Locals rock out, PMA locked out

ILWU Oral History Project:
Lou Goldblatt on early organizing in Hawaii

Dock wars have long roots and broad reach
Inside Line

BACK TO THE FUTURE?

While President Franklin Roosevelt might not have been a feminist, he did appoint the first woman Cabinet officer. Her name was Frances Perkins and in 1933 she became Secretary of Labor. Her first job was to put teeth into the New Deal’s labor laws.

Perkins proposed relief for the unemployed, minimum wage and man-hours law, unemployment insurance and the abolition of child labor. She helped launch the National Industrial Recovery Act in 1933 and the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, federal laws that established self-organization and collective bargaining as rights for workers. The NLRA established the National Labor Relations Board. The NLRA was charged with enforcing labor rights, rather than the property rights that are the basis of most of the other laws.

It is estimated that six fatalities in the Big Strike. That struggle forged an unprecedented Coastwise unity. The employers refused Coastwise bargaining even as they united into coast-wide employer associations. But the NLRA under Perkins took its mandate seriously.

In June 1938 it ruled the waterfront employers were acting together to set a wage below the minimum wage that established self-organization,” it read.

The decision was not a gift from on high, but a right workers spilled blood to seize. The government had brought home to the longshoremen that workers were acting together to set a wage.

Justice Dept. accusing the ILWU of violating the injunction. They said that the ILWU asked the ILWU to be back on the same page of its contracts.

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So strap on your hard hat and get ready. Meanwhile, read on page three about spirited support for the ILWU, including the lockout of the DMA and support from the AFL-CIO. This month’s labor history articles profile former International Secretary-Treasurer Lou Goldblatt, beginning on page five. Dockers around the world have weighed in for the ILWU, as seen on page six, along with an international timeline of union-building activities of the employers and their friends in government.

PMA’s stubborn refusal to register enough longshore workers)

Dockers learned that, since their employers were acting together on a coast basis, they, too, would have to build a coast-wide organization which would parallel the organizing of the employers,” the decision continued.

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Local 10 rally bridges oceans and generations

by Tom Price

Labor's response to globalization was on the minds of a couple hundred ILWU members and supporters as they rallied at the longshore Local 10 hall Oct. 10. They gathered to hear fellow workers from across oceans and generations link the longshore struggle to its history and to its future as part of an international labor movement. Supporters from maritime labor hung out with veterans of the Battle of Seattle, who mingled with veterans of the 1948 longshore strike and the 1980s battles against South African apartheid.

Bjorn Borg, president of the Swedish dockworkers' union (Svenska Hamnarbetarförbundt) and European Zone Coordinator for the International Dockworkers Council, spoke of the growing global unity of transport workers brought on by the PMA lockout. Two of the people arrested that morning for "locking out" the PMA shared the podium (see story, this page). Juliette Beck, from Public Citizen, commended the ILWU for all it has done for social change and recently hired Tom Pickett, from the Alliance for Sustainable Jobs and the Environment, spoke of her morning's adventures and added, "We have common ground because of the corporate mindset that says, 'We want to take this waterfront away from you—we're locking out the PMA,'" Pickett said. "We say no to that mindset, we say no to the corporate exploitation of workers and the corporate exploitation of the environment."

Local 10 Secretary-Treasurer Clarence Thomas reported on his trip to France, where he informed the French workers of the ILWU's struggle.

"The day after I left Paris there were 80,000 French workers in the streets of Paris to protest privatization, and I submit to you we may very well have to do that here," Thomas said. "From coast to coast we have to get the message out, because this is about corporate greed, this is about the elimination of organized labor, this is about the loss of our civil liberties. We have to wake up."

Local 10 President Richard Mead outlined the meddlesome role in negotiations played by the U.S. government and major retailers "organized by the West Coast Waterfront Coalition. While this has slowed down bargaining, it also points to the much larger issue of class struggle."

"It's bigger than the ILWU and PMA," Mead said. "It's international: capital versus international solidarity. That's who the ILWU has behind it, and we're going to prevail."

Asher Harer, Local 34 retiree and veteran of the 1948 strike, also spoke. Younger members gathered around Asher after the event. While frail in body, his spirit is as strong as ever. He recited one of his favorite poems, Shelley's "Rosalind and Helen," published in 1819: "No tyrants shall rule for ever, Or the priests of the bloody faith; Like wrecks in the surge of eternity."

Activists turn the tables on PMA

by Tom Price

SAN FRANCISCO—Executives of the Pacific Maritime Asen. got a dose of their own medicine Oct. 10 when they arrived at work and found themselves locked out. A group of social justice activists had arrived early that morning and chained themselves to the front doors of PMA headquarters at 550 California St.

The suits failed to share the demonstrators' sense of irony as they leaned out their car windows and gaped like beached fish at the banner hung above the entrance. Some could be heard angrily ordering their drivers to use the garage entrance, which is where demonstrators directed the company's workers.

"Bash makes PMA rich! Workers get the Taft," the 120-square foot banner read.

Meanwhile the protestors literally held fast. Four people locked themselves to the door handles with chains and bicycle locks, while two more sat down in the revolving door. The participants were identified as members of social and environmental justice organizations in leaflets handed to the press.

"PMA locked the union out, now we're locking out the PMA," the pickets said in a prepared statement. "We stand in solidarity with the ILWU workers and we stand in opposition to PMA's back-door politicking with the Bush administration to strip workers of their collective bargaining rights."

Police officers responding to the scene barely concealed their amusements. They had to call the fire department to get bolt cutters large enough to remove the bike locks. All this took quite a while, long enough in fact for the bosses to see the banner announcing their own personal lockout.

Public Citizen, founded by Ralph Nader, advocates fair trade and has led major drives against water privatization. Two of its members, Juliette Beck and Mike Dolan, played prominent roles in the 1999 shutdown of the WTO in Seattle. Police arrested them along with other veterans of the Battle of Seattle Kevin Dannacher of Public Citizen, Karen Pickett, from the Alliance for Sustainable Jobs and the Environment, and Randy Hayes of the Rainforest Action Network. They were released quick enough to remove the bike locks. All in fact for the bosses to see the banner announcing their own personal lockout.

"Fear not the tyrants shall rule for ever, Or the priests of the bloody faith; Like wrecks in the surge of eternity."

You are not going to take this waterfront away from us!'

by Evelina Alercon

Nearly 2,000 members packed into longshore Local 13's general membership meeting Oct. 22, eager to hear an update on the longshore division contract fight. AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Richard Trumka, ILWU International President James Spinosa and Local 13 President Ramon Ponce De Leon exploded the crowd to keep fighting.

"Our mode is you are not going to take this waterfront away from us—we are going to win," Spinosa, who got a standing ovation when he rose to speak.

"We've gone far beyond the contract," Spinosa said. "Now, under Taft-Hartley, the employers are setting the stage to bankrupt the union. They have the media, the President and the courts set up to get us."

"What do we do?" he asked. "We have to think outside the box and outsmart them. We've got Trumka and the AFL-CIO, we have friends around the world and a good negotiating team. The one thing they cannot take away from us is our solidarity.

"You've gotta do your job and not allow the PMA to beat us in the courts," he said. "Stay on the job. They recently defeated us, they beat us out if we are on the job because we are protecting our job.

"Trumka, who worked with the United Mine Workers Union of America (UMWA) when it faced the Taft-Hartley Act in 1978 and won, pledged to do everything humanly possible to help the ILWU.

"We struck for 118 days in 1978 and we won because we stuck together," Trumka said.

"We know two things for sure. First, that the PMA and shippers are going to continue to try to conquer us by dividing us, and second, that as long as we continue to reject their scheming and we stand together, we will win."

Trumka stressed the meaning of the ILWU battle to the rest of labor. Bush knows that if he can bring this union down, the rest will be easy for him," Trumka said. "But on the other hand, this union stands him down—and you will. Bush will think twice about taking on another union."

Trumka also talked about labor's stakes in the November elections and congratulated the ILWU for sending 32 members to five states to participate in close electoral campaigns there.

"This election will determine who will be in office for three years. Will it be Wall Street versus the Federal government," he said. "It will decide whether Bush can interfere in negotiations or not. You are showing incredible solidarity by sending your members across the country while you face this battle on the waterfront."

The ILWU volunteers had just received training in Los Angeles and were on their way the next day to Minnesota, Missouri, Texas, Colorado and Arkansas. When they came onstage, the members gave them a standing ovation.

Dave Arion, public relations chair for the negotiating committee, gave a round-up of the strategy for this stage of the fight. Rob Remar, one of the ILWU's lawyers, made a presentation on Taft-Hartley.

Local 13 members peppered their leaders and the lawyer with questions after the speeches, but also expressed appreciation for the information.

"The meeting renewed my spirit," it said UTR driver Robin Mahaley. "It reinforced my feeling about the need to educate our friends and neighbors about our fight, and I appreciate that we will be doing that."

"I am very stressed, but this meeting was very informative and gave us a lot of knowledge," UTR driver Mona Brisenio said. Members let their re-charged spirits rip with a rousing ouation when Spinosa, Trumka and the Local 13 officers left the stage.
Edited by Harvey Schwartz, Curator, ILWU Oral History Collection

This is the second of a three-part series featuring the recollections of ILWU leaders who made significant contributions to labor history. Louis Goldblatt, who was the union’s International secretary-treasurer for 34 years, is the subject of this month’s article. Goldblatt’s testimony focuses on the ILWU’s early days in the Islands, his own leadership role and his relationship with long-time International secretary-treasurer and start of the ILWU in Hawaii. We also feature interviews with several Workers of the World, or IWW, a hardy, efficient and ended with a lot of energy and enthusiasm, not only the rebuilding of the longshore union but mainly going after the plantations. Resentment had built up around the plantations and all through the society on the manner in which manpower had been handled. A number of people wanted to get out of the jobs they were doing, like laundry jobs, and wanted to work in Pearl Harbor where better jobs were opening up. The military had frozen people on the Islands, but there was a need for a lot of people to have their shirt washed.

The situation was the same when we got going in the organizing push. We began putting some money in. We had the idea that we needed a guy in the field like Frank Thompson, who was as good an organizer as this country has ever seen. He was quite a character, an old-time Wobbly (member of the Workers of the World, or IWW), a hardy, efficient guy with an endless amount of energy.

Frank worked well with Jack, although they didn’t see too much of each other because Frank spent so much time in the field. As soon as the initial breakthroughs began and the word went out that the union was up, everybody got into the act. There was a real wave of organization.

The waterfront fell into place very quickly. There wasn’t too much of a problem there. At that point we had to do some heavy duty thinking. Do we have the organization? What is the purpose if you can’t follow through? The signing up itself is a very preliminary stage of an organization.

The big decision we had to make was how wide could we scatter our forces? We only had so much money and manpower.

Ultimately, the conclusion we had reached didn’t change. We decided we wanted to make the break primarily in sugar and pineapple. We decided that we could not repeat the mistakes made in the past. We thought the plantations were the main deal about the whole background of lost racial and economic discrimination.

The Japanese were an inarticulate people, but they had a racial pride. They would move in and say, “We are going to protect this area.” The Filipinos were not too far behind. They would also move in and say, “We are going to protect this area.”

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In the fall of 1944 they had elections for the Territorial Legislature. Luhua had become a state until 1959. Jack had always been interested in the political off-shoots of the company's situation in Hawaii, and particularly the domination of the legislature by the big employers. The legislative representatives were practically just stogies of the Big Five. Legislative sessions sounded more like a Gilbert and Sullivan show than a genuine legislature.

Well, in the '44 elections, under Jack's lead, we endorsed a great many candidates, and the result was highly favorable. One of the commitments we had where we made endorse- ments was to get a Little Wagner Act for Hawaii. We did get a Little Wagner Act in 1945 out of that legislature. It provided for collective bargaining elections for all agricultural workers. This included a lot of people who were not covered under the Wagner Act. Congress had passed ten years earlier to set up the NLRB. Voting for candidates recommended by the union in '44 was a direct offshoot of the whole organizing campaign. It was also one of the begin-nings of the sociological breakthrough of some of our early leaders. Midkiff was with me that night. Midkiff was the tour section.

That was for haoles (whites), and they were far more privileged than they belonged down in the Kalahi district. River Street was another section of town. I had to persuade them to join me for dinner at the Tropics, which was at the Waialua company on Oahu. Waialua had always been a very prosperous plantation, and it was owned, as a sort of waste land, by a very rich man. There the sociological break-through was taking place.

A lot of the plantations topped up place, but this one outfit that we had present a bit of a problem. We had a group of Japanese workers going into Waikiki just to have a drink. In those days that was not a common thing. Waikiki was the tourist section.

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Visitors bring dispatches from the dock wars

by Marcy Rein

With this year’s contract fight, ILWU members join the long traditions of dockworkers around the world who have been fighting privatization and casualization for more than a decade. Shipping and stevedoring companies have led the anti-worker drive, but governments everywhere have backed them up.

The port industry is going through global restructuring. Shipping lines and port service companies, like Maersk-Sealand and Stevedoring Services of America, are consolidating globally. They are coming to dominate ports often fiercely owned and run as public trusts. Privatization steps up pressure to lower costs—and takes savings out of workers’ hides. From Britain to Brazil, Australia to Amsterdam, longshore workers have had to step up to defend their wages, working conditions and basic union rights.

The timeline below skims the history of this fight. October visits to the ILWU fight by the International Dockworkers Council and representatives from waterfront unions in Australia and New Zealand gave a glimpse of today’s battles around the world. The Dispatch first talked with the IDC’s General Coordinator Julián García, who is also head of the Spanish dockers’ union Coordinadora, and IDC’s European Coordinator, Björn Borg, president of the Swedish dockers’ union Sveriges Hamnarbetarförbund. José Luis Lleóres of Coordinadora translated for García.

Borg: Today’s situation began unrolling in 1989, when the right-wing government of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher abolished the Dock Labour Scheme, Borg noted as a process. They want to de-regulate, cut off our work conditions inshore and offshore, cut off the workers from participation in any changes.

García: I tried this in France in the ’90s but the dockworkers won the fight. In Amsterdam the dockworkers lost.
Racing team supports Charleston Five

Racing fans at NASCAR’s Winston Cup races next year should see something of the Charleston Five’s struggle if Robert Fenley’s former team qualifies. The team's Ford Taurus, sporting a bright Charleston Five sticker, and it will be entered into next year’s race season beginning in February.

“I have so much respect for my grandfather and all the union-busting they went through in the ’30s,” Fenley said. “My grandfather was part of it. There was no reason I couldn’t think of to justify not supporting Charleston. We need to reconfirm that this unity of longshore workers. Everyone needs to do it and that’s a good thing.”

—Bon Price

ILWU WOMEN SHARE HONORS AT BRIDGES INSTITUTE LUNCHEON

Patricia Aguire of ILWU longshore Local 13 and Helen Kaunisto of Ladies Auxiliary #8 were recognized at a tribute to working class women put on by the Harry Bridges Institute Oct. 27. Above, State Assemblymember Alan Lowenthal (D-Long Beach) poses with three of the four honorees: (Left to right) Paula Solomnon of IBEW Local 11, Patricia Aguire and Audrey Hudson. File Drivers Local 2375.

Aguire, a third-generation longshore worker, became a registered member of Local 13 in 1997. She is serving her third term on the local’s executive board and was elected as a delegate to the ILWU’s international convention in 2000.

“True independence comes from the ability to earn a living wage, which everyone should be entitled to,” she said.

Kaunisto held leadership positions in Auxiliary #8 and the Federated Auxiliaries for many years and pitched in up to her elbows supporting the local, the pensioners and the 1971 strikers. “This is my 46th year as an ILWU Ladies Auxiliary #8 member and I shall try to make it to my 50th year,” she said.

The luncheon also featured “Women at Work: Then and Now,” a visual presentation with costumes designed by Motion Picture Costumers Local 705 and worn by members of ILWU Local 13.

The Harry Bridges Institute is a non-profit organization that aims to celebrate and build international solidarity, social justice, union rights and union democracy. —MER

DOCK WAR INTERVIEWS

Robson: “In Australia we were 'treacherous.' He hasn’t called us traitors, but he’d like to.

We’re in the middle of a terrorist legislation is put in place here and all countries at the beck and call of George Bush. You’re a terrorist for taking a democratic decision to stand on a picket. It can be used in that manner for any dispute on the waterfront or in the mining division that’s affecting the economy.”

DECEMBER 7, 2002

MISSION HIGH SCHOOL, SAN FRANCISCO

Called by ILWU longshore Local 10, the Marine Engineers Beneficial Assn., Graphic Communications International Union Local 4 and the Port Workers Solidarity Committee (PSC)

THE ILWU WAS FIRST TO GET SLAPPED WITH TAFT-HARTLEY—BUT IT WON’T BE THE LAST.

COME TOGETHER TO STRATEGIZE—ORGANIZE—PREPARE OUR OFFENSIVE!

To register, get more information, endorse or give money, contact the PSC, P.O. Box 15086, San Francisco, CA 94115 (415)820-3927 e-mail solidarity1804_2002@hotmail.com

DOCK WAR INTERVIEWS continued from page 6

Europeans fear will follow the Port Directive. Ships making local runs are converting to “flags of convenience,” meaning they re-register in countries with lax regulations. Then they run with immigrant crews who earn far less than union scale.

Keane: “These are Australian vessels doing Australian coastal jobs. It should be our work. It’s like, say a train crew turns up at the UP depot. UP says, ‘Sissy lads, here’s your pink slip, piss off.’ Then the replacements get on, work three months and they get another replacement.”

The ILWU catapulted into the headlines on the hostility of Australian Prime Minister John Howard.

Robson: “In Australia we were getting no coverage of this whole dispute. Then our PM turned around and made it headline news by attacking us. He said we were assisting in a strike that was costing Australian farmers millions by their perishables rotting on the ships. He called us ‘treacherous.’ He hasn’t called us traitors, but he’d like to.

The same terrorist legislation is put in place here and all countries at the beck and call of George Bush. You’re a terrorist for taking a democratic decision to stand on a picket. It can be used in that manner for any dispute on the waterfront or in the mining division that’s affecting the economy.”

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NATIONAL LABOR CONFERENCE AGAINST TAFT-HARTLEY AND UNION BUSTING

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DOCK WAR INTERVIEWS continued from page 6

Europeans fear will follow the Port Directive. Ships making local runs are converting to "flags of convenience," meaning they re-register in countries with lax regulations. Then they run with immigrant crews who earn far less than union scale.

Keane: "These are Australian vessels doing Australian coastal jobs. It should be our work. It's like, say a train crew turns up at the UP depot. UP says, 'Sissy lads, here's your pink slip, piss off.' Then the replacements get on, work three months and they get another replacement."

The ILWU catapulted into the headlines on the hostility of Australian Prime Minister John Howard.

Robson: "In Australia we were getting no coverage of this whole dispute. Then our PM turned around and made it headline news by attacking us. He said we were assisting in a strike that was costing Australian farmers millions by their perishables rotting on the ships. He called us 'treacherous.' He hasn't called us traitors, but he'd like to.

The same terrorist legislation is put in place here and all countries at the beck and call of George Bush. You're a terrorist for taking a democratic decision to stand on a picket. It can be used in that manner for any dispute on the waterfront or in the mining division that's affecting the economy."
ILWU Book & Video Sale

Books and videos about the ILWU are available from the union's library at discounted prices!

**BOOKS:**

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