribund labor movement, showing that the way forward was militant democratic industrial unionism, organizing all workers irrespective of skill, race, gender or status.

The history of the ILWU represents one of the purest expressions of class consciousness and class militancy in the US, and future of immense interest to us all. Perhaps no union in the US has a more inspiring historical legacy than the ILWU.

As workers and their leaders debate the Taft-Hartley law and how the corporate bosses and the betrayals of some corporate bosses and the Bush faction of the ILWU had to face down both the corporate bosses and the National Guard machine guns and the many-faceted play “Fire on Pier 32”

The play begins with the 1934 maritime and San Francisco general strike. Frustration about repeated employer offenses against labor, and organized, militant solidarity through solidarity . Their passionate union that resists corporate attacks and struggles through building their union-controlled hiring hall), of pay standards and make a real difference in workers’ lives.

At the same time, “Fire” entertains, with six new songs in contemporary musical styles, performed by a chorus of three singers-dancers and the cast of actors. The lyrics and music of the play’s two theme songs, “The Song of Solidarity and “Song of the New Unionism,” are particular memorable, representing in musical form the main premise of the play. Other key songs include “The Song of Desperation,” “Government Man,” “The Web,” and “Moving the Money Around.” These songs focus on secondary themes: government always siding with the bosses, the infamous Taft-Hartley law and how the corporatization plays games during negotiations.

The acting is also outstanding. “Fire” central protagonists, Frank and Joe, are two young workers who grow and develop as they build a union that resists corporate attacks through solidarity. Their passionate portrayals of the rank and file helps us feel in our guts what it must have been like to be a worker with only his fists, courageously facing police and National Guard machine guns and tanks during the decisive battles of July 1934.

This play is a powerful and important contribution to the entire American labor movement. In “Fire” historical events and the union movement live again through art, allowing our collective history to emerge clear and true. We see the personal and social transformations that take place as workers and their leaders debate the strategy and tactics of resistance while facing the manoeuvres of the bosses and the betrayals of some corrupt leaders.

The play succeeds in giving a human face and emotion to the meaning of solidarity—born of struggle, nurtured by sacrifice and cherished forever in the hearts of those who come to know it as more than just a concept. The universality of Rasmus’ art helps us see deeper truths about ourselves and our current predicament. The result is a useable past, helping us see that our ultimate goal must be democratizing the world, confronting the corporate capitalist usurpation of our inalienable rights and emancipating all working people everywhere.

It has been said that the theater houses a nation’s soul. If this is true, it can be said that “Fire on Pier 32” is the one place where the soul of American labor resides. “Fire” is now on video and DVD, get a copy and see it with your union brothers and sisters.

CONSERVATIVE TERRORISM?
I do believe The Dispatcher staff has hit a home run with the conservative letters. These [folks] could be the most valuable tool to this union since the fort lift. Give these guys some column space, give ‘em a topic to butcher and watch the response. When it comes time to renew the contract, let them report their stand. I believe we can turn the tide of apathy and non- involvement that some have into a union tidal wave. After we have succeeded, we can turn them on the AFL-CIO and boost a national return to unionism that has never been seen before. Sign these clowns up before the Bush administration has them put away as a terrorist threat for the way they incite good union men to jump into action.

Mary Kilsgaard Local 98

A REPUBLICAN VIEW
Quite remarkable that some brothers and sisters we have in our union cannot understand why one would be a Republican or a Democrat. From my perspective I can see that some Democrats are friendly to unions and can also see some propaganda and lip service that comes our way.

I am a Republican for some basic reasons. I believe the responsibility of the federal government is to provide for the security and defense of our nation. I believe in capitalism and providing a tax structure that awards those who succeed in business and does not penalize those once they have succeeded. Also it makes no sense to tax those on a lower income level, especially when some are at such a low-income level they receive government help. Property rights, human life, personal liberty, justice and swift punishment for those who commit crimes are important issues to me. Making sure our families are not taxed to death I believe are issues both parties agree on.

One look at this newsletter and many may see why some of our members may have a problem with those who speak for our union. Our membership is hurt by government help. Property rights, and those who succeed in business and does not penalize those once they have succeeded. Also it makes no sense to tax those on a lower income level, especially when some are at such a low-income level they receive government help. Property rights, human life, personal liberty, justice and swift punishment for those who commit crimes are important issues to me. Making sure our families are not taxed to death I believe are issues both parties agree on.

One look at this newsletter and many may see why some of our members...
Farewell, Asher

By Alan Benjamin

A
sher Harer, a longtime member of
the ILWU and steadfast fight-
ner for social justice, died Feb. 16, in
San Francisco. His mother raised six chil-
dren on her income as a night tele-
phone operator.

Over the last few years Harer was active in
many other labor struggles, as well as 
civil rights and antiwar movements. Through
out his life, he has been found on just about every picket
line for workers’ rights and social justice in the
San Francisco Bay Area. He organized support for
the United Farm Workers, was active in
the civil rights movement, and participated in the
Bayview/Hunters Point area. He coordinated the
mayoral campaign of Supervisors Ron Briggs and
Mike Anderer.

His activism continued until his death. Meanwhile,
Harer was in the process of writing a book about
his life, which was to be published later this year.

Today, as we mourn the passing of a true friend of
working people across the globe, we are reminded of the
legacy and achievements of Asher Harer. His life was
a testament to the power of collective action, and his
determination to stand up for what is right.

Asher Harer at a Fair Play for Cuba rally in 1961.

Asher’s lasting devotion and example to the causes of union, labor, civil
rights and peace.

MEMORIAL MEETING AT LOCAL 34

A memorial meeting to celebrate
Asher’s life and contribution to the labor and progressive movements
was held March 6 at the ILWU Local 34 hall.

Among the ILWU members who spoke at the meeting were Jack Heyman, business agent of ILWU
Local 10; Clarence Thomas, executive board member, ILWU Local 10; and
Brian McWilliams, ILWU delegate to the S.F. Labor Council—all of whom
spoke about Asher’s influence in the union and spoke of the
impact he had on them.

Asher Harer recited one of his favorite poems, “Like
wrecks in the surge of eternity.”

On the occasion of Harer’s 90th birthday in April, 2003, the San Francisco Labor Council issued a
“certificate of honor in public appreciation” to Asher
Harer for his exemplary leadership role in San Francisco’s labor
and social justice movements for over six decades.

The certificate commended Asher, in particular, for serv-
ing as “a mentor and example for all young people striving for a more just
and humane world.”

Likewise, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors issued a Certificate of Honor “in appreciative public recogni-
tion of distinction and merit to outstanding
work on behalf of working men and women in the ILWU, as well as
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The family suggests donations to the
UFCW Grocery Workers State
Council Strike Fund, at P.O. Box
5169, Buena Park, CA 90620.

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