A diverse delegation of ILWU longshore workers joined more than 400 other delegates at the International Dockers Council's (IDC) 9th General Assembly in New Orleans, LA from May 25-26. It was the largest ILWU delegation ever sent to an IDC Assembly.

The ILWU delegation included representatives from the Coast Longshore Division, the Hawaii Longshore Division, and the Alaska Longshore Division, along with ILWU Canada President Rob Ashton. ILWU International Vice President (Mainland) Bobby Olvera, Jr, the IDC's West Coast Zone Coordinator, ILWU International Vice President (Hawaii) Sam Kreutz, and ILWU International Secretary-Treasurer Ed Ferris were all a part of the delegation.

General Coordinators report
IDC General Coordinator Dennis Daggett from the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) delivered a report that touched on many of the themes that surfaced throughout the two-day Assembly: strengthening international solidarity, defending dockworkers under attack by employers and governments, fighting automation and privatization, fighting against discrimination based on race, gender, and sexual orientation and improving the IDC organizational structure.

“With the struggles and strikes that we’ve experienced in Portugal, Australia, South America, and other parts of the world, I hope by now we all understand the importance of international solidarity and unity,” Daggett said. “Governments, employers, and the ocean carriers do not want to see a unified global docker movement. They don’t even want to see it in the United States. ILWU International President Willie Adams at our last ILA convention delivered one of the most powerful speeches I have ever experienced. He bridged the gap between the two coasts in the United States, and the ILA’s bond with the ILWU is stronger than ever.”

Daggett urged the delegates to adopt a unified position opposing automation of the ports, saying it destroyed jobs and was less efficient than dockworkers in loading and unloading cargo. “Automation eliminates jobs, period,” he said. “There’s no other way around it. You can sugarcoat it all you want. Automation eliminates our jobs. Nobody on the other side has proven to me that automation is more productive than an actual butt in the seat.”

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Global dockers, ILWU strengthen bonds of solidarity at IDC 9th General Assembly

More than 400 dockworkers from around the world convened in New Orleans for the International Dockers Council's 9th General Assembly.
ITF Inspector Position in Southern California

The International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF) is hiring for the ITF Inspector Position in Southern California due to the upcoming retirement of Stefan Mueller.

The position will be a full-time role, the duties of which are detailed in the ITF Inspector Role Description document. A copy of the job description and ITF Inspector Application from have been sent to your local or can be obtained by contacting Jeff Engels at the email below.

Applicants should send a resume and cover letter along with the completed ITF Inspector Application form to Steve Trowsdale (trowsdale_steve@itf.org.uk) with a copy to ITF U.S. West Coast Coordinator Jeff Engels (engels_jeff@itf.org.uk), to be received no later than Friday, July 29 2022.

Freedom Day in Seattle: ILWU members in Seattle celebrated Juneteenth with a waterfront march and rally. The event was covered by the local CBS affiliate KIRO 7. “Today is a great day for us because we are seeing that the country and people are moving forward for change, for better. And that’s what Juneteenth is all about,” said Local 52 Vice President Gabriel Prawl who was interview for the news segment.

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Diversity is strength: ILWU’s first Annual Women, Trans, and Non-Binary Workers’ Conference

The ILWU held the First Annual Women, Trans, and Non-binary Workers’ Conference on April 26 and 30. The event was held online over Zoom. The event was the result of the tenacity and the hard work of several members who wanted to see a conference for women.

Event organizers drafted a resolution to host a women’s conference and submitted it to the ILWU International Convention, the union’s highest governing body, in June 2021. The resolution was amended at the Convention to include trans and non-binary workers, and passed with overwhelming support. A planning committee was convened to help organize the event. Members of the committee included women and non-binary workers from across all ILWU divisions who provided input into the event themes, sessions, outreach, and the selection of panelists.

ILWU International Secretary-Treasurer Ed Ferris welcomed everyone to the conference. “We’re building worker power. We’re promoting inclusivity. That’s what we’re all about. Just look at the ILWU’s Guiding Principles number three: workers are indivisible. I want to thank and acknowledge all the hard work that has been put into this program and looking forward to learning a lot tonight,” Ferris said.

Gender in the workplace

The first panel, “Gender in the Workplace,” focused on the ways ILWU leaders have encouraged participation from women, trans, and non-binary workers. The panel was facilitated by Adrienne Smith, a labor and social justice attorney from Vancouver, British Columbia. Their work includes conducting workplace trainings on labor law, and racial and gender inclusivity. The first panel of the session were Local 5 Union Representative Myka Dubay, Local 94 member Fran Grove and Local 19 Alternate Dispatcher Sarah Esch.

“Union is a verb”

“I think we really get into trouble when we stop thinking about union as a verb and we start thinking about it as a noun,” Smith said. “Union is a thing that we do. And it’s a way that we hold ourselves together.” Smith said that in preparing for the event, they were struck by how radical the ILWU’s 10 Guiding Principles are.

“What you say in your Guiding Principles is that there is this basic democracy among the union is the people. You also say workers are indivisible and the fact that employers try to keep us apart is answered with organizing,” they said. “That boils down to a solidarity that is tangible and we celebrate it; it’s also a call to arms. Part of what we’re doing here today is making sure that the solidarity that some of us have enjoyed will be extended into the world.”

Years in the making

Local 94 member Fran Grove was one of the driving forces for the conference. Grove said that prior to the event, they were looking at having a union that was not working well for them. When she started on the waterfront, she was surprised that a union as progressive as the ILWU did not have something similar.

“It took probably about 10 to 15 years before we got to this point,” said Grove. “But we had finally had a group that was able to push it forward. We’ve gotten to the place now that we’re having our first conference. It’s a fantastic thing.”

Local 5 union representative Myka Dubay talked about how union contracts can be fought for all workers.

“We have the power with a contract to build stuff that protects more marginalized workers,” Dubay said. “You can do more. You can fight for a trans-inclusive healthcare, you can fight to get like spouse/domestic partner language into health care access. We try and support our members, and fight against things that maybe only impact a couple of our members, but it shows them that this contract is for them.”

ILWU Canada’s anti-bullying campaign

The second panel focused on the ILWU Canada anti-bullying and harassment prevention program called Be More Than a Bystander. The panel featured Tracy Porteus, Local 500 members, and Be More Than a Bystander program coordinators Jessica Ishbister and Angela Talic, and ILWU Canada President Rob Ashton.

Porteus is a leader in the Canadian anti-violence sector who has worked for the past 40 years addressing gender-based violence in communities, workplaces, and families. She kicked off the panel by giving an overview of the Be More than a bystander program.

“We are working to make violence and disrespect socially unacceptable,” Porteus said. She compared the program to the environmental effort that changes cultural attitudes around smoking and normalizing wearing seatbelts. The change didn’t happen overnight, but was the result of consistent messaging over time.

“Sharing the story of men committing violence,” Porteus said. “But many men are bystanders. They have seen and heard negative and disrespectful attitudes towards women and girls. They see firsthand down putting jokes and are privy to abuse and violence going on around them.”

Porteus said the harassment prevention program was about teaching people in the workplace the skills to know how to intervene safely and effectively when they see harassment or bullying in the workplace. “We’re not born with skills and confidence and knowing what to say or what to do.”

ILWU Canada President Rob Ashton took the course and said that it taught important skills, and also learned a lot about himself. “This program is going to give people the courage to help stand up and make our culture better, and to make our union better. That’s what this is about.”

“Cultural change takes time. But this is a positive step towards a better waterfront,” concluded Ishbister.

Diversity is strength

Before the panel discussions began, the conference heard from guest speaker April Sims, Secretary-Treasurer of the Washington State Labor Council. Sims is the first woman of color and the first Black person elected as a Washington State Labor Council executive officer.

She spoke about the importance of diversity and how hearing other people's viewpoints can expand your vision of the possible and lead to stronger, more effective organizations.

“We need the diversity of opinions, ideas, perspectives, and experiences of all workers if we really want to build power for the working class,” Sims said. “We know that our solidarity makes us stronger. And anything that divides us makes us weak. When we come together across ideology, or political affiliation, regardless of background or race, no matter our gender, identity or ability, when we build together, nothing can tear us down. We know that organizations that are the most diverse, the most competitive, and the most efficient are also the most diverse.”

Organizing the Untraditional

The final panel discussion of the day was “Organizing the Untraditional,” a conversation with ILWU activists who have been involved in organizing across genders in the ILWU.

The panel was facilitated by ILWU Canada Organizer Genevieve Lorenzo. In her introduction, Lorenzo spoke about the importance of the ILWU’s Third Guiding Principle, which states: “Workers are indivisible. There can be no discrimination because of race, color, creed, national origin, religious or political belief, sex, gender preference, or sexual orientation. Any division among the workers can help no one but this divided.”

Dis-crimination is a weapon of the boss. Its entire history is proof that it has served no other purpose than to pit worker against worker to their own destruction.”

Lorenzo noted, “It’s in the very foundation of our union to actively seek out and value workers as they are and as they exist. Diversity is not division. It is a unifier. Without change, growth, and evolution, we stagnate. A diversity of experiences makes us stronger and more resilient in the face of challenges. And we can accomplish that through organizing. Not only by bringing in new workers through organizing externally but also internally.”

The panelists for this topic were Local 5 organizer Kate Stubblefield, Local 500 member Joulene Parent, and IBU member Krisel Calibo.

Stubblefield spoke about the efforts in the Portland area to organize early childhood educators in order to fight for better pay and working conditions in that industry, and the gendered nature of the work. “It’s work usually performed by women or girls. They see firsthand down the job, but it is not as visible because of the high turnover, she said. “Because we live in a racist, patriarchal, capitalist society, those workers are treated worse and paid less. It’s a liberatory action to organize in places where the most marginalized people are working.”

Parent talked about the importance of community alliances, solidarity, and supporting struggles outside of your union.

“It’s very important to go out there and support other people who are dealing with struggles,” Parent said. “Answer the call to invite, and bring them to places where the most highlighted, the importance of just inviting somebody along.”

Krisel Calibo from Inlandboatmen’s Union (IBU), the ILWU’s Marine Division, spoke about the internal organizing effort by the IBU on the Washington State Ferry system in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court’s Janus vs. AFSCME decision.

Find your voice in leadership

The final panel of the day focused on women in leadership, which featured Local 54 Vice President Stief Flores as moderator, Local 142 Vice President Corinna Nguyen, Alaska Longshore Division Unit 60 Secretary-Treasurer Sonya Hibberts, Local 10 Recording Clerk Vaneta Hamlin, and Local 519 Younger Leaders Viri Gomez. The panel discussed one of the unique stories about finding their way into leadership positions in their unions.

“I just encourage everyone to take that first step,” Hamlin said. “Get involved. Get engaged. Get educated because it’s going to be there. And just keep learning, I’m still learning right now, today. Every day is a learning day for me.”

Planning for the next Women, Trans and Non-binary workers’ conference is already underway. A date has not yet been set, but once it has, it will be announced in the Dispatcher.
Local 14 in Eureka, CA, was chartered in 1937 with approximately 55 members. The members in Eureka have historically handled cargo related to the timber industry, and the fortunes of the local have been closely tied to the region's logging industry. Membership in the local steadily grew from 1937, reaching a peak membership of approximately 175 in 1967.

In the 1970s, membership in the local began to fall with the decline of the forest product industry, losing about 25-50 members per decade until the 1990s, when membership continued to decline but at a slower rate. Today the local has 13 members who still primarily handle wood products. A proposed offshore wind farm project could be a boost to the local. Local 14 officers, with the help of the ILWU International, are already meeting with elected officials to protect ILWU jurisdiction for the proposed project.

Steve Kioukis
Local 14 member
I came into the local originally in June of 1968 and then left the area. I eventually moved back and got registered again. My father was a longshoreman, and I came in when I was 18. I was the baby of the group at the time.

As a young man, you don’t understand what the adult world is all about, and you don’t understand the benefits of longshore. I had real respect for my father. He said, “You need to get into this union, and you need to stick around. This is good for you.” That was the catalyst for me coming down here and trying to stick it out.

I didn’t want to leave, but back in that era, we had what I called conventional ships coming in. Those ships took a lot of manning. We were doing 15-man gangs. You’d have three gangs in the daytime and two at night. At that time, there were 170 of us registered in the local. There were 42 or 43 B men, and the rest were all A men. In a five-year period of time, it went from the conventional ships to the more open hatches with the swinging booms and the manning was cut way down.

I was a B man, and there wasn’t enough work for the A men. It got to the point where you had to go out and get another job. I ended up getting deregistered in 1973. I moved from here to Sacramento and spent 15 years in Sacramento. From Sacramento, I ended up moving to Boise and spent 17 years there. When Boise started to get too big, it was time to move again. Eureka is home. I talked to the wife, and we decided to move back here. I decided to poke my nose into the hall. There were still guys here that I knew and that I’d worked with years ago—this was in 2003. They told me to sign up as an off-the-street casual. I thought, “Oh, sure, that’d be fun.”

I started right at the bottom as an off-the-street casual and then worked my way into being an ID casual. I got the hours and was taken in as a B man. I knew how the game was played because I’d worked here before. I knew that I had to get as many hours as I could. It was worth a gamble because I knew what ILWU was, and I knew the opportunity here.

My dad was a logger. He didn’t come to longshore until he was 60 years old. He was born in 1896. He came over here from Greece when he was 15. He came through Ellis Island, went to Chicago, and then ended up in Washington State, and that’s where he logged. He was logging there for 45 years. In the 1920s and 1930s, my dad was involved with organizing logging unions. I grew up with him telling me about the struggles that they had. They used to send gangsters from Chicago to break strikes and that type of thing. It was pretty violent in those days. My father told me that his best friend was shot and killed next to him in a union struggle.

It’s important to understand what unions had to put up with to get what we have today and what people that went before us fought for.
I progressed to the point where I just quit coming to work and didn't notice. I have been addicted to opiates, and I know it's not an easy quit. My disease is self-destructive, and it has taken me years to get to where I am today. They put me on probation. I couldn't drive a crane anymore. That was the start of me going downhill. I wouldn't show up for work.

When I came into the union as a young man, I was 15 years clean and had been working as a longshoreman since 1968. I fell into that position when someone retired. I was probably the most successful equipment operator at the time. I was a logger at the time. In those days, you could just walk in off the street and get a job. I would work logging during the day and would come home at night and get a night job. And that's what I started.

At the time, I didn't even know what a union was. I just heard people in the community about how good a job it was. The security was unmatched; the pay was unmatched; the benefits were unmatched. It's 100 times more of a job than I thought that was.

I'm the ADRP (Alcoholism and Drug Recovery Program) Representative. I fell into that position when someone retired. I was probably the most qualified to become the ADRP Rep, and I took the opportunity to help other people. When I came into the union as an A man, I was 15 years clean and sober. I relapsed on pain pills.

That was the start of me going downhill. I wouldn't show up for crane jobs. I should have been there. Nobody could work because I wasn't there. PMA started noticing, and they would have meetings with me. They put me on probation. I couldn't drive crane anymore.

This whole time my disease was progressing. Anybody who's ever been addicted to opiates knows it's not an easy quit. My disease progressed to the point where I just quit coming to work and didn't have any contact with the local. I didn't have any contact with PMA. Eventually, I was deregistered, because I was on the run for five years in the drug bowels of Eureka. I didn't even know I was deregistered. I hadn't contacted anybody. When I finally had enough of living on the streets and I finally reached out for help, I called my brother, and he came and got me.

I got into a suboxone program, which was a way to help heroin addicts get off of opiates. My brother said he had contact with the union and that it was possible I might be able to get my job back. He told me to check with Hunny Powell, the ADRP Rep in San Francisco. I called Hunny and sure enough, I qualified for the last chance program. I had to pay for my rehab and had a year's worth of observation to see if I was going to stay straight. There were a lot of hoops and drug testing, and I jumped through all of them. It's an awesome program.

I got my book back. I even got my same number back. There's just really no way for me to say how grateful I am for this program and this local. They had to vote whether to allow me back. And with how I went out, they didn't need to do that. But they did. I'm just so grateful for the people that believed in me. It's unbelievable, to go from being a homeless, drug addict—the only thing I had in my name when I came into the union and that it was possible I might be able to get my job back. He called up, you might not. They needed truck drivers. Because I have a Class A driver's license, 30 years of experience driving trucks, and was licensed through the State of California, they figured I knew enough to make it to the dock and back.

I was never in a union before I got here. I spent seven years working for my father-in-law; we hauled lumber and feed. It kept me away from home much of the time on the road. It was sometimes tough, but I was able to make it work.

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Standing from left to right: ILWU Vice President (Mainland) Bobby Olvera, Jr., ILWU Vice President (Hawaii) Sam Kraut, ILWU Secretary-Treasurer Ed Ferris and (seated) ILWU Canada President Rob Ashton.

Global dockers, ILWU strengthen bonds of solidarity at IDC 9th General Assembly

Honoring the Liverpool dockers’ struggle

The Assembly also paid tribute to the Liverpool dockers’ strike that lasted 28 months between 1995 and 1998. That struggle ended in defeat for the Liverpool dockers and was the precursor to the eventual formation of IDC in 2000. A video was shown that honored Liverpool dockworker leaders Jimmy Nolan (who passed away earlier this year), along with Tony Nelson and Terry Teague. Each was awarded a medal of distinction in recognition of their enormous contributions to the global dockworker movement.

The IDC’s slogan, “We will never walk alone again,” was inspired by the recognition of the international dockworker movement’s failures to adequately come to the defense of the Liverpool dockers.

Daggett and IDC International Labor Coordinator Jordi Aragunde both tattooed the slogan on their forearms. “Their vision was to have a rank-and-file run, democratic organization with no bureaucratic nonsense,” Daggett said. “Hence, the IDC was created on the principles of direct participation, assembly, and solidarity. And that’s why we’re in this room today.”

Zone Coordinator reports

Delegates heard reports from the Zone Coordinators, getting updates on struggles in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and Oceania, Europe, and the East and West Coasts of the United States.

In Latin America and Caribbean Zone report, the General Assembly heard details of dockers under attack in Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, and Ecuador where port privatization efforts are underway. Delegates also heard about the violent persecution and repression of dockworker leaders in Colombia and El Salvador that have included death threats and assassinations.

The Africa Zone report highlighted progress in Côte d’Ivoire, including the legal recognition of dockworkers. However, dock work in much of the continent remains precarious with poor wages and conditions for many dockers throughout the region. The need for modernization of maritime laws, implementation of training and safety standards, the need to combat the widespread use of casual and informal labor in the ports, and the need to hold multi-national corporations accountable were emphasized.

The European Zone report included a report on the struggle by Portuguese dockworkers in the Port of Lisbon. The Stevedoring and Logistics Activity Union (SEAL) has been on strike since February of 2020. Delegates also heard a report from the BTB Belgium young dockers movement.

West Coast Zone Coordinator report

ILWU International Vice President (Mainland) Bobby Olvera, Jr. gave the West Coast Zone Coordinator report. He spoke about the importance of educating new generations. He used the analogy of the importance of learning your grandmother’s recipes so that her knowledge and legacy don’t pass with her.

“The recipes I have learned are a reflection of the 28 individual members of my family, on both my mother and father’s side, that have loaded and unloaded ships along the West Coast since 1901,” Olvera said, noting that his grandfather and great uncle were both members of the ILA in the Port of Los Angeles pre-1934 and charter members of ILWU Local 13.

“This has come full circle for me. We are a family. Dockers—it matters not whether you are SEAL, ILA, ILWU, or MUA, we are all one. We walk the same gangways. We unload the same cargo. I hope we take back a sense of education and solidarity to those that come behind us,” said Olvera.

“We have an obligation to those that come behind us to teach them the victories, the struggles, and yes, even the losses, so they understand the culture and the recipe of what your unionism is about,” continued Olvera. “It’s not about always fighting and having and owning. It’s about giving. It’s about serving. It’s about working tirelessly until you cross that finish line. And that’s what we will do together.”

ILWU Canada President Rob Ashton also addressed the Assembly during the West Coast report. Ashton brought words of solidarity and unity. He said that ILWU Canada would be there for any docker around the world even though ILWU Canada is not an IDC affiliate.

“Our longshore contract is up next year on March 31. We could be in for a big struggle just like every other union in this room,” Ashton said. “I know that one day, I will probably need somebody’s help that is sitting here today. I know that same person or another person will need the help of ILWU Canada. Just because we don’t sit in the IDC does not mean we won’t be there. Because the slogan that you all use, ‘We shall never walk alone, again,’ rings true no matter who you are, where you are, or what corners of the earth you’re from.”

Hawaii Longshore Division Director Dustin Dawson also addressed Assembly, pledging support and solidarity to dockers who need assistance.

Resolutions and elections

The assembly adopted more than a dozen resolutions addressing a range of issues to strengthen collective bargaining rights, equality at work, health and safety, building international support and solidarity for dockers around the world as well as making several organizational changes.

• Delegates unanimously adopted a resolution on diversity and inclusion, declaring itself an anti-fascist, anti-homophobic, anti-racist and anti-bullying organization.

• Non-discrimination on the basis of birth, ethnicity, sex, class, age, ability, or any other personal

continued from page 1

ILWU delegation: The ILWU brought its largest-ever delegation to an IDC assembly with dockworkers from the West Coast, Alaska, Hawaii and Canada.
Jim Norton: “Union Man”

On January 18, the ILWU lost a brilliant, dedicated, and humble mentor, Jim Norton. Brought up in a decidedly working-class community, Jim was a lifelong union man and one of the best Leaders ever produced by ILWU Local 23. He was a longtime Business Agent, served several terms on the local Labor Relations Committee (LRC), and as a Caucus & Convention delegate.

Even years after retirement, Jim stayed active in the union through the Tacoma Pensioners Club, as a longshore arbitrator, and helping negotiate contracts for the local’s allied division at the South Intermarsh Yard and with ILWU Local 22 at the Port of Tacoma. Jim was a mentor to multiple generations of longshore workers in Tacoma and a fierce advocate for the ILWU No. 23 Young Workers Committee, embodying the complimenters’ motto of “retired from the job, not from the struggle” better than just about anyone.

James P. Norton (#60503) was born February 16, 1939 in Ruston, WA. a small town south of Tacoma’s Old Town neighborhood. His father worked at the old Aarco smelter and was a member of the Mine, Mill & Smelter Workers Union (despite needing to be 18 to join). He snuck him into the union at age 17 with the help of one of his uncles, who was a member of the Inlandboatmen’s Union (IBU) and made the B bench on March 20, 1957, an old-timers union with close ties to the ILWU.

All four of his uncles were members of the Boom Men and Rafter’s Union, raking logs to the several mills along the old Tacoma waterfront. They stuck him into the union at age 17 (despite needing to be 18 to join). He later worked as a tugboat deckhand with the Inlandwaterways’ Union (IUW) and met his wife, Joan Norton, who was the secret to his 50+ years of marriage.

Like many of his generation, Jim was a champion of the “Tacoma Advantage”, defined by the local’s driving work ethic and entrepreneurial approach toward working with the Port, especially port manager Roger Perry. He joined several delegations traveling to other ports on behalf of the local, learning how to handle rubber in New Orleans or documenting discrepancies between working conditions on the West Coast and elsewhere.

Jim first ran for office after an unfortunate ending to his job from Business Agent George Ginnis. He raised a safety issue about storing sacks in the wings of the hold, but was ordered back to work by the BA. Jim held a grudge over it but Ginnis later encouraged him to run for LRC. They quickly became good friends and Jim quickly emerged as an expert on arbitrations in the local. After Ginnis retired, Jim ran for BA and held the position for many years

Early on, Jim struggled on the LRC. After he got beat in five arbitrations in a row, Jim committed to never letting that happen again. Jim rigorously studied the contract and past rulings. He made a point to remind others that he wasn’t above asking for help either, frequently turning to then ILWU Vice President Rudy Rubio and Coast Committeeman Bobby Olvera Sr. for advice.

Most importantly, it was Jim’s wife, Joan Norton, who was the secret to his success in arbitrations. In an interview last year, Jim recalled how there was no one at the hall who could type or edit well enough to do the job to his standards. So Joan helped at home on her typewriter, transcribing Jim’s notes and making corrections to the final documents.

“I never had one arbitration typed in this local. My wife did ‘em all,” he said. “I didn’t lose many of them. I’m proud of that. And my wife, god bless her, she really helped me a lot — she’s smarter than I am!”

Jim was a living legend in Tacoma, particularly for his work as an arbitrator and a mentor. His characteristic style always deflected the praise he received. “Maybe I got too much credit,” he said. “You always have mentors or someone to help. All the negotiations I ever did, I can’t do ‘em alone. It was guys that helped me and I always appreciated that.”

That kind of support went two ways. For many in Tacoma, Jim was the one helping out when they needed it most. As ILWU Local 23 Vice President Dean McGrath put it, “It really helps to know that someone you’re learning on has been through tough times too.”

Always appealing to unity, Jim’s advice on has been through rough times too.”

When Jim was a young worker, he continued to provide support and education series or coordinating picket support for the committee’s Passing the Torch education series or coordinating picket support for other unions. Other times we just met up and talked. Those were the moments when Jim really opened up and was at his best.

He taught us in those meetings that it’s ok to be vulnerable and to love your union. Like all the longshoremen of his generation, Jim was one of the toughest guys you could ever meet. He was also one of the few you’d see choke up talking about Bloody Thursday and the men who gave their lives to build the union.

It wasn’t lost to us just how lucky we were to work with him. Jim and the other pensioners were our old timers. And when Jim was a young worker, it was the 54 Men who were his old timers and mentors. Learning about the union from someone like him meant we were only one step removed from the people who struck for 82 days, won the hiring hall, and built the ILWU from the ground-up.

Jim was quite funny and the stories he’d tell about the old waterfront always had the group laughing. A particular favorite was his story about the time he and another Tacoma delegate slipped out on caucus proceedings to grab a drink and were joined by none other than Harry Bridges himself. Bridges was apparently equally disinterested in the debate at that moment and so the three of them just drank in the hotel bar instead.

What Jim appreciated most about the exchange with Harry was that even though Bridges was nearly 40 years their senior and despite the historic tensions between Bridges and an older generation in Tacoma, he effortlessly put that aside and treated these two younger delegates as equals.

They talked union and swapped stories. They were just longshoremen together at the bar.

Jim was both grounding and practical when we needed it while simultaneously never limiting or discouraging. He never tried to pull tank or clip anyone’s wings and listened more than he ever spoke. For all of us who came up through the YWC, Jim wasn’t just a mentor and a role model but our friend and equal.

Jessica Fote, a Tacoma B woman and one of YWC’s first organizers put it best: “I’ve wondered many times how someone like Jim who has done so many great things can make anyone feel so an equal, right now and more than enough struggles ahead of us. Rather than suggest what Jim Norton might have wanted or said in this moment, I’ll leave you with what he did say.

“There’s so many jobs today where people are in need or for want — not us. I never have worried about having three meals a day or having medical coverage, and that means a lot to me and my family. But everything we got, we deserve ‘cause we fought for it.”

If you’re a younger worker reading this right now, go find each other and get active in the union. But just as importantly, find your pensioners. Get yourself the mentors you need to organize for the long haul. And if you’re a pensioner, go find your young workers invest in them and teach them what you learned the hard way to make sure we keep our union strong, as Jim so often reminded us: “You don’t do these things alone. You do ‘em together.”

— Zach Pattin, ILWU Local 23
Global dockers, ILWU strengthen bonds of solidarity at IDC 9th General Assembly

continued from page 6

or social circumstance involving discrimination of any kind in a non-negotiable principle,” the resolution stated.

• The Assembly voted to change the terms of office from two to four years, with a biennial convention in between Assemblies.

• The delegates unanimously passed a resolution that IDC-affiliated unions who refuse to adhere to the IDC Constitution – such as refusing to pay membership dues – will be expelled by the governing body of IDC delegates. Delegates also affirmed their commitment to standing behind all dockworkers under attack, regardless of their affiliation status with the IDC.

Dennis Daggett was re-elected as IDC’s General Coordinator through 2026.

Daggett said the IDC emerged from the Assembly stronger and more united. “No employer, no shipping company, no port, no international, no national government, no national or international union, no government agency or organization, no self-interested individual, no lobby, no gut,” he said.

In the West Coast Zone, ILWU International Secretary-Treasurer Ed Ferris was elected Coordinator to replace Bobby Olvera, Jr. who stepped aside because of other obligations. Paul Keating, Oceania and Asian Zone Coordinator; Andy Green, European Zone Coordinator; César Luna, Latin American and Caribbean Zone Coordinator; Ken Riley, East Coast Zone Coordinator; and Guigrehi Abegbeg, African Zone Coordinator, were all elected to return to their posts.

Stronger together

The ILWU delegates were energized by their experience at the IDC and the chance to meet, connect and learn from dockworkers all over the world.

“The IDC Assembly was a revitalizing experience,” said Local 13 member Mary Cerda, “It was filled with passionate speakers from around the world, pledging renewed dockworker solidarity. The event embodied everything global working-class solidarity should look like. We shared challenges, perspectives, and potential solutions. Above all, we promised to be there for each other when called on, because we’re stronger together.”

Eddie Hayashi, Vice Director of the Hawaii Longshore Division, said that the Assembly exceeded his expectations and that hearing from the experience of dockworkers around the world was a learning opportunity. “It was very different from what I experienced in Hawaii. To have the opportunity to have this international exposure, to experience the camaraderie, and to see how different ports are throughout the world, was very educational for us.”

BPO Corner:

Introducing the ILWU-PMA Benefits Plan Office column

Greetings from your Benefit Plans Office! This is a new column, and we want to begin by saying thank you to The Dispatcher for devoting some space so we can share benefits information with the members of the ILWU, their families, and their survivors. In the coming year, look out for articles about applying for benefits, submitting updates or other documentation, notifying the unions of members and survivors. We can help answer your questions about your benefit plans, including how to enroll, how to make changes, and how to file claims. Our website is available 24/7 and can be found at www.benefitplans.org. The website has contact information, special announcements, forms, and resources for members. In addition, we have a Coastwise Claims Office that can be reached by phone at (800) 955-7376.

We are not the only organization that helps to administer your benefits. There are several other organizations that work with us, including the Benefit Plans Office of family changes and address changes, as well as processing claims. In the Medicare reimbursement reset, we process healthcare claims. We also process claims for annual events like open enrollment, the other insurance coverage audit, and the benefits audit. We also process claims for retirement, submitting power of attorney documentation, notifying beneficiaries of changes, and gathering information about members and survivors. In the coming year, look out for articles about applying for benefits, how to make changes, and how to file claims. Our website is available 24/7 and can be found at www.benefitplans.org.

We are actively recruiting new members and look forward to answering any questions you may have. Feel free to contact us at BPO@ilwu.org or Auxiliary President Victoria Sowers at 253-223-5714.

– ILWU Federated Auxiliaries

The Federated Auxiliaries held their 35th Biennial Conference on May 13-15 in Portland, OR. It has been three years since the Auxiliaries have been able to gather in person and we had an amazingly productive weekend.

We had five of our Auxiliaries attending the conference Auxiliaries 1 & 5 from Oregon, Auxiliary 8 from California, and Auxiliaries 14 & 35 from Washington. Other Auxiliaries sent reports sharing what their members have done since our Convention in May of 2021. We have some very active Auxiliaries in both the community and in support of the locals they serve.

One of the highlights of our conference was our guest speakers. Local 23 Young Workers’ Committee members Brian Skillington and Zack Pattin from Tacoma spoke about what organizing really means. They suggested ideas on attracting and retaining new Auxiliary members. Both Brian and Zack did their research into the Federated Auxiliaries and reminded us of our commitment to promote union ideals and the history of our militant sisters of the 1940’s and 1950’s. It was a needed reminder of our purpose and place in the ILWU and our role in union activism.

Area Vice President Carrie Perrin attended the ILWU Women, Trans and Non-Binary Workers’ Convention and reported to the membership. One of our agenda items is the updating of our Federated Auxiliary Constitution. We have found that the language is outdated and vague. We have put together an amazing group of committee members to address the changes needed. Another agenda item was the promotion of our Auxiliaries within the ILWU and our communities.

Your Federated Auxiliaries are committed to our purpose: FORTIFY – STRENGTHEN – SUPPORT.

• We FORTIFY the ILWU in times of need.
• We STRENGTHEN the ties of the ILWU and communities.
• We SUPPORT the ILWU, communities, and ourselves with time and resources.

Thank you to the locals that support our Auxiliaries. If you are not in contact with your local Auxiliary, reach out! The Auxiliaries are here to support you, the ILWU membership.

We are actively recruiting new members and look forward to answering any questions you may have. Feel free to contact us at BPO@ilwu.org or Auxiliary President Victoria Sowers at 253-223-5714.

– ILWU Federated Auxiliaries

TRANSITIONS

NEW PENSIONERS:
Local 6: Thomas Langman; Local 10: Julio Arangueta; Harold Green; W. Lybrand; Local 12: Russell Leibelt; Local 13: Kenneth Anderson; Gerard E. Beauvoir; Frank C.; Delgado; John Habbara Jr.; Thomas C. Hoygaard; Cindy L. Norman; James E. Prijatel; Dennis M. Swearingen; Jeffrey L. Thayer; Alice M. Trujillo; Local 19: Donnell Jackson; Abdur R. Lane-Abdallah; Charles T. Morton; Local 23: Scott R. Laterialle; Tommy S. Tomal; Local 63: JoAn Bossovski; Tina Fianian; Sabrina Jimenez; Craig M. Kazmark; Mary Kazmark; Rene X. Perez; Sheila A. Reeves; Tena P. Sandrow; Local 92: Gary L. Carson; Local 94: John L. Brayl; Patrick F. Gabel;

DECEASED PENSIONERS:
Local 2: Emiliano F. Rodriguez; Local 6: Jose M. Carracho; Raymond Potter; Noel R. Roach; Robert Woodruff; Local 12: Dennis L. Gerber; Local 13: Joseph Camello; Erick Koski; Edward Loy; Richard H. Masterson; Barbara N. Williams; Local 19: Daniel Martinez; Fred Redman; Local 21: Steven L. Grizzle; Local 34: Robert Lucas; Local 45: Daniel Tinoone; Local 63: Laraine Arias; Charles Coleman; Mary L. Lawrence; Local 19: Gives Walker;

DECEASED ACTIVE MEMBERS:
Local 8: Mark A. Sr Thorfanded; Local 13: Gary S. Hirschberg; Ron L. Langham; Local 34: Steven R. Anderson;

DECEASED SURVIVORS:
Local 6: Lawrence K. Kemp; Local 10: Virginia M. Anderson; Eleanor Oathea; Local 13: Celestine Phillips; Local 19: Maria Hernandez; Betty May; Local 19: Renate Brac; Local 50: Sadie R Gipson; Local 51: Mildred Kyle; Local 63: Pauline J. Cox; Betty J. Mc Graw;

8 DISPATCHER • JUNE 2022

– The Benefits Plan Office