



THE DISPATCHER

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The Fifth ILWU Young Workers Conference returned to Vancouver, B.C. after being delayed for two years because of COVID. More than 200 ILWU workers from across the union came together for the three-day conference designed to lay the foundation for the next generation of ILWU leaders.

We are all leaders: ILWU Young Workers Conference prepares new generation for the future



Portland welcomes 54th PCCA Convention [page 3](#)

More than 200 registered delegates and guests gathered at the Maritime Labour Centre in Vancouver, B.C., from September 27-29 for the fifth ILWU Young Workers Conference. The last Young Workers conference was held in 2019. The conference's biennial schedule was delayed two years because of COVID.

"The goal of the conference is to provide the tools for the next generation of ILWU leaders," explained ILWU Canada's Second Vice President Dan Kask. He said the delegates brought a tremendous amount of energy and enthusiasm to this year's conference.

"We missed a whole cycle because of COVID. I almost forgot what it was like. The participation from the delegates has been absolutely amazing," he said.

The conference covered ILWU and labor history, the union's Ten Guiding Principles, political action, the role of art and design in labor

activism, and other concerns, such as workplace health and safety, supply chain organizing, beating apathy in the workplace, international solidarity, and social media. A wide variety of speakers included international guests, current and former ILWU elected officers, rank-and-file leaders, and active members and pensioners from across the union's divisions.

Recognizing the First Nations

The conference began by acknowledging and thanking the First Nations peoples of Vancouver—the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples. Shayla Jacobs and her daughter Soriah Jacobs of the Squamish Nation whose unceded territory the Maritime Labour Centre is located on, performed a welcome ceremony to start the conference.

Welcome address

ILWU Canada President Rob Ashton welcomed the delegates and spoke about the challenges of leadership and the importance of leading with love, vision, compassion, and courage.

"Leadership is about creating a movement. It's about building some-

thing better. The great leaders in history didn't all start as gray-haired old men or gray-haired old ladies. They were young people with new ideas, a new vision, and thoughts to make the world a better place," Ashton said. "Leadership is about making those tough decisions and maybe going against the norms of everyday life. Leadership is about having people look at you like you're crazy—like they did to Harry Bridges when one day he decided to create our union. He was a young worker just like every one of you. So if you have a vision for your union, your local, or your community group—pick it up, run with it, explain it to others, but have love in your heart when you do. Because leaders that lead through love, strength, openness, and camaraderie are the leaders that we should follow."

BC Federation of Labor

Following Rob Ashton, delegates heard from BC Federation of Labor President Sussanne Skidmore and BC Federation of Labor Secretary-Treasurer and Local 502 member Hermender Singh Kailley.

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Coast Committee meets with President Biden



Historic meeting: From left to right: Department of Labor Senior Counselor Lynn Rhinehart, Coast Committeeman Frank Ponce De Leon, Coast Committeeman Cam Williams, ILWU International Vice President (Mainland) Bobby Olvera, Jr., ILWU International President Willie Adams, Acting Secretary of Labor Julie Su, President Joe Biden.

For the first time in the history of the ILWU, the Longshore Division's Coast Committee including International President Willie Adams, International Vice President (Mainland) Bobby Olvera, Jr., and Coast Committeemen Frank Ponce De Leon and Cameron Williams were invited to the White House to receive President Joe Biden's thanks to all the members of the ILWU for reaching a new contract with the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA).

ILWU leaders met with President Biden and Acting Secretary of Labor Julie Su on September 6, to discuss ongoing needs for investment in infrastructure and workforce development at West Coast ports, negative impacts on port operations caused by automation, as well as emergency aid for ILWU families in Hawaii impacted by the tragic fires in Maui.

The ILWU delegation then joined President Biden as he spoke to the national press corps. The President opened his remarks to press by saying, "I'm really happy this day has

arrived. It's a big deal — for management and for labor, as well as for the United States of America. And I really mean it."

"I just met with the leaders of the ILWU, including President — and I have known Willie for a long time — Willie Adams, who is the leader there," the President added.

Biden recalled pandemic caused congestion issues at U.S. ports in 2022 and thanked port workers for setting cargo moving records to break the impasse. "America's longshore workers stepped up with extraordinary measures, including working around the clock — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week — to keep the cargo moving. It worked. Working with port operations, about 97 percent of the packages were delivered on time for the holidays or with only minimal delays."

The President used his strongest words when he addressed a worker's right to bargain. "This contract proves that collective bargaining works. It gives workers a seat at the table and ensures that their well-being, security, and futures are our priority. And, also, it gives employers the opportunity — it delivers for employers by helping them attract and retain the best, most productive

workers in the world. Yes, it often takes time. But done right, collective bargaining means everyone wins: Workers, employers, our economy, and consumers."

"There is no question that our West Coast ports continue to offer the unmatched competitiveness that the shipping industry requires and that sets our ports apart from all others....The ILWU will continue to do what we do best - move cargo at the West Coast ports."

ILWU International President Willie Adams responded, "On behalf of the members of the ILWU, I would like to thank President Joe Biden and Acting Secretary of Labor Julie Su for the opportunity to meet and for their faith in the collective bargaining process." President Adams added, "We are proud to have reached a six-year contract that recognizes the important role longshore workers play in the ongoing success of our West Coast ports which includes ensuring a reliable and resilient supply chain while supporting millions of

jobs and billions in economic activity nationwide.

"There is no question that our West Coast ports continue to offer the unmatched competitiveness that the shipping industry requires and that sets our ports apart from all others. As we prepared for negotiations and entered into bargaining amidst COVID-19, longshore workers risked their lives and worked tirelessly to ensure that even as most of our country shutdown, hospitals were supplied, grocery shelves stocked, and PPE accessible to all. It was during this time that our members moved historic levels of cargo month-after-month to meet unprecedented consumer demands and to keep our economy strong. The ILWU will continue to do what we do best - move cargo at the West Coast ports."

President Biden recalled his 2022 visit to the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach — another historic first for a U.S. President to visit a West Coast port to meet with workers — and recognized the role of the ILWU to the Nation's economy, "This landmark contract covers 29 ports — stretching from San Diego, CaA, to Bellingham, WA — that play a major role in our nation's economy. More comes through those ports than any other means of getting into the

United States of America. It's gigantic — gigantic economic impact."

President Biden closed this press event by once again calling on Congress to pass the PRO Act to strengthen workers' organizing rights and puts monetary penalties on unfair labor practices. "I'm continuing to call on Congress to fully and finally pass the Protection of the Right to Organize Act — the PRO Act — which makes it easier for workers to organize unions and more difficult for businesses to engage in unfair practices."

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Portland welcomes 54th PCPA Convention



From left to right: PCPA Recording Secretary Yolanda Nuhi, PCPA President Greg Mitre, PCPA Vice President Lawrence Thibeaux, PCPA Treasurer Chris Gordon, and Local 13 President Gary Herrera.

The Pacific Coast Pensioners Association (PCPA) met in Portland, OR for their 54th Annual Convention on September 18-20. More than 200 members and guests attended this year's convention. Topics that were discussed included the recently negotiated Coast Longshore Division Contract and the challenges of automation. The event brought together pensioners from across the West Coast including Alaska and Canada. Guests included local union officers from across the union.

Welcome to Portland

Port of Portland Commissioner Stuart Strader welcomed delegates and guests to Portland. Commissioner Strader said he comes from a longshore family on both his father and mother's side.

"It's an honor being a part of the working class. This organization was born from struggle and difficulty," Strader said. "We need to acknowledge that and pay tribute to that history and teach those that come behind us about those struggles. I just want to acknowledge how important you are and my genuine appreciation for all that you have done because you truly are the backbone of the ILWU."

ILWU speakers

The ILWU International Titled Officers and Coast Committeemen were unable to attend this year's convention because of ongoing meetings with the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) to work on issues related to the implementation of the recently ratified longshore agreement. ILWU International President Willie Adams sent a video message of support and solidarity. Pres. Adams thanked the pensioners for their support during the 13 months of bargaining. "We couldn't have made it without our pensioners," Adams said.

Several leaders from ILWU locals and members of the Longshore Contract Bargaining Committee were on hand at the convention.

Local 13 President Gary Herrera expressed his appreciation for all that the pensioners have done to build the ILWU.

"It is such an honor to be here. Everything I have and everything that I stand for is because of your hard work and dedication," Herrera said. "You're the foundation of what the ILWU stands for; we have a lot of battles ahead of us. I promise as long as I'm President of Local 13, I am going to educate and teach what I learned from the pensioners—that is: 'Take care of the job and the job will take care of you.'"

Local 63 President Joe Gasperov spoke about some of the values and principles he learned from the previous generation of ILWU leaders. "It's not about me, it's not about you, it's about all of us together. I think sometimes, you can get discouraged. Being the president of a local and seeing the membership change it sometimes seems that they have lost a little piece of that. But then something happens and you end up realizing that the mentality is still there, that the membership stands behind the idea that we have to all fight for each other; we have to bring the bottom up, and we have to protect those who came before us."

Local 10 President Farless Daily thanked the pensioners for building the ILWU and said that he wouldn't be alive today if not for the health benefits fought for and won by the pensioners.

Local 40's Dane Jones who served as the Longshore Clerk Technology Representative on the Longshore Bargaining Committee spoke about the challenges and limitations of automation and artificial intelligence, stating that labor has real, practical advantages over automation, noting that human labor is very good at adapting in complex and changing environments.

Other speakers included Local 23 President Jared Faker and Local 10 Secretary-Treasurer Frank Gaskin, and Alaska Longshore Division Secretary-Treasurer Daryl Tseu.

PCPA President's & Vice President's Reports

PCPA Vice President Lawrence Thibeaux delivered his report that focused on the dangers of artificial intelligence and the impact of automation on workers' job security across industries.

PCPA President Greg Mitre began with a status report stating that the PCPA is in good shape coming out of the pandemic although membership

is down slightly. Mitre said last year's in-person convention in Long Beach was well attended. The bulk of Mitre's report focused on the longshore negotiations—describing key achievements of the new contract, particularly as it relates to increased benefits for pensioners and improvements to the medical plan. Mitre also noted the agreement includes adding a permanent assistant for the Southern California Area Welfare Director Sam Alvarado and adding Juneteenth as a holiday.

Solidarity with Local 5

Representatives from Local 5—Local 5 Vice President Eloise Bacher, Local 5 Union Representative and International Executive Board Member Myka Dubay, and Bargaining Committee Member Michelle Carrol gave an update on the bargaining for a new contract at Powell's Books in Portland including their one-day unfair labor practices strike on Labor Day.

Benefits plan

ILWU Coast Benefits Specialist John Castanho along with the Area Directors for the benefits plan, coordinators for the Alcohol and Drug Recovery Program, and representatives of the Benefits Plans Office also spoke at the convention and were available to answer questions.

UW Labor archives

Also speaking at the event was Conor Casey from the Labor Archives of the University of Washington. Casey gave an update on the ongoing project that plays a vital role in preserving the history of working people in the Pacific Northwest. He spoke about the Labor Archives' efforts to preserve union records and history and the ongoing oral history project that has been collecting the stories of ILWU pensioners for many years.

Jesse and Lois Stranahan Award

This year's recipient of the Jesse and Lois Stranahan Award went to Denise Miken from Auxiliary 5 in Portland. The award is given out every year to honor an outstanding labor activist.

Elections

The convention closed by electing officers, executive board, and committee members. The PCPA officers elected by acclamation at the conference were: President Mike Jagielski, Vice President Lawrence Thibeaux, Recording Secretary Yolanda Nuhi, and Treasurer Chris Gordon. Greg Mitre declined a nomination to serve another term.

Mitre received a standing ovation from the convention delegates for his service to the PCPA.

"I want to acknowledge brother Greg Mitre for his consistency and heartfelt dedication that he has towards the pensioners up and down the coast," said Southern California pensioner Norm Tuck.

Newly elected PCPA President Mike Jagielski said he had big shoes to fill. "I think Greg wears size 20 shoes and I wear 11.5. He's done an amazing job through hard times and good times," Jagielski said.

Vancouver, British Columbia will host the 55th PCPA convention next year.



Auxiliary 8's Denise Miken received the Jesse and Lois Stranahan Award from PCPA President Greg Mitre.



Local 23 President Jared Faker addresses the PCPA convention.

We are all leaders: ILWU Young Workers Conference prepares new generation for the future



YWC Delegate Anastassia Oborotova works on a group discussion project during the conference.

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Kailley challenged delegates to not put labor leaders on pedestals. “I’m just a worker representing workers,” he said.

Skidmore spoke about the important connections between the labor movement and the broader community.

“Nothing is going to serve you better in the workplace or in your community as solidarity,” Skidmore said. “That is what binds us in the labor movement. We’ve seen it time and time again—when we stand together and speak with one clear voice, workers win. We use the phrase ‘An injury to one is an injury to all,’ because we want the community to understand that we are standing with them and that these struggles are not just about unionized workers. It is about community and when communities get injured, we all get injured; the union movement shows up for the community and we show up for each other.”

Leaders past, present and future

A panel of ILWU Canada pensioners provided an important perspective on ILWU history. The group included former ILWU Canada President Emeritus Tom Dufresne, Cliff Wellicome, Gerry White, and Joe Breaks. Each reflected on their experiences of rank-and-file power in the workplace, their thoughts about leadership and automation, and the importance of knowing the history of the waterfront and the struggles that have shaped existing collective agreements. The panel was moderated by Mike Carrigan and James Hospedales from Local 500.

Following the pensioner panel, the ILWU Young Workers Committee presented their achievements and accomplishments during their COVID-extended tenure, including the challenges and opportunities presented to their work during the quarantine. The Committee members on the panel were: Local 500’s Tereza Tacic, Local 502’s Bryan Delwo and Paul Gill, Local 508’s Brittini Paquette, Local 400’s Mathew Williams, and Local 23’s Tyler Rasmussen.

Ten Guiding Principles

Following the lunch break, Brittini Paquette and Tereza Tacic from the Young Workers Committee and past Young Workers Committee member and Local 54 member Stef Flores led a discussion on the ILWU’s Ten Guiding Principles. The panelists took turns discussing a principle, highlighting a concept in each one, and explaining why it was meaningful to their experience as union members.

Fighting racism and anti-trans discrimination

This panel was followed by a discussion led by Local 5’s Myka Dubay and Local 23’s Zack Pattin titled “Weapons of the Boss: Racism and Anti-Trans Discrimination.” This workshop built on the Ten Guiding Principles discussion with a focus on the Third Guiding Principle:

“Workers are indivisible. There can be no discrimination because of race, color, creed, national origin, reli-

gious or political belief, sex, gender preference, or sexual orientation. Any division among the workers can help no one but the employers. Discrimination of worker against worker is suicide. Discrimination 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.”

“Now that we’ve talked about the Ten Guiding Principles,” said Dubay as they introduced the discussion, “I just wanted to put this thought out there—that labor unions are a movement to protect workers, not just some workers, but all workers, and not just from wage exploitation, but from all forms of exploitation.”

Pattin started by discussing the historical context of the Ten Guiding Principles and why they were written as part of the Officers’ Report for the 1953 ILWU Convention.

“What the Guiding Principles really are is a distillation of the experience of the ILWU’s founding generation and the first 20 years of building this union. People came to these conclusions because of things that they went through and settled on them as principles that make a good union.”

Pattin spoke about the ILWU’s long history of building an integrated union, including in the 1930’s when racism and exclusion of non-white workers were the norm for most unions. The commitment to anti-racism from longshore workers in the Bay Area played an important role in winning the 1934 strike and strengthening worker power on the waterfront. It increased solidarity between workers which ultimately led to improved wages and conditions for longshore workers.

Dubay spoke about the important role unions can play in fighting anti-trans discrimination and protecting the rights of trans workers. They gave examples of specific ways Local 5 is putting that into practice—from representation to the use of contract language.

“Some of the things that we hear from new members coming in is that just having a non-binary leader in the local has made a huge difference,” Dubay said. “When you’re going into negotiations, having a contract that uses gender-neutral language—and I don’t mean taking out ‘he and she’ and putting in ‘employee’—but normalizing the use of ‘they’ as a singular pronoun because that’s what we’re seeing being attacked.”

Secretary-Treasurer Ferris

ILWU International Secretary-Treasurer Ed Ferris delivered the keynote address for the day. He encouraged delegates to step up and begin contributing their skills and passion the union immediately.

“This union needs you; you are our future,” Ferris said. “I want to help prepare you because it’s not going to get any easier. We’re going to have to fight tooth and nail just like we always have. I’m sorry you don’t have a lot of time to get prepared. The future is now and we

need you to step up. We need you to get back to your home locals, and find out where you can help because we need you. We need new ideas. Don’t let anybody make you feel less because you are young and want to contribute. Get out to your meetings, hit the mic, and let your voice be heard.”

Beating Apathy

The second day began with a workshop on “Beating Apathy” led by Barbara Madeloni of Labor Notes and ILWU Canada Organizer Genevieve Lorenzo. The interactive workshop challenged the idea that the problem in organizing a workplace is apathy. Instead, the workshop focused on the way employers keep workers disorganized using fear, hopelessness, division, and confusion; workplace organizers can combat this by developing a plan and identifying common ground to give workers hope that change is possible and the courage and determination to act.

“There is no such thing as apathy. Everybody cares about something. It is our job as organizers to find out what people care about,” Lorenzo said, “and turn that into a plan of action.”

Save our sailors

Local 400 Vice President and Young Worker Committee member Mathew Williams presented on Local 400’s “Save Our Sailors” campaign. He showed a campaign video produced by the local that explained how The Port of Vancouver in British Columbia is awarding contracts to tugboat companies that are “lowering wages across the board and leaving ILWU tugboat workers out to dry,” and how people could assist the campaign by signing and promoting an on-line petition.

Internationalism and art activism

Delegates also watched a short documentary on the Patrick’s dispute in Australia that took place in 1998 when the Patrick Corporation fired members of the Maritime Union of Australia.

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ILWU International Secretary-Treasurer Ed Ferris spoke to the delegates and encouraged everyone to contribute their skills and strength to the union. “The future is now and we need you to step up,” he said.



Soriah Jacobs of the Squamish Nation whose unceded territory the Maritime Labour Centre is located on, performed a welcome ceremony to start the conference.



YWC member Tereza Tacic discussing (standing) discusses a group exercise on the ILWU's Ten Guiding Principles.

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lia (MUA) in four Australian ports and replaced them with non-union workers. The ILWU responded by refusing to unload cargo from Australian ships loaded by non-union workers. The firing of MUA members was later ruled illegal by Australian courts. The film highlighted the important role international solidarity plays in uplifting workers worldwide.

A popular presentation was “Activism through Art” led by Sam Wallman a dock worker and art activist from Melbourne, Australia. Wallman is a rank-and-file member of the MUA whose art has been featured in a number of labor campaigns. He also designed the artwork for the Young Workers Conference. Wallman spoke about his own design process, the important role that collective artistic expression can play in campaigns and protests, and gave practical tips for designing banners, placards, and flyers. During the lunch break, Wallman invited delegates to participate in creating a banner for the Local 400 “Save our Sailors” campaign.

Solidarity message from President Adams

ILWU International President Willie Adams was unable to attend the conference but recorded a solidarity video. Pres. Adams thanked the Young Workers all along the West Coast for their efforts in sending aid to workers affected by the fires in Maui and said the future of the union is bright with a new, emerging generation of strong ILWU leaders. “You are the future leaders of the ILWU,” said Adams. “I will be retiring soon and I know this union is in good hands.”

International Transport Workers Federation

A panel featuring International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) delegates included ITF Dockers’ Section Coordinator Enrico Tortolano, Local 519’s Viri Gomez, ITF West Coast USA Coordinator Ryan Brazeau, ITF Western Canada Inspector Nathan Smith, and Kima Iosua from the Maritime Union of New Zealand.

The ITF is a global federation of 700 affiliated trade unions from 150 countries fighting to secure rights, equality, and justice for workers globally. They represent nearly 18.5 million transport workers across the world. Panelists talked about ITF campaigns to secure

the rights of dock workers and protect seafarers across the globe.

History lesson

During the Friday morning session, Mark Leier, a history professor at Simon Fraser University, discussed the labor history of Vancouver and the Pacific Northwest with a particular focus on direct action and how movements build solidarity. His session included small group brainstorming and a sing-along to songs from the I.W.W.’s *Little Red Book* written by the famous Wobblie organizer and labor bard Joe Hill.

Elected allies

Jagmeet Singh, leader of Canada’s New Democratic Party addressed the delegates. Singh thanked ILWU Canada longshore workers who went on strike for 13 days this summer for their courage.

“You sent a strong message for every worker who looks around their workplace and wonders why the greedy CEO of the company is making a big salary, while workers are struggling to put food on the table,” Singh said. “You sent a message that workers can come together and fight back and demand better.” Singh was on the picket line supporting ILWU workers during the strike and from the first day made clear his opposition to legislation that would force them back to work.

Heat and Hammer

ILWU International Assistant Organizing Director Jon Brier and Northern California Organizer Evan McLaughlin presented on supply chain organizing and harnessing the “heat”—the energy and passion among fellow workers about an issue—and identifying the “hammer”—the points of leverage and pressure to apply to decision-makers and the tactics and actions that will be used to reach an organizing goal. The presentation involved group discussion with a specific focus on supply chain organizing.

Social media

A panel on social media was led by Local 502’s Ashley Bordignon, Local 63 OCU’s Jamie Bulaich, and labor attorney Caitlin Meggs. The panel gave practical tips and advice about how to effectively use social media platforms to get your message out, explained how understanding social media algorithms can be used to increase views,

Mathew Coleman Local 142, Hawaii Longshore

The whole conference was a new experience for me. Listening to everybody’s stories and gaining more knowledge has been inspiring for me to get better. I’m looking forward to taking what I have learned here and bringing it back to the membership of Local 142 and encouraging others to come to the conference next time.



Charissa Kelly Local 502

There’s so much potential for our union to do really great things. In our specific local, it can be discouraging for people to have to wait until membership. I want to learn how to keep people engaged and feeling like they matter so when the time comes to become a member and make the decisions, they’re still passionate about making those changes. This union gives everybody the opportunity to learn, to keep growing, and gain an education; it’s been a really good experience for me.



Gina Villeggiante Local 10

We just started a Young Workers Committee at Local 10 about a year ago. Coming here and meeting people that have been doing it for years has been really cool. My takeaway is that creating solidarity is important, and there is a need to have more patience and understanding for one another. It’s very difficult at times because everybody has a lot going on. Having that extra patience is sometimes all you need to mend relationships. That just makes us stronger because if we have drama among ourselves, it’s a distraction. We need to minimize those distractions to actually fight the employer.



Anthony “AC” Cavalier Local 19

The biggest takeaway for me was learning how much the ILWU is connected with other unions around the country and around the world. That was a bit of a surprise to me. I am learning a lot about the history of the ILWU.

The driving force that made me want to come and participate in the conference was wanting to get more involved in my local and with the union as a whole. I want to be a leader and I figured that this is a good way to start and to connect with other people who have the same goals as me as well as meet and learn from other leaders who are here facilitating the conference.



and discussed important Canadian laws affecting the use of social media. The presentation used examples of effective social media from several ILWU Young Workers groups across the union.

Electing a new committee

The final order of business was the election of a new Young Worker’s Committee that now includes: Kaleb Wallace (Local 333); Connie Leo (Local 400); James Hospedales (Local 500); Cristiano Pantusa (Local 500); Robert Crews (Local 502); Charissa Kelly (Local 502); Andrew Reid (505), James Brophy (Local 508); Justin Bhandal (Local 514); Katie Lofto (Local 517); Viri Gómez (Local 519); Johnathon Lundman (Local 523); Mason Van Luven (GSU); Hazel Pemberton (Local 19).

Making their mark

Dan Kask said the ILWU’s Young Workers movement is in a positive place and that they are making their mark in and outside the ILWU.

“They are growing within and are also doing panels at Labor Notes conferences and running education workshops in their locals,” Kask said. “ILWU Young Workers are influencing not only our own union but the trade union movement in general.”

We are the ILWU



Inlandboatmen's Union of the Pacific Northern California Region

The Inlandboatmen's Union of the Pacific (IBU) is the ILWU's Marine Division and one of the largest inland maritime unions in the United States. The IBU represents workers on the West Coast, Alaska, and Hawaii. IBU members work on a variety of vessels, including ferries, tugboats and barges, dredges, tour boats, and more.

The Inlandboatmen's Union of the Pacific was originally founded in 1918 as the Inlandboatmen's Union of California in San Francisco. In the early 1920's it became the first San Francisco Bay Area union to admit members of all races.

From Ferryboatmen's Union to the Inlandboatmen's Union

The IBU's early growth was possible because so many ferries were being used to transport cargo, railroad cars, and people around booming cities and ports on the West Coast. The union's initial boom lasted more than a decade until new bridges built during the mid-1930's caused many ferries to be idled and thousands of ferry workers lost their jobs. The IBU pivoted and began organizing workers on tugs, barges, and other vessels. In 1936, the union changed its name to the Inlandboatmen's Union of the Pacific to reflect this change in scope.

The search for a democratic partner

Over the years, the IBU has affiliated with different unions and federations, always searching for a democratic partner. Early on, they affiliated with the International Seaman's Union (ISU) that was part of the American Federation of Labor. When the industrial union movement rose in the 1930's, the IBU aligned with the Congress of Industrial Unions (CIO). They were the first West Coast union to join the new labor federation – doing so a few months before the ILWU. In 1947 the IBU joined the Seafarers' International Union (SIU), but left in 1979 over objections to what were seen as undemocratic and unethical practices. The following year saw a bitter strike by Washington State ferry workers; IBU leaders Don Liddle and Larry Miner were jailed for defying a court injunction. ILWU locals shut down the Puget Sound in solidarity; the move led to a settlement for ferry workers and the IBU affiliated with the ILWU on October 31, 1980.

Northern California Region

The IBU's Northern California Region currently has just under 250 full book members, most of whom work on the region's ferries. They also represent approximately 85 casual registrants that work out of the union hiring hall and are on their way to becoming full book members, according to Regional Director Robert Estrada. The Northern California IBU also represents workers on tour boats and the deck crew and engineers on Crowley and Foss tugs.

Organizing victories

Working with the ILWU's International Organizing Department, the Northern California IBU Region had two recent organizing victories: One at Alcatraz Cruises that organized captains, crew members, and other staff that provide ferry service to Alcatraz Island and a second that organized deck crew members, tankermen, engineers, and mates at Centerline/Leo Marine who operate bunker barges that

transport fuel to container ships in the San Francisco Bay. Alcatraz Cruise workers are still bargaining their first contract and workers at Centerline/Leo Marine recently ratified their first agreement with the company.

Opening opportunities

The region operates a hiring hall where out of work IBU members can pick up relief work, Estrada explained, adding that it's also an avenue for people without boat experience to get into the industry.

"After they get the proper documentation—a TWIC card, merchant mariners' credential, pass a drug test, various things like that," Estrada said, "we call them in groups as needed, and they take a 40-hour basic seamanship course. There are tests along the way to make sure they're learning what they have to learn. If they pass that 40-hour training period, we show them a video on ILWU history, so they understand the family that they're coming into and the historical background of what we do and what we're about. Then we give them a registration card and they're able to work and compete for jobs."

Building unity in the hiring hall

Estrada said the hiring hall is important for building the unity and strength of the union.

"The hall helps with both our militancy and the commitment of the members to the union. When workers come into the hiring hall, they know that it's a real place. They know that they have real officers and staff working on their behalf; they see it every day. They see us calling to fill jobs and talking to people. It's not an abstraction," said Estrada.

"And when we need to call on them for militancy, to show up at a rally, to stand up on their own behalf or on behalf of their fellow workers, they're willing to do it."

Rebuilding after COVID

The region is on the rebound from the impact of COVID, Estrada said.

"We were on a powerful trajectory upward, when COVID hit us," he explained. "There were millions of dollars going into the ferry system infrastructure in the Bay Area—for new terminals, vessels were being built, training—everything was just gangbusters. Then COVID hit and the ferry ridership dropped down to 3 percent. We are coming back as far as ridership—a lot has changed but we are still on a trajectory for growth. There are still plans for new infrastructure, ferries, and terminals in the region, and that's going to mean more demand for workers. Anybody who gets into the IBU at this time in the region is not on the ground floor but maybe the first or second floor for all that growth, so there's a lot of opportunity here."



Brian Dobruck Captain Alcatraz Cruises

I've been driving boats for 20-something years now. I started in marine biology and I ended up working in Hawaii for about 15 years maintaining and driving tour boats. I moved to San Francisco about 10 years ago for family reasons. I took a job with Alcatraz Cruises as a captain. I've been driving in San Francisco on the ferries for about 10 years. During my time at Alcatraz

Cruises, the captains in particular had talked about unionizing several times, but it never blossomed.

Just before COVID, in 2019, we started making a push for unionizing. Once COVID hit everything just went sideways and that all went out the window. A year after worked started back, we began having issues—the same issues that workers had concerns about before—scheduling, safety concerns, and just the regular things that concerned us. We wanted a voice on the job, so we decided to call the IBU and get the ball rolling again. They helped us do that.

The captains started the push for the whole thing. But the issues and the concerns that people had were not just limited to the captains, it was the whole crew and even other employees within the company. We knew that we wanted to involve the crew and we knew that the IBU represented a lot of boat crews in the Bay Area. As we talked to other workers—the maintenance department, the engineers, facility workers, and agents, they all seem to have the same concerns, the same or similar issues that the crew and captains had. We asked them if they wanted to be part of it. It was almost unanimous. When it came time to vote on the union, we had close to 90 percent of people voting to join the IBU.

I'm on the bargaining committee. The IBU and the International Organizing Department are helping us through this process, and to tell you the truth, it's painful. It's not easy at all. I don't know what I had in mind for this, but I knew it wasn't going to be easy. It's a lot of work. And I'm glad that we have experienced people working with us to get the best contract we can.

Larwence Thomas
Engineer
Foss Maritime

I started around 1998 when I was fresh out of high school. College wasn't in my future. I come from a family of longshoremen. I figured that at some point, I would be working down on the docks here in the Bay Area. Until then, my plan was to go out to sea, make a little money, maybe buy a house.

As an ordinary seaman (OS), it was very hard to get on a ship at the time. I needed sea time in order to get an able seaman (AB) cert and I was told the best way to do that was to be on tugboats. That's when I joined the IBU. I worked on ferries a little bit but it was hard at the time to make a transition from ferries to tugboats. I worked out of the hall for a couple of years and then I went to Masters, Mates & Pilots (MM&P) which had an easier path for me to get on tugboats. I got on with a local tugboat company, worked there for four years, and came back to the IBU around 2004, when I got a job with Foss Maritime as an engineer. I've been working at Foss ever since.

As an engineer my job is to make sure that everything on the boat always works perfectly. We have daily maintenance routines. There are certain components on a boat that need to be serviced every month, others that need to be serviced every quarter, others yearly, so you're always maintaining, doing basic upkeep and repair of everything on a vessel.

I like the immediate satisfaction of fixing something. If there's a problem, once you fix it and get the boat back on line, there's like an instant satisfaction. You feel the appreciation from your crewmates, the captain, and even the company who are all happy that you were able to get the boat back in service. I take pride in keeping things running in tiptop shape.

I see the union as a protector—not just in the maritime industry but for workers in general. Companies are based on profit. When a company is trying to cut back or save money, it's usually on the backs of labor—making cuts to pay and benefits and things of that nature. The union gives people like me a chance to earn a living wage. My oldest son just got an MBA. I was able to send him to college, and my youngest son is a freshman in college. This career has afforded me the ability to take care of my family and create an environment for them so they can excel and do better than I was able to do. I really appreciate that, and I want other people to have that same opportunity.

My role in the union is to be a champion and a force for young people, particularly in the African American community. I want young people who are coming up to have an opportunity, and know that this option is available to them, if college might not be for them. It just opens a whole new world. You can learn skills and you can grow into an industry. I think it's very important the union continues to do outreach in all communities, and specifically in communities that are underserved in our industry.



Jason Chilbert
Tankerman
Centerline Logistics

I got in when I turned 30 in 2014. My dad and a couple of my uncles had been in the maritime industry. I've always been around the industry in one way or another. I was doing odd jobs in AV and IT and then my dad mentioned that it was a good opportunity in the maritime industry. When I turned 30, I ended up joining the Sailor's Union of the Pacific (SUP). The plan was to get train as a tankerman.

In 2016, I ended up going to Foss and working on the bunker barges that deliver fuel to ships. Initially, they didn't have any positions available as a tankerman, so I worked as a deckhand for three years and learned the basics of deckhanding and calling distances. Eventually, I got into a tankerman position when a spot opened. I was able to get train under the best—older, seasoned tankermen that had been in the industry for 30 plus years.

As a tankerman you are the person in charge. You are the interface between the customer and Chevron. Tankermen perform the safety checks and oversee tying up the barge, connecting the hose, ensuring the safe transfer of the product, ensuring that the proper paperwork is filled out, and that all safety measures are taken into account. It's a lot of responsibility.

Foss was a good company to work for with a really good contract that the SUP guys worked really hard on refining and improving it for 30 years.

Foss ended up selling the bunker barges and operation in 2021 or late 2020 to Centerline Logistics. The job was basically the same, the equipment was the same, just under a new company. I was told that there wouldn't be a union. Then they put us in another union. That union had a reputation, according to my dad and uncles and some others I spoke with in the industry, as not necessarily being the best union to represent workers.

They negotiated a contract in like three days, and it was voted on by two people. We didn't really have a say. That just left a bad taste in my mouth especially after coming from Foss and benefiting from a really great contract with the SUP. It was a golden ticket; I got a little bit of a taste of working under that contract and being in a strong union.

Instead of leaving for another job, I decided I would stay and try to make things better for myself and other workers. I felt like it was my turn to step up and try to set a foundation for an organized labor movement in the new company.

We ended up voting to get the other union out and get the IBU in to represent us. It was important to us to have a union that had a relationship with the workers instead of a union that had a relationship with the employer.

We started organizing and seeing what people thought. Workers were on board to try and get something going and start a dialogue with the company. It took about two years for the whole process but we finally got it done and we just ratified our first contract.

It was a really good experience to start a movement from a grassroots level. It was really cool to see but it was also hard. It was a long road. We had to sustain this energy even through frustrations and hope it was going to pay off. Workers feel like we really did something special.

It's clear that organized labor is getting a footing once again, whether it be at Amazon, UPS, or Starbucks, and we are a part of that. I'm 39. I'm still considered on the younger side. But it's cool to hear people my age and younger hyping organized labor and forming unions. I remember when "union" was a four-letter word. Now workers are coming together and realizing that their labor is worth more than what the company says and are doing something about it. To be part of that is really special. It's a rewarding part of this job.

Celeste Farris
Blue & Gold Fleet

I joined the IBU in 1999 right after I graduated college and got my seniority at Blue and Gold about a year later. About 10 to 12 years ago, the company needed people splicing line—the line that we use to tie the boats up—and they were asking the IBU members to come off their shifts to do it because the guy who had been doing it left. I was asked if I was interested in learning. I already knew a little bit about splicing but not the big stuff that we used to tie the boats up. So that started that part of my career.



For years I was doing shifts on the boat and working in the line locker splicing line. Then for a while we had made an agreement with Blue & Gold at one of the joint labor relations meetings to create a position in the line locker as a full-time thing. So for a few years, I was doing that. That kind of fell apart when COVID hit. Last year in our contract negotiations, the position was put into the contract. I've been able to do this for about a year now full time.

It's more like a maintenance position because I do a lot of other stuff like painting and small projects on boats that don't require you to be an engineer. The engineers have a lot more important things to work on.

I think of the IBU as a big family. We've got our squabbles and stuff but in the end, we back each other up. When I was working on the boats, it was nice to have a whole crew with you to help out when things got crazy.

I feel incredibly lucky to have found this profession when I did, to get into it when I did, and learn from the guys that I learned from. This has been a great job. I'm so glad I'm doing this and not stuck in a building somewhere sitting at a desk all day and staring at a computer. I get to be outside most of the time. I'm just incredibly lucky to have found this and to be part of the IBU and to be in this industry.



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Weapons of the Boss: Racism and Anti-Trans Discrimination

Zack Pattin (ILWU Local 23) and Myka Dubay (ILWU Local 5 and ILWU International Executive Board) discuss their workshop from this year’s YWC Conference, “Weapons of the Boss: Racism and Anti-Trans Discrimination.” Zack walks us through the origins and context of the ILWU’s Ten Guiding Principles and Myka lays out the stakes of the current anti-trans backlash — and what it means for workers and our unions.

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