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I confess—
I rob banks

I have a confession, I am a thief. I steal and, you know what, I’m not going to stop. I steal from banks because that’s where the money is.

I am not robbing the innocent. Banks steal from the working poor, namely you. They call it making an honest profit. But banks use your wealth against you.

Banks take the wealth from working families and then don’t lend that money back into the communities from where it came. That is called redlining. I call it robbery.

What do banks do with your wealth? Banks pull resources out of American industries where we work and open new modern plants in poor countries. They prefer countries where there are puppet military dictators who are willing to sell out their own people to American multinational corporations financed with your hard-earned money.

They send your wealth overseas to these corporations that rob the resources of other working people like you.

Here in America banks are consolidating their power. Bank of America, which was started in San Francisco by Italian immigrants as an answer to the steel strike. San Francisco-based Bank of the West is headquartered in North Carolina and has bought up large Eastern banks. Wells Fargo financed the union-busting law firm in a Pittsburg, California steel strike. San Francisco-based Bank of the West finances Threreemile Canyon Farms for $101 million where the owner refuses to hire woman saying, “I don’t want women at the farm—they are only good for the bed.” That’s the way banks and their finance partners talk about your mother, wife and daughter.

The United Farm Workers union has a case against Threreemile Canyon Farms for sex discrimination.

Banks tell their investors to “look for the union label and run the other way.” Don’t invest in companies with unions, don’t invest in countries with democracy, but open up a bank on every corner to suck up the wealth of working families to send off shore. So you see, banks are stealing from you.

When banks and savings and loans failed in the 1980s, who picked up the tab? You did. They didn’t fund their insurance agency sufficiently to cover their billions in losses due to their criminal lending practices. This bank failure turned out to be the biggest “transfer of wealth” (robbery) of the middle class to bail out the banking class in the history of the United States. Banks made out like bandits. As Woody Guthrie noted in his famous song, “This war’s the notorious bank robber Pretty Boy Floyd “some rob you with a six gun, some with a fountain pen.”

For those and many other reasons I rob banks of their most essential assets—their customers. In the last five years I admit to playing my part in taking thousands of customers from banks and making them members and owners of their own financial institution. Now they control their own profits and those profits are kept in their community. They are invested in your homes, cars and education loans and earn a much higher rate of return. There are no risky loans to foreign dictators or union-busting firms or multinational corporations closing your plant and moving it to some dictatorship, putting you on welfare and making your fellow workers pay for it while the bank hides from the tax man on some tax-free island.

So what is this member-owned financial institution that now thousands of your fellow workers have discovered? Simple. It’s your Credit Union. Join it and you can be the getaway driver in my continuing bank robbery.

They told the nation that we were to blame for the econom- my losing a billion dollars a day. Then it was two billion a day. There was no take figure they were not willing to say.

And all the Americans workers want someone to blame for them feeling the pinch.

Christmas was being stolen from America, it’s not the union, but the PMA that’s the Grinch.

We know that if we lose, then all workers of the world will lose.

So our officials stepped up to the plate and earned every penny of those union dues.

We lobbed in D.C., flew globally, held rallies and shouted “Bush Butt-Off!”

But the crooked employers and shippers and the government- ment consorted to keep us shut out.

The gates were chained, and we did not have the keys to the locks.

There were rumors that the National Guard would be coming in to work the docks.

No work equals no money equals pulling kids out of col- lege and losing houses.

And all we want is a good contract and a raise for retirees and surviving spouses.

But they don’t want the workers controlling the terminals and rail yards.

But the tide really turned when Minisce showed up with two armed guards.

The momentum is changing, the game pieces are rearranging, and it is starting to look up.

Hoffa and Trumka are coming in like the Cavalry, giving us the “Homie Hook-Up.”

That ten-day lock-out taught our union a lot.

We should be proud of how we stuck together and how hard we fought.

They’ll be coming at us again in 2008. Using terrorism and national security, there’s no time to wait.

We’d better start preparing and be ready to perform.

The waters may seem calm now, that’s why they call it the “Eye of the Storm.”

Now if you don’t mind banks making a profit off your sweat, then don’t come down and join your credit union. If, on the other hand, you’re tired of being mistreated and abused, then the credit union is for you. Let the credit union show you how you can make a profit off your own money for a change.

To join your local ILWU credit union, just ask at your local union or go online to www.creditunion.coop/locator. There are nine ILWU credit unions up and down the Pacific Coast, so it’s easy to find the one for you. Whether you’re up in Hohquiam, Wash. or down in San Pedro, Calif., come home to your family, the family of the ILWU Credit Unions.

—Lewis Wright

ILWU Local 63 retired

LASH

This is how it was cold wet muscles tense moving fast pulling the metal rods downtown that bind the towers of stacked steel boxes to the ship’s deck Watching you work in the narrow aisles

One eye up for falling rods Jumping to the slam of the crane’s rack scooping cargo to shore

Hardhat long gone Gloves sagging from rain rivers of sweat and grease thick as butter on the rusty threads of binders that won’t budge

The soft pads of your palms bruising as you finally turn loose, spin and drop the worn turnbuckles where they lay like dead bodies in an open grave

—Kevin Castle, 56876, ILWU Local 19

The Dispatcher

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SACRAMENTO—The Capitol hearing room got so quiet it seemed like everyone was holding their breath. Some 60 people had gathered for a forum on the Employee Free Choice Act hosted by U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-Martinez) and joined by Rep. Doris Matsui (D-Sacramento). Ivo Camilo from Blue Diamond Growers was describing what happened to him exactly a year before, while he and his co-workers were organizing to join ILWU warehouse Local 17.

“In March 2005, we went public with our demand to gain a voice and respect on the job,” Camilo said. “A month later I was fired.”

“Management accused me of ‘willfully contaminating the almonds’ and on April 20th at 2 p.m. two supervisors escorted me out of the building. I was suspended pending investigation. I was asked to surrender my badge. I thanked the company for the 35 years that I had worked with them, and left the property,” Camilo said.

For a minute he couldn’t go on. He swallowed hard. He pushed up his glasses and wiped tears out of the corners of his eyes, then continued. “After losing my job I felt angry and betrayed,” he said. “I also learned that I would do it all over again. I would join the organizing committee and speak with my co-workers about the need for health coverage, better wages and better conditions at work.”

Four days after the hearing, Camilo and fellow organizing committee member Mike Flores were getting congratulatory hugs from co-workers as they stood outside the plant in the 6 a.m. chill, ready for their first day back at work.

The National Labor Relations Board found Blue Diamond broke labor law when it fired Camilo and Flores. In a March 17 ruling, NLRB Administrative Law Judge Jay R. Pollack ordered the company to rehire them. Judge Pollack also found Blue Diamond guilty of illegally discriminating Alma Orozco, illegally intimidating workers about their union sympathies and illegally threatening them with plant closure and loss of pensions and other benefits.

Blue Diamond insisted it had done nothing wrong. It vowed to appeal. But then the company blinked. It let the April 14 deadline for appeals go by.

“The union is glad to see that Blue Diamond recognizes they’re not above labor law,” Local 17 Secretary-Treasurer Jack Wyrtz, Sr. said. “Local 17 will remain vigilant to see the company respects the rights of its workers.”

Inside the plant, the company only announced the decision not to appeal in two departments, committeee member Cesario Aguirre said.

“The supervisor in manufacturing just said it would be a waste of time and money to appeal. This says to me everything is still business as usual,” Aguirre said.

Despite the ruling, the company has continued to harass union supporters. The ILWU filed more unfair labor practice charges March 20 on behalf of Aguirre and fellow committee member Leo Esparza. IDBG wrote up Aguirre for putting aside his safety glasses for a moment to examine a sinkhole he was drilling. They fired Esparza for pulling a broken weed-whacker out of the trash and taking it home without a “property pass.”

In the past Esparza had scavenged many items from the garbage without being disciplined. Once he even tied an old desk to the top of his car and drove right past security with it.

The weaknesses in labor law mean the damage to people’s lives and their rights still lingers. Camilo was out of work for a full year, Flores for 10 months. But then the company blinked.

“Accepting the decision from the NLRB has helped the vibe in the plant, but people are still scared,” committee member Randy Reyes said at the forum.

The Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) discussed at the forum aims to make the organizing process fairer by stifling the penalties for employers who break the law. Rep. Miller introduced EFCA (H.R. 1699/S. 842) in April 2005 with 212 co-sponsors, including Rep. Matsui.

Under EFCA, employers found guilty of illegally firing workers during a drive would have to rehire those workers and pay them triple back pay. Employers could be fined up to $250,000 per violation, and employers found to be thwarting organizing, and the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) would have to seek court injunctions against employers if there was “reasonable cause to believe” their law-breaking would have a major impact on an organizing drive.

So if EFCA were in place now, the NLRB could have gone to court just after Camilo and Flores got fired and asked for an order putting them back to work. The company could be facing as much as $650,000 in fines for its illegal threats and firings. Instead it only has to pay out about $80,000 in back wages plus interest.

EFCA would also make it easier for workers to get representation. Card-check recognition would replace NLRB elections a way of seeing whether a majority of workers want to join a union. Under a “card check” agreement, the employer has to recognize the union if a majority of workers in a shop sign cards or petitions saying they want representation. Current law allows card check but doesn’t require it. Most employers refuse card check. They prefer the more drawn-out election procedure, which gives them time to campaign against the union.

Workers from Cingular Wireless joined those from Blue Diamond at the Sacramento forum. Rosa Samaniego and Cherie Heizne talked about their experiences organizing under the neutrality card-check agreement between Cingular and the Communications Workers of America. The 800 workers in Cingular’s Sacramento call center and more than 100 in local Cingular retail stores joined CWA in October after a majority signed cards confirming that they wanted CWA to represent them.

“Prior to the neutrality agreement, we couldn’t go into the stores,” Cherie Heizne said. “After the agreement, we had access and could even sit in the break room to answer questions and give information.

“Organizing a union with neutrality in place allows workers to get information and enables them to be able to truly make a free choice on the question of union representation,” she said.

This sounded good to the Blue Diamond workers, who have already been working hard for a year and a half.

“We want what they have,” committee member Ann Hurlbut told Reps. Miller and Matsui. Working closely with the International Organizing Dept. and Local 17, the committee is aiming to get a neutrality agreement from the huge almond cooperative, as a first step towards representation and a contract.

After Camilo and Flores walked back into the plant April 24, lead organizer Agustin Ramirez took a moment to reflect. “This was huge for the workers,” Ramirez said. “It was a huge step, but a huge step on what could be a very long road.”
Government will screen longshore for terrorists

Michael Chertoff, Secretary of the Dept. of Homeland Security (DHS), held a news conference Tuesday, April 25 to announce the Bush administration’s latest plan to secure the nation’s ports—check the names of port workers against the FBI’s Terrorist Watch list.

“This initial round of background checks, which is beginning with today’s legal notice, will cover an estimated 400,000 port workers and will focus first on the employees and longshoremen who have daily access to the security areas of port facilities,” Chertoff told the media. “In other words, we’re going to focus on those who could potentially be the greatest risk to our security.”

It was an odd accusation considering ILWU officers have been meeting with Coast Guard and Transportation Security Administration officials, the DHS agencies responsible for port security, for a couple of years. In fact, the union’s top officers had met with them just a month before and had agreed to cooperate with the name match program. The union was only concerned that there be an appeals process since the list, used to screen longshore workers would “focus on those who could potentially be the greatest risk to our security.”

“Being pulled out of line and missing a flight because of a false match is inconvenient, but losing your job, your healthcare and your pension because of a mistake is unacceptable,” ILWU International President James Spinosa said. “We have to balance the need for security with civil rights.”

The Democrats had been pouting the Republicans for not having funded and implemented a port security program more than four years after 9-11. This announcement was a way to keep the Democratic House was really doing something.

But typical of the Bush administration and Republican approach, Chertoff was putting the security risk on us American workers instead of where the real source of danger lies—in the millions of un inspected containers that enter U.S. ports every year from all over the world. Even though current Coast Guard regulations require inspection of container seals and so-called “empty” containers, this is really if ever done at West Coast ports because it would cut into the productivity and profitability of the terminal operating companies. And the Coast Guard has shown little interest in enforcing those regulations. Doing background checks on longshore workers is so much easier.

“Productivity isn’t hurt by inspecting workers, only by inspecting containers,” Spinosa said.

Chertoff is requiring unions and employers supply the government with a spread sheet listing each port worker’s name, date of birth and Social Security number and, where applicable, immigration status. The ILWU does not keep its members’ Social Security numbers. That information resides with the employer group, the Pacific Maritime Assn. (PMA), which issues the workers’ paychecks.

At the press conference Chertoff also said that this list matching was just a preliminary check of longshore workers. He said that by the end of the year the government will begin criminal background checks on all longshore workers to further see if they pose a security risk to the nation. All longshore workers will be required to pass the background checks before being issued a Transportation Workers Identification Card (TWIC), the new national ID card that will be needed to gain access to port terminals. The TWIC card will carry biometric information, digital data of a fingerprint to positively identify the card holder.

The ILWU has raised several concerns about the TWIC. First, the union wants to limit the data encoded on the card to that which is absolutely necessary to identify the workers and limit who has access to that information. So far, the government has given no such assurances and has claimed that what information is encoded on the card must remain secret for security reasons.

Second, ever since the issue of longshore worker background checks was raised in September 2001, the ILWU has insisted that legitimate anti-terrorism concerns not be used against workers and their unions. The list of disqualifying offenses must have some real correlation to matters that would make someone a national security risk.

“If someone has been convicted of a crime, done their time and paid their debt to society, he shouldn’t be punished a second time. That’s unconstitution al,” Spinosa said. “The fastest way to turn someone into a criminal is to take away their opportunity to earn a living with dignity.”

Again, as a result of the ILWU lobbying efforts, the current TWIC background checks include an appeals process. Any member unjustly accused and screened off the waterfront will have an opportunity to present a defense in front of an Administrative Law Judge.

Further news on the TWIC card and its affects on ILWU members will be published in The Dispatcher and posted on the union’s website at www.ilwu.org.

Steve Stallone
The workers, who slaughtered hogs and processed and packaged the pork, had maintained standards high enough to have earned the company permits to sell to Japan, the world’s toughest food market. They were then contracts worth $430 million by the late 1980s. But the company had gone bankrupt last year, leaving its workers jobless and owing them money. A bankruptcy judge freeze its assets, but the workers plan to expand and work. They had signed a contract with the company. The workers have plans for more value-added processing in the plant with the product we have, the advantage, it was a family business. It was on your product. We want to be a team and make a profit. We want to save our jobs. And what we’re after is that the workers plan to expand and work. They had signed a contract with the company. The workers pay off in the near future.

The workers took to the streets to apply for workplace accommodations. They demonstrated April 25 in front of the local offices of Glenn Haged and Debra Higgins, New Democratic Party members of the provincial legislature. The workers explained that investors didn’t want to come in without provincial help, yet the province wouldn’t commit without private investors. The workers argued that the province has been locked out five years ago in a workplace standard. The workers plan to expand and work. They had signed a contract with the company. The workers have plans for more value-added processing in the plant with the product we have, the advantage, it was a family business.

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Along the Shore

Reviewed by Fred Glass

To watch Bill Morgan in his elementary school classroom in San Francisco is to see a master teacher in his element. That element would be children—laughing, fighting, sounding out words and sentences aloud, eager to learn.

Morgan, 60, a member of United Educators of San Francisco, AFT Local 61, has been teaching for 32 years. Most of his students are kids of color, and many are Spanish speaking. They bring to his classroom their enthusiasm, their worries and a wide range of experiences drawn from different ethnic backdrops and immigrant cultures. Morgan, fluent in Spanish, is aware of the need to teach and understand the diverse, and various identities of his students.

“It’s important to acknowledge their cultures,” he said. “It’s part of who they are, and we’re not one-size-fits-all society today, if we ever were.

The readings he assigns include books on Chicanos icon Cesar Chavez, on the girl who lived in Hiroshima when the U.S. dropped an atom bomb on her city at the end of World War II. Native American legends from Nicaragua. “It’s equally essential,” Morgan said, “to give them a way to understand their underlying common interests, what unites them all, as well as what distinguishes them from one another.”

As a result, his students also read, create, act on hand. Along the Shore, a 24-page coloring book that Morgan wrote, published by the California Federation of Teachers’ Labor in the Schools Committee. Members of that committee, including Morgan, have purchased a number of booklets, videotapes, and other materials that bring the world of work and the labor movement into the K-12 classroom. Along the Shore features images of longshore workers, their working environment and the various tasks they perform. Coloring books sponsored by unions and depicting the work of their members have been, if not common, at least not unknown over the years. A glance through the Labor in the Schools Committee’s files reveals coloring books underwritten by unions of letter carriers, autoworkers, carpenters and other workers. Where Along the Shore differs from most of its predecessors is in its direct description of the workers’ union and what it does.

Says one page, “A group of workers who agree to help one another to make their jobs better is called a union.” Another caption, accompanying an image of a meeting, says “At union meetings, the workers discuss ways to make their work better and safer.” In the back of the ILWU banner and slogan, “An injury to one is an injury to all.”

“Virtually all of my students will grow up to be workers,” Morgan said. “Their parents are all workers. Yet there’s very little that our education system does to promote an awareness of work and the problems kids will face once they’re working. And there’s even less to acquaint students with the main conflict resolution tools that workers possess as union members: their union and collective bargaining.”

Morgan sometimes moonlights on weekends as an event planner at San Francisco’s Moscone Center setting up conventions. As a dual member of Sign and Display Local 510 and UESF, he has a broad perspective on the need for unions in any industry. “Most unions focus on the individual,” Morgan added. “I try to help my students see that all workers have common interests, and those common interests are better served when we’re organized.”

Along the Shore is the result of a collaboration between the CFT Labor in the Schools Committee and the ILWU. Morgan, the ILWU’s Director of Education and Librarian for ILWU. Eugene Vrana, Associate Director of Education and Librarian for ILWU. David Erkkila, a retired member of Local 10 and a friend of Victor Smolin, and chair of the Smolin-Melin Scholarship Fund.

Along the Shore was authorized by the ILWU’s Colorful Labor Labor in the Schools Committee and the Diane Middleton Foundation and Sign and Display Local 510 and UESF. They left a sum of money to establish the scholarship fund. They specified that scholarships were to be available to children of Class A Local 10 members to further their “collegiate” education. Trustees of the Smolin-Melin Scholarship Fund are prepared to accept applications for scholarships for the academic year 2006-2007. Now is the time to indicate your interest.

The Trustees interpret “collegiate” to apply only to two-year colleges or universities, and from $750 to $1750 for full-time students at two-year colleges.

In June 2006 is the application deadline. Victor Smolin and Carlton Melin were long time members of Local 10. They left a sum of money to establish the scholarship fund. They specified that scholarships were to be available to children of Class A Local 10 members to further their “collegiate” education. Trustees of the Smolin-Melin Scholarship Fund are prepared to accept applications for scholarships for the academic year 2006-2007. Now is the time to indicate your interest.

Video review

“Meeting Face to Face: The Iraq-U.S. Labor Solidarity Tour”

Each day as the news from Iraq gets worse, the mainstream media present the same pundits who defended the invasion. They say they may have made mistakes then, but now we have no choice but to stay the course.

But we rarely hear from the Iraqi people. Here at last is a documentary about workers in Iraq, their concerns and their views.

U.S. Labor Against the War led a union fact-finding mission to Iraq in May 2005 and then invited representatives of all three Iraqi labor federations to speak before forums of union members, labor leaders and politicians in the United States last summer.

“We face a hostile position from American businesses and labor privatization, efforts to import foreign workers despite massive unemployment, and a ban on bargaining for public employees,” Iraqi unionist Adnan Al Saffar told New York City unionists June 17.

Their message was that the U.S. occupation is a major obstacle to peace. U.S. troops need to leave Iraq so Iraqis can begin to solve their own problems.

One of the most stirring sequencen is the film shows Iraqi unionists cheering as the 2005 AFL-CIO Convention passed the historic resolution calling for the speedy withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq.

Three years into the occupation, Saddam Hussein’s law prohibiting collective bargaining by public employees is still in force. But unionization has grown rapidly and now over 300,000 Iraqi workers are in unions. They are unanimously opposed to U.S. and World Bank plans to privatize Iraq’s oil and other major public industries.

“Meeting Face to Face: The Iraq-U.S. Labor Solidarity Tour” is a 27-minute DVD ($9.95 or $14.95 for the VHIS) which includes a 12-minute condensed version perfect for presentation at union and other meetings. It was produced by Jonathan Levin and Michael Zweig of the Center for the Study of Working Class Life. For more information, go to www.meetingfacefaceface.org. USLAW (www.uslaw.org) promotes projects to help Iraqi unions, including the peace demonstration in New York City on Saturday, April 29.

— Ken Nash

Smolin-Melin Scholarships

ATTENTION : LOCAL 10 MEMBERS

Trustees of the Smolin-Melin Scholarship Fund are prepared to accept applications for scholarships for the academic year 2006-2007. Now is the time to indicate your interest.

Victor Smolin and Carlton Melin were long time members of Local 10. They left a sum of money to establish the scholarship fund. They specified that scholarships were to be available to children of Class A Local 10 members to further their “collegiate” education. Trustees of the Smolin-Melin Scholarship Fund are prepared to accept applications for scholarships for the academic year 2006-2007. Now is the time to indicate your interest.

If you have a son or daughter who is applying to enter college next fall, or is already a college student who is planning to continue, and the above requirements are met, you might want to apply for one of these scholarships.

To request an application, simply call Mathilda Mendonca, at (415) 771-7050. Then send them the application form with the necessary explanatory material.
Local 10’s Reino Erkkila passes

by Tom Price

Reino Erkkila started on the docks at age 12 working on lumber schooners in the summer and hung around school situations in the winter when longshoremen discharged cargo with the ship in the ‘teens,” Reino’s son Dave said. “My father marched in Little’s funeral with the family. He was always proud that he was there.”

Little was latched on for organizing, for speaking out against WWI and for organizing the IWW, including Herman Erkkila, who moved to San Francisco in the 1920s and worked on docks. Ex-Wobbly and his wife RosaLee said they were proud for having their experiences down in the hold with their fellow workers. Sometimes he was in the same work gang as Harry Bridges before the birth of the ILWU.

Reino graduated from San Francisco’s Mission High in 1931 and dropped a train back to Montana in 1932. He came back and attended San Mateo Junior College before joining his father on the docks in 1933.

He met his wife Irene in the Finn Hall in San Francisco and they were married in 1938. He became a registered longshoreman a year later and son and daughter Dave and Lynn were born in 1942 and 1943. Reino’s first elected job in Local 10 was as dispatcher in 1944.

Over most of the next 20 years Reino did stints as Local 10 president and numerous more as secretary-treasurer and BA. He supported healthcare for workers and preventive medicine. He worked on the safety committees in 1954 and on the union’s political committees as a District Council delegate for most of 20 years.

In 1960 he was selected by the International Executive Board as one of 24 rank and file delegates who visited 21 nations to study labor conditions. Reino co-authored a detailed study on four countries in the book. “U.S. Communist to get elected to union was a Senator, made it a crime for a Communist to get elected to union office.”

Dave said Reino attended training for 400 new B registrants in 1963 and was later given an award for it. His last 10 years were spent in clerks’ Local 34. He stayed active in the community and died April 5, 2006.

Reino leaves behind his son Dave, who was a longshoreman in Local 10 and 34 for 40 years between 1963 and 2003, and Dave’s daughter Karin and son Richard. Reino’s daughter Lynn Von Wiedenfield has two children, Steven and Wendy, and her daughter Christina Barajas, is now a member of Local 10.

Local 10’s RosaLee retires

RosaLee Flitter left 39 years of her life on clerks’ Local 34. She was born in 1917. She started school and was 18 years old, and Harry Bridges offered her a job as administrative assistant at Local 10 while he was president.”

“...I’m bi-lingual, and Harry’s secretary taught me Spanish,” RosaLee said. “I read everything.”

“Chronicos. I read everything.”

“...members did not have an absolute right to select whomever they chose; their right may be regulated by Congress. It’s the membership really made it worthwhile for me. I always remembered the motto, ‘You don’t have the right to tear down what cost blood to build,’” RosaLee said. —Tom Price
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