"The strongest bond of human sympathy, outside of the family relation, should be one uniting all working people of all nations, and tongues, and kindred."
Abraham Lincoln
What 1934 means today

by JIM HERMAN
ILWU International President

This fiftieth anniversary celebration has many meanings. It is first of all, a solemn memorial for the union men who gave their lives on this coast in the summer of 1934, so that those who came after could achieve through unionism a greater measure of security and dignity. It is also a time to remember the men and women who paid their dues on countless picket lines, who were beaten and jailed, and harassed by their employers. It is a time to remember all those leaders, sprung from the rank and file, who poured their life's energies into this union.

We can look back over the last half-century with enormous pride. Hundreds of thousands of working men and women got a better shake out of life because of what we have been able to do together. A group of essentially casual laborers welded themselves into an effective and disciplined fighting force, and won a decent way of life and the respect of the communities in which they live. They laid the basis for a democratic and progressive labor movement for the whole coast.

But more than anything else, it's a celebration of a rich and varied history. Many crimes have been committed against working people over the years—not the least of which is the destruction of our past. Educators and politicians have paid little attention to labor's contributions. And we, as union members are not blameless. We have not really educated our younger members, we have not made the past come alive for them, and therefore we have denied them an honest and wholesome perspective on the present or the future.

We can no longer afford the luxuries of indifference and ignorance. Over the past few years the labor movement has taken a series of body blows which have sapped its strength and put it on the defensive. These attacks originate in the White House and trickle down to the lowest regional office of the National Labor Relations Board. They begin in corporate offices of companies like Louisiana-Pacific and Phelps-Dodge, and work their way down to even the smallest employers.

We are concerned about the future of our jobs, the industries in which we work, the world that our children will inherit. We are therefore inclined more and more to look into the past for some sort of anchor, to discover our roots. We don't want just a few names and dates, but a living, ongoing story in which we can see ourselves as actors as well as spectators.

So as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Big Strike of 1934, it's time for a fresh look. Young workers in particular must look at "1934" and ask what relevance it has for them.

For the generation of West Coast workers who went through the depression, the answers are self-evident. The 1934 strike was the main event in their working lives, their passage into first-class citizenship. By establishing a solid union presence on the West Coast waterfronts, by doing away with the humiliation of the shape-up, the hiring hall and the company union, the 1934 strike changed the face of the waterfront forever.

The same might be said for the generation which came on during and after World War II. They may not have participated in the actual events of the strike, but their fathers and uncles had. As kids growing up in the 1930's, they had seen the changes—whether it was the growing stability of their family life, the increased self-respect of the adults around them, or a little more meat on the table. The generation of the 1950s and 1960s, those who put together the first pension and health and welfare programs, also understood that they were enjoying the payoff of the sacrifice of 1934. The "Big Strike" remained a vivid memory and it was clearly responsible for their being able to enjoy a degree of comfort and security undreamed of by their parents.

But what are we to say to the young people of today, people who are separated from the 1930s by the tremendous changes which have taken place in those years? For them, "1934" is a heroic dream of a golden age of American labor, when the labor movement was fresh and young, and things were a simple matter of right and wrong.

What was unique and so instructive about 1934, and, in fact about the whole CIO experience, was that it was a creative response to change in society. Over the past 50 years preceding the 1934 strike, American industrial life had changed dramatically. The village blacksmith became a steelworker in a huge plant. The assembly line diluted craft and skill acting as it was 1870, or thereabouts, with our little craft unions, jealous over our own spheres of control, concerned only about maintaining our jurisdiction, our burial societies, etc. The world was passing us by.

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The creative part of the CIO idea, as expressed on the waterfront, was unity of all workers. That meant the end of competition between the skilled man and the casual, it meant the hiring hall and equal work opportunity. It meant a coastwide contract, so that ports couldn't be played off against one another. It meant unity with the sailors. Industrial unionism succeeded so well because it fitted the circumstances of corporate development so well.

Now we are in a new age of rapid-fire change. Our employers are now in a position to make a leap toward total automation, to replace millions of American workers with robots and computers. At the same time, they have taken overseas large sectors of what's left of the American industrial base. McDonald's now employs more people than the entire US steel industry. Millions of American industrial workers are relegated to the ranks of the permanently unemployed, and the bargaining strength of those who remain is substantially weakened.

What is the role of American unions in this situation? We are again at a time when the same spirit of creativity which infused the 1934 strike and the whole CIO movement of the 30s must be revived; a time when we must create a new movement to make sure that the benefits of this so-called "high-tech" revolution are shared equally; to make sure that the next generation of technology serves us rather than controls us.

None of us have the answer nor the vision of where to go from here. But when we look back on the success of our father and grandfathers, we must be struck by the common sense of what they were all about. The bottom line for them—industrial unionism—was really summed up in the idea of unity of all workers. They wanted to break down jurisdictional and organizational lines which no longer made sense. That's why closer and closer cooperation between all unions is so important. We must pay more attention to developing multi-national connections between unions, so as to keep up with our leap-frogging employers as they move around the world in search of cheaper labor.

We cannot duplicate the conditions of 1934. The tactics and strategies of those days must be adapted to the 1980s and 1990s. But we can certainly continue to draw inspiration. We can borrow the approach of the leaders of those days going on around us, and assess the correct strategy. And we can borrow the basic concept of unity of all workers—whether expressed in the industrial unionism they preached or in any other form—which is absolutely essential to our survival.
The strike of 1934 was the third upheaval in the life of longshoremen in the past eighteen years. In 1916, the longshoremen, in the person of the IWU Local 38-79, the precursor of today's ILWU Local 10, San Francisco sometime in 1935.

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The men streamed into the union

Getting organized

From the oral history of Henry Schmidt, University of California Regional Oral History Office.

I.L.A. Local 58-76 failed out of existence either in 1916 or in 1919. There was a longshore strike in San Francisco which was not won and the union just wrapped up its books and closed the door, so to speak. It was an old-time longshoreman; he had been appointed as an organizer by the main office in New York. It was the right time and the right place to attempt to reorganize the San Francisco longshoremen. If I am not mistaken, he brought along an elderly man who had been a longshoreman two years ago and his name—

OLD-TIME LONGSHOREMAN—Holman was sort of sold on an idea. He was convinced that there was hardly anything better than an old-time longshoreman. He was always using that phrase. "I am an old-time longshoreman, this fellow's an old-time longshoreman." Once he made a speech in the Labor Temple and he said that he would give his life for the old-time longshoreman. That was not the right thing to say on that particular occasion because he didn't get any applause. It was a little bit overdone.

In any event, he came along in 1933. As I recall, it was a sort of streamed from the office and put down the so-called initiation fee, which was fifty cents; got a book, and it was the right time and the right place.

It also had something to do with that thing that was called the National Recovery Act, NRA, section 7a. It encouraged the men to understand that employers would not be in business until 1935 when a man would be confronted with the fact that they were engaged in an unlawful activity if they attempted to prevent workers from joining a union.

They were marched into the office and put down their fifty cents, and it was necessary to arrange for a meeting. I can't recollect now how a meeting was brought about. Apparently pressure was put on Holman by some of the fellows—Holman wouldn't recognize those people as old-time longshoremen, but those were the fellows that put the pressure on him to call a membership meeting specifically for the purpose of initiating new members and giving them what they call the obligation. I went to that meeting and this was where Holman made a few introductory remarks and became patriotic, in a manner of speaking, and said that he was willing to die for longshoremen.

I think that was the moment when Harry got up and said, "When are you going to initiate us and when are you going to give us the obligation?" I guess Harry indicated that he had become impatient with the other things that Holman said.

Anyhow, we took the obligation and became members at that moment, and we were made acquainted with the fact that there were certain obligations—that we would have a meeting every month. This particular meeting took place in the Labor Temple at Sixteenth and Capp Street in San Francisco. As I recall it, about all the business that was transacted was that the people who filled the hall were given an obligation. In any event, the most important thing that happened thereafter—must have occurred at another meeting—it was proposed that Local 58-76 contact other locals up and down the Coast, especially the local in Tacoma because that I.L.A. local had never folded up during the years prior to 1934. It had continued to function in Tacoma, and they had some kind of a hiring system which was controlled by the employers, as happened also to be the case in Seattle. The Coastwise secretary had an office in Tacoma. His name was Bjorgum.

Secretary Bjorgum must have given us some information with regard to whether or not some locals had gone out of existence, and called attention to those that had continued to live through these so-called lean years. He gave me the impression that he had been a leader in the trade union movement for many, many years, and I was impressed by his ability to make a talk to a group of people.

September, 1933—after forcing Matson to re-hire those who refused to pay their dues to the company union, men marched to a nearby vacant lot and burned their "fink books."

The Blue Book is on the way out. On Thursday, September 14, the stevedores working on the Matson dock, decided amongst themselves that the B. B. had ruled them long enough. The result was that when called on to show their books, the men refused and walked off the dock. The next day, a little discussion outside proceeded to tear up their B. B.'s and dump them in a pile on the sidewalk. Imagine, the feelings of Wicks and Red. It was the right time and the right place to attempt to reorganize the San Francisco longshoremen who were asking for a closed shop which, without which the other demands would be worthless. The convention went resolutely on record for a closed shop.

A BUNCH OF REDS

A delegation of twenty men was elected to go to the convention to present the demands to the shipowners. The shipowners called them a "bunch of communists" and refused to deal with them. They intimated, however, that they might be willing to discuss matters with the conservative, salaried union officials, but would have nothing to do with rank-and-file delegations.

When this report was carried back to the convention the men decided that if the employers had not acceded to their demands by March 23, if the demands were rejected, everybody on the coast would walk out on strike. It was decided also that the balloting be taken immediately in all ports to confirm the strike decision.

So George Creef, Regional Labor Director of California, advised employers to engage in conciliation conferences with local officials of the I.L.A. On March 5 such negotiations were opened.

Empire Daily turned down the demands outlined by the rank and file convention and entered into a long series of conferences. Reasons stated for turning down the demands was that each union was to give its own separate agreement, and that the men were asking for a closed shop which, in their opinion, was contrary to the provisions of the National Recovery Act.

In the meantime the strike ballot was completed in all ports with the result that a 99 per cent majority of the 14,000 coast longshoremen voted to walk out on March 23 if the demands were rejected.

While ship owners engaged in totally unproductive negotiations, the men on the docks proceeded with arrangements. When it was decided that they elected a rank-and-file strike committee of fifteen in the hope of the first attempt at regular preparations were afoot in other ports.

Job Action

Waterfront Worker, September 15, 1933.

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The following, walking the sidewalk on Five Mile short time and cleared out pit was that the longshoremen on the waterfront are definitely through with the B. B. Don't let this action go unsupported.

All longshoremen must stand ready to back up the action taken by the gangs on those days and to see that the I.L.A. also gives its full support.

I.L.A. delegates that were present at the time of the walkout, and who gave the longshoremen a great deal of unofficial support deserve credit. But, we might ask, why?

Red, Bryan and Wicks, when they left the docks after their conference with the Matson Company officials, were asked by some of the men, "Well, what are you going to do about it?"

They replied that they were going to stick with it, and for a moment. It looked as if they were in for a tough time, but that quickly jumped into their machines and beat it, followed by a great chorus of howls and hoots.

The Blue Book smashed!

Waterfront Worker, February 26, 1934.

Swayne & Hoyt (Sweet and Hurry) had a gang up at Crockett, awhile back, loading sugar. They were swinging 24 sacks to a load. The holdmen were worked at such a speed that they couldn't stand up under the speed-up, so they hung the hook. The boss pleaded with the men to work the men agreed—after two more men were added to the gang, and when the understandings day the third day they would go back to swinging 18 sacks to a load.

Being Careful


We kept pretty quiet at first. Nearly every day, at noon time, the guys would sit out a few of them would have a crap game they would sit out a few of them might have a hundred people out there we had about ten thousand men in the shipyards. Well, we'd all congregate out there in the morning and at the end of the day, and the I.L.A. organizers would move down there and people, telling the men, "you got to get organized. You got to be making millions and you're not makin' a living." And some time the partner would say, "they don't say nothing you got a big son of a bitch right next to you." So you had to be careful.
Marches down the Embarcadero by striking longshoremen were met by mounted police with billy clubs and tear gas.

Pickets and scabs
From The Turbulent Years, by Irving Bernstein

At 5 p.m. on May 9 longshoremen struck in Bellingham, Seattle, Tacoma, Aberdeen, Portland, Astoria, Grays Harbor, San Francisco, Oakland, Stockton, San Pedro, San Diego, and the small ports. Almost 2000 ships were tied up tight.
The ILA established picket lines at all ports. In San Francisco 100 men paraded two abreast with the American flag at the head of their column. Along the three and one half miles of the Embarcadero the corrugated steel gates to the piers slammed shut and electrified barbed wire blocked the entrances. Police patrolled the docks on foot, in radio-cruise cars, on motorcycle, on horseback.

SCABS RECRUITED
The employers tried to operate in face of the strike. They ran advertisements in the newspapers: "Longshoremen wanted; experience desirable but not necessary." They offered the Blue Book rates—$85 an hour and $1.25 overtime—plus $1.50 a day and meals and lodging.

Bill Ingram, the football coach at the University of California, recruited students and was called the "scab incubator." Several vessels, notably the Diana Dollar became floating boardinghouses. A strike-breaker, writing later in Reader's Digest under the name Theodore Daurein, described the life as "scab's paradise." "The men, he said, were "pasty-faced clerks, house-to-house salesmen, college students, and a motley array of the unemployed who had never shouldered anything heavier than a BVD strap before in their lives," along with some "hard nuts" from Chicago and Los Angeles. While they could lift loads, they never learned to stow cargo properly.

TEAMSTERS HELP
But strikebreaking had little impact upon the effectiveness of the walkout. Scabs only unloaded vessels in the congested port. The shipowners could not load cargo and on May 15 for the first time in the history of the industry no freighter sailed from a Pacific Coast port. Here the longshoremen won decisive help from San Francisco:

The ILA announced that the purpose of the walkout was self-protection; his men "might be come involved in fights and might result." Some were not squeamish. Immediately following the meeting a brigade of teamsters marched to the Embarcadero to join the picket line. Teamsters in Seattle, Oakland, and Los Angeles took similar action.

"Something to do"
(Henry Schmidt oral history)
The soup kitchen committee established a facility right around the corner from the union headquarters. That facility faced the Embarcadero. They put up, in due time, a very efficient thing—must have fed hundreds of meals during the strike.

We had begging committees, and of course, we went out begging letters all over the nation. Especially, we in San Francisco contacted the labor movement and it was quite successful. A fellow came down from the Chauffeurs' Union and he said, "I don't know how much money we've got in the treasury, but we're going to send you fifteen hundred dollars a week as long as it lasts." And they did. I don't know how long it lasted.
The fact of the matter is that when the strike was over we had more money in Local 38-75's treasury than we did when it started.

"KEEP THE GUYS BUSY"
And we put up a good fight in spite of the tear gas and the cops and the guns. One of the things that happened, somebody said to me, "We've got to keep these guys busy, have to give them something to do.

This business of you going down there and holding an open-air meeting across the street from the union headquarters—there was a gasoline station there and there was some space—that won't do. You have to have more things to do." I guess it was pointed out to this fellow that we had fourteen or seventeen people working the soup kitchen, but the answer was, "That keeps those guys busy. The other guys have to picket. There were people around who were in their opinion, experienced scab chasers. They do their stuff in the middle of the night, or whenever.

MARCHES
I don't know where I got the idea, but I know that I did talk to a fellow by the name of Johnny Olson (who later became vice-president of Local 10) and I said, "What about parading up and down the waterfront and taking a soapbox along and when we get to the end of the line get up on there and make a speech?" John said, "Well, let's try it." He said that he was a pretty good drummer boy to keep tempos.

So we started off and marched up and down in the waterfront, maybe not exactly to stop, but in column. We would march from the Ferry Building to Fisherman's Wharf, or from the Ferry Building to the other direction towards the Dollar docks, which would be Pier 48. We would be marching, if we went south, against the automobile traffic, but if we marched towards Fisherman's Wharf we would be marching with the traffic.

COPS ATTACK
There were things to do to everyday, and once in awhile this business got quite serious. One day we started out to march south from the Ferry Building. I was not at the head, I was marching with Johnny Olson with about fourteen or fifteen marchers ahead of us. And then there was the flag, and the guys up in front swung onto the sidewalk.

It came as if it were prearranged—hose cops from all directions and just rode into us. Schomaker got beat up and Willie Christiansen got beat up—he was too heavy to get out of the way, anyway—and we were scattered in all directions. Then they shot us. There was an empty lot alongside the Seaboard Hotel and many of us ran through that lot towards Steuart Street. I was really running. I fell flat on my face for purpose because I could hear the bullets flying over my head—or maybe I thought I did, you know.

The Seamen's strike
Waterfront Worker, May 21, 1934

When the stevedores called their strike a week ago Wednesday and girded upon all workers in and around the marine industry to support them, they received that support and nearly 100%.

Seamen of all ratings walked off the ships. Teamsters refused to handle scab cargo.
The seamen, seeing in the longshoremen's strike the opportunity for not only showing their workingclass solidarity but also the opportunity to strike for their own demands.

First, a mass strike conference was called by the Marine Workers Industrial Union, of all organized and unorganized seamen representing nearly 3000 men in the port. A United Front Strike Committee was formed, and the time for the strike was set for May 12, at 8 p.m.

When this time arrived the seamen of 17 ships walked off the ships, despite the fact that the union was not on strike.

Finally, at the demand of the rank and file, they were off their ships anyway, the International Seamen's Union (ISU) leadership declared a strike anyway.

The importance of keeping the support of the seamen, passed a resolution that there would be no settlement until the seamen had won their demands.

On Friday night. May 15, an official conference of all seamen's organizations was held in the ISU hall, and certain agreements in regard to wages and hours were established.
'Blood flows on SF Battleground'

by Royce Brier in San Francisco Chronicle, July 6, 1934

Blood ran red in the streets of San Francisco yesterday. In the darkest day this city has known since April 18, 1906, 10,000 embattled police held at bay 5,000 longshoremen and their sympathizers in a snarling front of Market street and east of Second street.

One was dead, one was dying, 14 others shot and more than two score sent to hospitals. The purpose of it all was this: The State of California had said it would operate its waterfront railroad. The strikers had defined the State of California to do it. The police had to keep them from doing it. They did.

The Police Department was doing a day's work. It was working at the limit of its capacity to maintain some semblance of order. Technically the strike had lost that battle Tuesday, but now there was something else. The State Belt engines were puffing up and down.

At Bryant and Main streets were a couple of hundred strikers in an ugly mood. Police Captain Arthur de Guire decided to clear them out, and set his men on them with tear gas. The strikers ran, scrabbling up Rincon Hill and hurling back rocks.

Proceed now one block away, to Harrison and Main streets. Four policemen are there, about 500 of the mob are on the hill. Those four cops look like good game.

"Come on, boys," shouted the leaders. They tell how the lads of the Confederacy had a war cry that was a holy terror. There's a lot of them kids in their teens, come down that hill with a whoop, and mixed blood and yelling. One policeman stood behind a telephone pole to shelter himself from the rocks and started firing with his revolver.

Up the hill, up Main, came de Guire's men on the run, afoot and the "mounties." A few shots started whizzing from up the hill, just a scattering few, with a high hum, like the hum of your boyhood.

Then de Guire's men, about 20 of them, unlimbered from Main and Harrison and fired at random up the hill. The downpouring shot halted, hesitated, and started scattering up the hill again.

Here the first man fell, a curious bystander. The gunfire fell away.

Up came the tear gas boys, six or eight carloads of them. They hopped out with their masks on, and the gas guns laid down a barrage on the hillside. That hillside spouted blue gas like the Valley of the Ten Thousand Smokes.

Up the hill went the moppers-up, phalanxes of policemen with drawn revolvers. The strikers backed sullenly away on Harrison street, past Fremont street. Suddenly came half a dozen carloads of men from the Bureau of Inspectors, and right behind them a truckload of shotguns and ammunition.

RINCON HILL CLEARED

In double quick they cleared Rincon hill. Ten police cars stuck their noses over the brow of the hill. More came in from a street railway on its belly. So do strikers and police, and even newspapermen.

Now it is 10 o'clock. Rumors of the coming of the soldiery fly across the town. The strikers are massing down at the foot of Mission and Howard streets, where a Belt Line freight is moving through.

Massed there, too, the tear gas squads, the rifle and shotgun men, the mounted. Not a sign of a machine gun so far. But the cops have 'em. There's plenty of talk about the "typewriter." There they go again into action, the gas boys. They're going up the stately little streets from the Embarcadero to Steuart street, half blocks up Mission and Howard.

Across by the Ferry building are thousands of spectators. Boom! go the gas guns, boom, boom, boom, boom. Around the corners, like sheep pouring through a gate, go the rioters, but they don't go very far. They stop at some distance, say half a block away, wipe their eyes a minute, and in a moment back comes a barrage of rocks.

Here is the hottest part of the battle from now on, along Steuart street from Howard to Market. No mistake about that. It centers near the I.L.A. headquarters.

MASSED FRONT

See the mounties ride up toward that front of strikers. It's massed across the street, a solid front of men. Take a pair of opera glasses and look at their faces. They are challenging the oncoming mounties.

The men in front are kneeling, like snipers at the mark. Center, clatter, clatter come the bricks. Tinkles goes a window. This is war, boys, and this Steuart street between Howard and Mission is one of the warmest spots American industrial conflict ever saw.

The horses rear. The mounted police dodge bricks.

A police gold braid stands in the middle of the street all alone, and he blows his whistle. Up come the gas men, the shotgun men, the rifle men. The rioters don't give way.

Crack and boom! Sounds just like a gas bomb, but no blue smoke this time. Back scrambles the mob, and two men lie on the sidewalk. Their blood trickle in a crimson stream away from their bodies.

Over it all spreads an air of unutterable confusion. The only organization seem to lie in the little squads of officers hurrying hither and yon in automobiles. Strips keep up a continual screaming in the streets, you can hear them far away.

Now it was 2 o'clock. The street battle had gone on for an hour. How many were shot, no one knew. Maybe they dragged some of the wounded up to I.L.A. headquarters. Yes, they did exactly that.

HAD HOUR'S REST

But you couldn't get near the small groups of armed rioters on pain of your life. You had to wait for the police to mop up a new sector, and then you could look around and see if any men were lying in the street.

One sector was a score of casualties seemed to be enough for a while. Police consolidated their position at Mission and Steuart. Man, how these battles have moved from place to place! The Police Department was doing a day's work. It was working at the limit of its capacity to maintain some semblance of order. They still had the machine guns, but there were noncombatants in the streets. There were office buildings with rush onlookers crowded at the windows.

Yes, they just had to fight it out on these lines for a little while yet. Perhaps the troops would come. All afternoon the militia was mobilizing.

HAD HOUR'S REST

Now, it was apparently win or die for the strikers in the next few hours. The time from 3 o'clock to 5 o'clock dragged for the police, on the wings of the wind for the rioters. An hour's rest, they had to have that one hour.

At 5 o'clock the sympathy front merged once more at Steuart and Mission streets.

Here was a corner the police had and had to hold. It was the key to the water front, the strategic key, and it was in the shadow of I.L.A. headquarters.

The rocks started filling the air again. They crashed through street cars. Some brave motorists on those street cars. They stopped. Citizens huddled inside.

AGAIN BLOOD FLOWS

The police started firing again, revolver shots, rifle shots, perhaps a blast or two from a shotgun. Again men fell in the streets. Blood trickled slowly down the slanting sidewalks.

Panic gripped the east end of Market street. The ferry crowds were being involved. You though again of Budapest. The troops were on their way. Soldiers. SOLDIERS IN SAN FRANCISCO! WAR IN SAN FRANCISCO!
July 3-5, 1934
Puget Sound

For the first few days of the strike, peaceful picketing began to gather from as far away as Everett and Tacoma to concentrate their efforts on the three remaining terminals which continued to load cargo, or the longshoremen (about one-third of the total in the Puget Sound area), 600 seamen, and the employers would, at the least, have damaged the maritime unions. And they agreed to hire ship crews under terms acceptable to the longshoremen. They agreed to hire only union members in Alaska ports. Also the employers agreed to reopen the Alaska trade and promises did not soon reach them. At length, the level of violence on the docks rose dramatically. Confrontations between union pickets and police, trying to protect the strikebreakers, occurred daily. In response, the ILA pulled its men off the Alaska ships and vowed not to return to the docks. Despite tremendous efforts to get cargo moving again, the port remained closed.

CITIZEN COMMITTEES

The employers also began organizing “Citizens’ Committees” in the various ports, including Seattle and Tacoma, to break the strike by recruiting strikebreakers, lobbying elected officials, and giving the illusion of public support for the employers’ positions. In Seattle, the Citizens Committee paid the salaries of the police and special deputies on strike duty. Soon, “streams of trucks and box cars rushed goods for Alaska from Seattle to Tacoma” and the port began “humming” again.

Portland

On May 10, the Portland Stevedoring Co. advertised in the Oregonian: “Better Stop. Look, Listen, for you will lose this strike... (it) has already cracked in J.A. and S.F. We remember 1922. Better come to work while your jobs are still open.”

Ad also appeared asking for 500 men to work the docks, and notifying the strikers if they did not report by 8 a.m., they would be fired.

Strike Headquarters was located in French’s Restaurant, across the street from the employer’s hiring hall at 9th and Everett.

A FULL FINK HALL

“When we got down there that morn- ing,” said pensioner Toby Christianen, “the fink hall was full of scale—they must have been there all night! About 8 a.m., three buses came to take them to Terminal

“I said to Fred Flank, ‘Fill ‘em up with pickets so the scales can’t get in.’ But Com Negrad (an ILA official) objected, so we unloaded the boxes, and I said, ‘Let the air out of the tires—those wheels ain’t going anywhere!’ Then the head bus driver said he was afraid the tires would pop. We just wouldn’t let them go. We made an aisle and let them through.

The May 11 Oregonian told the story this way:


The next encounter with strikebreakers was on the SS Savannah. They had a barricade set up to keep us from going through, but I was helped over and created a diversion, and the pickets swarmed aboard. Some of the scabs jumped in the river, those that didn’t were helped in. That broke up their playhouse.”

LOGGERS SUPPORT

There was a massive turnout of both ILA and lumbermen from downriver the day they tried to reopen the port, said Toby. They had to be fed, as did the seamen who joined the strike from the 27 ships tied up in the Ballard Locks. Then a few hundred longshoremen showed up to help the employers open the port. “The employers called for paddy wagons and the workers of the ILA and the Forest Industries threw in their support. The next night 3,000 or so men were on the docks in an attempt to break up the longshoremen’s cause. In mid-May, the labor group passed a resolution pledging to ‘advocate a general strike if the National Guard was called in to help the employers open the port.’ The Waterfront Employers Assn. and Mayor Joe Carson were forced to make do with special police.

On May 24, with Carson’s connivance, Terminal 4 was turned into an armed camp, complete with machine guns, cables, and charging of cargo. Facilities for the housing and feeding of specials and scabs were set up.

Scabs who arrived in the Terminal the whole time. Some were sneaking in and out to work the docks. We threw blocks on our pickets, but their checks didn’t.”

On July 11, they tried to move a train into the Terminal.

“The old stern-wheeler... We rushed down to the dock, about 300 of us. The scabs sent the head bus driver said ‘we won’t beat them up. We made an aisle and let them through.’

The Oregon Labor Press of July 13, 1934, takes up the story—continued on page 9

Longshoremen and cops fought a bitterly at Seattle’s Smith Cove on the morning of July 20, 1934. Here, a striker, partially overcome by tear gas, is hauled off by Seattle police.

—photo courtesy Seattle Times

Wells Standard Oil Company docks who were protecting a scab crew. In the melee, Shelley S. Daifron, a member of ILA Local 38-12, was shot in the back by a guard. Several other strikers were injured. A few hours later Daifron died of his wounds.

By now tension was so acute that Charley Reynolds, chairman of the Regional Labor Board in Seattle, urged the city to accept the longshoremen’s offer to lift the ban on Alaska ships in exchange for removal of the police from the docks. The Seattle employers and Mayor Smith refused to relent, but the proposal had the desired effect in Tacoma. The Tacoma operators agreed to load the ships under union conditions and withdraw the guards and strikebreakers. Soon, “streams of trucks and box cars rushed goods for Alaska from Seattle to Tacoma” and the port began “humming” again.

Coast unity made the difference in 1934
"Poor longshoremen, injured at terminal 4. Police use shotguns and revolvers. The bloody scenes enacted in San Francisco (on July 5) were duplicated in Portland Wednesday morning.

"Police Chief Lawson was in the cupola of the caboose, next to the engine... strikers say he fired the first shot and ordered his men to show to kill."

"The paper reported that the four injured men, Elmas Beatty, Peter Stevenson, Ben Yates and W. Huntinton, were shot above the waist."

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"BLOODY SHIRT

Beatty was shot in the head, the bullet entering his mouth, passed under his tongue and lodged near the base of his brain."

"Longshoremen, with police pistols leveled on them, carried him over the bumpers between the cars to an automobile."

"That afternoon Matt Meehan, ILA's representative on the Portland Labor Council's Assembly Committee and eight other members of the committee, including Agnes Quinn of the Waitresses Union, marched into City Hall with Beatty's bloodstained shirt."

"This blood is on your hands, Joe!" Meehan said, flinging the shirt on the Mayor's desk. Carson never lived down the name, "Bloody Shirt Joe."

"The labor representatives demanded the immediate dismissal of Chief Lawson and removal of all special police from the public docks."

"Commissioners Riley, Bennett and Clyde agreed. They were overruled by the Mayor. However, Carson and the Police Department came under heavy criticism."

"This mounted after it was learned that children playing in the park that bright Sunday, that the federal government would intervene. Nevertheless, Los Angeles Police Department contracted with the Burns Detective Agency to furnish guards, and a pool of $85,000 was established by steamship companies and held at the company hiring hall for disbursement."

"They kept all their scabs in a big bull pen on Terminal Island, the late Archie Royal remembered. "It was really a big circus tent where they ate and slept. It was fenced in. They took them to the docks in big trucks with mesh wires on the windshield. We fought every day and picketed every day. One time at Pier 90 we raided a ship, and made 40 of the scabs jump into the bay."

"THE MAY 14 RAID

In the first days of the strike, only about 300 pickets walked the dock area. As shipping operations continued, at almost normal level, however, this number was increased to approx. 1,800, with union seamen and teamsters joining the picket lines. Although clashes between police and strikers occurred frequently, there was no serious disturbance until the night of May 14, when some 300 strikers stormed a strikebreakers' stockade in the west basin of LA harbor. One striker was killed by a special deputy, six were wounded and a score or more were injured in the noises that ensued. Here's how Royal remembered it:

"We were going to raid one of the bullpens in Wilmington. There was an electrician we knew, a union man, who said he'd pull the switch and turn out the lights at 11 p.m. But he didn't do it. So we attacked anyway and knocked out the big search lights with rocks. All hell broke loose. We went around the north side where there was a fence, and I saw a guy tearing the fence down. It was Dickie Parker and I saw him go down. I'm sure the guy who shot him was the cop named Hache from the red squad." Another striker Tom Knudsen, suffered injuries that night that caused his death.

"Fires were started and when the fire department came, we cut the hoses. Me and "Mexican Joe" Hernandez fought together, back to back. I gave him my camp axe to use. I used a billy club. We burnt the camp down, and cleaned out the locals pretty good. The cops brought in reinforcements from LA, but by that time the job was done, we scattered."

"They came and arrested me at five in the morning. Pulled me out of bed in my long underwear. I'd gotten home at about 2 a.m. I remember all the kids crying. It was like the Gestapo. They held me in jail without charges for 72 hours. No one knew where I was. In jail, they turned on the air conditioners at night and the heat during the day. When I went before the judge, he said, 'Now Royal, you're a family man, you shouldn't be fighting.' I said, 'Hell, I'm fighting for my family.'"

"LA Harbor

Although the overwhelming majority of the San Pedro dock workers, numbering about 3,000 answered the strike call, members of the Longshoremen's Mutual Protective Association continued to work. This group had been formed several days before the strike, by about 300 dock workers."

"Waterfront employers in Southern California backed on a short strike because of the large reserves of unemployed, division among maritime leaders, and confidence that the federal government would intervene. Nevertheless, Los Angeles Police Department contracted with the Burns Detective Agency to furnish guards, and a pool of $85,000 was established by steamship companies and held at the company hiring hall for disbursement."

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Bustling Center of 1,000,000 Takes on Appearance of 'Ghost Town'

Paralyzing Effects of Great General Strike Begin to Show

San Francisco, under nearly a million people, yesterday lost much of the hustle of a great California metropolis as the growing effects of the forthcoming general strike began to show their presence.

Business as usual? Not on these streets.

Bustling center of 1,000,000 takes on appearance of 'Ghost Town'.

Strike Developments

General Strike—Mayor Brown moves to appeal general situation to acquire means of community food and protection. Strikes organized even police forces. Municipal Railway to continue to operate. Market Street and cable car service will be suspended.

San Francisco Bay and Southern Pacific ferry service will be suspended.

Bay Zone Scene of Violence on Walkout Eve

Business as usual? Not on these streets.
Monday July 16—without the aid of streetcars, buses, or taxicabs, commuters had to find their own way up Market Street

Although the deadline for a general strike was not until 8 a.m. on Monday, July 16, 1934, the walkout was largely in effect Sunday. All but a few streetcars had stopped running. Taxicabs had disappeared from the streets. Countless grocery stores, already stripped of most of their stocks by anxious housewives, had closed their doors and put signs in their windows, "closed till the boys win," or "closed for the duration of the general strike."

Governor Merriam, from Sacramento, had already instructed that food trucks should be sent into the city under armed convoy. He stated, "I am placing at the disposal of each sheriff of his county the State Highway Patrol. I am determined nothing shall interfere with the movement of food supplies."

Mayor Rossi issued a proclamation suspending all provisions of the city charter during the emergency, and taking full reins of dictatorship in his own hands, with freedom to act without recourse to usual formalities and procedure.

In a second proclamation he urged citizens to cooperate with police and civic authorities in breaking the strike. He said, "The present issue being clearly defined, I ask support only from those completely committed in their hearts to the American form of government, in being my intention that those who seek the destruction of this government shall find no comfort in this community."

The paralysis on the morning of July 16 was effective beyond all expectation. To all intents and purposes, industry was at a standstill. The machinery of commerce was a lifeless, helpless hulk.

Highways leading into the city bristled with steel-helmeted troops carrying formidable rifles. All in the city were either marching or situated at street intersections. The workers had left it—instruments, equipment, tools, machinery, raw materials, and the buildings themselves. When the men walked out they took only what belonged to them—their labor. And when they took that they meant as well as they could.

Everything was there, all intact as the workers had left it—crafts, implements, tools, machinery, raw materials, and the buildings themselves. When the men walked out they took only what belonged to them—their labor. And when they took that they meant as well as they could.

Alarming editorials warned that communism had seized control of the business districts. But if the most carnivorous spirit was apparent in working-class neighborhoods, laboring men appeared on the streets in their Sunday clothes, shiny capped union buttons glistening on every coat lapel. Common social barriers were swept away in the spirit of the occasion. Strangely addressed each other warmly as old friends, labor wore its new-found power with calm dignity.

In the absence of labor, giant machinery bemoaned as much idle junk. Labor had withdrawn its hand. The workers had drained out of the plants and shops like life-blood, leaving only a skeleton framework embodying millions of dollars worth of invested capital. In the absence of labor, giant machinery bemoaned as much idle junk.

In all streets and a cordon of troops flung around the area. Guards with bayoneted rifles stood outside the National Guard Armory on Mission Street. Truckloads of men hand-carrying formidable automatic rifles lent a war-time atmosphere as they passed through the streets.

Chief Quinn, in the Hall of Justice on Kearny Street, was busy swearing in his 500 additional policemen.

A long line of laborers they passed through the streets of San Francisco. The sale of intoxicating liquors was prohibited by the strike committee as a precaution for preserving order.

All theaters, night clubs, and barrooms were shut down. The sale of intoxicating liquors was prohibited by the strike committee as a precaution for preserving order.

Pictorial history on sale

The Big Strike, A Pictorial History of the 1934 San Francisco General Strike, is now on sale, featuring more than 150 photographs, paintings, and pencil sketches, and a narrative by well-known author Warren Hinckle and an introduction by Harry Bridges.

The book is printed in black and brown duotone, and includes work by photographers Dorothea Lange, John Guttman and Joe Rosenthal, and unpublished sketches by Maynard Dixon. The 108-page book costs $11.95, plus 50c for postage and handling (union members receive a 20% discount). From Silver Dollar Books, P.O. Box 695, Virginia City, Nevada 89440.
What was it all about?

by HARRY BRIDGES
ILWU President International President Emeritus

Something special happened in the spring and summer of 1934. Maritime workers who had been considered little more than ignorant rousters took history into their own hands. They built a powerful new movement from the ground up, waged a complex and bitter strike along the length of the Pacific seaboard, and conducted the only successful General Strike in the country's history. They proved that they could win, and win big. Their success stimulated hundreds of thousands of other workers to organize. In the long run they raised the standard of living of nearly every man, woman and child on the coast, and created working conditions which became the envy of millions of workers in the rest of the nation.

Today, we are inclined to take these victories more or less for granted. It's hard for us to keep in mind just how hard they came. It's hard to imagine a time when unions had no legal standing, when it was practically illegal to picket, when workers were absolutely at the mercy of their employers. As bad as things have gotten for unions these days, we're still not back to where we were before 1934.

It's also interesting to recall how hard it was for people, who should have known better, to understand what was going on. Take the daily press for example. The editorial policy of virtually every newspaper on the coast was to write the whole thing off as a communist plot. The Chronicle published a front-page editorial saying that the strike was not a legitimate labor-management dispute but an effort by a bunch of Reds, under direct orders from Moscow, to cripple trade, create anarchy and eventually seize the government. They were forever appealing to the "real" "American" leaders of labor to wake up and toss out this Bridges character and his bunch. (The fact is that the only newspapers which supported us were the Catholic Monitor and the Western Worker, ancestor of today's People's World.)

The shipping employers and the whole crowd in the Chamber of Commerce and the Industrial Association also missed the boat. They thought that they could hire scabs to do our work. They thought they could starve us out. And finally, when it came down to it, they thought they could use the police and the National Guard to beat us and shoot us and intimidate us into submission. After all, these tactics had worked in the past.

But the real story, which they all missed, was the tremendous understanding of the members of our union and their families, the members of the AFL unions, and most of the labor leadership—those "real Americans" that the papers were always talking about. Take a guy like Michael Casey, International Vice-President of the Teamsters and one of the most respected labor leaders in San Francisco. Casey was in most ways a very conservative man. But he had more than 30 years in the labor movement, in good times and terrible times, and his loyalties ran deep. His cooperation, despite the enormous amount of pressure placed on him by the employers, made our victory possible.

The same gut solidarity pulled us through after Bloody Thursday, when Nick Bordoise and Howard Sperry were killed. We never meant for anyone to lose his life. Many of the members of our strike committee figured we were licked. We'd given a pretty good accounting of ourselves, but we knew we couldn't go on fighting the police every day, let alone the National Guard. The logical result of Bloody Thursday—as had happened so many times before—was that the union would be broken and the men would slowly trickle back to work.

But we counted on people like Mike Casey, and so many other people like him. Sure, most of them didn't agree with us on many things. We had some pretty wild ideas. But they understood that if they allowed the police to shoot down strikers, or resolve labor problems by bringing in the National Guard, we were all done for. Their loyalty and support laid the groundwork for victory.

We've come a long way since then. Imagine trying to explain pensions, and health and welfare, let alone a guarantee, to one of our guys back then. Imagine his reaction to some of the wage increases we've won. And try telling him about women working on the docks!

But also, you've got to imagine telling the same guy that the movie actor he saw galloping across the screen on Saturday afternoon would one day be president and the most bitterly anti-worker president in the history of this country. Imagine his reaction to some of the shenanigans of the courts and the NLRB. Imagine trying to explain containers and computers. The problems of the modern worker are so much more complex, so much more puzzling.

And so they ask, 50 years later, what was it really all about?

First of all, it was about power. We showed the world that when working people get together and stick together there's little they can't do.

Second, it was about democracy. We said that the rank and file had the right to decide, and that if you gave them the facts, they'd make the right decision.

Finally, it was about how people treat one another, it was about human dignity. We forced the employers to treat us as equals, to sit down and talk to us about the work we do, how we do it, and what we get paid for it.

Pretty basic stuff. But all those gains are today under the most sustained and vicious attack we've seen in more than a generation. The employers, with the connivance of the Reagan administration, have made mincemeat of the rights guaranteed to us by the legislation passed under the New Deal. It looks as though they've decided that the sky's the limit, and that now is the time to take full advantage of the newly favorable climate.

But I believe that the principles for which we fought in 1934 are still true and still useful. Whether your job is pushing a four-wheeler or programming a computer, I don't know of any way for working people to win basic economic justice and dignity except by being organized into a solid, democratic union.

Sure, we may be taking a beating now, as we were in the years before 1934, but that's nothing new. What saved us then was our faith in each other, standing together despite what the employer did to intimidate and divide us, and to discredit our leadership. We showed the world that united working people could stand up against guns and tear gas, against the press and the courts, against whatever they threw at us. We can do it again.