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The living standards of working people in the U.S., Canada and, for that matter, the whole world, are being slashed, macheted back to the 19th century. Real wages—adjusted for inflation—are easily calculated and undeniably declining for the last 30 years. Health care coverage is becoming a luxury beyond the reach of an increasing portion of the U.S. population. But perhaps the most insidious theft of workers’ wealth is the ever-expanding robbery of their pensions and retirees’ health care coverage.

Employers are always looking for ways to cut costs and those decisions are usually made on the basis of efficacy and efficiency—what they can get away with the most easily. Rarely do issues of morality factor in. Even legal, contractual obligations are viewed as just another hurdle to get over. They may have to buy some lawyers or politicians, but that’s usually doable and cost effective.

So when employers look around for weak links in the chains restraining their profits, they are turning more and more to retirees. They figure if unions are having harder times defending their active and dues-paying members, how much easier a target are retired workers? It’s not like they can strike or otherwise take economic action against the company. They are usually not organized and often geographically isolated, and the company is almost too tempting a target to turn down. We can see this corporate debt dumping in many ways. For instance, in the once mighty U.S. steel industry, companies that had good contracts negotiated with the United Steel Workers of America (USWA) are dumping them, tanking their pension plans, and dropping their pension payment obligations on the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corp. (PBGC), the government agency set up to insure long-term pension funds. But the PBGC is so overwhelmed by such cases, and so few companies are contributing to its fund these days (as employers move increasingly to 401(k) retirement plans if any at all) that the PBGC is capable of paying only pennies on the dollar.

Other steel companies are “going out of business” and selling their plants to new companies. The old ones assert there is no way they can pay the claims and the new ones argue they never signed onto any such obligations. With a wink and a nod they still haven’t done one thing towards that goal. They are in fact back pay we are owed. Yet through laws and regulations promulgated by the Bush administration and the Republican Congress, companies are being allowed to declare bankruptcy and renge on their contractual obligations to provide their former workers with pensions and health care. At the same time, Bush and the Republican Congress are in the process of passing new laws that will make it more difficult for individuals to go bankrupt (half of all individual bankruptcies are caused by catastrophic medical expenses that should be covered by health insurance) without paying their debts to businesses. The Republicans are shameless—they don’t even try to hide the class warfare that guides their policies.

The labor movement is fighting off all these assaults for its members and all workers. Few issues are more important. It is in old age and retirement that health care is most important. Having medical and prescription coverage is often the difference between poverty and comfort, between life and death. Having retirement benefits to fall back on is the difference between stress and security, between shame and dignity. They allow retired workers to stay active, to enjoy saying they would work with us towards national health care to deal with their skyrocketing costs. But three years later they still haven’t done one thing towards that goal. Against all odds the ILWU has always fought not just to protect our retirees and health care, but to improve them—and we will never give up on that tradition.
Cracks in cranes prompt work stoppage, arbitrations at Port of Long Beach

By John Showalter

During a routine inspection, ILWU maintenance and repair workers discovered stress fractures, some as long as nine inches, in two hammerhead cranes at the Port of Long Beach’s APM Terminal around 10 a.m. on Feb. 21. A subsequent round of inspections by M&R workers found cracks on the lower section of the portal beams of four other cranes. In all, an area relief arbitrator declared that five out of six cranes at the terminal had cracks that could be structurally dangerous.

“Noell’s refusal to perform an in-depth visual inspection of the remaining eight cranes, and his refusal to order the shut-down of these cranes, was an action that could be detrimental to the health and safety of both our operating personnel and the public,” Fernandez said. “We believe the cracks pose a serious potential health and safety concern to ILWU crane operators and all those working around them.”

Despite Fernandez’s insistence, APM did not call in a structural engineer to inspect the cracks on that evening’s night shift. The damaged cranes, with the exception of #7 and #8, were operated throughout the night. When Fernandez learned of this the next morning, he immediately called for a second arbitration.

In the second arbitration with Weule and PMA Feb. 23, Local 13 President Dave Arian and Fernandez contended that until such a qualified expert could inspect the cranes, their operators would stand by on the port’s safety concerns until a certified inspector arrived.

APM disputed the danger, insisting that crane operators “work now, grieve later,” and called in Relief Area Arbitrator Bruce Weule to settle the matter. Between Feb. 21 and Feb. 23, APM ordered the two shut down, and Fernandez visually inspected the remaining eight cranes. Of those eight, Fernandez found four to have visible cracks and ordered all crane operators at the pier to stand by on their safety concerns until a certified inspector arrived.

When Relief Arbitrator Weule arrived on the scene, around 2 p.m., he listened to both sides’ arguments and to Hoiland’s comments. He then went up in a man-basket to inspect the cracks and made chalk marks for what he considered to be their safest, maximum allowable extent. He also said that—since five of the six damaged cranes could not be certified as “safe”—they presented a serious potential health and safety concern to ILWU crane operators and mechanics.

“We believe the cracks pose a serious potential health and safety concern to ILWU crane operators and all those working around them.”

—Pete Favazza, Longshore Division Safety Committee

The ILWU Local 10 Drill Team and Bay Area members led the labor contingent through the streets of San Francisco in the anti-Iraq War protest March 19. The demonstration coincided with hundreds of similar actions in cities and towns throughout the U.S. that day calling for an end to the war and occupation and withdrawal of U.S. troops.

The Bay Area longshore locals moved their stop-work membership meeting from its regular round of inspections by M&R personnel to inspect the cracks on that evening’s night shift. The damaged cranes, with the exception of #7 and #8, were operated throughout the night. When Fernandez learned of this the next morning, he immediately called for a second arbitration.

In the second arbitration with Weule and PMA Feb. 23, Local 13 President Dave Arian and Fernandez contended that until such a qualified expert could inspect the cranes, their operators would stand by on the union’s health and safety concerns.

“In response, PMA argued that ‘the Union is using the alleged health and safety issue as a gimmick for a work stoppage’ and that Noell’s interim plan (1. surveillance of the cranes; 2. drilling of the crack ends to stop the damage process; and 3. reduction of trolley speed to 80 percent) were being taken and were adequate measures, but that the ILWU did not certify to ILWU crane operators and mechanics were further indemnified against any structural failures in the cranes until the repairs were made.

“What really bothered me was that PMA didn’t take the time to hire someone to look at these cracks. These cracks have been there for some time,” said Fernandez. “When it comes to safety, the employer doesn’t pay attention to it.”

At press time, repairs had been made to cranes #7 and #10, but not to others at Pier 400. These two cranes are now operating despite the protests of ILWU that the repairs must first be approved by an OSHA-certified inspector, and a complaint has been lodged with the area arbitrator.

According to Local 10’s Pete Favazza, Chairman of the Joint Accident Prevention Committee, the cracks in these cranes may foreshadow structural problems with other cranes, such as the new ZPMG cranes just delivered to the Port of Oakland.

“There are identical structure failures with the Noell and ZPMG cranes. Other cranes with the same design flaw may be affected,” Beeman said.
CAFTA: The NAFTA nightmare returns

By Lindsay McLaughlin
ILWU Legislative Director

T he ILWU International Executive Board reiterated its opposition to the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) at its meeting April 1, 2005. This free trade agreement, as passed by the United States, five Central American countries and the Dominican Republic, is modeled on the failed North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The ILWU takes this position because free trade leads to more job loss, misery, lower wages and displacement of American workers. Free trade is not in the interest of workers in developing countries either. The Guatemalan government had to use brute force, tear gas and water cannons March 8 and 9, 2005 to beat down workers protesting their government’s consideration of the ratification of CAFTA. Having managed to delay the vote previously through large protests, Guatemalan workers took to the streets again to try to prevent their Congress from voting against the working class of their country. In the end the workers lost this battle, but they wish to have their Congress ratify entering into the free trade agreement with the U.S.

Early in the CAFTA negotiating process, unions in Central America worked together with the American labor movement to articulate a shared vision for a regional economic integration. In written submissions and in joint pronouncements the unions called for any new trade agreement in the region to require adherence to the core labor standards of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and to enforce these labor standards through trade sanctions. The unions also vowed to fight any agreement failing short of this standard and demanded that the current workers’ rights tools in U.S. trade preference programs not be weakened by the Central American Free Trade Agreement. But these proposals were ignored by government negotiators.

Twelve years ago the ILWU opposed North American Free Trade Agreement for many of the same reasons the union is now opposing CAFTA. The ILWU said NAFTA would hasten job losses in the U.S., depress wages, increase the trade deficit and continue the exploitation of Mexican workers by large multinational corporations. Then-President Bill Clinton said that NAFTA would lift up living standards in Central America and America would create jobs and lift the living standards of those workers. But in reality it would only serve the interests of rich landowners who would convert the sugar plantations into sugar cane plantations. The Bush administration is asking our sugar workers to compete with an industry in Guatemala that is intentionally written to weaken existing labor protections for workers.

This is a higher standard than that found in CAFTA. Under CAFTA, employers and governments will actually enjoy more freedom to deny workers their fundamental human rights than they currently have under U.S. trade preference programs. While the labor rights provisions of these programs are not perfect, they have led to some improvements in labor rights in the region. In fact, nearly every labor law reform that has taken place in Central America over the past 15 years has been directly tied to the threat to withdraw trade benefits under U.S. preference programs. Despite these successes, the administration is preparing to give up those workers’ rights clause once the weaker labor provisions of CAFTA go into effect.

Many ILWU members may lose their livelihoods if CAFTA is enacted. CAFTA places 146,000 sugar producers right in the interest of working people here and abroad, a model embraced by unions in America as well as Central and South America (see “Statement of Policy opposing CAFTA” on page 8).

Despite the consistent lobbying by George W. Bush and multinational corporations, Congressional representatives have not brought CAFTA to the floor for ratification. They have not done so because the proponents of CAFTA think the ILWU is being selfish in trying to protect these sugar jobs. They believe the union should allow Central American and other countries to supply our market with as much sugar as they can produce. They contend an expansion of the sugar industry in Central America would create jobs and lift the living standards of those workers. But in reality it would only serve the interests of rich landowners who would continue to exploit their workforce.

The Department of Labor’s own publication, “By the Sweat and Toil of Children,” documents children in Guatemala working along side their fathers in the cane fields with machetes to cut down the cane. These are dangerous jobs and any incident of child labor in the sugar fields would mean severe penalties under the International Labor Organization standards.

The minimum wage for a sugar cane laborer in Guatemala is 64 cents. The Bush administration is asking our sugar workers to compete with workers who make pennies for their labor. Worker rights exist on paper in Guatemala, but in practice the government does not enforce labor laws effectively or provide workers who exercise their rights, according to the U.S. State Department’s Human Rights Practices report. Only one sugar mill out of 17 in Guatemala has a labor union.

ILWU sugar workers are asked to compete with an industry in Guatemala that has inadequate environmental law enforcement. Only about three-fourths of the mill boiler stacks have scrubbers to reduce air pollution. There are no standards for water quality and water quality in Guatemala. In contrast to Guatemala, water and air quality standards and monitoring activities in the U.S. are rigorous and add to the cost of producing sugar.

The ILWU Executive Board took the position that a new trade model should be developed that would be in the interest of working people here and abroad, a model embraced by unions in America as well as Central and South America (see “Statement of Policy opposing CAFTA” on page 8).

For more information about CAFTA visit these web sites:

http://www.worldjusticeproject.org/issue/NAFTA
http://www.globaljustice.org/campaigns/CAFTA

http://www.sit.org/usaspolitic/globaleconomy/cafta_ftaa_main.cfm
http://www.citizen.org/trade/cafta
http://www.solidarity.org/invocations-77.html

For more information about CAFTA visit these web sites:

March 2005
Central America up in arms over CAFTA

By David Bacon

PUERTO CORTÉZ, HONDURAS—When the Honduran Congress took up ratification of the Central American Free Trade Agreement March 3, over a thousand demonstrators filled the streets of Tegucigalpa, angrily denouncing the effort. Congress ratified CAFTA anyway, but the crowd was so angry that terrified deputies quickly fled.

“We chased them out, and then we went into the chambers ourselves,” said Erasmo Flores, president of the Sindicato Nacional de Motoristas de Equipaje Pesado de Honduras (SACTO), the union for Honduras’ port truckers. “Then we constituted ourselves as the congress of the true representatives of the Honduran people, and voted to scrap Congress’ ratification.”

Similar demonstrations have multiplied across Central America, and just weeks ago police shot into a crowd of protestors in Guatemala, killing one. Meanwhile, however, growing controversy has not helped the treaty’s key supporter, U.S. President George W. Bush, to find the votes he needs to pass it in Washington.

While admittedly an act of political theater by the left-wing Bloque Popular, the Honduran protest showed dramatically how unpopular the agreement is in Central America, at least among workers and farmers. This is quite a change from Mexico, where the promises of then-President Carlos Salinas de Gortari deceived large sections of Mexican society, especially its labor unions, into supporting the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1991 and 1992.

While U.S. workers might suffer job loss, Salinas cajoled, Mexican workers would get those jobs. The country would be come a “first world” economy, he promised, with first world living standards.

The truth was bitter. Currency devaluation cost the jobs of a million Mexicans in the first year after NAFTA went into effect while. And U.S. Bill Clinton bailed out investors threatened by the crash, he made it contingent on Mexico using its oil revenues to guarantee the loans, instead of using them to promote economic development. Tying hundreds of thousands of low-wage maquiladora jobs to the U.S. economy also made them vulnerable to it. When consumers north of the border stopped buying goods during the 2000-2001 recession, 400,000 border workers were laid off. And export-industry wages, far from rising, remained flat, while prices of milk, tortillas, gasoline, bus fare and most working-class necessities skyrocketed.

But the most devastating effect on workers came from privatization, enforced by NAFTA’s mandate to make Mexico more investor-friendly. As railroads, airlines, mines, factories, telephones and many other large national enterprises were sold off, sometimes for just a fraction of their worth, new private owners cut labor costs by slashing jobs and gutting union contracts. Since NAFTA’s first decade, Mexico’s privatization created more billionaires than any other country in the world.

CAPTA is built on the same political premise. It seeks to reinforce the transformation of Central American economies, maintaining a low standard of living as a means to attract investment in factories producing, not for an internal market, but for export to the U.S. Understandably this vision is hardly popular among workers and unions. But hundreds of thousands of Central American jobs are already tied to export production, and the Bush administration can and does use them as bargaining leverage, threatening economic disaster by raising the specter of import barriers against countries that won’t adopt CAPTA.

CAPTA promises to extend the harmful impacts of NAFTA to Mexico’s weaker southern neighbors. Most Central American nations already belong to the Caribbean Basin Initiative, which requires participating countries to uphold internationally recognized labor norms. CAPTA, however, using the example of NAFTA’s notoriously ineffective labor side agreement, only requires that governments enforce their own laws, which are often far weaker.

Central American public sector workers have been especially keen observers of the Mexican experience. Honduran’s longshore workers’ union has twice beaten back government efforts to privatize the docks of Puerto Cortez, successfully mobilizing the whole town in the process.

“We put our union’s assets, like our soccer field and clinics, at the service of the town,” explained Roberto Contreras, a union officer and Honduran representative for the International Transport Workers Foundation. “When the government tried to privatize our jobs, we told the town that if we didn’t cooperate to defeat it, the whole town would lose, not just us.”

In El Salvador, huge protests accompanied government efforts to privatize the healthcare system. And in Costa Rica, a massive strike by public telephone and electrical workers forced the government to withdraw from CAFTA negotiations in 2003.

Guatemala’s National Civilian Police sealed off the streets around the Guatemalan Congress March 9 after it voted to ratify CAFTA, and then used clubs and tear gas against almost 2,000 demonstrators. Following the vote, popular organizations began mounting highway blockades throughout the country, effectively halting commerce and travel. At a clash in Guatemala City, the Puente Naranjales crossroads, police and the army fired on the crowd. Just last week, six died and nine others wounded by bullets.

Ironically, the Bush administration’s efforts to arm Central American legislatures with more power—arguing Central American legislatures than other, more powerful Latin American countries, or even the U.S. Congress. In 2003 the World Trade Organization talks in Cancun collapsed amid huge protests, and later in Miami, the big South American economies of Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela told the administration they had little interest in its carefully-outlined negotiations towards a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

Even in the immediate aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks, the administration could only muster a one-vote 216-215 majority in the U.S. Congress to give it fast track negotiating authority. Almost all observers agree that if Bush had the votes to ratify CAFTA, he would have introduced it in Congress long ago. The fact that the agreement has been negotiated, has been ratified in most Central American countries (although amid bullets, clubs and chanting protestors), but has yet to be introduced for ratification in Washington, is the best indication that what political support Bush could muster is shrinking, not growing.

While Bush and the agreement’s corporate backers still want CAFTA, it’s getting harder for them to point to anyone else who does.
T
o honor Women's History Month, this issue's oral history features Willa Hendricks, who in her Local 6 activist days was widely known to ILWU members as Billie Roberts Hendricks. In 1933 Hendricks went to work in a San Francisco liquor warehouse. The following year she witnessed the Big Strike. Hendricks joined the warehouse union during the great Bay Area “mass inaction” organizing drive of the mid-1930s. Like many of her co-workers, she immediately became a volunteer organizer and a staunch supporter of the new union.

Billie Roberts Hendricks served on union committees and on the Local 6 Women’s Division Executive Board that functioned between 1937 and 1942. She was a member of the San Francisco Industrial Union Council, CIO, and a delegate to California CIO Conventions in the late 1930s. Her oral history, though, goes far beyond these formal titles. What you really get from her story is some understanding of the early problems and achievements of ILWU women. One problem she touches upon in commenting on the “mercurial wage” she earned during WWII, when she took a “man’s wage,” was that for several years the union was unable to eliminate the employers’ lower “women’s wage” category. Another important thing you get from Hendricks is a feeling for the dedication, spirit and camaraderie of the people who built the union and lived its struggles and triumphs.

Hendricks was born in 1905. She passed away in 2003. Her working years as a Local 6 member ended in 1951. She was interviewed by former ILWU librarian Carol Cuenod in 1982 for the Local 6 Archives Project. Cuenod transcribed most of that interview, loaned me a copy and graciously helped me in other ways while I was preparing this article.

BILLIE ROBERTS HENDRICKS
Edited by Harvey Schwartz
Curator, ILWU Oral History Collection

I
grew up on an Iowa farm. I’m 76 now. My mother was the only one of eight children not born in a log cabin near Prairie View. My grandmother rode to Iowa in a covered wagon and my grandfather went through the Civil War as a Yankee with the Eighth Iowa Cavalry. We’ve got family trees until it comes out of your ears. Some of my relatives wanted to join the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), but I never joined. It’s so stuffy!

My parents were married in 1904. They weren’t rich, but they owned their farm, 80 acres of corn, oats and livestock in Van Buren County, Iowa. My folks raised me to be a little lady and marry a “professional man.” Well, by age 17 the farm was chocking me. I would wake up and see the sun come in over the corn field and settle over the corn field. The world was my oyster, but it was nothing to do, just grow up and pick flowers in the summer. We were five miles out of any little town.

I’d read books where you get out and see the world. I wanted to leave the farm, be on my own and go to school. My father wanted me to stay home and raise chickens, but that didn’t appeal to me at all. So I went to Lawrence, Kansas where my Aunt Lucy took me in and I went to college. I wanted to be a school teacher. You didn’t have to have a college certificate to do that in those days. So I took a teaching job when I was 19 or 20.

For two years I taught grade school in the small Kansas towns of Bayshore and Heifer. I had to sign a paper that I’d go to church at least twice a month. My first union meeting must have been about 1932. My first union meeting must have been about eight hours’ work, if I was lucky. If you were asked for a second shift, it was eight hours more at 32 cents an hour. All we got between shifts was coffee, no meals. There was no such thing as hours-week or overtime. But mostly, we’d go in and work a few hours and then they’d say, “There’s no more orders. Go home.” We’d work two hours, sit there and wait two more hours until the mail came, and then go home.

I worked on a line with a big machine, and it would keep going and going and going. We pasted labels on whisky bottles in cases, 24 to a case. If you weren’t careful, if the label didn’t get it right, the glass would fly. The floors were like the ones in old warehouses. You wore your own gloves. These were old warehouses. Sometimes they weren’t even heated. After they were union you had clean uniforms, and you bought your own shoes. They supplied gloves.

Before the union, the women that worked at the warehouse had to stay the longest. Then the bosses would say, “Now you women, go along and say, “Fire all the old bags, and keep the pretty ones with pretty legs.” Here the poor old gals were working their tails off and needed the money and was in great violation of the law never knew when you were going to be let out and when you weren’t.’

When the three-day San Francisco general strike came along in July 1934 everybody was out. The town was ours. We were just on top of the world. Nobody dared tell us we were wrong. We knew we were doing right. There was nothing quitting and saying, “We can’t make a living, we’ll go someplace else.” During the long maritime strike, before and after the general strike, I was working at South End Warehouse. When the National Guard patrolled the waterfront following the police killing of Billie Thursday, the longshoremen gave me a pass to go through. The women weren’t organized yet, but they weren’t “anti.”

Actually it was our dream to be unionized. Imagine belonging to a group like the longshoremen that stuck up for your rights, saw that you had seniority, and that the boss couldn’t harrass you or sleep with you. Harry Ludden, the foreman at South End Warehouse, used to say, “Come out to my house and I’ll give you a drink.” We didn’t dare say, “No.” We were fried, but when we were invited to the boss’ party, we went. Once he made us all get down on our knees and knees and bark like a dog for our plate of supper!

The first group of organized warehouses we heard about was in the coffee houses. We went down to the hall to get in the union. But the work wasn’t too steady. We would go to the hall and be dispatched to work. During the years right after the 1934 strike people flocked to the warehouse local. All the Italian women from North Beach rushed down to join the union. Those were the years the longshoremen worked to start other unions going. They inspired everyone. The garment workers and longshoremen worked to start other unions going. They inspired everyone. The garment workers and longshoremen worked to start other unions going. Everyone wanted to get their home base, just like the longshoremen.

My first union meeting must have been about 1936. The women would just listen back then. We didn’t think much of organizers—Gene Paton, who became a wonderful Local 6 president in 1937, Lou Goldblatt, the Heide brothers, and Bob Robertson—were “it.” And Lou Goldblatt knew how to get things rolling. He started our steward system. But we didn’t have much of a voice. The men would make all the rules. There was nothing between a woman’s hand and a rubber stamp for them. They ended in 1937 and 1942 the women had their own separate meetings. Our male Local 6 leaders weren’t much interested in women’s...
problems in those early days. Neither was Harry, although we were engaged before we were married. The men thought “the girls” were not interested in them until they got married or made some extra money. We were members of the Women’s Division Executive Board, but we didn’t have any say in the real power. We didn’t meet with the men until we bellowed. They got fired and I was unilaterated with them. We wanted to be known as workers. I never knew about this Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) because I thought I was a worker.

Sometimes when we were dispatched out of the union hall for jobs we were sent to a place we wasn’t familiarized. We would talk union to the workers. We had to get across the union in. We were called “Red Hats” because we had red hats.

The bosses hated us. We had some pretty rough times. Whenever anybody struck, we were on that picket line. This little Judy Anderson always had a long sock with a Sweetheart Soap bar in it. If she was bothered by seabs, they’d get hit with a “sweetheart.”

My husband and I divorced before very long. Then I married a man named Roberts. While I was working at Distillers Division, I became a union steward. When my daughter Sallie was 18 months old, Roberts left me to marry someone else. But by then I had a good Local 6 job and was determined to keep care of my little girl.

I became interested in a group called Working Mothers with Children. As a volunteer, I’d run家门口 for up for the next seven or eight years, I went to every meeting they had. There were several Local 6 people who were interested in child care, including Tillie Olsen, the famous author, and Hazel Drummond, who wrote a column for The Dispatcher in the mid-1940s. We’d meet with the Board of Education and rant and rave about getting a center for working mothers’ kids. All the unions sent delegates, including the longshoremen.

Right at the end of 1939 or in 1940 I went over to Schenley’s Liquors. It was just starting up. The union wanted volunteers to go in and help organize the place. One of the officers asked me to go. The company was avaricious to get workers. We just went down and asked for a job. We succeeded in organizing Schenley’s into Local 6, too. I’d been working at the MJB Coffee warehouse packing tea bags on a belt line. It was a wrench to give up your seniority at the MJB Coffee warehouse packing tea bags on a belt line. It was a wrench to give up your seniority. When you were a school teacher you had to get out of this and get organized in warehouse. There were big signs that read, “Come work for Local 6 and get organized.”

When the United States got into World War II in the early 1940s and most of the men went into the service, I took what had been considered a “man’s job.” I got a marvelous wage and I was now called a receiving clerk. This was at Schenley’s. The boss said, “Are you afraid to go downtown to shipping and receiving, and you Alice Moore?” We weren’t. Alice became a shipping clerk. We each got our own little office.

I used to get this solution that came in five gallon cans. It went over the top of the liquor to keep the government stamps intact. I took in supplies for the machine shop, too. All the boys were helpful, although there was one old man who used to say, “Why don’t you girls go home and raise your family?” Why do you want to do men’s work?” What an old son-of-a-gun he was. We had to live, you know? I was also quite into the blood donor scene during World War II. I was one of the workers who were organizing. I represented Schenley’s, Local 6, and the San Francisco Industrial Union Council, CIO in this big contest to elect Queens of the Purple Hearts. When you gave a pint of blood you cast a vote for a queen. I got 400 votes for 400 pints donated. We had it all organized in warehouse. There were big signs that said, “Vote for Billie Roberts.” I gave a lot of blood myself, too. You’d think I was a mainliner. But I had lots of blood. I was a strong person.

When Schenley’s and all the other liquor houses closed down in 1951, I went to work in a top grade restaurant at the Cliff Hotel and became a member of the AFL Waitresses Union. They were a very so-so outfit. You didn’t have to go to union meetings. In early Local 6 days we couldn’t wait for our two meetings a month. But in the Waitresses Union, if you didn’t want to go, you just had to pay your month’s dues. They thought I was the craziest thing they ever saw because instead of paying for someone to picket one of the restaurants, I went and picketed after my job. They never heard of anyone getting out and walking again after she’d walked all day.

Of course, I was always in political action as a good Democrat. When Franklin Delano Roosevelt was running for president, Sylvia Maker from Local 6 and I took pamphlets around. We walked for blocks to put fliers in front windows. It didn’t occur to us to charge. The Waitresses Union didn’t care who was running. They didn’t care if you voted or not. It was very different.

The waitresses too, always worked for tips and were jealous of each other. There wasn’t that comraderie like we had in the ILWU, where you knew that you belonged. You weren’t fighting alone. All of my life, for the last 30 or 40 years, I’ve remembered those Local 6 kids. They were like the buddies, I guess, in a war. We were together against the enemy every day.

I love the ILWU. I’m so proud of it. I don’t know what life would have been for me without the union. It was certainly a wonderful way of life. When you were a school teacher you had to get out and wrestle your own job, or go in all dressed up to see the boss, with him looking you up and down wondering what kind of a lay you were. But it was nothing seeing the boss after there was a union and we got our dispatch hall.

I never got into anything before where I thought the workers would get their just desserts. When I was in college, they used to say, “What good are unions? They’re only for stupid people. Anybody with any ingenuity can get their own job.” You know, stuff like that. But when I found out these workers were organizing, I thought it was beautiful.
T he ILWU’s International Executive Board, the union’s highest governing body between International Conventions in San Francisco March 30-April 1 with an eye toward developing the federation’s financial and resource three-year budget proposal for the 2006 International Convention (to cover the period April 2005 – March 2006). The board met as the Board of Trustees to go over the current budget and spending with a fine-tooth comb. They reviewed expenses and their reasons to determine which programs may be cut back and where they need further expansion. The board plans to begin fashioning budget proposals at its August meeting for next year’s Convention.

International President Jim Spinosa told the IEB Executive Council meeting in Las Vegas March 1-3 he and other ILWU officers attended. The meeting was meant to discuss the various “restructuring” proposals floating around. AFL-CIO President Andrew Stern declared several months ago that the federation’s nearly 60 unions needed to merge into no more than 15 or 20 to consolidate power and bargain more effectively on an industry-wide basis. His plan would force unions in the same sector to merge if they did not do it voluntarily. If that doesn’t happen, he would force it through the courts.

He said that before he took any action he would bring it back to the board for discussion and approval. The board unanimously passed two policy statements, one opposing the ballot initiatives California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger is backing, and the other opposing the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) that is pending in Congress. The board also passed two other resolutions. The warehouse Local 6’s Convention in February. One calls for U.S. troops to be taken out of Iraq, and the other for a moratorium on pre-emptive war, and demands warehouse Local 6’s Convention in Central American Free Trade (CAFTA).

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has instead spent his time breaking public employee unions to get the writ- ten consent of members before using dues money for political purposes. This has rallied opposition among con- cerned labor activists like the governor. This guarantees that Schwarzenegger will continue to receive the money going to education and to lead a drop in funding for a wide range of social services.

Schwarzenegger is also considering backing another initiative being promoted by business groups in an attempt to strike another blow to unions’ electoral power. It would require public employers to get the writ- ten consent of employees before using dues money for political purposes.

The January Schwarzenegger said he wanted to “go over the heads” of the federation to get the ILWU out of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). Since then, several other unions have developed proposals aimed at dealing with consolidation, organizing and bargaining.

The board was also agreed upon at the Executive Council meeting, but Spinosa told the IEB his position is that he would not agree to any merger with any other union and that he would propose the ILWU leave the AFL-CIO if it forced him to force a merger. He said that before he took any action he would bring it back to the board for discussion and approval. The board unanimously passed two policy statements, one opposing the ballot initiatives California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger is backing, and the other opposing the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) that is pending in Congress. The board also passed two other resolutions. The warehouse Local 6’s Convention in February. One calls for U.S. troops to be taken out of Iraq, and the other for a moratorium on pre-emptive war, and demands warehouse Local 6’s Convention in Central American Free Trade (CAFTA).

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worker rights” when granting preferen- 
tial market access under the program. 
These rules enable workers to complain 
about the inadequacy of national labor 
standards and their enforcement. Where 
Iraqi workers are the same as those wager 
on workers in the U.S. requiring greater 
international worker solidarity than 
ever before to respond to this crisis; 
WHEREAS, the Bush administra- 
tion has divided us here at home while 
influencing war and distrust among 
other nations of the world community, 
and has sacrificed the unity and friendship 
our country enjoyed in the days after 
September 11; and 
WHEREAS, AFL-CIO President 
John Sweeney, in preparation for the 
AFL-CIO Executive Council meeting in 
July, has asked the labor movement at 
every level to discuss important issues, 
challenges and problems we confront, 
and given that the issues of war and 
peace and the destruction of our social 
safety net are paramount among them; 
and 
Therefore, be it resolved, that 
Warehouse Union Local 6, ILWU, 
calls on President Bush to bring our 
troops home from Iraq now, and to 
consider the philosophical and pre-emptive 
war without a clear and imminent 
threat to the United States; and 
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, 
that Warehouse Union Local 6, ILWU, 
calls on the Bush administration to 
provide adequate benefits and services 
to meet the needs of our returning veter-
ans, and the needs of the public sector, 
for jobs, education, and healthcare; and 
better.
The July 1, 2002 Memorandum of Understanding between the ILWU and PMA provides that union members may change their health and dental plans during the Open Enrollment period and one additional time during the Plan Year.

Please join Ian Ruskin as Harry Bridges
May 11th
at the San Francisco Main Library, Koret Auditorium
100 Larkin Street
for an evening looking back at
the M&M!

• Introduction by “Harry Bridges”
• Screening of our film of interviews
• Panel discussion
6 – 7:30 PM Free!

Since the first edition appeared in 1974, the ILWU membership directory has included the names of retired and deceased members and their survivors. Now, the May Medical, Dental Choice period is an opportunity for members to review their coverage and make changes if necessary. 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 Delta Dental, City Center Dental and Genite Dental San Francisco plan group. For San Francisco Locals, dental choice is between Delta Dental, City Center Dental and Genite Dental San Francisco plan group. For Portland/Vancouver locals dental choice is between Blue Cross of Oregon Dentacare, Oregon Dental Plan and Oregon/Washington Dental Service. For San Francisco Locals, dental choice is between Delta Dental, City Center Dental and Genite Dental San Francisco plan group.

Information on the dental plans, and Coastwise Indemnity Plan, Kaiser and Group Health Cooperative medical plans, and forms to change plans can be obtained at the Locals and the ILWU-PMA Benefits Plans office. All active and retired ILWU members and their spouse or guest are invited to attend.

For more information contact Local 98 at (800) 824-7945.

May is Medical, Dental Choice Month

Active and retired longshore families in the ports where members have a choice can change their medical and/or dental plans during this Annual Review period May 1 to May 31, 2005. The change will be effective July 1, 2005. In addition to the May open enrollment period, members may change their health/dental 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.

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It is no surprise that longshore workers look up to Harry Bridges, but Local 13 members in Wilmington have another chance to lift their eyes and connect with the union’s founder.

“Harry is always looking over us,” said Patricia Aguirre, chair of the Education Committee that serves Locals 13, 19, 21 and 23 who take grain loading jobs. “That way if you have something to do over eight hours. Sort of a big idea, and it divided the ferry routes into tracts with the union clause in.”

The joint Education Committee commissioned the mural—entitled “Caretakers of a Great Inheritance”—as part of the group’s year-long push to educate brothers and sisters on the early history of the ILWU and issues affecting the ILWU today.

“The Education Committee members really took inspiration from the Palm Springs training,” said David Arian, who as Local 13 president approved the mural’s commissioning. “They’ve been busy all year trying to deepen the connection of rank-and-file members to our union.”

The committee also published 10,000 copies of a history of the union, as well as sponsoring performances by Ian Ruskin of his one-man show about Bridges at general membership meetings. The committee is also preparing programs about WallMart and how to get ready for the contract talks in 2008.

The mural is on permanent display on the west-facing inside wall of the Local 13 dispatch hall.

—Bill Orton

BILL ORTON
A Helping Hand... when you need it most. That’s what we’re all about. We are the representatives of the ILWU-sponsored recovery programs. We provide professional and confidential assistance to you and your family for alcoholism, drug abuse and other problems—and we’re just a phone call away.

ILWU Book & Video Sale

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

BOOKS:
The ILWU Story: unrolls the history of the union from its origins to the present, complete with recollections from the men and women who built the union, in their own words, and dozens of rare photos of the union in action. $5.00

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

Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s: By Bruce Nelson: the most complete history of the origins, meaning, and impact of the 1934 strike. $13.00

The Union Makes Us Strong: Radical Unionism on the San Francisco Waterfront: By David Wellman: the important new study of longshoreing in the ILWU. $15.00 (paperback)

A Terrible Anger: The 1934 Waterfront and General Strike in San Francisco: By David Selvin: the newest and best single narrative history about the San Francisco events of 1934. $16.50

The March Inland: Origins of the ILWU Warehouse Division 1934-1938: By Harvey Schwartz: new edition of the only comprehensive account of the union’s organizing campaign in the northern California warehouse and distribution industry. $19.00

VIDEOS:

We Are the ILWU: A 30-minute color video introducing the principles and traditions of the ILWU. Features active and retired members talking about what the union meant in their lives and what it needs to survive and thrive, along with film clips, historical photos and an original musical score. DVD or VHS version $5.00

Life on the Beam: A Memorial to Harry Bridges: A 17-minute VHS video production by California Working Group, Inc., memorializes Harry Bridges through still photographs, recorded interviews, and reminiscences. Originally produced for the 1990 memorial service in San Francisco. $28.00

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