Labor Day rally, 1940s.

Citizen Bridges on the steps of San Francisco City Hall.

At the Local 10 hall. —photo by Sid Roger

BY JIM HERMAN
ILWU International President

The death of ILWU President Emeritus Harry Bridges on March 30, 1990 is, of course, a source of great sadness for all of us. I know I speak for all of the active and retired members of our union, and millions of working people all across America, in expressing our deepest compassion to Harry's family.

But it is also a time for celebrating a life filled with good times, great victories and monumental accomplishments. The achievements of Harry Bridges, and of the remarkably talented group of people who worked with him in building this union, are with us every day, in nearly every aspect of our lives.

This is also a time for all of us to remember the agonizing difficulties involved in building this union, and the terrible attacks to which Harry and those around him were subjected, precisely because of his leadership role. We remember without bitterness, but rather with respect for the fact that Harry took these hits on our behalf.

As Harry said when he retired, "I got to play a small part in some of the great events of this century. I got the testimonials, I got to meet all kinds of famous people. I was also the one that got attacked, red-baited, called every name every under the sun. All of this stuff, the good and the bad, came about because the rank and file of this union chose to elect me as their representative. The praise I got really belonged to the members of this union, and the attacks on me were all directed at them."

This edition of The Dispatcher is respectfully dedicated to the memory of a life well-lived, in the service of working people all over the world.
The following Statement of Policy was adopted unanimously by the ILWU International Executive Board, meeting in San Francisco April 4-5, 1990.

Harry Bridges was the heart and soul of the American labor movement. He was a towering figure, whose life gave shape and meaning to an era.

In his absolute commitment to militant, democratic trade unionism, Harry represented the best of the generation of visionaries who built the modern labor movement. A labor leader of national stature, he was also in the forefront of major social movements for equality, for civil liberties, for peace.

Under Harry's leadership, from the Big Strike of 1934 until his retirement in 1977, the ILWU transformed labor relations on the west coast docks, providing dignity and security for workers who had previously been subject only to the whim of the employer and the hiring boss. He led the union as it carried its strength uptown, into the warehouse, distribution and other industries, and over to Hawaii where it brought a paternalistic colonial economy and social structure into the twentieth century.

Under Harry's leadership the ILWU pioneered in the development of health and welfare and pension benefits. It set the stage for the modernization of cargo-handling technology, establishing a model of how mechanization could be achieved in a humane manner. Most important, under Harry's leadership, the ILWU became the vehicle by which hundreds of thousands of working people made vital contributions to the welfare of their communities, and achieved a new level of respect and recognition.

Harry Bridges had a unique ability to relate his sweeping personal vision to the practical necessities of leading a union. He was a superb negotiator and organizer. The union he leaves behind is the best and most fitting monument to his passion for democracy, and his commitment to a better world for all people.
In 1920, Harry Bridges walked down the gangplank of an Australian sailing ship and set foot on the San Francisco waterfront for the first time. Only 19 years old, he was a seasoned 3-year veteran of the high seas. His young eyes had already seen so much. Images of worldwide poverty and disease haunted him. As a sailor, he knew first hand about isolation, miserable and humiliating living conditions, and the ever-present struggle against autocratic power.

Although he grew up comfortably in conservative mid-class surroundings—his father was a prosperous real estate agent—Harry developed a "feel" for the working class and the poor early on. His uncle was a catalyst.

Christened Alfred Renton Bridges, Harry assumed his beloved uncle's first name as a child. Uncle Harry told his nephew exciting tales of his experiences in the Boer War and was a staunch supporter of trade unionism and the socialist policies of the Australian Labor Party. Uncle Harry didn't know it at the time, of course, but he was sowing the fertile imagination of the boy who would grow into the man who changed the entire face of the American labor movement.

At 16, he joined the merchant marine. Within weeks, he was a seasoned sailor, he knew first hand about isolation, miserable and humiliating living conditions, and the ever-present struggle against autocratic power.

At age 14, young Harry was put to work by his father as a rent collector. But squeezing the poor in Melbourne's slums proved a painful experience. He got work as a clerk of job assignment corrupted by favoritism and kickbacks.

By 1922, Bridges was back in San Francisco, this time on the docks. Now with a family to raise, he found it tough to make ends meet. Hours were long, the work back-breaking. Employers made constant demands for "speed up," endangering the health and safety of workers.

By 1932, Bridges was the spokesman for a group of dockers who organized themselves into the Committee of 500, but were eventually called the Albion Hall Group after the site of their frequent meetings. They advocated militant job actions, encouraged rank-and-file decisions, and opposed racial discrimination and segregation. Bridges found many of their ideas compatible with his socialist views and joined them. Later in 1932, he became deeply entrenched in a nation-wide strike by seamen and marine engineers. He reported for picket duty and was shortly arrested and jailed.

The strike failed: under threats of retaliation from the police, union supporters either returned to work or got out of town. Bridges, ever the pragmatist, took a hike south of the border to look for work. Mexico thrilled me," he said of the Obregon government reforms. "For instance, in case of a strike, the government barricaded the plant, then the workers, the employers, and representatives of the government sat down together and arbitrated until the dispute was settled. The employers weren't allowed to use strikebreakers either.

"Nowhere else in the world had I'd ever seen that before. And it struck me as a forceful social mechanism that might be employed anywhere by governments, between the strong and the weak anywhere."

By the spring of 1934, Bridges and the men he led agitated for a waterfront shutdown with the help of other maritime unions. Their militancy was contagious and quickly spread to other West Coast ports. At 8 p.m., May 9, longshoremen from Bellingham to San Diego walked off the job and sealed off almost 2,000 miles of coastline. Warehouse workers joined the effort, refusing to handle scab cargoes.

Employers were determined to keep the docks open, using strikebreakers and bringing political pressure to bear. The Industrial Association of San Francisco—a secret group of wealthy and vehemently anti-union officials from almost every bank and major corporation in the city—fanned the flames by convincing city fathers to use police to intervene in the dispute. Mayor Joseph Rossi pledged to rid the city of "every Communist agitator on
The docks.

Other cities on the coast followed suit. The tragic consequence was the July 5 shooting deaths of striking longshoremen in San Francisco, Seattle and San Pedro, and hundreds of injuries up and down the coast.

The violence of "Bloody Thursday" spurred even more conflict. Governor Frank Merriam ordered the National Guard to San Francisco, ostensibly to keep peace, but in reality, to ensure the scabs access to the docks. Employers offered Bridges a $50,000 bribe to back off the dockers' demand for a union hiring hall. ILA official Joseph Ryan negotiated a deal with the bosses behind closed doors—wh ich strikers overwhelming rejected.

Bridges had his own ideas about how to settle the dispute. He and other ILA members went to local unions throughout the city, seeking their support. Union after union voted to strike in sympathy with the maritime workers; the Labor Council culminated the solidarity efforts by declaring a general strike for July 16.

Although the general strike lasted only four days, it changed everything; the balance of power shifted dramatically. Employers agreed to submit bargaining issues to arbitration; dockers went back to work July 21. By October, the new contract was ratified. Longshoremen won a coast-wide agreement, a union hiring hall, shorter hours, safer conditions, and increased pay. Union organizing in all sectors blossomed throughout the country.

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of California's infamous concentration camps where Japa-

nese Americans were imprisoned during World War II. The experience served as the foundation for her activism in later years.

Nikki was more than "Mrs. Harry Bridges." She was his partner in the truest sense, a sounding board that talked back. She played an integral role in the ILWU and the myriad causes and programs it supported. A writer, a poet and a dedicated activist, she was—and is—a public figure in her own right.

M & M

By the time the late '50s rolled around, technology loomed on the horizon. Harry Bridges, the pragmatic visionary, paid attention.

Mechanization of the longshore industry, he was cer-
tain, was inevitable. A series of discussions with maritime employers gave birth to the landmark Mechanization and Modernization Agreement in 1940.

Although some members feared loss of jobs, the agree-

ment was ratified, setting the standard in the industry. It allowed employers to use machinery and reduce the num-

ber of longshore jobs through automation. The trade-off was innovative protections for the longshoremen, including a multi-million dollar fund to supplement pensions and guarantee pay for those who opted not to retire.

The "M & M," as it was called, cost shippers some $292 million but saved them $200 million in reduced costs, and boosted productivity to record levels. Bridges was hailed as a "labor statesman" (a label he flatly rejected because it implied he had sold out) and "a man of his word" by some of the very employers who had previously sought to do him in. The irony never escaped him.

In 1970, Mayor Joseph Alioto appointed Bridges to the San Francisco Port Commission. For the next decade, Bridges was a active promoter of the Port, yet never yielded to the pressures that would put his members in jeopardy.

POLITICS IN PRACTICE

Bridges was a staunch advocate of civil rights ever since his brief association with the Wobblies in 1921. These views were fostered and established as policy during union organizing on the San Francisco waterfront in the early 30s.

In 1942, his "On the Beam" column in The Dispatcher called for an end to discrimination against Blacks and women. He was among the first in the labor movement to condemn the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.

In the early 60s, he was strongly critical of the government's backhaul investigation into the bombings of black churches and the deaths of civil rights activists in the South.

Politically, Bridges was often at polar extremes with the US government. In 1937, he advocated a one-day shut-
down of the Port of San Francisco to protest the US policy of non-support for the Republican government of Spain. Similar actions were taken the year previous, when the ILWU refused to handle cargoes bound for Fascist-con-
trolled Italy, and in 1938, when scrap iron headed for Japan was left on the docks in the wake of that country's invasion of China.

In 1947, Bridges tangled with President Harry Truman over Truman's threat to use the Army to break railroad and maritime strikes. He called Truman "a political acci-
dent, a back-room politician, a man without vision or courage...a strikebreaker."

Bridges openly opposed the Korean War and the Cold War policies of Truman and Eisenhowe, and continued against the expansion of the military-industrial complex. Finding no safe harbor for labor with either the Demo-
crats or Republicans, he called for the formation of an independent labor party.

The vision of Harry Bridges was never more evident than in his 1954 column condemning US policy in Indo-

China; he predicted with startling accuracy the perils of US involvement, which ultimately led American troops into Viet Nam. And when that war became a tragic reality, Bridges was an unceasing critic, urging the ILWU mem-

bership into formal protest.

Bridges kept the rank and file of the ILWU as his touchstone and guide, constantly pushing to preserve union democracy. Caucus and convention delegates set policies; negotiating committees spearheaded contract talks; locals operated autonomously. And the membership had the final word on everything through secret-ballot elections, referendums, initiatives, recalls and contract votes.

Meanwhile, Harry lived modestly and took pride in being one of the lowest-paid union leaders in the nation. "It is good union policy that officers should not earn so much that they drift away from the members," he said.

Bridges was a firm believer in labor solidarity and fre-

quently argued that the union "could not go it alone" and remain effective. In 1953, he supported the Maritime Fed-
eration of the Pacific as a unifying force for workers in the industry. In the '50s and the '60s, he reached out to the Teamsters and the ILA, which—like the ILWU—were considered renegades in the labor movement. And, when the ILWU considered affiliation with the AFL-CIO in the late '60s, Bridges supported the move.

THE GOLDEN YEARS

Retiring from the ILWU in 1977 on a longshore pension, Bridges forged new paths as the vice president of the California Congress of Seniors and became a formidable lobbyist for senior citizens. "I'm not looking for a job," he said then. "And I don't plan to make any money out of it. But I do want to lend a hand. It's time they were organized into one organization so they can hammer on the door of the White House—or kick the door in."

A living legend in his retirement years, Bridges was courted by politicians of every persuasion and deified by the press and hundreds of groups—labor, senior and other-

wise. True to his nature, he chafed under the burden of accolades and never failed to remind those who praised him that it was the membership—not Harry Bridges—who should be honored for the ILWU's success.

"I just got the credit for a lot of it," he said in 1985. "I was a working stiff who happened to be around at the right time."
Harry in His Own Words

Credit due

"Let me tell you that the history of the Union was not written by any goddam officer, young or old. And don't let it happen. "I know who wrote the history of this Union. It was the people down there facing the guns and doing a few other things. It wasn't anybody on top. "There's all kinds of people that have done as much as me to build this Union. And their names are not even mentioned."

—ILWU Convention (Apr. 1973)

Bean counters

"Now, we can understand college-trained economists working all these things out as models on paper or in a computer. But that's where these models usually finish—on paper. "As a case in point, I like to play the horses. I study the dope sheets, and make a million bucks—on paper. Something always seems to go wrong once I get to the track. The horses don't seem to be able to read my system."

—"On the Beam" (Sep. 1966)

Retirement

"I've noticed that when the old bastard's retiring, people say, 'He's not so bad, after all.'"

—"Harry Bridges, The Optimist" (1977)

Mechanization

"Unions aren't social service agencies. Why should we take it upon ourselves to pick up the pieces after industry discards people for machines? Isn't it about time unions got in there before the fact to insist that there must be some obligation to people in all this?"

—"On the Beam" (Dec. 1961)

Democracy

"I don't think the American form of government, as I read the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, can be bettered anyplace in the world. It might be possible. It might work under some other circumstances. I have still got to learn."

—Deportation hearing (1939)

Since '34

"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 telling the same guy that the movie actor he saw galloping across the screen on Saturday afternoon would one day be the most bitterly anti-worker president in the history of this country. Imagine trying to explain containers and computers. The problems of the modern worker are so much more complex, so much more puzzling."

—"The Big Strike" (1985)
Coast, Hawaii shut down in memory of Harry

SAN FRANCISCO—All West Coast, Alaska and Hawaii ports shut down for two hours April 5 as a ferry boat, bearing a capacity crowd, left Pier 43 and headed out to sea. Harry Bridges, leader of ILWU, was celebrated as a labor leader, prompting the first coastwise closure of a great man, they remembered with glowing tributes.

James Herman, International President, ILWU, said: "Harry Bridges brought smiles as he introduced himself as "the widow of Saint Harry," and thanked members of the Inlandboatmen's Union, ILWU, who volunteered their services for the day.

Three miles off the California coast, Bridges' family—Nikki, son Robert, and daughters Jacqueline Jourdan, Julie Fales and Katherine Bridges—led the procession to the gangway from which the ashes were cast. A tugboat stayed a great way off of the north, the air as quiet as riders hushed tones rose toward the sea in final farewell.

Following the ceremony, union officials, rank-and-file workers, pensioners joined employees and pillars of the community for a silent tribute.

"There was nobody like Harry Bridges," said San Francisco ILWU Pensioners Club President Bob Rohatch, "nobody. He was always ten to fifteen years ahead of the rest of us. We thought he was crazy when he started talking about health and welfare, pensions and benefits for widows. But, as always, he was right."

Bridges' remains an "indelible certification of his compassion and caring for his fellow workers." International President Jim Herman, ILWU, who volunteered his services for the day.

Sincerest condolences to the membership of the ILWU in the loss of this dynamic labor leader." Richard Gladstein, Telford Taylor, Aubrey Grossman, Father Bill O'Donnell of Saint Joseph of the Workman Church noted that while Bridges was "a great life that he led, and for all the lives that he made like Bridges...." His life, his commitment and his concern for others is a legacy he leaves for all of us to emulate.

"I had the good fortune to work with others — including my personal relationship with Harry Bridges. What a pleasure it was to keep company with this delightful and engaging man!"

Owen Bieber, President, United Auto Workers

"He never forgot his beginnings, and always exhibited a stronger conscience than the rest. He never ducked a fight, and while many disagreed with him, there was no friend or foe who did not respect the man and his ideals... In an era when we are all more conscious of the need for greater international worker solidarity, Harry set a fine and consistent example."

George Kourpia, President, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers

"My achievements will live on forever," Mike Sacco, President, Seafarers International Union

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Gunnar Lundberg, President, Sailors' Union of the Pacific

"He lived as one should. He dared to challenge power establishments... he attacked laborers who abused their power in arrogant and pompous ways. He raised their noses in dramatic ways that revealed a grand sense of inner humor. I know that the people in our industry held for him the highest respect."

Norman Leonard, ILWU attorney (retired)

"San Francisco Port Commission... by his selfless efforts, made great contributions to the economic welfare of this port, the shipping industry, and to the community as a whole."

Robert L. Woodell, Executive Director, Port of Portland

"Honor, Harry Bridges for the great life that he led, and for all the lives that he made better, and for the shining example that his life provides for all of us today."

Washington State House of Representatives

"Our remembrance of Harry Bridges is not merely for the sake of past victories, but to provide a model for the future. We remember him as a man who put the struggles of the working class first on all occasions."

Seamen's Union of America

"Harry Bridges and his struggles for workers' rights in the US are well known and appreciated in New Zealand. His wisdom and knowledge are reflected in many of the working conditions on the New Zealand

New Zealand Seafarers

"We have for over 50 years enjoyed a close relationship with ILWU. The foundations were laid by Socialists like Bridges...."