ILWU members find ways to honor Bloody Thursday sacrifices under COVID-19 restrictions

Picnics were canceled this July 5 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but ILWU members and pensioners along the West Coast organized socially-distanced Bloody Thursday remembrances to honor the sacrifices of workers killed during the 1934 West Coast strike that led to the establishment of the ILWU. (Read ILWU historian Harvey Schwartz's history of the “Big Strike” on page 4.)

SoCal caravan

Southern California ILWU members, pensioners, and family gathered on Sunday, July 5, to mark Bloody Thursday with a car procession that concluded with a graveside memorial at Roosevelt Memorial Park in Gardena, where the first two martyrs of the 1934 strike, San Pedro High graduate Dickie Parker and Lomita resident John Knudsen, are buried.

This year’s memorial was scaled down to observe proper social distancing protocols and ensure everyone’s safety. There were over 100 cars in the procession, including several beautifully restored classic cars. Most people remained in their vehicles while a small number conducted the service.

Among those in attendance for the graveside memorial were Local 13 President Ramon Ponce De Leon, Local 63 President Mike Podue, Local 94 President Danny Miranda, Local 13 Vice President Jesse “Nacho” Enriquez, Local 13 member and event coordinator Angel Blanco, Pacific Coast Pensioner Association (PCPA) President Greg Mitre, Southern California Pensioner President Jerry Garretson, and PCPA Poet Laureate Jerry Brady who opened the memorial with a poem about the 1934 strike.

"There is no greater love than this—for one to lay down their life for their friends," Ponce De Leon said of Parker and Knudsen. "We wouldn't have the lives that we have if it wasn't for these men to start it off. The fight is not over. We still have issues that we need to deal with and we're still fighting every day."

"The most important thing we do all year is to pay tribute to these men who gave their lives so we could have this union," said Blanco. "They did what they had to do for us, so this is the least we can do for them."

Bay Area Bloody Thursday featured new and old

The official Bloody Thursday ceremony sponsored each year by the Bay Area Longshoremen’s Memorial continued on page 5
ILWU mourns the passing of Civil Rights icon and Congressman John Lewis

The International Longshore and Warehouse Union joins millions of people across the country in mourning the death of Civil Rights icon and United States Congressman John Lewis. Our deepest condolences go out to his family, friends, and all of those whose lives were touched by Congressman Lewis’ life and work. Lewis passed away on July 17 at the age of 80 after a long battle with pancreatic cancer. He was one of the few surviving members of Dr. Martin Luther King’s inner circle.

John Lewis was a true hero and warrior for the working class,” said ILWU International President Willie Adams in a statement released shortly after Lewis’ death. “He was fearless, committed, and unwavering in his dedication to racial and economic justice. In the streets of Selma and the halls of Congress, John Lewis fought for us all. The torch has truly been passed to a new generation of activists who today are continuing the fight for civil rights. May the memory of his life-long dedication and commitment to social justice and the struggle for freedom be a light that guides us through these challenging times.”

Coming of age in the “King years”
Lewis was born into a sharecropping family in 1940 in Troy, Alabama. His life was shaped by his lived experience in the segregated Jim Crow South and his coming of age during the early years of the Civil Rights movement.

“I grew up about 50 miles from Montgomery. Growing up there as a young child, I tasted the bitter fruits of racism. I saw the signs that said white men, colored men; white women, colored women; white waiting, colored waiting.” Lewis said. “And I would ask my mother, my father, my grandparents, and my great-grandparents why. They would say, ‘That’s the way it is. Don’t go getting in trouble.’”

Lewis was 14 years-old when years of organizing and legal work by the NAACP, culminating in the Brown v. Board of Education decision that declared segregation in public schools unconstitutional. He was only one year older than Emmett Till when Till was lynched in Mississippi in 1955 and the shocking photos of his desecrated body appeared in the Black magazines Jet and the Chicago Defender. As a young man, Lewis was inspired by Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-56 and he spent hours listening to the speeches of Dr. King on the radio.

Lewis was an unflagging supporter of the rights and dignity of working-class Americans and a fearless champion for liberty and civil rights throughout his entire life. He was one of the original Freedom Riders in the summer of 1960 during which he faced violent attacks by angry racists.

March on Washington
Lewis helped to organize and also spoke at the historic 1963 March on Washington where Dr. Martin Luther King delivered the “I Have A Dream” speech. Lewis was not only the youngest speaker at the March, as a leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), he also represented the most radical organization.

“To those who have said, ‘Be patient and wait,’ we have long said that we cannot be patient,” Lewis said that day. “We do not want our freedom gradually, but we want it to be free now!”

Lewis challenged not only racists and segregationists but also liberal allies who he believed did not go far enough in eradicating injustice. In an early draft of his speech for the March on Washington, Lewis criticized the Kennedy Administration’s civil rights bill because it was “too little and too late. There’s not one thing in the bill that will protect our people from police brutality.”

The language was later changed to lukewarm support for the bill out of respect for more conserva- tive Civil Rights elders who asked for the change.

Lewis courageously put his body on the line in pursuit of racial justice and equality. He and Reverend Hosea Williams from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference led a nonviolent march in 1965 across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, headed toward Montgomery. The pair led over 500 peaceful marchers into a line of violent racist police who attacked the group with clubs, bullwhips, and tear gas while Lewis urged everyone to kneel and pray. Lewis was so severely beaten in the “Bloody Sunday” incident that he had to be hospitalized with skull fractures and nearly died from his injuries.

ILWU Family
John Lewis had longstanding connections with the ILWU that were forged over many decades because of a shared dedication to racial and economic justice, lifelong support for unions and workers, and the fact that his youngest sister, Rosa Tyner, was a member of ILWU Locals 10 and 91 for 23 years.

As a member of Congress, Representative Lewis was a champion of working people and a strong supporter of collective bargaining rights. He advocated for a living wage, called for raising the minimum wage and supported Davis-Bacon and other prevailing wage laws. He called for and strengthened workplace safety standards. Rep. Lewis was in all ways a true friend to longshore, maritime, and warehouse workers.

“There is a lot to learn from the life of John Lewis,” said ILWU International Vice President Bobby Olvera. “He fought against the forces of segregation at a time when civil rights were unpopular with white Americans. He responded to hate and violence with courage and hope and the belief that working-class people, united, could make America a better place for us all.”

continued on page 8
T
wo U.S. Senators directed
harsh words at foreign-
owned grain company
officials during the Agriculture
Committee’s markup of the Grain
Standards Reauthorization Act in

The grain companies – Marubeni,
Mitsui and Louis Dreyfus – are failing
to negotiate in good faith with ILWU
grain handler locals in the Northwest,
where U.S.-based TEMCO reached an
ILWU agreement more than two
years ago.

Ranking Democratic Sen. Debbie
Stabenow (D-MI) said, “I have heard
troubling reports that certain foreign-
owned grain companies may be failing
to make good-faith efforts to reach an
agreement with their workers. These
protracted and contentious negotia-
tions ultimately harm the workers, the
American farmers who want certainty,
and the American company that has already
put in the work to come to an
agreement. I would urge all parties to
engage in the process in good faith.
If left unresolved, these negotiations
will undermine certainty for everyone
involved in the grain trade, which is the
purpose of our meeting today.”

Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH)
echoed Sen. Stabenow’s comments,
adding, “I am deeply concerned by
what is happening to the workers
at some of our nation’s largest grain
export terminals in the Pacific North-
west. It is my understanding that
six terminals, owned either by Louis
Dreyfus, a Dutch firm, and two Japa-
nese conglomerates, have refused to
negotiate in good faith with the men
and women who have worked at these
ports for 70 years.”

American company reaches
collaboration

The grain multinationals that
Brown called out in fact allowed their
collective bargaining agreement with
ILWU grain locals to expire in May of
2018, while U.S.-based TEMCO broke
away from their fellow employers to
reach an agreement with the ILWU at
its three export terminals in Tacoma,
Kamloops and Portland. The foreign
companies include Louis Dreyfus,
operating in Portland and Seattle;
Mitsui-owned United Grain in Vancouver,
and Marubeni-owned Columbia Grain
in Portland.

“These companies, with annual
revenue in the tens of billions, are ask-
ing skilled workers to give up their pen-
sions and their healthcare,” said Sen.
Brown. “As this Committee knows, the
value of the Grain Standards Act is that
our trading partners can count on the
quality and integrity of U.S. grains. If
we allow this Act to be undermined,
whether by future privatization of
inspectors or by the undermining of
the skilled workforce at these termi-
nals, we will ultimately hurt the very
farmers that count on us.”

Attacks on benefits

“All three of the foreign grain
companies began the bargaining pro-
cess by demanding ILWU workers
forfeit long-standing health and wel-
fare benefits and work rules that took
decades and much sacrifice to negoti-
ate,” said Coast Committeeman Cam
Williams. “Company officials have
refused to budge on their takeaway
demands while remaining profitable
and putting the stability of the entire
grain export industry at risk.”

Concessional demands from the
grain conglomerates include:

- Removing ILWU members from
  a healthy “green zone” pension
  plan with over 100% funding and
  trying to force workers into
  an inferior retirement plan.
- Cutting health benefits and shifting
cost onto workers and family
members.
- “Our families cannot and will not
give up living standards that American
workers have fought so hard to win,”
said Jared Smith, a granthandler at the
United Grain terminal and President
of ILWU Local 4. “Our families deserve
a secure present and future from these
foreign-owned companies that are
highly profitable and control much of
the world’s grain supply. They’re sup-
posed to negotiate, not dictate.”

A Christmas lump of coal

The foreign companies’ “take-it-
or-leave-it” approach has effectively
ended meaningful negotiations since
the spring of 2019.

Marubeni tried and failed to use
heavy-handed legal tactics last year
against more than 100 grain workers
in Portland by filing a specious law-
suit the week of Christmas in 2018
and serving legal papers at employees’
homes that demanded up to $250,000
in damages from each family.

A U.S. District Court subsequently
dismissed the employer’s harassment
lawsuit, but Marubeni has appealed
in an apparent attempt to make the
ILWU waste money on legal fees. Such
suits have long been considered illegal
“unfair labor practices” by the National
Labor Relations Board.

ILWU stands in good faith

ILWU grain handlers remain com-
mited to reaching a fair agreement
with the companies, noting that the
TEMCO agreement they reached in
2018 protects working families, assures
no disruptions in grain exports, and
maintains a highly skilled workforce in
export terminals that benefit farmers,
workers and the U.S. economy.

“We won’t allow big foreign corpo-
rations to bully workers into giving away
long-established pension and healthcare
benefits earned by 3,000 American
workers in Oregon and Washington,”

— ILWU International President Willie Adams

All of Us: ILWU International President Willie Adams joined labor and community
leaders including UCLA Labor Center Director Kent Wong, Asian Pacific American Labor
Alliance (APALA) National President Monica Thammarath, International President of
the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA Sara Nelson and others for a video conference
to discuss Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAP) workers and the labor movement.
The discussion was broadcast live on the AFL-CIO’s Facebook page. The discussion was
aired as: All of Us: The Untapped Power of Asian American Pacific Islander Working People
President Adams spoke about the ILWU organizing campaign in Hawaii in the 1940s and
then touched on the history of IWI Region 37 including the martyred Filipino American
reform activists Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes. Adams also spoke about the recent
eight-hour, coastwise port stand down on Juneteenth in the context of the ILWU’s long-
standing commitment to civil rights and social justice in the US and across the globe.

“We believe in speaking truth to power without apology or permission,” Adams said.
Remembering Bloody Thursday July 5, 1934 on the San Francisco waterfront

The following history is based on a brief talk given by Harvey Schwartz at the Bloody Thursday Memorial presentations, Local 10, ILWU, San Francisco, July 5, 2019.

Bloody Thursday—July 5, 1934—marked the turning point of the great West Coast maritime strike of 1934. The reasons for this “Big Strike” had been seething for many years. For starters, an old San Francisco longshore union had been broken in 1919. The long nonunion period that followed lasted until 1934. These were the pre-container years of heavy, hand-worked cargo. Even when workers could get jobs handling “break bulk” cargo, as it was called, hiring was discriminatory, the pace of labor was inhumanly fast and unsafe, and work shifts sometimes lasted 12 to 16 or more hours.

The waterfront employers created and maintained divisions among longshore workers when it served their purposes. To speed up longshore operations and increase productivity, they frequently loaded work gangs of different nationalities or races to compete against each other at a reckless pace.

The accident rate on San Francisco’s waterfront was notorious, with three to six serious injuries for every eight-hour shift of 2,000 workers. The San Francisco employers even sponsored a company-controlled “union,” known as “The Blue Book,” but it existed only to keep real unionism out. You had to join the Blue Book to get most jobs. Its control was enforced by intimidation.

In recorded interviews from the large Oral History Collection housed at the ILWU International, union founder Harry Bridges and others described the corrupt “shape-up” in pre-1934 hiring. At the shape-up each morning, men gathered in front of the Ferry Building to beg for jobs or to pay bribes, called “kickbacks,” just to get a day’s work—a jug of wine, a bottle of whiskey, and sometimes even sexual favors from a wife or woman friend. Things got significantly worse when the Great Depression started in 1929. Jobs were scarce and people were desperate.

If you got hurt on the job, you didn’t apply for workmen’s compensation for fear of being “blacklisted,” or denied future employment. This was because compensation claims could increase an employer’s insurance rate. When Bridges broke his foot in 1929, he limped around on the job for two or three days instead of making a claim for injury. Workers worried, too, that if you took time off for illness or injury, another hungry worker might take your place on the waterfront for good.

Bridges also recalled how San Francisco longshoremen had to go to waterfront bootleggers during Prohibition (1918–1933), when liquor was illegal, to cash company-issued payroll medals called “brass checks.”

“Near the shape-up, there were bootleg points, bookmaking joints, and poolrooms. We used to cash payroll brass checks at Paddy Hurley’s. Hurley did business with the company union, cashing brass checks. There were other guys that used to cash in brass checks and take a 20% payment.”

Bridges added that at Hurley’s you had to buy drinks before the bootlegger would cash your brass check. The many grievances reached a boiling point by 1934. When the Big Strike began on May 9, the union made several demands. Bridges listed them in his recorded interview:

“We’d deal only as a district. We wanted a six-hour day, a thirty-hour week, one dollar an hour, and the union hiring hall. We wanted the union hiring hall because of the shape-up.”

The union won the six-hour day to share the work during the Depression but gave it up years later in contract negotiations. Bridges’ condition regarding a “district” deal referred to the 1934 demand for a coast-wide contract. As he explained:

“When one port is on strike, and the ship can move a few miles away and be worked by members of the same union, it’s ridiculous. That’s why we wanted to have an agreement covering all ports.”

The union achieved its demand for a hiring hall through a decision by the strike’s federal arbitration board that each hiring hall dispatcher must be a union member. The union also won the all-important coast-wide contract.

The strike arbitration board awarded longshore workers a ten-cent increase in wages to ninety-five cents an hour. This was the equivalent of eighteen dollars an hour in 2019. But wages were a secondary consideration compared to the issues of dignity on the job and union control in hiring.

During the strike, Bridges hid successfully for the support of San Francisco’s African American community.

In return, he promised that the union would adopt a policy of “no discrimination” in hiring if it won the strike. The San Francisco African American community agreed. Employers were unable to recruit African American community members to cross the union’s picket lines, and Bridges kept his promise when the strike ended.

The Big Strike lasted for 82 days, from May 9 to July 30. The Sailors’ Union of the Pacific (SUP) and several smaller marine crafts joined the walkout. In an effort to defeat the strike, the employers used “scabs,” or strike-breakers, they baited lehists for being “red,” and they formed alliances with coastal police to suppress the strike. Bridges described the situation in San Francisco: We’d get out there with our flag, our union banner, and I think we had a couple of drums to march along. Then the cops would move in and beat the shit out of us.

On July 5, Bloody Thursday, the employers tried to force open the San Francisco port by running scab trucks with police escorts through the longshoremen’s picket line at Pier 33. A great battle followed. The police used tear gas, clubs, and guns on the unarmed strikers. At least 100 strikers and their supporters were injured.

Three workers were shot by plainclothes police outside the union’s headquarters at Mission and Stuart Streets. One worker, Charles Olsen, survived. Two others, Howard Sperry, a longshoreman and a World War I veteran, and Nick Bordou, a union cook and strike supporter, were shot in the back and killed.

Along the Pacific coast, four more workers were killed during the strike: longshoremen Dick Parker and John Knudsen in Los Angeles and longshoreman Shelly Dalfon and SUP member Olaf Helland in Seattle. SUP member Bruce Lindberg was killed by a scab in Hong Kong.

A massive, dignified funeral parade for Sperry and Bordou marched up...
**ILWU No. 23 Young Workers Committee marks Bloody Thursday with online video call**

Each summer, in honor of Bloody Thursday and the union’s founding generation, the ILWU No. 23 Young Workers Committee (YWC) hosts an annual event where we retell the history of 1934 to the ILWU’s current and upcoming members. As part of our “Passing the Torch” education series, we gather in our union hall just down the road from our port to tell this story and remind those in attendance that the worker-controlled hiring they are sitting in at that very moment was the principal demand of the “Big Strike” — and a cause, for some, worth dying for.

But in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we were not able to meet in person this year, for either this event or our picnic on the 86th anniversary of Bloody Thursday. Instead, we tried something new, using Zoom video conferencing to meet online.

While we missed the company of our friends and families on this important day, holding an online event was the silver lining that opened up new opportunities for our annual event, such as bringing in members from other ILWU locals — including both the Longshore and Warehouse Divisions.

We had members in attendance from ILWU Canada and a few friends from other unions even, whose own young worker organizers were interested in both our union’s incredible history and learning how to run a member-led education program.

The program featured four speakers each taking turns to tell a different part of the story: Nyel Mohamed and Levi Cohen, both Local 23 longshore casuals; Branna Bonham from Local 5 at Powell’s Books, and Viri Gomez from Local 519 in Canada. They recounted the rise and fall of longshore unionism before 1934, the Industrial Workers of the World (or, the “Wobblies,”) the “shape-up” and “speed-up,” conditions during the Great Depression, and the lead up to the “Big Strike.”

We covered in detail the course of the strike, the anti-racist efforts of young leaders like Harry Bridges and Henry Schmidt to build multiracial unity and win, the intense rebranding and violence used by the employers and the police, the events of Bloody Thursday itself, Sperry and Borkum’s funeral, the San Francisco General Strike, and the strike’s resolve after 82 days out.

Our story concluded with the lasting impacts of 1934, such as the 1936-37 strike, building the Maritime Federation of the Pacific, the “March Inland” and the origins of the Warehouse Division, and joining the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) to become a new union: the ILWU.

This is the fifth summer we’ve told the history of Bloody Thursday and 1934. We’ve been hosting these and other “Passing the Torch” events — in various formats: lectures, panels, discussion groups, workshops — since early 2016.

When we formed the YWC in late 2015, we did it by working alongside our Pensioners. Our goal was to study and celebrate the history of the ILWU in order to bring a new generation of longshore workers in as active participants in the life of the union.

In the spirit of rank-and-file unionism and decision-making, our program is bottom-up, led by members and casuals themselves, sharing information and discussing ideas peer-to-peer, as equals. With an emphasis on the ILWU’s Ten Guiding Principles, we study our history in order to understand what makes the ILWU such a unique and powerful union.

— Zach Patton, ILWU No. 23 YWC

**ILWU members find ways to honor Bloody Thursday sacrifices under COVID-19 restrictions**

The home-made video draws on commentary from current BALMA leaders, including BALMA President John Castanho, who introduces the video. He’s followed by BALMA Treasurer Mike Villeggante, and cameos by International Secretary-Treasurer Ed Ferris, Local 10 President Trent Willis, and Local 34 President Keith Shanklin.

The production borrows heavily from existing footage to explain the 1934 strike that gave rise to the ILWU — the story of seven men who were killed in the struggle.

“We produced this video on a shoestring,” said John Castanho, who thanked the entire BALMA team for getting the project done ahead of schedule, despite the COVID-19 crisis. It has already attracted nearly 2500 viewers on YouTube. The video can be viewed at https://youtu.be/v78Ik8Ix4kQ

“We realized that a video is no substitute for our annual ceremony that brings together so many pensioners and families with their kids,” said Villeggante, “but it was a great alternative when the ‘usual’ was impossible because of COVID-19.”

**Modest memorial in Seattle**

ILWU Local 19 President Rich Austin, Jr. said ILWU members and pensioners in the Seattle area held a modest memorial at the gravesite of Shelvy Daffron. Shelby was shot in the back on June 30th while checking on a rumor that non-union crews were about to sail two oil tankers in Point Wells just north of Seattle. The names of the other 1934 martyrs were read by Carl Woeck of the Seattle Pensioners Club.

**Rally at the Port of Oakland**

Leaders from Locals 10 and 34 decided to go forward with another way to celebrate Bloody Thursday — with a protest at the Port of Oakland on July 5. The four-hour event connected current struggles for racial and economic justice with the “Big Strike” of 1934.

“Eighty-six years ago, workers in the Bay Area were struggling to overcome racism used by employers to divide waterfront workers and weaken the strike,” said Local 10’s Willis. “Employers failed because workers continued from page 1

Association (BALMA) at the Local 10 hall usually attracts a large crowd with many pensioners and families. That kind of event was too dangerous this year, so BALMA organizers had to search for a different way of honoring Bloody Thursday with online video call meeting via Zoom to discuss the history of 1934.

**Ten Guiding Principles**

1. The rise and fall of longshore unionism before 1934
2. The Industrial Workers of the World (or, the “Wobblies,”) the “shape-up” and “speed-up,” conditions during the Great Depression, and the lead up to the “Big Strike.”
3. The events of Bloody Thursday itself, Sperry and Borkum’s funeral, the San Francisco General Strike, and the strike’s resolve after 82 days out.
4. Our story concluded with the lasting impacts of 1934, such as the 1936-37 strike, building the Maritime Federation of the Pacific, the “March Inland” and the origins of the Warehouse Division, and joining the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) to become a new union: the ILWU.

**DISPATCHER • JULY/AUGUST 2020**
ILWU members find ways to honor Bloody Thursday sacrifices under COVID-19 restrictions

continued from page 5

reached a major milestone in the history of the union. The largest and longest strike in San Francisco history had just ended after 130 days, and the workers and allies who participated in the strike had achieved significant gains.

One man’s effort to honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice

Every year on Bloody Thursday, July 5th, a beautiful wreath of remembrance and gratitude is placed on the grave of ILWU martyr Howard Sperry in San Francisco’s Presidio. Also every year, pensioner Terry Taylor brings a bouquet of flowers to Sperry’s grave. “I always won- dered where the other martyr, Nick Bordois, was buried,” said Taylor, who joined the ILWU in 1959. Taylor knew that Bordois was not a veteran of WWII, so he wouldn’t be with Sperry at the Presidio’s National Military Cemetery near the Golden Gate Bridge.

Determined to honor Nick’s sacrifice, Terry finally located his gravestone with the help of ILWU historian Harry Schwartz, who has written several books about the ILWU, including “Solidarity Stories,” which is based on dozens of oral interviews that Schwartz has conducted with union members.

In 1934, Nick Bordois was a member of the Cooks & Stewards Union who came to protect picket lines along San Francisco’s Embarcadero on July 5. Like hundreds of other strikers that day, he was attacked and wounded by police and company thugs armed with shotguns, machine guns, rifles and pistols. Many were injured; he was one of the two who died as maritime industry workers defended their strike to improve working conditions along the west coast.

“Now I plan to visit both graves on July 5th,” says Taylor, who is now 85 years old. “It’s the least we can do for these men who gave everything for the union.”

Longshore workers honored Bordois’ ultimate sacrifice with a beautiful monument that marks his grave at the Cypress Lawn cemetery in Colma. This year flowers were placed there by an ever grateful ILWU retiree to honor this other labor hero.

Local 23 hosts virtual walk to benefit research for MS

One good way to combine important issues is to combine a rally with a car caravan to benefit research for MS.

Our rally and car caravan were a way to combine important issues of today with important history from the past,” said Shanklin. “Each generation has to keep moving the ball forward,” he said.

Remembering Bloody Thursday July 5, 1934 on the San Francisco waterfront

continued from page 6

Market Street in San Francisco on July 9. Henry Schmidt, an early longshore activist, reported that 50,000 people lined the street to watch. That day, public opinion turned in favor of the strikers. The massive show of support following the death of the two workers may well explain why the board arbitrating the longshore strike eventually conceded to the union’s key demands.

Between July 16 and 19, city and regional workers participated in the historic 1934 San Francisco General Strike to protest the killings. More than 40,000 Bay Area unionists walked out that July. Sam Kagel, who worked for the longshore union in 1934 and later became the longshore industry’s long-serving coast arbitrator, described the General Strike in his oral history:

“I can still see it and feel it. It was an exhilarating moment. I looked up Market Street and there was nothing moving.”

Seaside memorial: ILWU members and pensioners in Seattle held a mod- est memorial at the gravesite of Shelby Daffron who was shot in the back on June 30 during the West Coast strike near Seattle.

Ultimately, winning a coast-wide longshore contract and a union dis- patcher in 1934 provided the foundation for the Longshore Division and guaranteed the entire union’s long-term security.

Bordois and Sperry and the other five workers killed in 1934 died as martyrs to a great cause. That is the legacy we commemorate on July 5 in San Francisco and wherever there are ILWU members and supporters.

– Harvey Schwartz

Author Harvey Schwartz is Curator of the ILWU Oral History Collection, which consists of more than 300 interviews conducted since 1981. The collection is housed at the international headquarters of the ILWU. He is the author of The March Inland: Origins of the ILWU Warehouse Division, 1934–1938 (1975; reprint 2000); Solidarity Stories: An Oral History of the ILWU (2009); and Building the Golden Gate Bridge: A Workers’ Oral History (2015).

One man’s effort to honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, ILWU Local 23 was able to hold its annual MS Walk fundraiser to support research efforts to treat multiple sclerosis.

Local 23 MS Walk co-captains Holly Hulscher and Lisa Cole say the “virtual MS Walk” looked very different this year. Because of the need for social distancing, participants weren’t able to have the raffle in person, hold the fundraisers at the hall, or do the traditional group MS Walk. Despite these limitations, Local 23 members and pensioners still stepped up to donate to help fight MS.

Our Local 23 brother Mike Mitch- ell joined the Longshore team this year and was able to raise over $1,600 for the cause with the help of his fellow ILWU workers. Holly and Lisa said they would like to give a special thank you to Auxiliary 35 and members of Local 98 for their generous donations as well.

In total, the Longshore team was able to raise over $11,400 this year, which isn’t far behind what they raised last year!
ITF fights to secure return for seafarers stranded by COVID-19 restrictions

The International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF) is sounding the alarm about the impact of governmental Covid-19 travel restrictions on seafarers around the globe. The ITF estimates that there are now approximately 300,000 seafarers trapped working aboard ships because pandemic-related government border and travel restrictions in multiple countries are preventing ship crew changes.

An equal number of unemployed seafarers waiting to board vessels remain at home and are prevented from working. That means 600,000 seafarers affected by this crisis. The crew change crisis raises safety concerns for the world fleet as ships are operating with an increasingly fatigued crew.

“ITF is calling on governments to take action on visas, quarantining, and flights to see a return towards functioning crew changes for the global seafarer workforce.

Not enough progress

ITF General Secretary Stephen Cotton says that since July 15, there has been some positive movement to address the crisis, but not enough progress has been made by governments to establish the protocols needed for functioning crew changes across the world.

The ITF has called on the governments to act swiftly to give seafarers visa, border, and quarantine exemptions in order to make crew changes possible and resolve the present crisis.

300,000 seafarers are trapped working aboard these vessels, and another 300,000 are facing financial ruin at home, desperate to relieve these ships and start earning wages again.

Governments are the biggest barrier to resolving the growing crew change crisis,” said Cotton.

Urgent action required

Cotton warned of the dangers of world’s shipping fleet operating with fatigued and tired seafarers.

“Governments must wake up and realize that without a return to successful and safe crew changes, it simply not sustainable or acceptable to have a growing number of tired and fatigued seafarers trapped working aboard the world’s ships endangering themselves, their vessels and our maritime environment.” Cotton said. “Seafarers and their unions are deeply concerned about the risk to life, property and the environment as the chances of a major catastrophe or catastrophes rises daily. Government’s must act to better protect their people, or worse – a major maritime disaster.

Urgent action is required.”

ITF assisting thousands of seafarers

Since June 16 the ITF has been assisting seafarers to get off and get home. This has included assisting and advising thousands of seafarers as part of 645 cases/inspections. The largest group of seafarers assisted by nationality has been from the Philippines, the ITF said.

“We put a line in the sand last month to make it clear that the ITF and our affiliates are prepared to support seafarers in exercising their right to stop working, get off, and return home to their families, once their contract has finished and it is safe to do so. In the last month, we have provided advice and assisted thousands of seafarers on how they can enforce this fundamental right,” said Cotton.

West Coast ITF Inspectors on the job

ITF Coordinator Jeff Engels said that that team of West Coast ITF Inspectors have been very busy handling cases of seafarers who are trying to get home but remain stuck on ships. Engels said that in addition to working on individual cases of stranded seafarers, West Coast ITF inspectors are attempting to work with local and national elected officials as well as the US Coast Guard and US CBP on policy changes to ensure adequate crew changes in US waters.

“Engels said lobbying efforts were assisted by the Puget Sound District Council and ILWU Legislative Director Lindsay McLaughlin, Canadian ITF Coordinator Peter Lahay and ITF Inspector Nathan Smith who were working hard to address the crisis.

“It is important to put pressure on our government after the recent International Summit on July 9th where the US and 12 other countries discussed the crew change crisis,” said Engels.

“The US sent Admiral Mark Buzby, the head of the United States Maritime Administration (MARAD) to the summit. We are trying to get assurances that more action will now be taken to resolve this crisis.”

“Overall, we are making slow progress. We have a long way to go to help clear the back-up of seafarers that are stuck on ships,” Engels said. He added that for the ITF Inspectors, the biggest problem seems to be the lack of coordination between the ship owners, their agents, and US Customs and the US Coast Guard (USCG).

Engels said that federal lobbying efforts are focused on loosening up USCG and Customs and Border Patrol regulations to make crew change out easier.

“Unless a seafarer contacts an inspector at least a week in advance of the arrival, the responsible parties sometimes do nothing. Ship owners and their agents are either overwhelmed, lazy, or just don’t understand the proper procedures. As a result, seafarers are not allowed to change out and are stuck until the next country or maybe longer,” Engels said “But when ship owners and their local agents are proactive in arranging crew changes with the local US Customs representatives crew changes are possible.”

Engels also said that longshore workers can help by asking crew members how things are going in regard to crew changes and report any problems to their local area ITF Inspector (See box right for the contact information for your local ITF Inspector) “This crisis highlights the inherent problems with the flag of convenience system by which everyone from gov-

Craig Merrilees retires as ILWU Communications Director

ILWU’s longtime Communications Director, Craig Merrilees, is retiring after 13 years with the union.

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The ILWU is one of America’s greatest labor unions because it promotes progressive values and encourages rank-and-file democracy – inside the union and within the broader society. The ILWU’s willingness to challenge injustice on the job, in the community and around the world is a legacy that I will continue to admire because it is so sadly missing in many unions today,” he said.

Merrilees began at the ILWU with almost four decades of union and community organizing experience under his belt, including stints with television and political campaigns – all focused on social change. He arrived at the ILWU in 2007 after concluding five years in Washington, DC as a Communications Coordinator. Thirty years ago, he co-directed field operations for the campaign to stop the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), working with labor unions across the country, including the ILWU.

At the ILWU, Merrilees worked with his colleague Roy San Filippo to publish 145 monthly issues of The Dispatcher, along with countless press releases, reports, flyers and briefing papers. He assisted International and local officers with strikes, lockouts, job actions and organizing campaigns. In late 2009 and 2010, he was assigned to Boron during the 100-day lockout in the Mojave, helping Local 30 members to organize support in their community and region. He worked closely with the ILWU Organizing Department throughout his tenure, helping 500 Rite Aid warehouse workers win their 5-year fight in Lancaster and providing support for Bay Area Recycling workers to win dramatic wage and benefit improvements.

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During the mid-90’s he worked with the Teamster reform movement, spending five years in Washington, DC as a Communications Coordinator. Thirty years ago, he co-directed field operations for the campaign to stop the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), working with labor unions across the country, including the ILWU.

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continued from page 2
"Civil rights are labor rights and labor rights are civil rights," said ILWU International Secretary-Treasurer Ed Ferris. "John Lewis shared the same values upon which our union was built. The right of workers to collectively organize for better wages and conditions, and the right of all workers to be free from discrimination under the law and in the workplace. His leadership will be missed."

Black Lives Matter

In an essay published in the Atlantic in 2014 in the aftermath of the 2013 killing of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman and the policekillings of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and Eric Garner in New York, Congressman Lewis tried to explain the emergence of the Black Lives Matter Movement and the unrest that erupted in Ferguson and other cities at the time. His essay also illustrates the current crisis.

"Many Americans find themselves at a loss to understand the depth of the anger and frustration of the protesters. It might be worthwhile for them to read a speech Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered on April 14, 1967, at Stanford University," Lewis wrote. "King describes what he calls the ‘other America,’ one of two starkly different American experiences that exist side-by-side. One people 'experience the opportunity of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in all its dimensions,' and the other a 'daunting ugliness' that spoils the purest hopes of the young and old, leaving only the ‘fatigue of despair.’ The Brown and Garner cases themselves are not the only focus of the protesters’ grievances, but they represent a glimpse of a different America most Americans have found it inconvenient to consider.

“One group of people in this country can expect the institutions of government to bend in their favor, no matter that they are supposedly regulated by impartial law. In the other, children, fathers, mothers, uncles, grandfathers, whole families, and many generations are swept up by rubbish by the hard, unforgiving hand of the law.”

Honoring Lewis’s legacy

To honor Congressman Lewis’ life and work, there have been calls and online petitions to rename the Edmund Pettus Bridge after Lewis. Edmund Pettus was a Confederate general and leader of the Ku Klux Klan in Alabama. The bridge has become synonymous with Congressman Lewis and the Civil Rights movement and the ‘Bloody Sunday’ incident.

Others would also like to see concrete policies enacted, not just a symbolic change.

The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, sponsored by 47 Democrats and one Republican, was introduced in the House days after Lewis passed away. The Act would require that any state with a history of voting discrimination within the past 25 years seek federal approval before making any changes to its voting procedures. It would also mandate that any state obtain clearance from the Justice Department or a federal court before making any changes that would burden voters of color, such as strict voter ID laws or closing polling places in areas with large numbers of minority voters.

The Act is identical to legislation that was introduced by Lewis last year to restore the Voting Rights Act and passed by the House in December. Republicans refused to take up the bill in the Senate. It has now been re-introduced and the name changed in honor of John Lewis.

Reverend William Barber, the civil-rights activist and co-chair of the Poor People’s Campaign, said in a recent interview, “Imagine if we had listened to John Lewis? What if, instead of simply reading the law and in the workplace. His leadership will be missed."

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"It’s been an honor and pleasure to work with each of you," said Merrilees at the union’s International Executive Board meeting on July 17. President Willie Adams joined others who thanked Merrilees for his work. "You’ll be hard to replace and we thank you for all the work and people you’ve helped through your work at the ILWU," said Adams.

Roy San Filippo expands communications duties at International

ILWU International Officers have expanded the role of Dispatcher Editor, Roy San Filippo in the ILWU Communications Department. He has been responsible for producing The Dispatcher, creating videos and an array of social media responsibilities. San Filippo came to the ILWU 10 years ago after working with unions in Southern California. He previously taught history, focusing on labor, racial justice, and other social movements during the 19th and 20th Century. “I feel honored to take on new responsibilities and continue to work for such a great union,” he said.

Jennifer Sargent Bokaie resumes Longshore Division Communications Director work

Jennifer Sargent Bokaie began her work as Communications Director at the ILWU Longshore Division in 2008. She researches industry developments and delivers the union’s message to lawmakers, port commissioners, community members, and other workers when the union’s message needs to be heard. “Growing up in a union home gave me opportunities and a better life,” she said, “and I’m proud to fight alongside Longshore workers who are giving their all to protect good jobs for the next generation.”

Also at the July 17 International Executive Board meeting, ILWU Legislative Director Lindsay McLaughlin announced his decision to retire in August. The Dispatcher will run an article in the next issue about his 30 years at the ILWU.

DECEASED PENSIONERS:
Local 1: Brian P. Hans; Local 2: Timothy Waldman; Local 10: Oscar A. Mayorga; Odis Rucker; Charlie B. Hill; Oscar M. Gomez; Local 11: Osvaldo Munoz, Jr; Eric R. Gonzales; Atonio Luafalemana; Charles D. Lilly; Eva G. Miramontes; Jeny C. Millard; Eugene L. Rasmussen; Philip C. Mladinch; Julius A. Walker, Jr.; Orlando Aza; Martin A. Nunes Jr., Michael A. Uglesich; Tagumpay M. Vela; John M. Flanagan; Marie-Christine Aguirre-Zambrano; Local 15: Albert L. M. A. Mullen; Local 21: John A. Seidl; Tim D. Pream; Local 23: Richard D. Bickford; Francis M. Guyton; Wayne L. Wallace; Local 25: Michael J. Hardy; Local 29: Victor A. Dominiak; John L. Hudson; Melvin E. Anderson; Michael R. Johnson; Curtis R. Carter; Deanna M. Oberg; Local 92: Charles T. Murphy; Local 94: Robert A. Sandova; Larry W. Thompson;...